

**TEACHINGS  
FROM  
LAMA KONCHOG**

*for free distribution*

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## Dedications

By the merits of printing this book, may all spiritual teachers teaching true paths to enlightenment especially His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama - Tenzin Gyatso, Lama Ribur Rinpoche, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Lama Osel Rinpoche and Khen Rinpoche Lama Lhundrup, have long and healthy lives and continue to benefit sentient beings.

May all the wishes, prayers and aspirations of all our sponsors and benefactors and their loved ones be fulfilled in accordance with the Holy Dharma. May all their obstacles be pacified and may they have good health and success always.

May all sentient beings have happiness and its causes.

May all sentient beings be free of suffering and its causes.

May all sentient beings not be separated from sorrowless bliss.

May all sentient beings abide in equanimity, free of bias, attachment and anger.

May whoever sees, touches, reads, remembers, talks or thinks about this book never be reborn in unfortunate circumstances, receive only rebirths in situations conducive to the perfect practice of Dharma, meet a perfectly qualified spiritual guide, quickly develop bodhicitta and immediately attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

## Editor's Introduction

Geshe Lama Konchog, one of our precious Gurus of FPMT, had been conducting teachings at FPMT centres for many years. The teachings in this free booklet were first published in April 2001. This reprint is particularly timely and precious in view of Geshe-la's recent demise in October 2001. In this booklet, we offer two talks by Geshe-la on specific topics in Buddhism.

The first talk was given at Atisha Centre, Bendigo, Victoria, Australia in 1987. Here, Geshe-la presented the commentary on *The Seven Point Mind Transformation* practice. This teaching was originally written in Tibetan by Geshe Chekawa. The source of this text originated from Buddha Himself having generated Bodhicitta (great compassion) as an ordinary sentient being suffering in the hell realm. At that time, he saw other suffering beings being forced to pull a very heavy chariot. It was then through the power of great compassion that he understood the ego-grasping mind. This became the basis of the Seven Point Mind Transformation practice.

In the second teaching at Amitabha Buddhist Centre, Geshe-la emphasized that although one may have the thought of great compassion or Bodhicitta, nonetheless without right effort, one cannot cross the ocean of cyclic existence and reach the city of liberation or enlightenment. Just like the example given in this teaching, Bodhicitta is like the sail to a ship. If the sail is not blown by the wind of right effort, then the ship of hearing and contemplation cannot be moved.

Finally, we would like to thank Venerable Thubten Konchog and all other Venerables and friends who have helped to put these teachings together. We would also like to express our deepest gratitude to all friends and benefactors who have devoted their long service to Lama Konchog and the holy Dharma and the sponsorship they have given to Amitabha Buddhist Centre.

May all our efforts ensure the long and healthy life of our precious teacher, Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, Khen Rinpoche Lama Lhundrup and all other precious Teachers who have taught at Amitabha Buddhist Centre. Without them, we would be lost in the suffering vastness of cyclic existence, without the slightest hope of escape.

**FIRST TEACHING**

**A COMMENTARY**

**ON**

**THE SEVEN POINT  
MIND TRANSFORMATION  
PRACTICE**

This teaching was given at Atisha Centre, Bendigo, Victoria, Australia from 31st October to 3rd November, 1987.

The translator was Dhawa Dhundrup. Transcribed and edited by Ven. Thubten Konchog who accepts responsibility for all errors and omissions.





## CHAPTER 1

Lama Tsong Khapa said, in *Songs of Experience*, that to have attained a human body is a very rare experience and it should be used to its maximum potential for the Dharma. This human body has great potential if used positively but also great power if used negatively. We can illustrate the great potential of human rebirth by putting all the animals of this universe on one side and a single human on the other; even the combined number of the other sentient beings cannot equal the potential and ability that one human has to do positive actions.

Let us imagine a magical machine that has the power to produce anything a person could desire. If such a machine was used to produce only straw instead of using it to produce many wonderful things, we can understand how stupid that would be. Likewise, our human body is just like a magical machine and if we were to use it in a trivial way then we, too, must be considered to be very stupid. There could not be a more ignorant person than the one who possesses a human body yet does not put it to proper use.

If we were to use this human body in a negative way, it has the potential to be very destructive, but used in a proper and positive way, it has the power to generate bodhicitta and the mind of enlightenment.

Used meaningfully, this body can help us attain realizations on all the various levels of the path.

In the past, many great masters from India and Tibet used their human bodies in such a way that they were able to reach the desired goal of enlightenment. If we did the same, we could be just like them and have the same kinds of achievements and accomplishments.

Our normal attitude to life is such that the possibility of achieving material gain is far more important than putting our human body to proper use. This attitude is due to not realizing the importance of this precious human body - but maybe some people do realize the importance, yet they are still tempted by the prospect of material gain. Such a person feels more strongly about acquiring material possessions than they do about directing their mind towards a spiritual path.

It might feel that spiritual practice is beyond us but if we think and examine this carefully, we would realize that spiritual practice is very easy. It is as easy as changing and transforming our minds and attitudes. There is nothing to be transformed externally. If we stop doing something bad that we have been doing for a long time and substitute it with a positive attitude, along with good actions, that is spiritual practice.

Spiritual practice only depends on the transformation of the mind. And it is easy.

Our present way of thinking is to regard this life's interests and welfare as being far more important than next life's and so we use this body for the accomplishment of the good things of this life only. What we have to do is to completely turn this attitude around and instead,

to be more interested in next life's welfare and employ this body to do the things that will bear fruit in the next and following rebirths.

We can make a boundary line to decide whether we are acting for this life's interests or for the next, by deciding whether the acts we do are Dharma based - a spiritual act, or a non-spiritual act.

We usually use our body, speech and mind for this life's interests only and in doing so we use them in such a way that it is harmful and not helpful to other sentient beings. So what we must do is change, or transform our acts of body, speech and mind so that we help others and do not cause them harm. We also need to be very aware of the next life.

So from this point of view we can understand that spiritual practice is not something too difficult or too aloof.

If we were to put all our efforts into spiritual practice, we could attain the best possible result in the next rebirth and even if not, we could still attain an intermediate result. And even if we could not attain that, we could gain the lowest result to be achieved by spiritual practice. So there are lots of choices and options by which we can choose, all in accordance to our abilities and mentalities. It is only a matter of putting in the effort to do so.

In the past, we have attained many human rebirths. Yet in all those lives as a human, we did not use our body in proper spiritual practice, or in a proper way, because we have not been able to achieve the results of having higher realizations. And still now, if we do not use our rebirth properly, the pattern will continue.

Even up to this present moment, we have spent most of this life

pursuing things totally related to this life only. If we were to consider our present life carefully, we would see that we have spent much of our time doing things that can bring no profit for future rebirths.

We have had many rebirths as different aspects of sentient beings, from the top of cyclic existence to the lowest. We just do not remember them. Actually, there is no form of sentient being that we have not taken in the past. This pattern will continue if we do not carry out spiritual practice, and our past will continue to be our future. We have been born into many different forms and many different forms of sufferings. If we were to remember them, we would find it unbearable.

However the past is the past, it is over, but what we have to do for the remaining part of this life - for the next life - is to put effort into spiritual practice. At best, we should be able to achieve enlightenment and at the intermediate level, we should be able to obtain individual liberation. If we cannot attain these two levels, then the remaining part of our life should be spent in doing spiritual practices, so at least we will avoid future migration into the three bad migrations - as a hell being, a hungry ghost or as an animal.

If we know that we will have this human body for a very long time, there would be plenty of time to do spiritual practices, but we do not know this and it would be a very bad mistake to think like this. It is also wrong to think that we can put it off until the next rebirth because it is not easy to obtain a human rebirth as it requires all the proper causes and conditions. What we have to realize is that this is the time we have the freedom to decide: 'Am I going up to a good migration or down to a bad one?' It is up to each one of us to use this

body to its maximum potential for the purpose of next life.

To take rebirth as a human is not at all easy. Rebirth is not a product without causes or conditions. It all depends on causes and conditions and they do not occur easily. Firstly we have to observe the morality and discipline of observing virtuous conduct and we have to do the six perfections together with pure aspirational prayers. If we have all these factors complete then the next rebirth as a human is possible, otherwise it is not.

The human body as a basis for spiritual practice depends on you being able to do the practice. You may be rich with material possessions but if you have not used your body for proper spiritual practice, then in the real sense you are not a rich person. However, a person with no material wealth but who has used his body for spiritual practice is, in the real sense of the word, a rich person.

Even if a person generates an attitude of, 'I will use this body for spiritual practice but first I must have all the material facilities, so I must work, earn some money and look after my family and *then* I will be able to do my practice.' That kind of procrastinating attitude deludes oneself.

Even if the older students were asked, they would have to admit that most of their time is spent in worldly activities and very little in Dharma practice. Even for any of the older students to have done pure spiritual practice is somewhat quite doubtful.

Our normal attitude is such that we go on procrastinating - 'I will do it tomorrow, tomorrow,...' We never think that, 'I may die today!' and so we just go on and on putting it off from day to day. If death

were to come today, we would have achieved nothing, so we must be very intelligent and clever and practice at this very moment.

The person who does not procrastinate does their spiritual practice with a decisive attitude. Even though they realize that they may die today, there will be no regret because they are doing the practice right now. Such a person is an intelligent person. The human body has great potential but death can come at the most unexpected time, for instance, car accidents and deadly diseases. When the sickness has become very serious and life-threatening for some people, the teacher or Lama can only give instructions such as thought transformation as nothing else may be of help.

We have so many distractions during our lifetime such as good friends, delicious food to eat, beautiful clothes to wear, many places to travel to and so on, but when we die, we die alone and so we must be very clever and prepare for that lone journey to the next rebirth.

The only thing that we can take with us to the next rebirth is our spiritual practice - the Dharma. It is the only thing that will bring happiness and success in the next rebirth because we all want happiness and we do not want suffering. And even if we were to die today, spiritual practice is important because we would be able to make aspirational prayers in order to have a good rebirth which will be the basis for the attainment of enlightenment. If a person has done generous and charitable acts during their lifetime, then there will be no shortage of possessions in the next rebirth. In this life we have many facilities but, if we have not done spiritual practice, then in the next life they will be absent.

Spiritual practice is really a preparation for happiness in the next life and it is very important. We want happiness and we do not want to suffer - that is the innermost desire within everyone of us and because of this, spiritual practice is so important.

Because of being mindful of death, if a person feels afraid now, but does not fear it when he is dying, that is an intelligent person. However, a person who does not feel afraid of death at present, but becomes very frightened when death actually comes, that is a foolish person.

Milarepa sang a song which says, in effect, 'I am afraid of death because I am not mindful of it, so I have gone to the mountain retreat to understand the relative nature of the mind. Because of this, for the time being, I seem to have no fear of death'. We need to become very mindful of the death process and make preparation for it, so that when the time comes we will feel no fear.

Another good saying from Geshe Potowa is: 'I am not afraid of dying, I am afraid of taking the next rebirth!'

At the time of death, our mind will not dissolve into nothingness as the external substances of the body do. The mind is not like that. It is - and always has been - a stream of continuity. The subtlest mind which is inseparable from the subtlest wind, goes on from one rebirth to the next. There comes a time when this subtlest mind, in combination with other causes or other gross minds, becomes more in amount and engages in more activity. However, at the time of death it loses its composite parts and becomes the subtlest mind and wind and goes into the next rebirth.

What we have to do is to understand the nature of the subtlest

mind and wind and once we have attained the realization and understood it completely and properly, there will be no more fear. Just as Milarepa discovered when he understood the reality of the mind, he had no more fear.

We have to understand the nature of the subtlest mind, which is known in Tibetan as 'the remote mind'. This is like, for example, a person who is in total solitude in a mountain retreat, that person is said to be abiding in remoteness. So like that, if our subtlest mind remains too deeply inside, it is only the coarse mind that is performing activities. What we understand is only the external coarse mind and not the innermost subtle mind. Scientist doing studies on the functions of the mind only find the external, coarse mind. If we could find, by research, the innermost mind then we would not have to experience any more suffering of samsara or of cyclic existence.

We all possess this innermost, subtle mind and it is the seed, the very potential, for the attainment of enlightenment. At present we have not been able to find, nor understand, the subtlest mind and so we have not been able to employ it properly and this is why we have not attained enlightenment and have been wandering about in cyclic existence.

Once a person has discovered the subtlest mind, it is called by the term 'the knowing wisdom'. At present our minds are ignorant - which means in Tibetan terms 'not knowing' and what we have to do is to find that subtlest mind and use it properly.

Our mindstreams have much more negativity on them than virtue, so there is naturally a greater possibility that our next rebirth will be



in one of the three bad migrations. There is a far less possibility that we will attain a higher rebirth such as a human or a god.

After death, rebirth is determined by either of two ways: the first is by the heaviness or the lightness of the negativities, or of the merit, on our mindstream; and the other is by determining which of these we have become more accustomed towards.

If we have met with a dharma teacher and if we have done good spiritual practices, we have naturally become more accustomed to performing virtuous deeds and thereby accumulating more merit. So naturally when death comes, if we have become more familiar with doing virtue rather than non-virtue, we definitely will have a good rebirth.

If we have become familiarised with doing virtuous deeds, we will have accumulated merit. Then the next rebirth will be entering the formless or form realms. This means that the rebirth will be as a human or a god. If we have done many non-virtuous acts, then the next rebirth will be any of the three bad migrations such as a hell being, a hungry ghost or as an animal.

We have developed great power in collecting negativities onto our mindstream which becomes the cause of going down to the three bad migrations. We are like a super-power in collecting negativities but like an undeveloped country in collecting virtue!

We can see which rebirth we will be taking just by looking at our actions now - negative or positive, virtuous or non-virtuous. If we have done more non-virtuous actions than positive, then it is likely to be a bad rebirth.

If we are reborn in a hot hell realm, the body will become inseparable from the very nature of the flames of the fire. In hot weather here in Australia, we feel uncomfortable and turn on our airconditioners, but in the hot hells our body becomes fused with the fire and is unbearable hot. If we are born as a cold hell being, then our body becomes inseparable from the coldness of the ice and once again there is no relief. But at the present time, if the weather becomes cool, we find it unbearable and turn on our heaters.

When we do the fasting practice, the Nyung Nay, we do it only for the required amount of time, but if we were born as a sentient being in the hungry ghost realm, then for aeons and aeons we would have to stay without food in a constant state of starvation.

If we were reborn as a sentient being in any of those bad migrations, we would understand just how bad it is there and we would seek refuge. Just as a criminal turns to a solicitor to defend him, we too, would have to turn to the kind of refuge that we could rely on for support.

A criminal must depend on a solicitor for the entire length of time that all charges are made against him. Likewise, we have many negativities created from beginningless lifetimes and so we have to depend for protection on refuge to The Three Jewels. This has to be continuous and for a very long duration of time. Before death comes we should at least have generated the attitude of going for refuge and observing the law of cause and effect.

If we can generate a feeling of fear towards the suffering of the bad migrations and so generate an attitude of wanting to go for refuge

to The Three Jewels as well as observing the laws of cause and effect, then definitely in the next life we will obtain rebirth as a human. However, a practice done with only this much motivation is merely a spiritual practice, without pure motivation, because to be reborn again as a human is not a permanent release from suffering.

So if a person has not done any spiritual practices, they will still continue with those sufferings. This body is called 'the aggregates of the contaminated mind' which means that it is the result of negative actions. This human body has been attained or is the result of non-virtuous actions, which is called, in itself, cyclic existence.

No matter what kind of body we have, as long as there is suffering, that body is called the contaminated result of non-virtuous actions. However, the Aryas, the ones who have attained realizations on the Path of Seeing have eliminated the cause for suffering, the ego-grasping, so they no longer suffer or experience cyclic existence. However, as long as we have ego-grasping, there will be this body of suffering.

Of course, to uproot the cause of suffering, the ego-grasping, the wisdom realizing emptiness is the only means.

We can do visualizations, aspirational prayers, the practice of Chenrezig the Buddha of Compassion, as well as other practices and we can be reborn into one of the Pure Lands. Once a person is born there, they are still an ordinary person of course, but because that person is doing practices and still receiving teachings, from there they can gain enlightenment.

If a person does the Nyung Nay fasting practice along with very pure mantra recitation, as well as aspirational prayers to the deity,

they will be reborn into one of the Pure Lands. So from this point of view, we can understand the very great potential of this human body.

If a person does decide to do a spiritual practice, they have many options and alternatives available to them. There are practices that will bring them rebirth into any of the Pure Lands. It is only a matter of choosing to practise or not. It is just like going to a very big shopping centre where you can choose from the many different products being offered.

If a person wants to eliminate the causes of suffering during this lifetime, he or she must attain the wisdom of realizing emptiness and for this purpose, for the time being, they have to abide on the three higher trainings. These are the training on the morality or discipline, on concentration and on wisdom. If a person practices on these higher trainings they can, at least, be freed from the three lowest realms of cyclic existence.

A person is freed from cyclic existence when he or she attains liberation, but that is not enough because there is still self interest there. It is a completely selfish attitude to be only interested in one's own attainment of the goal. There are still mother sentient beings who continue to suffer.

To be freed from cyclic existence is not the ultimate attainment because one has still not attained all the qualities and has not overcome all the weaknesses.

The attitude we must generate is one of great courage. We have to think, 'I will release all these sentient beings from suffering. And with this purpose in mind, I will first have to attain the state that has all the

qualities and which is complete without any evils or weaknesses'. In other words, we think that we must attain buddhahood. The word for buddhahood in Tibetan means being awakened from the sleep of ignorance and of having all the qualities developed. And this is the state we must attain in order to help all sentient beings.

In order to do the practice that will attain the state of buddhahood, firstly we must understand the practice and to understand the practice, we must firstly listen to the teachings. And so it is with this attitude and understanding that we must now generate the motivation for listening to these teachings.

### ***The Seven Point Mind Transformation Practice***

The practice to attain buddhahood, of attaining the qualities in completeness and without any negativities, is a very profound subject. It is called *The Seven Point Thought Training* practice.

This is a most profound teaching and is, in a sense, the innermost essence of the teaching of the Great Vehicle, the Mahayana Path. It is the practice that we must consider as being the most important in order to attain the highest form of enlightenment. There is no greater nor meaningful practice to do than this one.

This Seven Point Thought Training text was written down by Geshe Chekawa but it was not something that he invented, nor is it new. The subject was taught by Buddha along with all the practices of thought training, but no matter what subject headings and subdivisions

there are, they are all included in the Seven Point Thought Training practice by Geshe Chekawa.

The source of this text originated with The Buddha and most especially when he generated bodhichitta in the hell realm while pulling a chariot along with other sentient beings. The source also lies with the texts by Nagajuna called *The Precious Garland* and the great Shantideva's *Engaging in the Deeds of the Bodhisattva*.

In the beginning of the text, Geshe Chekawa pays homage to Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion, by saying: "I prostrate to Avalokiteshvara." This has a special significance because it ensured that his work of compiling the text would be successful and be without any hindrances. However, it seems that respect is paid explicitly to Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion, but it also implies that respect is paid to the compassion that is within all sentient beings because this was the actual source that the Buddha of Compassion arose from.

All the qualities of the Greater Vehicle Path have the great compassion as their source either at the beginning, the middle or at the end. In the beginning, the great compassion is like the seed being planted in the soil; in the middle, the seed is nourished with water, sunlight and caring which is like the cause for continuous practice; and at the end, it is like the ripening of the crop which permits beings to eat and live.

If there were no continuous forms of conditions such as teachings and discourses, there could be no result, therefore all the qualities of the Greater Vehicle Path lie in the beginning, the middle and the end.

In order to show that the Seven Point Thought Training text was not newly invented by himself, and in order to show its genuineness by originating from The Buddha, Geshe Chekawa states in the second line of the text that: “This teaching has been passed on from Lama Serlingpa.”

The teaching was passed from Buddha Shakyamuni to Atisha, who passed it to Dromtoenpa under a seal of secrecy. Dromtoenpa passed it to Potowa and others in secret. Potowa passed it to Langri Tangpa and Geshe Sharawa. Sharawa passed it to his disciple, Geshe Chekawa who gave the teachings to the public.

### ***In the Beginning***

This teaching has its origins based on the great compassion (bodhicitta) of The Buddha when, during one of his rebirths as an ordinary sentient being suffering in a hell realm, he saw others trying to pull a very heavy chariot. It was then, through great compassion, that he understood how the ego-grasping mind was something negative whereas caring for others was something positive. This became the basis of the Seven Point Thought Training practice. So with this attitude in mind, he helped the other people pull the cart. The agent of the hell realm crushed a very heavy hammer down on the head of Buddha and said: “Why are you taking onto yourself the burden of others? You do not need to do that!” From then on, The Buddha took rebirth into a higher aspect.

So it is said that this teaching, with emphasis on the great compassion, originated from the very first act of Buddha at that time.

### ***In the Middle***

This teaching also has an act of the Buddha in the middle. Once he was born as a boy, but each boy born to his mother died and so it was believed that he should be given a girl's name and so this Buddha was named Zaway Pumo.

Zaway Pumo would sell things in the market place and give the money to his mother. However, one day he wanted to go with the other merchants to trade in far away countries, but his mother insisted that he not go as it would be too dangerous. He decided he would go and so he walked over his mother's body and was out of control.

This boy went on the sea voyage and passed the coasts of four different islands or countries, each with a different name. The first place was called 'the country of joy' and there he met four or five different girls but still he moved on to the next place. The next place was called 'the supreme joy'. He continued on to all these wonderful islands in this manner and it was believed that this journey was the result of the boy giving his earnings to his mother. So a very good result ripened from this action and he was able to enjoy the benefits of those countries.

Finally he came to a country where there was a house and inside there were many people who were suffering very badly. An iron rod



circulated over the heads of the people like a fan and as it went around it kept cutting and smashing their heads. The boy saw this and it caused him great distress.

When he asked these people why they were experiencing such strange suffering, they replied that it was because they had stepped over their mother's head in the past. This was considered to be a very disrespectful act.

Suddenly a voice sang from somewhere in the sky saying that the rod that had been circulating over the heads of the people would now stop and the people did not have to suffer any more. But now the iron rods would circulate over the head of the boy instead. This was the result of the ripening of the act where, in the past, the boy walked over his mother's head.

While the boy was experiencing the great suffering of the iron bar over his head, he began to consider the self-cherishing and ego-grasping mind and so it was at this point that he generated the attitude of caring for other sentient beings more than for himself.

### ***At the End***

He thought about the unbearable suffering of those who had committed similar acts towards their mothers and how they would have to experience similar suffering and so, with this reasoning, he thought, "May the results of sentient beings of the past, present and future who may have stepped over their mothers' bodies, ripen upon

me.” Because he generated this attitude so powerfully, the iron rod that had been circling over his head immediately went away.

If we experience problems with sickness or other similar desperate situations, it is good to think about this incident with The Buddha during one of his past lifetimes when he had a girl's name. Instead of being depressed, we can generate an attitude of courage - that this sickness be substituted for the sufferings of other sentient beings.

So whenever you experience physical or mental suffering, no matter what the problem, instead of being depressed generate a good heart towards taking on the responsibility for others and this could be very effective. This method is a very profound instruction, it is very effective in removing suffering.

The spiritual practice of the Greater Vehicle, the Mahayana, is something that has to be accumulated bit by bit, atom by atom. It does not come upon us suddenly and at a certain time. The process is not like that, it has to be achieved bit by bit.

## CHAPTER 2

At this present moment we have attained a human body, we have met with the teachings of the Buddha and we have met with a spiritual teacher - all of which is extremely rare. So if we, from our part, do our practice properly, we will have attained all the necessary factors to again have a human rebirth. So think about the great purpose of this human form and the great meaning of all the factors contributing towards it.

Do not be attached only to this life's interests and do not be attached to a good rebirth in the next life such as a god or a human. Also do not have the thought of attaining benefit for oneself only, but rather generate the wish, 'I must attain supreme enlightenment so that I can liberate others from suffering and so help them to reach the ultimate happiness - for which purpose I must do this practice and to do the practice, I must know, and to know the practice, I must listen to the teacher'. Therefore, with this motivation, please establish the right attitude for listening to this teaching.

The teaching to be given is *Lojong*, or thought training. Generally, it could be said that any spiritual practice is mind or thought training but, with this teaching, we have to leave the ego-grasping and the self-

cherishing mind behind and instead practice something new. To renounce our ego-grasping and self-cherishing mind and begin to learn a different way is not easy. It is a very difficult thing to do.

This teaching, taught initially by Buddha Shakyamuni, was passed to Atisha and it has been passed on from teacher to disciple in a single lineage, in secret. Geshe Sharawa eventually passed it to Geshe Chekawa, in whose time it was given openly to the public.

When Geshe Chekawa first saw Langri Tangpa's *Mind Training in Eight Verses*, he noted the lines: "Take the loss and defeat on oneself and give the victory and happiness to others," and he wondered who had the lineage of this text. He went in search of this person until finally he found Geshe Sharawa who was giving a public discourse on the subject.

Geshe Sharawa, however, never used a single word related to Lojong or thought training and at that point Geshe Chekawa felt very doubtful about the existence of the lineage of this text. Still, he persisted in listening to the teachings and on one occasion, when Geshe Sharawa finished his discourse, Geshe Chekawa said, "I want to ask you one question."

The teacher, Sharawa, replied, "There is nothing to be asked, everything has been explained and made clear in the discourse itself and nothing remains to be clarified."

Finally, Sharawa agreed to reply to Geshe Chekawa's question and so he asked: "If a person seeks enlightenment then, definitely, this is the instruction they must have. If one does not want enlightenment, then that is another matter." Geshe Sharawa then gave the lung, the

oral transmission of the text to Geshe Chekawa. It was the transmission of *The Eight Verses of Mind Training*.

After Geshe Chekawa received this transmission, he felt that it was such a precious instruction and if it was not explained to the general public there could be a danger of it becoming extinct. So from then onwards, Chekawa, with this motivation in mind, started the tradition of giving teachings on this subject in public.

From one side, there are so many teachings that we can hear these days because we are so fortunate, but from the other side, although we may be fortunate enough to be able to hear every teaching, we may never get to practice any of them. A time may even come one day when we could feel a bit disrespectful due to having to listen to the same thing again and again.

The *Seven Point Mind Training* text by Geshe Chekawa is explained by means of three main divisions:

1. An explanation of the quality of the author which shows the genuineness of the teachings;
2. explanations of the actual instructions' greatness in order to generate respect for them; and
3. the actual instruction.

### ***The Greatness Of The Author***

The first division explains the greatness of the author in order to show

the genuineness of the teachings. In the opening of the text, it says, “This essential nectar has been passed on from Lama Serlingpa.” ‘Nectar’ in Tibetan has the literal connotation of something that has the means for the attainment of eternal life. What does ‘eternal’ mean? It is the state of buddhahood; once a person attains the state of enlightenment there will be no more death.

### ***The Greatness Of The Teaching***

In the line from the text it says: “This teaching is like a diamond, the sun and a wish-fulfilling tree,” and if this text is practiced, then all these purposes will be fulfilled.

For example, even a small piece of diamond has a quality unsurpassed by other ordinary stones and this instruction and the practice of eliminating the self grasping mind which emphasises cherishing others, is more superior than any other practice or instructions.

The example referring to the sun means just as the sun eliminates darkness, this instruction and practice also expels the darkness of the ignorance of the self-cherishing and ego-grasping mind. Two of the greatest hindrances along the path to attaining enlightenment are these two minds.

The wish fulfilling tree refers to the healing or the medicine tree. All the parts of the medicine tree can be used to heal sicknesses and so can this instruction on thought training. If we practice well and even

though the realizations may be very minor, it will still help to eliminate some of the sicknesses of the self-cherishing mind. Therefore, no matter how little we may be able to practice, it will still help towards curing the sickness of our self-cherishing mind.

### ***The Actual Practice***

Now we come to the place in the text where the actual practice begins, which is turning bad situations into the path. We are now in the time known as the increase of the five degenerations. This is the time called the Era of Conflict which refers to any of the five degenerations of life and time itself. The five degenerations are as follows:

- (1) Defilement of views -  
when incorrect, perverse thoughts and ideas are predominant;
- (2) Defilement of passions -  
where all kinds of transgressions are exalted;
- (3) Defilement of the human condition -  
when people are more unhappy and dissatisfied;
- (4) Defilement of the life-span -  
we live shorter lives;
- (5) Defilement of the world age -  
when war and natural disasters are rife.

The situation we are in during this time is very bad, but a Dharma

practitioner should not think that these bad circumstances are hindrances to their practice. Instead we should be able to turn these bad conditions into very effective ones for our practice.

The two areas in which to practice are the two kinds of bodhicitta - the ultimate bodhicitta and the relative bodhicitta. To generate these two kinds of bodhicitta onto our mind is not easy. To gain a realization from merely listening to a teaching is not simple. Actually this has to be preceded by practices to purify negativity and to be able to accumulate merit. We have to remove all hindrances and accumulate many positive factors.

### ***The Preliminary Practices***

In order to generate realizations on the two kinds of bodhicitta we have to precede our practice by doing the preliminary practices which emphasise the purification of negativities and the accumulation of merit. These practices, according to Lama Serlingpa, can be included in the six preliminary practices.

The six preliminary practices are most important because bodhicitta is not easy to generate just by listening to teachings once, so we must practice them. I will explain the importance of them briefly:

Wherever you are going to do the six preliminary practices - whether in the mountains or in your own home - they must be done in a place that has been well cleaned. It is said that the best practice place is one where there have been no wars or fighting in the past, it



should not be inhabited by spirits and if possible, it should be a place where past masters have done their practices. If you are able to find such a suitable place with all these factors complete, it is believed that there will be a good possibility of gaining realizations quickly.

### *1. Cleaning the Place*

Merely sweeping the floor is not enough for a real dharma practitioner! The act of cleaning requires motivation at the beginning and dedication at the end. Even the simple act of cleaning can be included as an aspect of the path.

We need to visualize as we sweep that the dirt and impurities are like the delusions in our own mind and that the broom and our hands are visualized as the two kinds of bodhicitta and wisdom.

We should also think that we are applying the means of the three higher trainings to eliminate the dirt - especially for the vajra practitioners - the dirt of the self-grasping and self-cherishing mind, because, for the attainment of enlightenment, two of the most heavy hindrances are the self-cherishing and the ego-grasping mind.

The Tibetan word for cleaning has the connotation of cleaning and throwing away, so merely sweeping the place is not enough, we have to throw away the dirt. At this point we should visualize clearly that we are not only throwing away our own impurities, but also those of all sentient beings. It is most important to realise that the root of all suffering is the ego-grasping and the self-cherishing mind.

At the time of throwing away the dirt, we should visualize ourselves as well as all other sentient beings having uprooted the cause of suffering. Next, visualize that the dirt goes down underground, seven levels below the earth and into the mouth of the Lord of Death. We should think that this is the very best means to prolonging our life.

While you are cleaning and sweeping it is good to recite these two lines in accordance to the past practitioner, master Chudapanthaka: “I abandon all particles! I abandon all impurities!”

Master Chudapanthaka attained the state of Arhathood by having performed a visualisation and recitation of these words as he swept. So if we could do in accordance to that practice, it would be very good. This master was a practitioner of the Lower Vehicle, the Hinayana, and so only tried to eliminate the self-grasping mind, whereas we are supposed to be Great Vehicle practitioners so we have to not only eliminate the self-grasping mind, but also the self-cherishing mind. So our visualization and way of thinking should be much more broad and then the benefits will also be more.

By performing the act of cleaning the place of practice by proper means, the benefits will include having the meditation sessions become very clear and also, if somebody comes and looks at your place of practice, their mind will become clearer and they will have a feeling of delight in just being there.

As well as having these benefits, we will also attract positive spirits and the gods will help us. And not only that, it will also become a cause for purification into the realm of buddhahood into which we will enter when we become enlightened. It will also become a cause

for the attainment of a beautiful and handsome body in the next rebirth.

Therefore, if you understand well how to practice the simple act of cleaning the place of practice, it will include all aspects of the Greater Vehicle practices - and it could include all the six benefits.

## *2. Arranging the Body, Speech and Mind*

This is the arrangement of the representation of body, speech and mind of enlightened beings - the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. We do not need to go into all the details here, but if you have a statue or a painting of a Buddha, you need to look at it every morning before you begin the practice.

If you have a picture of a Buddha on your altar, do not think of it as being a mere picture. Think that there is an actual presence of the Buddha there. This will help to eliminate the self-cherishing and the ego-grasping mind. Do the aspirational prayers so that you may be able to eliminate those minds, and also that they can generate in us, a loving and compassionate mind.

## *3. Arranging the Offering*

The offerings, such as flowers, food, etc., should be of the best possible material.

The offering that costs a lot of money is not necessarily the best kind. The best offerings are those made with the two purities: (1) purity of heart and mind - without pretence, and (2) purity of the substance. The purity of substance means that the income used to acquire the offering should not have been obtained through income that caused harm to other sentient beings. If the substance for the offering was earned by causing harm to others or by any negative actions, then the offering would not please the Buddhas.

If we offer things that are very expensive there is the danger of either feeling miserly or of feeling proud. So, at the best, it should not be too expensive. The tradition of offering water in the waterbowls is very good because there is no chance of feeling miserly or proud.

The offerings should not be made with impure thoughts or motivation. They should not be mixed with any of the eight worldly concerns. If you make the offering with pure thought and motivation and without any impurities then the object of the offering, the Three Jewels, will be delighted.

#### *4. Sitting in the Meditative Posture*

This is staying in the seven featured sitting posture on the cushion, concentrating on the breath and not letting the mind go towards a non-virtuous aspect, or into a neutral aspect. Instead, we must generate special virtuous thoughts. This means that you must have a very strong, virtuous mind.

You should stay in the seven featured sitting meditative position - if you are able. There is a saying from the great master Marpa, “All the practitioners of Tibet on one side would not be able to compete with my way of sitting.” This was meant to emphasise the importance of the correct way of sitting in meditational practice, because if the body is straight, then the channels will be straight and if they are straight, then the mind will also be straight.

If our mind is directed in this practice of thought training towards non-virtue, or even towards a neutral state, then the actual session will not be good. For example, if you are sitting in your room doing meditation and your mind becomes distracted towards things that are happening outside, then even though you are practicing thought training, it cannot work because the mind has gone out of the room. And if our mind is in a non-virtuous state, then naturally our practice cannot be good.

This is like having one cushion - there is no possibility that two people can sit on one cushion. Likewise, if the attitude of the mind is towards the negative side then there will be no room for a virtuous or positive thought. For example, if it is too hot outside, we come inside and find someone sitting on our cushion. We cannot be rude and force them off, but we could be clever and say, “Friend, there is something happening outside, go and have a look!” Then when he leaves the cushion, you can sit on it!

So, if our mind is in a negative state, before starting the session of the meditation we must concentrate on the breath and do the nine round breathing technique. With the exhaling air, imagine all your

impurities and negativities going out. With the incoming air imagine that you are drawing in all the qualities of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. By doing the nine-round breathing, this will help to bring our mind to a neutral state.

This practice of nine-round breathing was appreciated by the master Milarepa and he said that it was the best means for bringing one's mind to a neutral state.

For example, when the rain falls into a tank the water at that time is not very clean or pure but after it has sat there for awhile it clears. When you bring it into the house in a jug, it is clean and clear and all the rubbish has gone. And this is just the same with the breathing meditation, this will help our mind to come to a state where it is not negative, not positive, it is just neutral. Once it is in a neutral state, then we must bring it to a virtuous state, aided and motivated by bodhicitta.

At the point when we have a very pure mind, we must think: 'Now while I have this precious human body with all its qualities, I will not waste it. I will do the practice on the thought training and I will do it in this very lifetime. I will do it this very moment!'

If you generate this motivation at the beginning of the day, you will be able to practice during the daytime. Even while engaged in other activities, during the course of the day, because of the strong motivation in the morning, somehow your activities will be quite different from what they would normally have been.

If you were ever engaged in some form of warfare, you would not have been bothered about hunger or thirst, or even injuries, sickness or pain. And so it is the same if we were to generate very strongly our

motivation in the morning to do the practice of thought training during the day. Then, during the day, we would not be bothered by distractions.

For example, one person may suffer a little, but he always remain gloomy even though others around him are cheerful. Another person with great suffering, but with a very strong mind, always remains cheerful. This is because that person's motivation will not allow minor things to affect him.

### *5. Refuge*

If you wish to do the extensive practice, you need to go for refuge and visualize the merit field. It is to the merit field that you offer the seven main offerings together with the mandala. Together with this, you visualize the drawing of the nectar from the objects of refuge and the merit field.

This thought training or thought transformation practice is very profound and so, as a basis, you must at least, take refuge. To do this, you must be able to recognize the objects of refuge and having recognized them, you then must go for refuge to them. If you are unable to recognize any objects of refuge, yet you still go for refuge, no realizations can arise.

If you are unable to do the extensive visualization, you should at least be able to recognize one principal figure in the merit field - and that should be the four-armed Buddha of Compassion, Chenrezig

(Avalokiteshvara) with all the implements in his hands. This is the most abbreviated way to visualize the object of refuge and this is actually what the Seven Point Mind Training text says to do.

Chenrezig represents not only all the buddhas, but he is also the embodiment of all the dharma protectors, all the deities and also all the lamas and teachers. So for those who cannot do extensive visualizations, this would be very good as he represents and embodies the entire merit field.

The seven-limbed offerings are, in completeness: prostrations, offerings, confession, rejoicing, the request not to die, the request to turn the wheel of dharma and the dedication. The older students know these seven main practices, but the new ones may feel a bit embarrassed if they do not know how to prostrate properly.

Where there is great benefit there is also great loss. This means that there are shortcomings if the prostrations are not done properly.

What we visualize while prostrating is the purification of the negativities of our own body, speech and mind and requesting the blessings of the body, speech and mind of a Buddha. The act of prostration is not something that is insignificant - it is something with a lot of meaning.

It is necessary to explain to beginners how to do the prostration properly. Another point to be made is that the practice of prostrating brings about a healthy body - it is like a yoga exercise.

In a place where I once lived, there were many people with chronic diseases that medicine could not cure. However, when they did the 100,000 prostrations they were cured.



There are three types of prostration: of the body, of the mind, and of the speech.

With the motivation of great faith and respect, just by folding the hands together becomes a prostration of the body. By putting the folded hands to the points of the body - the crown of the head, the forehead, the throat and at the heart - will become the cause to attain the crown of a Buddha's head along with the qualities of the thirty-two signs and the eighty marks of a Buddha.

It is like a form of punishment for we beginners if we have to stay sitting in long meditation or, for instance, meditation on ignorance, so perhaps an alternative practice would be to do prostrations. If we know how to do the meditations well that is a different matter, but otherwise we might be just sitting there and that is not so good. Instead, it might be more beneficial to do just one single prostration.

Prostrations normally recommended for the thought training is in relation to the *Confession of Transgressions Sutra* and also *The Suvarnabhasottama's Confession Sutra* (see Tsongkapa's *Collected Works*). This has been especially recommended for thought training practitioners, therefore if one does prostrations according to this, it would be very good. Recitation of these texts becomes the prostration of the speech.

When prostrating the body, the two thumbs should be put inside and there should be gaps inbetween the fingers and they should look like you are holding a gem. It is not proper to hold the palms together with the thumbs outside as it becomes a bad omen, a cause to have rebirth in a region that has no Buddhist teachings. However, if we do

it properly, it becomes a cause for rebirth where Buddhism has spread.

Realizations do not just arise. It has to be like going to school and going from one class to another until, at the end, we receive a certificate. And it is just the same with the thought training, it should firstly be preceded by the first stage.

While prostrating with our body, we can visualize that countless numbers of our own body are prostrating. We can also do them by trying to recollect what past rebirths we have attained. In the past, we have attained countless numbers of rebirths that even this whole universe could not hold or accommodate them all. But still, with the prostration of the body - visualizing this present human body representing all those human forms from previous rebirths - this visualization has been explained as being very effective in purifying the negativities acquired during those periods in the past.

I am not trying to invent a new teaching. Actually the origin of this way of thought training lies in *The King of Prayers* called the *Samantabhadra's Prayer*.

The prostration offered on behalf of all previous rebirths is very effective in purifying the negativities which are hindrances to our practice of the thought training practice. If we can eliminate negativities by means of this method, even though we might not expect to have the realizations associated with the mind training itself, still, realizations will come naturally by themselves.

## CHAPTER 3

We have, at this present time, attained the very good basis of a human body and we have also met with the essence of the Mahayana teaching, both of which are very difficult to find.

The state of the world now is in a degenerative time and it is called the Age of Conflict which is, in fact, a very bad time. Although we have not been born during the good times when the dharma was being freely taught and was widespread, nevertheless, we have heard the teachings and are engaged in learning about the practice of Dharma and of precious bodhicitta. So we are extremely fortunate.

No period of time can be classified either good or bad - summer will be summer, winter will be winter, but why we say a time is bad is because it is a time when the conduct of human beings degenerate. But if we do the practice of Dharma and, in particular, the practice of bodhicitta and try to be on a spiritual path, even though we live in a bad time, for us it will be good.

At such a time, we should think about how very fortunate we are to be able to practice the conduct of the Bodhisattvas, therefore please think: 'I will practice Dharma not only in this lifetime, but this very hour! And, in order to do this practice on thought training, I must

understand it - and to understand it, I must listen to these teachings.’

This teaching was summarized by Geshe Chekawa after it had been passed on by a Kadampa master and when he read Langri Tangpa’s *Mind Training in Eight Verses* and, in particular, the lines:

“Give the gains and victories to others;  
Take the losses and defeats on to yourself....”

Geshe Chekawa taught it to many lepers and, after listening to the teaching, many of the lepers were cured. Because of this happening, this teaching was at one time known as *The Lepers’ Dharma*.

### ***Renunciation***

If the practice on thought training is done properly, we will generate a very strong sense of renunciation and it will become the basis for very pure and strong bodhicitta. Strong bodhicitta can only arise by dependence upon renunciation, but firstly we must know the different factors related to renunciation.

Renunciation has been explained during the practices of the small and intermediate practitioner. Firstly we should try to generate renunciation within us so that we can experience compassion. Renunciation directed at oneself is just renunciation whereas, when it is generated for the benefit of others, it becomes a compassionate basis for bodhicitta. For example, a power station holds much power within itself and it can distribute that power to others. But if the main power station is underpowered, the people will not benefit from it. And so

renunciation is like that, it all depends on the strength of renunciation.

### ***Unconditional Love***

Next we have to generate love with compassion - but this is not ordinary love: the type of love we feel when we see our friends and relatives and they appear delightful and attractive to us. People we do not like usually do not appear to us like this. And when we meet a stranger we usually do not feel anything.

Unconditional love is when any type of sentient being appears before us and we feel real affection towards them. It is this unconditional love that we must generate first because, without it, there is no possibility for compassion to arise. We should see all sentient beings as being equal, not feeling love for the friend but no love for the enemy. We have to see all sentient beings as being the purest form of friend and the most kind.

We usually think that our mother has been the most kind to us, so we imagine that all sentient beings are as kind to us as our mother.

However, this way of thinking should not just be limited to the mother because some mothers have not been the kindest parent. Perhaps, it was the father and so those people should look upon all sentient beings as having the kindness of their father. Actually, this is in accordance to Buddha's recommendation where he says in a sutra text, "Look upon sentient beings as being one's mother, father, brother, sister, son or daughter." So if you feel that your son has been the most

kind and delightful to you, then think that all beings are as kind as him.

The mother is usually the one considered to be the most kind and that is why we think that all sentient beings are our mother.

### ***Equanimity***

In order to generate this attitude, it is important that it is preceded by the mind of equanimity because, if we do not have a level mind, we will not be able to have the outlook that all sentient beings are our mother. We could even do a meditation and try to think that ‘This sentient being and that one are my mother,’ but it will not be clear. There is a saying that says, one has to make the ground of equanimity wet with the water of love and so we first of all have to change our mind into a state of equanimity towards all sentient beings.

According to our self-cherishing and ego-grasping mind, we have three different ways of perceiving the three objects, which are the friend, the enemy and the stranger. For instance, we feel close to someone who has helped us and we call them a friend; towards somebody who has harmed us, we look upon them as an enemy; and to a stranger to whom we have no relationship at all, we feel neither distant nor close. Therefore we have three different thoughts that arise from the three different objects.

While we maintain this view, we will always have obscurations when we try to meditate on the precious bodhicitta, because something is definitely wrong.

To level our thoughts and mind into a state of equanimity, we should firstly consider the relationship that we have with this life's mother and to be aware of her kindness and appreciate the suffering she has undergone for us. For instance, we can think about how we were in her womb for nine months and then the pain she went through to deliver us. By doing this, we should come to the conclusion of just how very kind she is and, of all our relatives, she is the most dear to us.

Next, think about a person whom we do not like and then think of the person who means nothing to us. By looking at the different ways we relate to each of these three types of persons, we will come to the understanding that is based on three different types of reasonings.

We can change the way we see the friend who has been most kind and understand that, in previous lives, he has also been our enemy and has hurt and even killed us. Also, the good friend of this life has also been at other times, indifferent, and a stranger.

We can think that the second type, the enemy, for the time being only appears to be such because, in the past, this same person has been my relative and friend and has been very helpful and kind. With regard to the harm that he is causing us in this life, there is always the possibility that, in the past, we have done even more harm to him.

There was an incident, from the past, where a master, Utpalavarna, who could see by clairvoyance sang a song:

He eats his father's flesh and hits his mother.

The enemy he killed sits on his knee.

A wife gnaws her husband's bones.

Samsara can be such a farce!

This happened once in a family where the father and mother both died. The father was very attached to the property of this family and was reborn as a fish somewhere behind the house in a small pond. The mother also had attachment to the property and was reborn as a dog of that family. The enemy of that family was reborn as a grandson.

One day the dead mother and father's son caught the fish from the pond, cooked it and ate it. As he was eating the fish, the dog came by and wanted the scraps but the son beat the dog over the head and sent it away. At the same time, the son was holding his son on his lap - and it had been his previous enemy. The nature of samsara is a laugh!

Even our enemies cannot be seen as being definite because they may have been our friend or even a stranger in the past and it is the same with the person who is a stranger to us now. But if we really think properly, it is only for the time being that this person appears such and they may have been our parents in the past many, many times.

We can see that the stranger of today may not only have been our parent in the past but he could also have been our best friend or our worst enemy! It is only because we see, or perceive, these three people differently, that we relate to them differently. But they are, in fact, all the same - they have just played different parts.

We might still have the feeling that there really is a big difference. Even though we try to think of this person as having been our friend



in the past, at present he is my worst enemy, and we really feel justified in condemning him. We could even think that there is no point in concerning ourselves with past rebirths. But this is not the case because it is like, for example, a person who beat you with a stick last year and then someone causes a similar injury this year - both are equally to blame for what they have done to you.

This is just the same with the relatives and friends who delight us so much in this life. They also have been our worse enemy in the past and so it is the same with the enemy who beat you with a stick last year and the one who did the same this year.

We might still tend to think that, even though our enemy now may have been very kind to us in the past, nevertheless, he is our enemy in this life. This way of thinking could also apply to the relative or friend whom we love dearly now, even though we understand that they have been our enemy or a stranger previously, they still seem much better.

This kind of thinking is not correct because if somebody gave you a feast of delicious food last year and this morning someone else gave you the same, both of these two people are to be considered to be equally kind.

There is very good reasoning behind why we should not have a mind that feels distant towards some and close to others because that is a discriminating mind. All types - friends, enemies and strangers - all want happiness and do not want suffering. They are all alike in this way, there is no difference. So there is no justification for feeling either distant, close or indifferent towards people.

It is important to maintain a level mind - a mind of equanimity - towards all three different objects.

There is a section in the mandala offering where it says, "I offer the three objects, the friend, the enemy and the stranger, who are the very basis for the arising of hatred, ignorance and attachment. This I offer and may I be blessed to have the three poisons released".

If we can have this levelled mind of feeling the same towards everyone, it can become a very good basis for the generation of love and compassion. It is like, for example, a car - a car cannot go over terrain that is covered with bushes and trees or very steep hills. But if the surface of the ground is levelled out, it can move along easily. Likewise, in order to have the car of love and compassion progressing along well, the mind's surface needs to be levelled out.

None of us has exactly the same type of complexion or colour, but if we could imagine a painter who used three different colours: white for the friend; black for the enemy; and grey (a combination of both) for the stranger, because this is the way we discriminate. If we could level our mind to a state of equanimity, the colours of all sentient beings would be exactly the same.

We should not have the thoughts of feeling distant from some and close to others and we should not have the three poisonous minds of ignorance, hatred and attachment. As long as we have these three poisons on our mindstream, we cannot see a friend without becoming too attached and we cannot see an enemy without getting angry. We cannot see that the friend can make us angry and the enemy can show us kindness.

This is like a demon's deception. What does a demon's deception mean? It means that in the past there were demons, or spirits, who were cannibals and survived on human flesh. When they came to where the humans were, they would behave like humans in order to deceive people. When the humans would accept them as being part of their group, they would get very attached to them. They would then trick the humans and take them away to their place where they would kill and eat them.

Being attached to our friends and angry with our enemies is like a pig that is attached to its master. The pig feels very secure and trusting because it is getting fed well and cared for but it is only a matter of time before the master will kill and eat it.

If we can maintain a levelled, equanimitable mind, we will succeed in whatever we engage in - maybe it is the recognition of all sentient beings as being our mother! This would be like the foundation being laid for the construction of a house. If the foundation has been well levelled, then the upper part will be sound and strong. In this way, if we can gain the attitude of thinking that no matter how a sentient being appears to be to us, we will not respond by holding them near with attachment, distant with hatred, nor indifferent with ignorance. We must react to all beings in the same way and treat everyone equally, and then we will have no trouble meditating on the recognition that all sentient beings are our mother.

### ***Meditation On Recognizing All Sentient Beings As Being Our Mother***

To do this, firstly we must start with the mother of this life and understand that she has not only been our mother this time but for many, many rebirths. Meditate on that until you get the absolute belief that this life's mother has been your mother during all your past lives.

Next, shift your thoughts to your father of this life and try to meditate on the recognition that your father has been your mother in all past lives. Meditate until you get the determined belief in this.

Actually this is true because, if we were to count our rebirths since beginningless time, the number would be infinite and uncountable. In actual fact, our father of this life has, for countless rebirths, been our mother many, many times. Then see any of your other relatives who are very dear to you and imagine that they have been your mother for countless numbers of rebirths during the past.

Continue meditating on recognising all family members as having been your mother and then meditate on seeing all your spiritual friends - Dharma brothers and sisters - as being your mother.

We can finally extend this meditation to cover all the people of our own country and beyond, to all the sentient beings across the sea to all the other countries of the world. And then you can cover all the other worlds. You can then gain the distinct recognition that all sentient beings - every one - has been our mother in past lives.

This has to be a gradual extension from one to hundreds of thousands. It is like a drop of water being put into a container, drop

by drop, each one goes in until at last the container is filled. It is not possible to just go into a meditation session and think that all sentient beings have been our mother. This would not work.

We need to extend our meditation to all the sentient beings around us and extend it to all the beaches and towards the sea, thinking of how many animals and insects are on the surface of the water and how many are underneath the water, then extend this to the other countries until you have covered the whole world in your meditation.

This meditation on the recognition that all sentient beings have been our mother is quite difficult to do in the beginning. In fact, it is believed that a realization on this subject is one of the most difficult to arise amongst the six causes and the one result instruction of bodhicitta. It has been said that if we are able to attain a realization on this subject, then realizations on other subjects would be very easy. Even though it may take years and years, we should try to gain a realization on this subject.

A point in time should come when we get the feeling that no matter what type of sentient being appears to us, there is a feeling that he or she really is our mother. At this point, realization has been achieved.

Some people think it is not really possible for another sentient being to have been their mother - especially those who do not accept the belief of past rebirths. But this is a different matter. As long as a person accepts the existence of past lives, then, we have to implicitly accept that there have been other mothers. A birth in a past life did not arise like stones and pebbles without a mother. As long as we have

taken rebirth in the past, there must have been a mother.

In the past, we have taken countless numbers of rebirths since beginningless time. Even Buddha has not been able to see the beginning of our existence! If we have taken one hundred thousand rebirths, for instance, then there must have been the same number of mothers.

We could, however, still have the belief that all sentient beings may have been my mother in the past, but the past has gone and so there is only the mother of this life. But the same reasoning would apply to this life's mother because the time when we were born, is now the past. This mother who gave birth to us fifty years ago, is still our mother and the mother who gave birth to us two hundred and fifty years ago is still our mother. And the one who gave birth to us countless aeons ago was still our mother.

As long as we can recognize that all sentient beings have been our mother, then definitely we will have the attitude that they appear delightful. However, it would be different in the case where the mother had not been kind to us in this life.

Either you have been convinced that all sentient beings have been your mother - or you have not. Let us leave it at this. You can go into your own study of this afterwards.

At the beginning of the meditation session, visualize Chenrezig at the crown of your head and then visualize the drawing of the nectar from him. Even while doing the meditation on the mind of equanimity and while doing the visualization of the drawing of the nectar from Chenrezig, we should make this request: "May I be blessed to have a realization on the mind of equanimity".

When doing the meditation on the recognition of all sentient beings as being one's mother and visualizing the drawing of the nectar from Chenrezig, imagine that the nectar purifies all hindrances and obstructions to this recognition.

This is important because it is very difficult to believe that all sentient beings have been our mother. This is caused by our own self-grasping ignorance and self-cherishing mind. So these hindrances must be removed and purified before we can generate this recognition. The drawing of the nectar will purify and remove the hindrances for that realization.

At the end think that you have been blessed by the nectar coming into your body and that you have attained a very special realization on this subject.

### ***Remembering the Kindness***

Just to have a mere recognition that all sentient beings have been our mother is not enough - we have to remember their kindness.

There are two parts to this section: (1) remembering the kindness - which is remembering the kindness of all sentient beings as being our mother; and (2) remembering the special kindness - which is remembering the special kindness of all sentient beings, even though they are not our mother at this time.

Right from the very beginning, our mother has been kind to us - she gave birth to us and therefore gave us this body. She gave us the

flesh and blood of this body which can be used as the basis for the practice of Dharma.

At the time when she carried us in her womb for nine months and ten days and then gave birth to us, she underwent pain and suffering. She was also very careful in any activities that she did so that we were not harmed in any way. If she had not been very careful while we were still in the womb, by being harsh and rough, we could have died.

Even at the time of delivery when we were covered with blood and afterbirth, she considered us to be very precious as if she had just found a gem. She would have been totally unmindful of how we looked.

That act of affection is shown even by animals and insects who try to protect their young and would sacrifice their lives for the sake of their babies.

When we were babies, we were very vulnerable and many conditions could have brought about our death and yet she never forgot about our welfare for a moment. She tried to not leave us unattended for even a few moments. It is said that she cared for us so much during this early stage in our life that the merit she accumulated would be equal to buying animals from the slaughterhouse and setting them free, hundreds and hundreds of times over.

Once in Tibet a merchant was riding a pregnant mare when they were accosted by a robber. The robber hit the mare on the belly with his sword and the baby foal fell out. Before the mare died she licked her tiny baby as a final act of caring for it. So even with regards to the



animals, we really can believe how very kind our mothers have been.

Even the insects on the ground and the birds in the sky all try to defend and protect their babies. They are not just trying to show their anger or strength, they are just trying to protect their babies and for this cause, they will undergo any hardship whatsoever.

Most mothers have the attitude that they would rather have sickness themselves than their child be sick. She would often prefer death for herself than for her child. Not only the mother of this life has been so kind in this way, but also the many countless mothers we have had.

### ***Remembering The Special Kindness***

Remembering the special kindness refers to the kindness of others who provided things such as food, clothing and even our fame and name. It is only due to the kindness of other sentient beings that we are able to exist. It is only due to others that we are able to attain high position, a good name, fame and fortune.

For instance, just one grain of rice is the result of the labour and caring of countless numbers of sentient beings. One grain of rice has passed through countless numbers of hands until it reaches us.

We normally just pay for things with our money - and that is it. But if we think carefully, the object that we are buying is the outcome of the work of many other sentient beings. Even the money with which we buy things is the product of the work of countless numbers of sentient beings.



## CHAPTER 4

Please make your motivation such: Since having attained this human body with all the pleasures and endowments, I will not be attached to the three realms of cyclic existence. Instead, this very day, I will try to eliminate the source of all suffering - the self-cherishing thought. In order to do this, I will listen to these profound instructions on the teachings. By listening to this, may I have the potential to liberate myself and all other sentient beings from suffering.

This instruction is very profound in the sense that it has been passed on from the great master Shantideva. The instruction is called The Great Way which leads to the conduct of being of great benefit to oneself as well as beings. It is called the Great Way Conduct as it includes the instructions taught on the Wheel by Manjushri and others. It places great emphasis on the method path and it is normally referred to as the Great Way Instruction.

If we were to rank this instruction with others in respect to quality, it would have to be placed first above all. This is the one that offers the most potential for one to accomplish the purpose - not only for oneself but for others.

This instruction on thought training has, as we explained before,

two main divisions - the preliminary and the actual. The actual training is the generation of the two kinds of bodhicitta - the relative and the ultimate. According to the root text, the first one to be explained is ultimate bodhicitta and the relative one is explained next. However, according to the traditions of other great masters of the past, it would be better to have the explanation of relative bodhicitta first, followed by ultimate bodhicitta.

### ***Training on the Method Path***

These instructions come to the focal point of the generation of bodhicitta. There are two intentions for the generation of this - firstly, the aspiration for enlightenment and secondly, the desire to attain it for the benefit of others.

In order to help other sentient beings, the best means to do so would be for oneself to attain the state of buddhahood. So what we have to do is to try to train on the path and have the realizations that lead to enlightenment.

Once we have gained all the realizations and the qualities of enlightenment, from that enlightened state we can transform into an emanation body to administer to the welfare of other sentient beings. In this state, even one light from our body could transform into many emanation bodies and help so many, many beings. This is, of course, the best state to be able to remove the suffering entirely, of sentient beings and lead them to ultimate happiness.

In order to attain the state of dharmakaya and enlightenment for oneself - or of attaining the major body of a buddha - is firstly to train on the method path. In order to do this, we must understand and generate bodhicitta. If a person has not generated this great compassion, there can be no possibility for the attainment of enlightenment.

In order to generate precious bodhicitta, firstly we have to generate delightful love and compassion. Without these two, there is no possibility of generating bodhicitta. In order to have these two, we must have the mind of equanimity. As long as our mind is not levelled towards all sentient beings equally, even though we may feel love and compassion, it will only be partial love and partial compassion because it will be meted out to some and not to others.

The definition of love and compassion is that it should be a state of mind that focuses fully on all sentient beings equally and wants them to experience only happiness and to be separated from suffering. To have this, we must generate the kind of mind that does not discriminate.

To be able to gain the recognition that all sentient beings have been our mother must begin by thinking of our mother in this lifetime. Just to merely acknowledge that all sentient beings are our mothers is not enough. We must be mindful of the kindness of our present mother: How she was kind in the beginning when she carried us in her womb; in the middle when she delivered us and at the end when she cared for us.

We should be mindful that this is not just human mothers who do this - it is all mothers. And all mothers have been kind to us in all

our past lives.

We must also be aware that our mother has not only done many positive things for us, she has also committed many negative actions in order to help us. On some occasions, she would have killed other sentient beings just to protect us. It is very possible that our mother is somewhere down in the hell realms and the same could be true for our mothers of past lives. They could be experiencing suffering in the hell realms, all because they may have committed negative actions for our sake!

Even now there could be the possibility that our mother now has negativities on her mindstream which are complete factors and causes to be reborn in the hell realm. There are many others who have created negative actions in order to help us and they, too, are in the same situation of being born in the hell realms.

Our mothers in the past may have sacrificed their own lives countless times, just for our sake. There would have been many times when she would not have been mindful of any danger to herself in order to guard and protect us. She would have suffered and died for us many, many times. We might agree that our mother is kind and that she would have been kind when she was our mother, but not at any other time.

### ***The Kindness Shown When Not Our Mother***

Both directly and indirectly many, many beings have been very kind

to us. For example, a room in a house has timbers, carpets, windows and other parts that are all the outcome of the labour of many people. Yet because those people will never be recognised, we feel no connection to them. However when we really think properly about this, everything to do with this life is the result of the kindness of others. Even this body that we think of as ours, is due to the kindness of another sentient being - our mother!

To attain this human body, we would have, in the past, observed the practices of the six perfections such as generosity and morality and so forth. If there were no sentient beings towards whom we could direct all those positive actions, there would be no possibility of attaining rebirth as a human.

Even enlightenment, the state of buddhahood, is attained only by dependence on other beings. It is only due to the practice of compassion and love. If there were no sentient beings, there could be no enlightenment.

Not only is the happiness and comfort that we experience now, due to having had a loving attitude towards others, but all the suffering and problems we have are the result of having done harm to other sentient beings. If we really think about this, we must realize that every act we do to others either harms them - which results in discomfort and problems to ourselves - or we help them and bring happiness to ourselves. This understanding should bring about the belief that the law of cause and effect is definitely true.

The great Indian master Shantideva said in one of his works that many people meditate on bodhicitta, they do prostrations and pay

respect to the Buddha, but yet they completely neglect all other sentient beings. “But”, he wonders “whose tradition is this?” To devote to the Buddha and not to other sentient beings is wrong. He says that all beings should pay equal respect to the Buddha as well as to all other sentient beings because the state of enlightenment is attained only by dependence upon both of these objects equally.

Some people attain high positions and are very popular and famous, but that greatness is only due to the kindness of other sentient beings. If such a person were to stay alone in an isolated place, they could not become famous or popular because there would be no sentient beings around to respect and acclaim them. Fame, affection and popularity all depend on other sentient beings.

No matter how much you believe that you have supreme knowledge or that you are the best type of person, if others do not appreciate you, you are nothing.

So all sentient beings, no matter whether they are our mother at this time or not, have been very kind to us. Our food, shelter, reputation, name and fame are all due to other sentient beings. If there were no sentient beings, there would be nobody to help and then there would be no source of happiness. And if there were no sentient beings who could harm us, we would have no cause to practice. Everything depends on other sentient beings.



## ***Waging War On Self-Cherishing And Ego-Grasping - Destroying The Ego-Grasping Mind***

Most of the time, we have a strong fortress around the centre of our self cherishing and ego-grasping mind in order to protect it and keep other forces out. We consider our self-grasping and ego-cherishing mind to be our personal protecting deity! And we act towards it as if offering it prostrations! It seems that we have become a siddhi, or a very accomplished person, in the matters of samsara. We really have become highly realized persons in this regard.

Now is the appropriate time for us to wage nuclear war on our self-grasping and ego-cherishing mind - with the nuclear weapons of love and compassion! If we do not wage such a war - at this moment - it will become impossible to destroy those two types of mind.

So with the visualization of Chenrezig on the crown of your head imagine drawing the nectar into your body. This will destroy all possible hindrances to the recognition that all sentient beings are your mother. Then remember their kindness. The nectar enters your body and purifies it. Then generate a very firm and strong realization on the recognition that all beings have been your mother - now and in the past - when they were, and when they were not.

Think that the essence of the love and compassion from all past enlightened beings has been received by you in the form of nectar. Think that when the nectar enters your body, it crushes down and destroys the ego-grasping and self-cherishing mind.

***Repaying The Kindness***

Just to remember the kindness is not enough. We must repay that kindness.

What we have been doing until now is borrowing other's kindness. We have always been the subject of other beings' kindness and we have never been able to repay it. We have never even tried to repay the interest! But now, at this time when we have attained this precious human body and have met with the supreme Dharma and are able to practice the Dharma - we are in the right position to repay.

There is a Tibetan saying that says ' we borrow wine, but we repay with water'. And this has been our normal attitude to now.

We can use an example of this with a son who has a blind mother and suddenly that mother goes crazy. If this mother were to grab a sword and throw it at her son, he would not react with anger because she is not only blind, but also crazy. He would react with compassion because he would understand that she cannot help what she has done.

This is the same when we think some sentient beings are our enemy because they cause us pain and suffering. However, if we think clearly, they are only harming us because they have no control over their behaviour. They are under the control of the three poisonous delusions - hatred, ignorance and attachment.

If the son had remained unmoved and totally neglected his mother and refused to help her, it would be very sad. In the same way, if we did not try to help other beings that, also, would be very sad.

We are often too familiar with the discriminating mind, which

we have had since the beginning of time. It is still possible at this time, when seeing someone who has harmed us to think of him as our enemy - not as our mother. Or maybe we just feel indifferent towards them and treat them as a stranger. According to the lineage instruction at this point, the recommended practice is to generate a special equanimity of mind. To do this we have to equalize ourself with others.

### ***Special Equanimity***

This type of equanimity is different from the one we explained before, because at that time the equanimity simply meant that all sentient beings want happiness and do not want to suffer. In that sense they are all equal. Also that type of equanimity refers to all sentient beings as being considered to be our mother, our enemy, our friend and a stranger. In this way they are all the same, they just want happiness without suffering.

But in this instance, we generate the feeling of equanimity by thinking: 'I will try to bring happiness to all sentient beings equally - and I will try to remove their suffering equally and without any form of discrimination'.

This is the attitude of the Buddha who cares for the welfare of all sentient beings without showing any discrimination such as being far from some and close to others. It is this special thought of equanimity that we have to try to generate at this point.

We must meditate on the thought that all sentient beings - down

to the very smallest ant - wants only happiness and does not want to suffer. But because they are ignorant to the means for gaining that happiness, they continue to suffer.

Here is an example of how the discriminating mind wants to look after the welfare of sentient beings: Imagine that there are many beggars pleading for food, but you do not have enough food for all of them. Some will eat and some will not. To discriminate between them would become an inappropriate act because they are all hungry and they all need food. They all equally deserve to be fed.

As human beings we all want the two levels of happiness - the contaminated (worldly), and the uncontaminated (beyond worldly happiness). From our side however, we cannot bring happiness equally to all beings and so our help becomes inefficient. Like the example, we too, would be unable to feed all the beggars without having to discriminate between them and feed some and not others .

It is inappropriate to give medicine to some people who are dying but not to others. All sentient beings are suffering from the sickness of the three poisonous delusions. But if we try to discriminate between being helpful to some while neglecting others, that would be inappropriate. While all sentient beings have the sickness of the three delusions, there will definitely be death - and that is suffering. We must not discriminate, we must relieve the suffering of all sentient beings equally.

If a friend and an enemy were standing side by side, we should not discriminate between them. According to Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Buddha once was cut on the shoulder by

an enemy with an axe. A friend stood on his other side offering ointment. Buddha looked upon these two people equally and without discrimination and showed compassion towards both of them.

The Buddha could not accept that there was a friend and an enemy who truly existed from their own side and neither should we. If the enemy truly existed from his own side, he would always be seen to be an enemy. But this is not so because the enemy of last life could turn into the friend of this life. Even the enemy of this life can later turn into our best friend. And the same with the best friend who turns into our worst enemy - in one lifetime.

Because we have strong non-believing minds, we think that we should do more for our friends and less for our enemies. This is like not using our hands to remove a stone that hurts our foot because the two parts are unrelated. But we might say that that is not the same thing and does not apply to the friend/enemy relationship, but feet and hands are part of the same mental continuum of our mind - they are not separate.

There is not even any need to cherish our feet and hands because with proper reasoning, we can understand that this body does not even belong to us - the flesh and blood has come from our parents.

Because of our very strong non-believing mind, we could even think that there is no need to look after the welfare of other sentient beings. But this way of thinking stems from beginningless time, we have always been under the influence of hatred, ignorance and attachment. And it is because of this that we suffer. So, unless we change our attitude, we will remain under the power of these three,

we will continue to suffer.

After thinking about these reasonings, we should come to the realization that there is no reason for us to have a discriminating mind - one that views some sentient beings as near to us, as friends - and others as distant, as enemies or strangers. By understanding these reasonings, we should come to the conclusion to take responsibility for the welfare for all others' happiness equally and to separate them from suffering equally.

At this point, visualize nectar entering your body. Visualize or imagine that this nectar purifies any hindrances to realizations on this subject. At the conclusion, think that you have attained a very special realization on this subject of equalising oneself with others.

### ***The Self-Cherishing Mind***

To be able to generate the precious bodhicitta we need to precede it by thinking of every possible reasoning for eliminating the self-cherishing thought. And we need to think of every possible reasoning and viewpoint on the qualities of cherishing others.

We have become so familiar with self-cherishing that really we have become inseparable from it. There is a line in the text that says: 'I am also an enemy of myself.' Unless we can recognize the fact that we can be our own worst enemy, there can be no possibility of bodhicitta arising.

The meaning of being our own enemy should be understood in

the terms of having this self-cherishing mind. While we have it we will remain very much under its control. Our self-cherishing mind is like, for example, a sesame seed which is the source of oil - the oil and the seed are of one nature and cannot be separated. And that is like our situation.

The suffering experienced in the hot hell realms is caused by the self-cherishing mind. It has led us into performing negative actions such as killing due to the attachment of seeing someone as an enemy, motivated by the self-cherishing mind. All the suffering that we experience is caused by our own self-cherishing mind.

The cause that leads us to the hungry ghost state is also the self-cherishing mind which makes us miserly with our possessions. Normally the cause for taking rebirth in this realm is said to be miserliness. There is no other factor that can lead us to this realm, it is only the self-cherishing mind.

The self-cherishing mind prevents us from observing ethics and morals properly and, because of this, it leads us towards attaining a rebirth as an animal. In the animal realm, there are many different and frightening aspects of animals which are the outcome of the self-cherishing mind.

Wars and fighting between nations are created because of the self-cherishing mind. Even fighting and arguments within a family have the same cause. The self-cherishing mind is the commander who governs over wars and arguments.

The Arhats or solitary realizers cannot attain the state of enlightenment because of the self-cherishing mind. Even a small injury

to our foot caused by a thorn is the result of the self-cherishing mind because it is believed that anger in a past life brings the result of thorns hurting one's feet.

We, as Dharma practitioners, know that, during some teachings, we do not feel like staying in the cross-legged position on our cushion because it causes discomfort. This is only due to the self-cherishing mind. However, in competitions such as horse or car racing, people put up with great discomfort just to be there! But when it comes to Dharma practice, those same people feel too much discomfort after sitting for a very short time. This is because of a self-cherishing mind.

Consider horse racing. The race is very fast and the jockeys do not really mind much if they fall off and get hurt. Even the spectators are willing to pay as much money as the entry ticket demands. However, if we are asked to listen to a teaching on Dharma, many of us would instantly try to have our ears somewhere else! And with regard to Dharma projects, when people are asked to give some sort of financial help, they just refuse to hear.

We can see this self-cherishing attitude with regard to the development of a country. Many firms profess to have the aim of developing the nation, but if we look carefully, we find that they are really deeply rooted in self-development.

It is the self-cherishing mind that brings the twenty-one inauspicious omens, sufferings and troubles. Whatever is wrong in the world has been created entirely by the self-cherishing mind.

As long as we have not been able to expel these inauspicious signs, or the bad luck that comes with the self-cherishing mind, no matter



what practice we do, they will not be good. If we have not expelled this from our heart, then even though we may call ourselves a Mahayanist, it would be inappropriate.

As long as the self-cherishing mind is firmly rooted inside our heart, yet outwardly we show that we are a Mahayanist, it would be without meaning. This is just like a very great person living inside a house with somebody guarding and protecting him. If no-one can talk to him, what good does that do?

This centre is called the Atisha Centre. Atisha was the person who was successful in expelling the self-cherishing and ego-grasping mind. All those who are connected to this centre should try, with true meaning, to expel these two minds.

If we can do this, the name of this centre will be appropriate to all the people living here and who are connected to it. We should all aspire to do this.



## CHAPTER 5

The great Atisha had one hundred and fifty teachers but he was not satisfied with one hundred and forty nine of them because he wanted the instructions on generating the precious bodhicitta. He searched for a long time for a Lama who would teach this subject and, in the course of this, he endured many hardships. One such hardship was a long sea voyage which ultimately led him to Lama Serlingpa.

This Lama asked Atisha whether he was able to train on the precious bodhicitta and Atisha replied that he could. Then Lama Serlingpa asked whether he could stay for twelve years to undertake the training needed and Atisha replied that he could. We, too, should try to be like the great Atisha and generate the precious bodhicitta onto our mindstreams.

Although Atisha had one hundred and fifty teachers and he received extensive teachings on both aspects of the path, the sutra and the tantra, when the names of any of his teachers was mentioned Atisha was not moved - except for at the sound of the name of Serlingpa - and then Atisha would fold his hands together in reverence and tears would fall.

When people saw this they would ask: "Is this because Lama

Serlingpa has higher realizations?” And Atisha would reply: “No. It is because at present I have a good heart and it is due to the instructional path taught by Lama Serlingpa. It is because of this that I feel reverence even at the sound of his name”.

Even if we are not able to generate the precious bodhicitta in full, to be able to generate a fraction of it would be very great. To be able to generate love and compassion is very profound and could even surpass all the other qualities. For example, a diamond surpasses all other jewels; the sun gives light to darkness; and the healing medicine tree can cure every type of sickness.

To be able to generate the precious bodhicitta, we need the method of the six causes and the one result, which is the Seven Point Thought Training instruction. With this instruction we can generate the precious bodhicitta, but it would not be very strong. What we have to do is to combine together the practice of equalising and exchanging oneself with others.

### ***Equalising And Exchanging Self For Others***

There is a prayer in the tradition of Lama Tsong Khapa which is very special because it tells of the superior method of combining the generation of bodhicitta with the seven point instruction on equalising and exchanging oneself with others.

We should think that we will immediately begin this practice and that it will become a counter-measure against our own self-cherishing

mind. This is stated in a line from Guru Puja where it says that the self-cherishing mind is the source of all unwanted suffering.

So what we have to do is to realize that when we become angry with our enemies, we should become angry with ourselves. We should direct that anger towards the internal self-cherishing mind and not towards other people. We have to begin to develop the outlook that the real enemy is our own self-cherishing and ego-grasping mind and then try to suppress them as much as we can. Eventually, we should reach the conclusion that these two are the source of all our suffering.

Next, we consider from every viewpoint and reasoning the benefits to be gained from cherishing others. It is because we have cherished others in past lives and not killed them, that we will have a long life now. And because of having cared for others in previous lives and have practiced generosity, in this life we will be quite wealthy and have many possessions. We should think from now on that all the happiness and comfort we experience in this life is all due to having cherished others.

From now on, we should try to aim at generating bodhicitta. We should train our mind in cherishing others and then our own happiness and comfort will increase. This is the beginning of true happiness. Therefore, cherishing other sentient beings as if they were our mother creates the cause for all the qualities and happiness to arise. All the qualities and realizations attained by the Bodhisattvas and Solitary Realizers are all the outcome of having cherished others.

The Buddha was, in the beginning, an ordinary person just like us but, after training on the Path, he came to an understanding that

the self-cherishing and self-grasping mind is to be suppressed and the cherishing of others is to be adopted. After training on this, he attained enlightenment.

In one of the Buddha's past lives, he was born as a prince in Nepal. His father had three sons who were named The Great God, The Great Love and The Great Windfall. The Buddha's name was The Great Windfall.

Once these three princes went to a forest and there they saw a starving tigress with four cubs. The Buddha's two brothers felt great compassion for the mother and immediately went in search of food for them.

The Buddha however, instead of looking for food, thought deeply on the nature of the situation. He came to the understanding that from beginningless time, he had been under the power of the self cherishing mind and it was this that caused him to experience suffering. The instant that he realized this, he immediately abandoned that type of mind and adopted the mind of cherishing others. He realized that, it was the self-cherishing mind that deceives and causes suffering, whereas the cherishing of others becomes a source of happiness. He then generated great courage and will-power and offered his own body to the starving tigress and her four cubs.

Even though the other brothers were very compassionate to others, their compassion was not as strong as the Buddha's because he offered his own body, whereas the brothers did not.

We should remember this incident of the Buddha's great courage which came about only by the thought of cherishing others more than oneself. We should try to act in accordance to that.

A line in the text says, “To cherish mother sentient beings is the source of all happiness.” Even though others may rise against us and cause us harm, we should still consider them to be more dear to us than our own life. We gave the example previously about the crazy, blind mother who threw the sword at her son. The son was not angered but became even more compassionate by understanding the condition of the mother and how she was under the control of delusions.

From beginningless time until now, we have been cherishing only ourselves and neglecting others. But now, we must exchange this thought for one of cherishing others more and neglect our own interests. That is what is meant by the term ‘exchanging oneself with others’. It does not mean that we have to turn into another person.

We might get the impression that it is just not possible to exchange our normal attitude because we do not have the kind of courage which permits this to happen. However, if we put a real effort into doing this, we will succeed.

If we can think about the outcomes of the two kinds of thoughts - the self-cherishing and the cherishing of others - we must surely gain an understanding and then really want to exchange oneself with others. By understanding that our problems develop because of self-cherishing attitudes and happiness comes from cherishing others, we can gain the courage to change.

So from now on, we should be able to develop the attitude that all the activities of our body, speech and mind will be dedicated to others instead of oneself. If we can become mindful of others, instead of our own self interest, that is the real starting point. This is what we mean

by exchanging ourselves with others. Let us assume that we have exchanged ourselves with others as a sign of auspiciousness.

### ***Giving And Taking Meditation***

Now we come to the part of the text where it says, “Combine the giving and the taking together.” So along with the special force of compassion, we do the visualization of taking and with the special force of love, we give.

### ***The Taking Visualization***

The text says, “Start the taking visualization from oneself.” This means that we take upon ourselves *NOW* whatever possible suffering we are to experience in the next life - or next year. And this should be extended into future rebirths. We should visualize taking on that suffering now.

Next, we extend the same visualization to our parents of this life. Then we extend it to the people within our locality and then we take on the suffering of all the people of Australia and then the world.

Next, we take on the suffering of all other sentient beings such as the ones in the hell realms, the hungry ghosts and the animal realms.

When doing the taking visualization, we have to feel real compassion for the sentient beings and their critical situations. We want to take on their sufferings of sickness and other unwanted obstacles.



## ***The Giving Meditation***

In the giving visualization, we offer our body, wealth and all the merit that we have accumulated.

To give our body, we visualize that we transform it into a wish-fulfilling gem that has the potential to give to sentient beings whatever their needs may be. For instance, visualize that this body has the power to bring a shower of rain to the hot hell realm which removes the suffering of intense heat. For those in the cold hell realm, visualize this body has the power to bring warmth. For the hungry ghost realm, visualize that your body has the power to transform and give food and drink to those beings. Visualize that this body has the power to give wisdom to the animal realm because animals are supposedly ignorant and lacking in wisdom.

Imagine that this body has the power to give whatever is necessary to each and every sentient being. For those who are in need of flesh, transform your body to fulfil that potential. For those who want blood, give blood and those who want shelter, then visualize the power to give shelter. For those who need a lamp or light, then visualize that. Whatever is needed, your body has the power to give.

There are two aspects to the giving of the body: (1) Offerings of different kinds of substances to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions and (2) the body has the potential to give the things needed by sentient beings.

When you have become proficient at the visualization of taking and giving, you then do it on the breath. It is not recommended

initially, that a practitioner does the giving and taking on the breath. Firstly we need to become familiar with the practice for quite awhile and then shift the visualization on to the inhalation and exhalation.

When you become very familiar with this training, it is possible for you to actually take on the pain and suffering of others. There was once an incident, where a Lama saw someone throwing stones at a dog and because of his training, he immediately took upon himself the pain that the dog was suffering. Later on, a swollen mark appeared on the Lama's back which indicated that the pain had actually been transferred to him.

### ***Inhalation***

The taking and giving meditation on the breath begins with the visualization of the self-cherishing self-grasping mind in the aspect of something very black in the centre of your heart.

As you inhale air, visualize that you are taking on the negativities and obscurations of all the sentient beings in the hell realms. This air enters in the form of black smoke with black impurities and goes into your heart where it crushes and destroys your own self-cherishing mind.

### ***Exhalation***

With the exhaling breath, visualize that you are giving out all your accumulated merit to all the sentient beings in the hell realms, so that

they can become a suitable basis for training on the Path and so they can gain enlightenment.

Then shift this visualization on the exhaling breath to the sentient beings of the hungry ghost realm, animal realm and others.

This is an outline of how to do the visualization of taking and giving on the breath. It cannot become a good practice to merely think, 'I am taking the suffering of sentient beings on to myself and giving them my merit'. This is too vague and general and would not be an appropriate meditation or visualization.

When you visualize that you are taking on the negativities and obscurations of other sentient beings, imagine that they have completely gone. Just like going to the barber and getting your hair shaved off and you are completely bald. Nothing is left.

Imagine taking on to yourself even the grossest negativities incurred by others that might bring rebirth into the hell realm. Imagine taking on the subtle obscurations of the ones who are about to attain liberation such as the wisdom obscurations of the Bodhisattvas who are attaining enlightenment.

The sufferings of others can be visualized in the form of a terrifying and ferocious animal who come by means of hailstorms or as thunder. When this visualization is done over and over again, there is the distinct possibility that you feel very afraid. You might think, 'Is this thing really coming at me?' This is usually a very good indication that something is beginning to happen to the self-cherishing mind.

When a person becomes trained in this visualization of taking and giving, when they become sick or in a critical situation, instead of

feeling depressed or sad they become happy. They feel that the negativities of others has ripened on them!

Amongst us here today, there are many elderly students who have had contact with the Dharma for many years, so now you know how to react in critical situations.

Although I have not had a lot of contact with Westerners, in fact only for about two years, but I find many people asking for observations for illnesses and advice on remedies for obstacles. There is no need anymore to contact a teacher about having observations done because you should be able to do the visualizations on these practices. You should be able to react in the proper way and with a spiritual person's way of thinking.

At the times when we are well fed, the sun is shining and everything is right in the world, we feel that we are very good spiritual practitioners. But at the time when we are sick and depressed and we feel worse off than any of our friends, we lose sight of our spirituality.

However, the person who is always practicing thought training, is the one referred to in the text of *The Seven Point Thought Training* where it says, "One should be able to turn adverse conditions into the Path and one should be able to turn inauspiciousness and obstacles into a blessing." But what some people do when they encounter a very critical situation, is to renounce their Christian faith and enter Buddhism! If they cannot find a religious solution, they go to hospital and have a surgical operation. These kinds of people just jump from one critical situation into another trying to find a solution to their problem.

Actually, what we should be doing if such situations arise, is to

apply these instructions as a means to bringing about a solution.

When people come and ask me to do a mo for them when they are sick, it is very difficult to recommend that they do this practice of taking and giving. But now you know the background reasoning for doing it, so you should be able to apply it if you get very ill or if you are in a very serious situation.

What happens when people who are very new to Buddhism, or who do not understand the reasoning behind this practice come to seek help, it is very difficult to help them. This is because there is no effective medicine that can be given to them and to explain these teachings would take too long. The person would not be willing to listen for so long.

To teach a person, who has not studied the LamRim, the practice of taking and giving would not be suitable to their mind and they would not be able to accept it.

For the last few days, we have been talking about thought training instruction, so perhaps you have an adequate basis on which you can now rely if, in the future, such a situation should arise. You can then put it into practice.

If we were to put aside this thought training practice and jump into a practice on the concentration on the winds and channels, or have high tantra initiations, it would become like the saying, 'the food in the mouth is pushed away by the tongue'. This means that something that is delicious is not allowed to be swallowed. It would be pointless, in other words.

The thought training should be the basis on which we add

additional practices such as initiations. The thought training is like the body. If you have a body, you can adorn it by adding jewels, clothing and ornaments. Without a body, the ornaments become meaningless.

So if you do the deity visualizations or the practices related to the channels and the winds on the basis of thought training, they will be appropriate and meaningful.

Listening to a few days teaching on this subject will not make us firm enough to be able to apply this practice. Reading books will not be enough either. We need the instruction that directly points out and details the instruction, so what is very important is to try to receive more instruction and then study this subject.

When you gain a good ability in applying this instruction, then you can tell your family members and friends how to react when they are in critical situations.

In the past when there was no cure for leprosy, Geshe Chekawa gave the mind training instructions to the lepers and many were cured. These days when there are many incurable diseases, it is possible that they can be cured by means of this practice. If it is done properly. Even if a person is not cured and they die, that person will have no regrets about dying.

The teaching on thought training is a high practice but as you have requested it, I have explained it as best as I can. So try to put it into practice as much as you can.

## CHAPTER 6

Since we have received the opportunity to be able to practice Dharma, we should no longer be attached to the three realms of cyclic existence. Instead, we should aspire to the attainment of enlightenment from which state we can liberate all sentient beings from the suffering of cyclic existence. Please make your motivation for listening to this teaching with this understanding.

The teaching to be given is the very noble path which has been delivered by the Buddhas of the past, the present and will be delivered again by the Buddhas of the future.

This is a very profound instruction which summarizes the different activities of the Bodhisattvas into a practice of seven points. The actual practice of *The Seven Point Thought Training* consists of training the mind with the two kinds of bodhicitta - the conventional and the ultimate.

### ***Conventional Bodhicitta***

There is a saying in one of the texts: “On the ground of equanimity, one has to sprinkle the water of love.”

Firstly we should try to level our minds towards the three kinds of sentient beings: the friend, the enemy and the stranger. We should try to not discriminate between them by being close to some, distant from others and indifferent to strangers. Instead, we should try to have the attitude of altruism towards all. As we explained before with the example of the blind and crazy mother with the sword. This boy was not angry with her because (1) she was his mother; (2) she was blind (by ignorance) ; and (3) she had gone crazy (with delusions).

We should be more compassionate towards our enemies because of the reasoning and understanding that he is more under the control and influence of ignorance and delusions. This is why he is trying to harm us. Therefore, we should try to become more compassionate to the enemy.

Once we have managed to think this way towards the enemy, it becomes a bit easier to relate to the friend and the stranger. However, this way of levelling the mind towards all sentient beings is said to be quite difficult to do initially and so we must put effort into it.

However much we may try, still there is the feeling of being distant or close to some and indifferent to others. The cause for this to happen lies in our self-cherishing and self-grasping mind. Therefore we have to uproot those two minds.

Two of the three poisonous delusions - attachment and hatred - can be eliminated when we directly see the nature of phenomena. In other words, when we have the realization of selflessness. However, the self-grasping, ignorant mind is very difficult to uproot unless we can generate the precious bodhicitta.



On the mindstreams of the Bodhisattvas who are on the first path of accumulation, there is no self-cherishing, but still the self-grasping mind is still strong. Whereas on the Arhats' mindstreams there is no self-grasping, but self-cherishing is still very strong. We, as ordinary persons, have both the self-cherishing and the self-grasping mind very strongly embedded onto our mindstreams.

Within our minds, the three poisonous delusions are very strong and it is because of this that practice of the two kinds of bodhicitta are recommended. The conventional bodhicitta is to eliminate the self-cherishing mind and the ultimate bodhicitta is to eliminate the self-grasping or ego-grasping mind.

### ***Ultimate Bodhicitta***

The first item to be explained in this mind training text is ultimate bodhicitta. The text presents its theory by saying that our mind is of two kinds - objective and subjective and they are both without any true existence. They do not have any inherent existence from their own side.

The text also presents the view that the mind is the object and the subject, with external phenomena being the object of the apprehending mind. So from that point of view also, there is no phenomenon or thing that truly exists from its own side. From this way of understanding, emptiness itself is devoid of inherent existence and so does not truly exist.

This is the real nature of all phenomena - whether they are subjective or objective things - they are devoid of inherent existence. Still, in the in-between session time, be like in a dream. This means that although subjective and objective things do not truly exist from their own side, we can still present a valid functioning of those things.

We can present that the things do exist. It is like an illusion or magic where things actually do not exist yet they still appear. So within the basis of inherent non-existence, things can still appear and we can still put a valid presentation of things performing a function. And so, from emptiness, we can still present the theory of dependent arising.

This is a short explanation so as not to miss the point where the text says, “During the in-between sessions be, like in a dream - or be like an illusion.”

The three root poisons are hatred, ignorance and attachment. They arise due to our partiality and because we take sides. For instance, we think, ‘This is my group, they belong on my side’. This comes about in the first place by the belief that there is a truly existent ‘I’ or self.

We then discriminate by thinking that someone who helps this ‘I’ is a friend, while someone who harms the ‘I’ is an enemy. Hence, we generate attachment to a friend, hatred towards an enemy and indifference to a person who does neither good nor bad to us. This is where ignorance arises.

As long as we have this grasping to the ‘I’, those three thoughts will arise. This self-grasping mind is not a valid mind. It is not a reasonable mind. It is a distorted and wrong mind.

As long as we have this wrong way of thinking that there is true

existence, we will definitely discriminate between people by putting some 'on my side' and others 'not on my side' and yet others as just being indifferent.

If we can understand that there is no true existence of an 'I', then there can be no conception of 'This is my friend, this is my group, this is my enemy and does not belong to my group'.

If we can understand the view that there is no self-existent self, then definitely we can bring about an end to the other two root delusions - hatred and attachment. If we could do this, our body which is called cyclic existence and is actually in the nature of suffering, will become lighter and lighter. However, if we maintain a self-grasping mind, it will become heavier and heavier and cause more and more suffering.

In the text it says, "Between sessions, be like an illusion". For instance, if we were to film our daily routine and watch it as a video, we would see ourselves reflected on the screen. Our mind would think 'That is me, and that is the way I behave,' but yet it would understand that it was not me, in person. Therefore, there would be no grasping feeling towards the person on the screen.

Likewise, when we become very familiar with the theory of selflessness, then even though we are engaged in activities and even though external phenomena appear to us, we will not have a grasping mind - we will just look upon them as illusions.

While we can become familiar with the theory of selflessness and may not have a grasping mind, there still remains the self-cherishing mind. Even though the Arhats of the Hearers' and Solitary Realizers' path, have attained an understanding of selflessness, because they have

not eliminated the self-cherishing mind, they are called by the phrase, 'Although they have stopped the extreme of existence, they have not reached the extreme of peace.' This means that they have not attained the supreme enlightenment.

We, as practitioners of the Greater Vehicle, are supposed to be practicing on the training of the mind, so we should be able to suppress and uproot the self-cherishing mind. Even greatly realized persons, such as the Arhats still have a self-cherishing mind even though they have an understanding of selflessness. This is because they they have not been able to generate the great compassion. We should literally try to 'hammer' at the self-cherishing mind.

Since beginningless time we have continued to cycle in samsara, or cyclic existence, because of our self-cherishing minds. The Buddha however, attained enlightenment because he cherished all sentient beings more than himself and he neglected his own interests.

By understanding the benefits of the practice of cherishing others and the shortcomings of the self-cherishing mind, we should realize that the thought of equalizing and exchanging oneself with others is not a secondary or insignificant practice to the attainment of enlightenment. It is the principal practice of the path.

With this understanding, we should think that this is the most essential practice to be adopted and we should make the vow to ourselves never to give it up - even at the cost of my life; not in the intermediate state and not in future rebirths.

At this stage, we visualize the drawing of the nectar while imagining that we will be successful in this attainment.

## ***Practice Of The Taking And Giving***

Because the practice of equalizing and exchanging oneself with others is considered to be the ultimate, or the most essential practice, it is appropriate then to do the practice of taking and giving.

The practice of taking should be carried out with the special force of compassion and the practice of giving should be motivated by the special force of love.

When doing the visualization of the taking, as explained before, if we cannot really comprehend the taking of a very large amount of suffering, then visualize taking on the suffering of this life and then extending that to the next life and then to future rebirths.

Visualize taking on whatever suffering you are supposed to be experiencing in the future, right now, at this very moment. Then visualize taking on the suffering of your parents, relatives and all the beings. This should all be motivated by the force of compassion.

When you do the visualization of giving, it should be with the very special force of love and as we explained before, you can do the giving of the body, possessions and the roots of your merit.

As you become better and better at this practice of *Tonglen*, you can do the giving and taking on your breath. So we will elaborate more fully from yesterday on this meditation.

### ***Taking And Giving On The Breath Meditation***

Visualize the self-cherishing and self-grasping mind in the centre of your heart as something very dark and black and then imagine taking the sufferings of other beings into it. This suffering comes from their right nostril and enters into your left nostril and into the centre of your heart in the form of black smoke and black impurities. Visualize that this suppresses the self-grasping and the self-cherishing mind.

You can then visualize the suffering of others entering into the bones of your body in the same way but in the form of a thunderstorm with rain. Really feel that the storm destroys the self-grasping and the self-cherishing mind.

You can visualize all the impurities sentient beings have committed with regard to not having observed the ten moralities perfectly and so forth.

When visualizing giving however, do it by giving your accrued merits in the form of air going out from your right nostril towards all sentient beings.

With regard to the very coarse manifest suffering of sentient beings, you can visualize these as scorpions and other terrifying animals entering into your body through the left nostril. Imagine that these animals are eating your self-grasping and self-cherishing mind just like vultures rush to eat a corpse.

This is actually recommended in the text, but I think it may not be appropriate for some people to visualize the forms of ferocious animals eating the self-grasping and self-cherishing mind because there

is the possibility of sickness, such as influenza, due to the stress if fear arises. However, if you are quite familiar with this mind training, then it will be very good.

As we explained before, the realization should be done by taking on the suffering of the sentient beings in the hell realms first and then the hungry ghosts and then the animals. Afterwards, you take on the suffering of the sentient beings.

Visualize taking on the suffering of the beings in the hell realm, the hungry ghosts, the animals and then all sentient beings' suffering and think that their karma becomes less impure. And, then, do the visualization of the giving of the merit to these beings. Imagine that they receive many qualities, more knowledge and that they will attain the different levels of realization on the path.

This visualization should go on continually, until you come to the realization of thinking that, now, all sentient beings have attained enlightenment.

Eventually, you should reach a point where you feel that the external environment becomes pure and so do the inhabitants. Imagine now, all sentient beings as without any weaknesses, having all the qualities and having attained enlightenment.

It is good to have the feeling at the end of the practice that, whatever effort has been put into it, it has been meaningful and of value, because now all sentient beings have attained enlightenment. It is good to feel a kind of divine pride at the end. Remain in this divine pride for awhile.

Unfortunately, sentient beings have not been enlightened! We need to come to the understanding that, in fact, they have not attained

true happiness. Nor have they been separated from suffering - and they have not been enlightened. So where does the solution lie?

We must investigate and come to the realization it is only through the state of buddhahood that we can have the potential to be able to free all sentient beings. Although we can do many practices of giving and taking, the real solution for removing suffering and actually providing other beings with happiness lies only in the state of enlightenment.

When we examine the question of whether we can attain the state of buddhahood or not, the answer is - yes we can! Even Buddha in the beginning was an ordinary person but he later attained the state of enlightenment.

However, the state of buddhahood or enlightenment is not achieved without effort. The Buddha understood all the hardships of the practices on training in the conduct of the bodhisattvas yet he did the accumulation of merit for the three great aeons. And during all of the times that he was an ordinary person training on the path, he underwent great hardships during his five hundred rebirths - yet he ultimately attained enlightenment.

Before we began this practice, we generated the aspiration of wishing all beings to be freed from suffering and that they have all the qualities and comforts of happiness. That was just a thinking process. But now, we understand that the actual way to get beings free from suffering and able to enjoy happiness is only through the state of buddhahood.

This is the very beginning of the generation of bodhicitta with



the two intentions: (1) The intention to help all sentient beings, and (2) (for which purpose) I wish to attain enlightenment.

The quality of Buddha's *body* has the ability to emanate into as many bodies needed by limitless numbers of sentient beings. With regard to Buddha's *speech*, even though many sentient beings may put different questions to the Buddha at the same time, he can still answer each one appropriately by using a single word. Buddha's heart or *mind* is always engaged in caring for the welfare of every sentient being because the great compassion of Buddha is always directed towards all beings.

So we must come to the understanding that it is only through the state of buddhahood that we have the real potential to be able to remove the sufferings of sentient beings and lead them to happiness. Please try to think: 'I will not lose this aspiration to attain enlightenment to be able to care for others'. This promise is the *real* generation of bodhicitta.

Think that with this wish, all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions are pleased with you. And because of this, they all absorb into Buddha Shakyamuni. Buddha Shakyamuni, being the main figure, absorbs into your body. Think for awhile that you have attained the actual state of enlightenment. Remain with this thought for as long as possible.

You could also imagine the central figure as being Chenrezig. Visualize all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions absorbing into Chenrezig on the crown of your head and then he absorbs into you. Feel that you have attained the state of enlightenment.

Imagine that any actions you do with your body, speech and mind become the means for the increase of bodhicitta. Think that, no matter what you do, it will be an enhancement of the bodhicitta on your mind and also that you will never be separated from it. This is what is termed in the text: 'Let all practices - or yogas - be one'.

From now on, our mind should be with the three inseparables. This means that our speech should not be separated from the recitation of mantras; our mind should not be separated from bodhicitta; and our body should not be separated from being in the form of a deity. These three are among the precepts or the things to be observed after having generated the bodhicitta.

### ***Taking Adverse Conditions Onto The Path Of Enlightenment***

Not only must we observe the precepts but we must take adverse circumstances onto the path. Normally if something bad happens to us, we try every possible means to get rid of the problem such as consulting doctors and/or special teachers. But now, instead of trying to apply a solution to remove that unwanted condition, we have to take those problems onto the path.

To do this, we must apply four actions, which are: (1) the accumulation of merit; (2) purification of negativities; (3) offering tormas to the spirits and elementals, and (4) invoking the protectors. When we make offerings to the spirits, we ask them not to harm us and when we offer to the Dharma Protectors, we ask them to protect

us from sickness and hindrances.

However, when we do the *Seven Point Thought Training* practice, we request the spirits and protectors to ripen all sentient beings' sufferings and adverse circumstances upon oneself. The requests have to be reversed.

We must think that all our own happiness and comfort be given to others. As the line in the text says, "May the happiness and the benefits fill space." Visualize giving all the happiness and the benefits we possess to others. So whenever we feel some form of suffering - instead of getting depressed - feel more and more joyful and happy.

At this point, we must request in our mind that all sentient beings' suffering be upon me. As the line in the text says, "May the ocean of suffering be dried." We have to aspire to the thought that while I am suffering, the suffering that other beings are undergoing shall be dried up or extinguished. There is a saying:

*When praised or admired - I am not happy, but when criticized - I am happy.*

*When rich - I am not happy, but when not rich - I am happy.*

*When comfortable - I not happy, but when suffering - I am comfortable.*

*Spirits and the hindrance-bringing spirits are my teachers.*

Usually if somebody praises us, we feel happy and puffed up, but this is a wrong attitude. Instead of feeling depressed, if somebody were to criticise us, we should feel more joyful.

If we become too wealthy and have too many possessions, we become attached to them and so we cannot possibly practice Dharma.

Whereas if we are poor and in the aspect of a beggar, this is a conducive factor for practice. Therefore, if we are poor, we should be really happy.

Having a lot of comfort and happiness can create attachment, hatred and anger which make it almost impossible to be mindful of the Dharma. But if we experience suffering, we naturally try to remove that suffering and so naturally we begin to practice Dharma.

We are so entrenched with our self-cherishing and self-grasping mind, so when spirits and hindrance-bringing spirits try to harm us, they are really harming that mind. What they are really doing is helping us to destroy self-cherishing and self-grasping - so they really are our best teachers.

When spirits harm us, we feel sick. When we examine very carefully the cause of sickness, we will realize that it originated from our self-cherishing mind.

There was once an incident that happened to the great Milarepa when he entered a cave that was inhabited by spirits. However, due to having trained his mind, when the spirit appeared to him, it said: 'If your conception of me is such that I do not appear as an enemy, there is no point in you seeing me.'

From now on, whatever bad circumstances arise, remain joyful and think it is very good, because if the suffering had occurred in the hell realms, you would have had to suffer for a very long time. Luckily it has ripened in this lifetime while you are in the human realm.

While feeling joyful, visualize that your suffering may become a substitute for all sentient beings' suffering. In accordance to the lines

in the text called “The offering to the teacher,” one has to make the request that the suffering of all sentient beings ripen upon yourself and may all your comforts, happiness and merit ripen upon others.

In other words, no matter what situation arises - whether it is good or bad - we should be able to take it onto the practice of the thought training. We should be able to turn all conditions into factors for our own development of the two kinds of bodhicitta.

If you are able to do this, you are a real siddhi! You will be a real Dharma practitioner and can be called by all the attributes we usually give to good Dharma practitioners! For such a person, everything becomes a Pure Land because wherever they go there is no suffering. This is because such a person can turn everything onto the path. Usually however, if we experience even a little bit of suffering or have a problem, we cannot bear it. A mind training practitioner can bear anything.

### ***At The Time Of Death***

When a person who has done the mind training practice dies, they will have no regrets and so there is no need to perform the special transference of consciousness practice. This practice supposedly brings a good rebirth. However, when death comes to a person who has not done the mind training practice, if he relies on a ritual such as the transference of consciousness, then it becomes like the saying: “The king’s wealth is of no benefit to him when he is sick. There are occasions

when the king has to beg food from beggars.’

The author of this *Seven Point Thought Training* text, Geshe Chekawa, became so familiar with training the mind into taking the suffering of all sentient beings onto himself that, when he was about to die, he decided he wanted to go down to the hell realms. He wanted to take on the suffering of those beings onto himself. He definitely decided to do this, but when he was about to die, a sign of his future rebirth appeared to him as a vision of the Pure Land. He felt sad at this vision and said: ‘This is not where I should be going!’ This really happened.

The text says that we must apply the five powers at the time of our death which are:

- the power of *familiarity*
- the power of the *white seed*
- the power of *determination*
- the power of *repudiation*
- the power of *prayer*

These five powers are the real acts or rituals of the transference of consciousness. So if we do them, there is no need to do any separate rituals for the transfer of consciousness at the time of death.

The power of *familiarity* comes about by practicing the mind training practice over and over again.

The power of the *white seed* is destroying all attachment. Before we die, we should give away all our possessions so that there is no attachment. Also, this becomes an act of generosity which will also create merit.

The power of *determination* is to be determined not to be separated from the precious bodhicitta.

The power of *repudiation* is to confess and retake broken vows when dying.

The power of *prayer* is to pray not to go to the Pure Lands. Instead, pray that the sufferings of others will ripen onto you.

### ***Precepts For This Practice***

This *Seven Point Mind Training* practice should be done continually. Even if we go to another country, we should continue the practice without a break.

We must not do this practice without firstly generating proper mindfulness because it could cause harm to the local spirits and others.

Mind training should become an antidote against the self-cherishing mind and should not be a cause to increase self-cherishing. As the text says, “Do not let the god become a devil.”

Do not retaliate and cause harm to another. A mind training practitioner has to accept harm.

The practice should not be done for the purpose of obtaining an income, food or clothing.

We should not practice thought training only with regard to the friend.

No matter what activities we engage in, or whatever situation we encounter, we should not consider as being either good or bad. This

means not being happy when praised or sad when suffering.

We should think that attachment and desire has been following me since beginningless lifetimes and now I must stop this thought. Visualize taking on all the attachments and desires of all other sentient beings onto yourself and think it has all been removed. This also applies to all delusions and obscurations that cause suffering.

We have not been able to elaborate into detailed explanations on this thought training text due to time.

However, if these teachings have benefited your mind, that is the real benefit for me coming to Atisha Centre. If it is just a mere explanation which is done just for the sake of doing it - and from the side of the students, just listening - it is just fooling oneself and others. It becomes a waste of one's time.

Whatever merit we have created, we dedicate it for the long life of all the teachers including His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the supreme teachers in all the directions. Let us hope that this stainless, supreme teaching will spread to places where it has not been and let it flourish within the mindstreams of all sentient beings.

Would you all please make the aspirational prayer that a time may arise when Atisha Centre will become a great community of ordained monks and nuns who will study and practice the teachings. Let us make prayers that this will happen soon.

It would also be good to make aspirational prayers that all sentient beings will not have any sickness, disease or any problems. And if they should arise, may we be able to take them into the practice of thought training.



We need also to do aspirational prayers that we may individually expell the self-cherishing and self-grasping mind and try to generate the thought of cherishing others. And may I be able to generate the precious bodhicitta.

So, in other words, whatever activities we do, and whatever situation we are in, we should be able to transform them into the practice of thought training. For instance, when we eat, visualize that the food helps feed the organisms within our body. Think that this will help them in the future to generate bodhicitta.

Even when we wash our face, visualize that the water is the wisdom realizing selflessness and that it is also bodhicitta washing away impurities and obscurations.

When opening a door, visualize that you are opening a door to the great city of liberation. When shutting a door, think that you are shutting the door to the hell realms and that no more sentient beings can enter.

When lighting a fire think that you are burning the self-grasping and self-cherishing mind by the flame of love and compassion.

There is very little to be explained in detail other than realizing that all activities we do should be able to be put into the practice of thought training. This what the line in the text says: “All conduct and activities become the training”.



SECOND TEACHING

A COMMENTARY

ON

RIGHT EFFORT

This teaching was given at Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Singapore in 1995.

Transcription and editing was done by Ven. Thubten Konchog who accepts responsibility for all errors and omissions.



## SUFFERING IN THIS LIFE

Lama Tsong Khapa has said that the super thought, or bodhicitta, is like a sail to a ship. If the sail is not blown by the wind, the boat cannot move. It cannot travel anywhere. So although we may have this super thought or bodhicitta, if it is not blown by the wind of effort, it cannot move the ship of hearing and contemplation. Therefore, without right effort, sentient beings cannot cross the ocean of cyclic existence and reach the city of liberation or enlightenment.

Effort is the best amongst all the friends and listlessness is the worst of all the enemies.

If the force of effort is applied, even the tiniest insects and animals can attain the state of full enlightenment. We are human beings so we have the power of wisdom to be able to discriminate between what is to be abandoned and what is to be practiced. We know the benefits of virtuous actions and the faults of non-virtuous actions.

We have this kind of power - this potential, so we should never become discouraged by thinking - "*I won't be able to reach enlightenment!*" Instead we should think: "*I definitely can attain enlightenment. I have that power, that potential.*" By thinking this way,

we should then be able to generate the courage to be able to work in a better way towards the attainment of enlightenment.

Even the smallest insect can attain enlightenment if it generates the force of effort. While we are a human being, we should not think that we will not be able to gain enlightenment and that we will not be able to generate that force. We should always think: *“I will be able to gain enlightenment and I will be able to generate the force of effort. I will then be able to have a mind that delights in the performance of virtuous deeds.”*

We could think that this is just too difficult! But it *is* possible to reach enlightenment. However, there are many hardships to be overcome along the way. This might mean that we have to make sacrifices - even of our body. If we are afraid to do this, it would be most difficult to attain enlightenment. This is because we are unable to discriminate between heavy and light sufferings.

From beginningless lifetimes we have taken many types of forms. We would have taken a life where we were tortured daily, or where our limbs were cut and injured or maybe even sliced into many pieces! However, compared to the sufferings that we have experienced in the hell realms, the sufferings or problems that we are encountering now - on the way to the state of enlightenment - are nothing. Or perhaps they are only very small.

All the sufferings that we have experienced in the past have been completely wasted. If the experience of those sufferings had been a cause for enlightenment for ourselves and others, then they would have been meaningful, but they did not help us to attain enlightenment

or even to awaken our minds. They have been completely wasted.

The sufferings that we experienced in the lower realms, such as the hells, were very intense and had to be experienced for a very long time compared to the sufferings that we are experiencing now.

By abandoning the purpose for this life only and working for the attainment of enlightenment, the hardships and difficulties that we encounter along the way to enlightenment will be nothing compared to the sufferings of the hell realms.

The sufferings that we are experiencing now are very small and they can be endured. In fact, they are very easy to endure. An example of this is a doctor who treats patients with serious illnesses. In order to remove the illness he might have to take blood from the body and test it. Some doctors might use a fire to burn a part of the body, or they may give injections. All of these kinds of treatments bring some form of harm or suffering, yet they will result in the relief of the severe illness in the long run. So even though we know we are suffering now, we can endure it by thinking that we will benefit from it.

The sufferings that we encounter on the way to enlightenment are the sufferings of hardship, but they are comparatively small compared to the sufferings in the hell realms. In order to remove the sufferings of cyclic existence, we have to bear them.

If we can endure the suffering we are experiencing now - the suffering of travelling on the path to enlightenment - then we will eventually be able to eradicate the suffering, the immeasurable suffering, of not only ourselves, but also of others.

Some very skilful doctors are able to treat their patients without

causing them any pain. The Buddha also gives many different methods to be able to be freed from suffering and from encountering many difficulties.

Sometimes, we encounter so many difficulties that we just cannot bear them another minute. Now, if you are unable to endure such hardships - I want you to stop for one minute!



## GENEROSITY

If we are not familiar with the practice of giving, we should not do it right away. We should not give away things that will cause us to endure suffering.

First of all, we should try to give away small things until we have become familiar with giving and then gradually start giving bigger and bigger things. Later, when we become comfortable with giving, we can give even of ourselves - our limbs and flesh. This would be just like giving somebody a portion of food.

In order to attain the state of enlightenment, we must apply the right methods. The Buddha said that these are not the methods used by ordinary doctors who cause pain to relieve diseases, but rather he showed methods that free us from the sufferings of cyclic existence. These are the methods of abandoning the two extremes and the abandoning of delusions, both of which cause beings to wander in cyclic existence.

There are not too many hardships that we will encounter while we travel on the path to enlightenment, so there is no need to become frightened or to feel fear while travelling along that path.

In the beginning, it is a very difficult path to travel along. To

engage in the deeds of the Bodhisattvas, we may be asked to sacrifice our limbs, our head or our hands. And to have fear of these hardships would make it very difficult for us to ever attain enlightenment.

Shantideva says that we do not have to undergo such hardships. If we are not familiar with suffering and are unable to bear it, then we should not have to do so. We can stop until we become completely familiar with a practice and then we will be able to do it easily. In this way, there can be no hardships at all.

Initially, if we are unable to make big sacrifices such as giving away big and valuable things, we should start with small things such as a small portion of food, or things that are not held so importantly. Then, very gradually, we can progress to where we are totally familiarised with giving and then can offer anything - even our own flesh - easily.

## FASTING RETREAT

When the Buddha taught about using effort, he said that, when we apply the *right* effort, there would be no hardship. By applying the right effort, the mind is then able to do things very gently and with great delight. For example, if we apply the right effort when doing the sessions in the fasting retreat, we will experience no hardships.

However, if we apply no effort and we do not have the mind that delights in performing virtuous deeds, then, to do just one session will be the cause for much hardship. If there is no effort, there will be hardship. If there is the right effort, it will be very easy. For example, if while doing the session, we were to think: ‘Oh, my visualisation is not that good, and I cannot sit straight, and I feel very sleepy’, etc., etc., there will be many hardships during that session. But, if we apply the right effort and try to do everything with delight, then it will not feel like a hardship.

When we do the fasting retreat, we are told we will incur the karma to be reborn in the Pure Land of Amitabha. Just by thinking this way should be enough to stop any difficulties from arising. For example, by remembering this, how could we feel upset at not having eaten any food for one day?

However, this all depends on the state of our mind. It is only from our mind that we experience suffering or happiness. For instance, during the fast in the retreat, we should not stretch out our legs or arms, nor should we sleep with outstretched legs and arms.

If we go back and sleep after finishing a session, we will feel hunger later on and will have difficulty sleeping that night. This could bring other problems such as headaches, fever or even be a cause for hepatitis. Sleeping in between sessions can bring many problems. If we really are very tired, we can lie down for awhile but then we should stand up and walk around. If we think that we will sleep for only a very short time, then that is OK. However if you just go and lie down and go to sleep - after every session - then that is no good at all!

If we go to sleep during the daytime, we will feel very bad when we finish the fasting retreat and will never want to do it again. However, if we do not sleep in the daytime, at night we will have a very nice sleep and, in the morning, we will feel very refreshed and then will feel quite happy about continuing on.

## HUNGRY GHOST REALM

As we spoke about before, the Buddha was very skilful when he taught how to practice generosity. He taught how to give away the small things that we do not hold so much attachment towards. This was done because, if we were to give with miserliness, we would not be giving delightfully and then, there would be no right effort - and no generosity as well.

Miserly people can be taught to practice giving. For example, even if we cannot give to others, we can give to ourselves. For instance, if we have a thing in our right hand, we can give it to our left hand and then the left hand can give it to the right hand and so on. This way creates no problems because we are not really losing that thing because, even though we are giving, we are still receiving. However, this way causes us to feel the delight and happiness of giving and receiving - the practice of generosity.

We could very well think that it is not too difficult to give to oneself but, for some people, this is very difficult. Some people just cannot give anything at all. Some people cannot even give away the things that they cannot use themselves; they keep with them at all times. There are some types of beings who find it very difficult to give even a cup of water to others.

These kinds of people will take rebirth in the hungry ghost realm. The hungry ghosts have three knots in their throats and it is very difficult for them to swallow food or water. They have been born as hungry ghosts because they could not give anything to other people and because they could not even use those things for themselves either.

Some cause trouble by telling other people who are trying to give something: “Oh, you should not give so much. That is far too much!”. Or even: “You should not give anything at all!”. By saying these things to others, you will take rebirth in the hungry ghost realm with the three knots in your throat!

Because of the three knots, only one drop of water can go down their throat. When the Lamas make tormas offerings to the hungry ghosts, they say: “ ..... and I give you one drop of water”. This is because they can only swallow one drop of water. If they take more, it will cause many problems in their stomachs.

These hungry ghosts always say: “Don’t give much, give a little”. They recite this every day like we recite mantras.

If we are not skilful in practicing the Dharma or of actualizing the path, things will become very difficult and we will have many problems to be endured. However, if we practice with right effort, we will have no difficulties at all. When we know how to do the fasting retreat, we will have no problems and we do it very happily. Therefore it is most important to know how to do it in the right way.

## BODHISATTVAS IN CYCLIC EXISTENCE

The Bodhisattvas actually reside in cyclic existence, but this does not upset them. They do not feel any suffering because they know how to live very gently. There is no rebirth for them while being in cyclic existence. They are not born into cyclic existence by the force of karma and delusions; they are here by the force of compassion.

The way of their birth is very different from ours and they do not have any regrets about being in cyclic existence, so it is for this reason that the Bodhisattva of the Mahayana path is superior to the Hinayana path, as the Heroes do not have this compassion.

Wherever the Heroes take birth in cyclic existence, they do so out of karma and delusion. They have fear of undergoing the suffering of cyclic existence so they cannot be encouraged to travel on the path of the Bodhisattvas.

When the Bodhisattvas sacrifice their bodies out of compassion, they do not feel any form of suffering. They have abandoned all the unwholesome actions of the three doors, so they have no suffering on their minds.

The Bodhisattvas are those beings who have reached the highest

level. They have reached the third ground of the third Bhumi. They experience no suffering, even when their bodies are cut into pieces. This is true also with the high tantric practitioners. If somebody were to beat them with a stick, they would not experience any pain. This all depends on the mind.

I am explaining here about applying the right effort and why the Bodhisattvas do this kind of sacrifice, and why they experience no suffering. It is because they do it all very happily and joyfully. The reason they experience no pain is because they do not hold the misconception of holding onto, or grasping at, the self and they have not incurred any negative action such as killing, etc. They do not have the concept of 'my' body.

Once, there was a Bodhisattva called 'The Always Crying Bodhisattva'. He wanted to go and receive teachings from another Bodhisattva. This Bodhisattva was his teacher and he was teaching on the Perfection of Wisdom sutra.

The Always Crying Bodhisattva did not have any offerings to make to his teacher, so finally he decided to sell his body to collect the offerings. He shouted out in the middle of town: "Is there anybody who wants to buy my limbs or my body?" Nobody came to buy. Finally, an incarnation of Brahma came in the form of a human being and said: "I would like to buy your flesh and bones".

When he heard that, the Always Crying Bodhisattva felt so very happy and went down to the corner to start smashing his bones for the sale. However, while he was doing this, some girls saw him and asked him why he was doing such a thing. They said: "It is very stupid



to do that. Why are you torturing yourself?”

He said to them: “I am doing this so that I can sell this body and collect enough money to bring offerings to my teacher so I can receive the teachings on the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra.” Then the girls asked him: “What are you going to do with this teaching?” He said: “By receiving this teaching, I can attain the thirty-two major marks and the eighty minor marks of a Buddha”.

While he was doing this, he did it with such joy and also with great compassion by thinking it would help him attain enlightenment for the sake all sentient beings. Therefore, he did not feel any suffering or any regret because he possessed the realisation of bodhicitta and great compassion.

The Always Crying Bodhisattva always seemed to be very poor because he did not have any material things. Actually though, he was not poor. He was very rich with the realisation of emptiness and bodhicitta. The reason he was always crying was because of not being able to see his teacher - not because he did not have any material things.

Milarepa also used to stay in a very poor condition. When people looked at him, they would feel most upset for him, thinking that he had a very ugly form. His condition was caused by eating too many nettles; his body had become green like the nettles! People thought that he was very skinny and very ugly and they thought he did not own anything so they felt very sorry and upset for him! But Milarepa felt very sorry and upset for *them*, because they thought he was very poor and skinny!

Milarepa felt most upset for sentient beings because he thought that just for the clothing and food of this life, sentient beings incur so much negative action. And, for that amount of negative action, they will have to wander endlessly in cyclic existence.

Because of the power of bodhicitta, the Bodhisattvas can expel the non-virtues that they have incurred in the past, and they can store the accumulation of merit and wisdom easily. This is why the Bodhisattva path excels over the path of the Heroes.

❦❦❦❦❦ END OF SECOND TEACHING ❦❦❦❦❦

## *Dedication*

Because of the infinite merit of this practice, may whatever suffering sentient beings experience ripen on me, right now. May whatever happiness and virtue I have accumulated — any realizations of the path up to the highest enlightenment — ripen on each hell being, each preta, each animal, each human, each asura, each sura and each intermediate state being.

I rejoice at the infinite merit accumulated by this dedication.

May the precious, sublime mind of enlightenment, source of my own and all other sentient beings' happiness and success, that has not yet arisen in my mind, arise without a moment's delay and may that which has already arisen increase forever without degeneration.

Because of the merit of the three times accumulated by myself, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, which are empty from their own side, may the I, which is empty from its own side, attain enlightenment, which is empty from its own side and lead all sentient beings, who are empty from their own side, to that enlightenment, which is empty from its own side, by myself alone, who is empty from its own side.

Whatever white virtue I have thus created, I dedicate to be able to uphold the holy Dharma of scripture and insight  
And to fulfil without exception, the prayers and deeds  
Of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas of the three times.

Through the power of this merit,  
May I never be parted in any future life from the four spheres of the

Mahayana,

And reach the end of my journey along the paths of  
Renunciation, bodhicitta, right view and the two stages.

*Special mantras to increase the merit 100,000 times*

CHOM DÄN DÄ DE ZHIN SHEG PA DRA CHOM PA YANG DAG PAR DZOG PÄ  
SANG GYÄ NANG PA NANG DZE Ö KYI GYAL PO LA CHAG TSÄL LO (3x)

JANG CHUB SEM PA SEM PA CHEN PO KUN TU ZANG PO LA CHAG TSÄL LO (3x)

TAYATHA OM PENTSA DRIWA AWA BODHI NE SOHA OM DURU DURU ZAYA  
MUKHE SOHA (7x)

*Special mantra so that prayers made come to pass*

CHOM DÄN DÄ DE ZHIN SHEG PA DRA CHOM PA YANG DAG PAR DZOG PÄ  
SANG GYÄ NGO WA DANG MÖN LAM TAM CHÄ RAB TU DU PÄ GYAL PO LA  
CHAG TSÄL LO (3x)

Due to the blessings of the eminent Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, due  
to infallible dependent arising and due to my special attitude, may  
all my pure prayers be accomplished immediately.

With Lama Tsong Khapa as our direct guru in all future lifetimes, may  
I, my family and all other sentient beings never be separated from the  
complete pure path praised by all victorious ones for even a second.

Due to the merits of myself and others, may the victorious teachings  
of Lama Tsong Khapa, Losang Dragpa, flourish for a long time. May  
all the centers and projects of the FPMT immediately receive all the  
conditions necessary to preserve and spread these teachings. May all

obstacles be pacified and may the FPMT organization in general and the meditation centers in particular — all our activities to preserve and spread the Dharma, particularly Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings — cause these teachings to continue without degeneration and to spread in the minds of all sentient beings. May those who have sacrificed their lives to benefit others through this organization have long, healthy lives, may all their activities please the virtuous friend, and in all their lives, may they always be guided by perfectly qualified Mahayana virtuous friends. May all their wishes succeed immediately, in accordance with the holy Dharma.

*Note*

For other more extensive dedications with commentary, see *Teachings from the Vajrasattva Retreat*. Also refer to Lama Zopa Rinpoche's *A Daily Meditation Practice*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997.

## *Dedication*

*Through the merit created by preparing, reading, thinking about and sharing this book with others, may all teachers of the Dharma live long and healthy lives, may the Dharma spread throughout the infinite reaches of space, and may all sentient beings quickly attain enlightenment.*

*In whichever realm, country, area or place this book may be, may there be no war, drought, famine, disease, injury, disharmony or unhappiness, may there be only great prosperity, may everything needed be easily obtained, and may all be guided by only perfectly qualified Dharma teachers, enjoy the happiness of Dharma, have love and compassion for all sentient beings, and only benefit and never harm each other.*

## *Acknowledgements*

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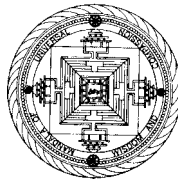
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Amitabha Buddhist Centre (ABC) is a centre for the study and practice of Mahayana Buddhism from the Tibetan Vajrayana Tradition. Founded in 1986 by our Spiritual Guide, *Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche*, a wise and deeply compassionate Tibetan Master, the centre strives to offer the pure liberation teachings of Je Tsong Khapa, the 15<sup>th</sup> century founder of the Gelug lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. To that end, we offer courses in Lam-rim, or the graduated path to enlightenment, Buddhist philosophy, thought transformation and the practice of tantra.

ABC is a member of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), the world-wide network of Dharma centres, monasteries, publishing houses, and service organisations established by *Lama Thubten Yeshe* (1935-1984) and *Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche* in 1975.

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At ABC, we provide a range of courses from beginners' meditation and introductory Buddhist talks to the intermediate level Lam-rim, or the graduated path to enlightenment, to the study of more advanced Buddhist philosophical subjects. Teachings are conducted in English or Tibetan (translated to English).

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Bearing in mind that Buddhism is a living tradition, teachings to be studied and put into practice, ABC organises a variety of meditation retreats. These include one-day retreats and Nyung Nay retreats – an intensive two-day fasting practice with prayers to Avalokiteshvara (*Kwan Yin*) as a way of immersing our minds in compassion.

### *Devotional Practice*

Since faith, the accumulation of good karma and purification of negative deeds are as important as correct understanding of the teaching, we hold regular devotional practices, such as Tara and Guru pujas. In these practices, chanting, meditation and ritual combine as a powerful way to bless and inspire the mind. We also arrange for large-scale offerings to be made on special days at holy places. In line with the Buddha's teaching on loving kindness and compassion, we also liberate animals regularly, reciting prayers for their benefit before releasing them.

### *Social and Welfare Activities*

In keeping with the Mahayana spirit of love and compassion, ABC complements its teaching programmes with social and welfare activities to nurture true caring and concern for others. ABC also provides chanting

services for the sick and deceased, and schedules visits to homes for the less fortunate. Our resident teachers also offer advice to people with Dharma questions and spiritual problems.

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ABC is deeply committed to share the benefits of the Dharma with others and will make available various titles to ABC members, the public and overseas readers as funds permit.

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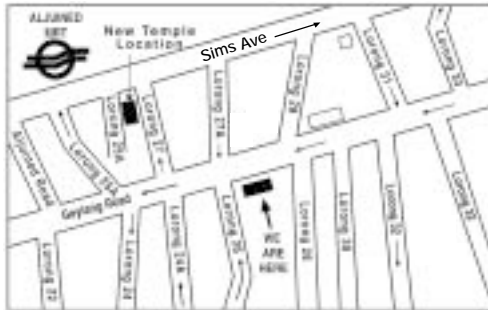
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*The Merits of Producing  
Buddhist Teachings and Buddha Images*

1. One's light karmic misgivings will dissolve, while heavy ones lighten.
2. One will be protected by devas and be unharmed by natural and man-made disasters.
3. One will always be free from the suffering of hatred and vengeance.
4. One will be unharmed by yaksas, evil spirits and wild beasts.
5. One's mind will be at peace, free from harm and nightmares.
6. One's complexion will be radiant.
7. One will be full of auspicious energy.
8. One who practices the Dharma wholeheartedly will have adequate living necessities.
9. One's family will be harmonious and be blessed with fortune and wisdom.
10. One who practices what one preaches will be respected and loved by all.
11. One who is dull-minded will gain wisdom.
12. One who is ill will gain health.
13. One who is poor will gain wealth.
14. One who is female will be born male in future lives if one wishes to.
15. One will be free of being reborn in the negative realms.
16. One will be able to help others grow in wisdom and gain great merit in doing so.
17. One will always be able to learn the Dharma, till one's wisdom and spiritual penetrations are fully grown and becomes a Buddha.

## *What to do with Dharma teachings*

The Buddhadharma is the true source of happiness for all sentient beings. Books like the one in your hand show you how to put the teachings into practice and integrate them into your life, whereby you get the happiness you seek. Therefore, anything containing Dharma teachings or the names of your teachers is more precious than other material objects and should be treated with respect. To avoid creating the karma of not meeting the Dharma again in future lives, please do not put books (or other holy objects) on the floor or underneath other stuff, step over or sit upon them, or use them for mundane purposes such as propping up wobbly tables. They should be kept in a clean, high place, separate from worldly writings, and wrapped in cloth when being carried around. These are but a few considerations.

Should you need to get rid of Dharma materials, they should not be thrown in the rubbish but burned in a special way. Briefly: do not incinerate such materials with other trash, but alone, and as they burn, recite the mantra OM AH HUM. As the smoke rises, visualize that it pervades all of space, carrying the essence of the Dharma to all sentient beings in the six samsaric realms, purifying their minds, alleviating their suffering, and bringing them all happiness, up to and including enlightenment. Some people might find this practice a bit unusual, but it is given according to tradition. Thank you very much.

## *Dharma Books Sponsorship Form*

*The gift of truth excels all other gifts...*

(The Buddha)

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