

Lama Zopa Rinpoche



Motivations for the Awakening Mind

THE NECTAR OF BODHICITTA

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THE NECTAR OF BODHICITTA



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spiritual guides, quickly develop bodhicitta and immediately
attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.



LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

The Nectar of Bodhicitta

MOTIVATIONS FOR THE
AWAKENING MIND

Compiled and edited by
Gordon McDougall

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WHILE COMING to understand the nature of reality is a vital aspect of developing the Buddhist path, altruism, opening our heart to others, is the factor that gives us the determination to continue. Bodhicitta is the ultimate open heart.

For me, the way that Mahayana Buddhism marries the emotional with the rational is what makes the teachings on bodhicitta incredible. We need to move from our closed, selfish world view to one that embraces all beings equally, but just wishing to be loving to others won't get us there. In the methods Buddhism uses to achieve this supremely altruistic mind there is a deeply logical understanding of the shortcomings of the self-cherishing attitude and the benefits of the attitude of cherishing others. But even so, the road from our habituated self-centeredness to a thoroughly selfless attitude is a long one.

We need to have strong determination that the goal of bodhicitta is attainable and desirable. For that we need inspiration, and, to my mind, there is nothing more inspirational than Khunu Lama Rinpoche's *Jewel Lamp* and the first chapter of Shantideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. These two great bodhisattvas have given us verses of inspiration that are beautiful and profound; verses that are good to read and reread many, many times.

A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, Shantideva's eighth century

classic, lays out the entire path for a person who wishes to realize bodhicitta and engage in the activities of a bodhisattva. For anybody interested in Mahayana Buddhism it is indispensable. The first chapter of the book is about the benefits of bodhicitta. Khunu Lama Rinpoche's great book, *The Jewel Lamp*, written the year the Chinese army invaded Tibet, is purely a book of inspirational verses, written into a diary one verse a day for about a year. The first chapter of Shantideva's text and the entire *Jewel Lamp* say all that needs to be said about why we need to develop this most incredible mind of bodhicitta.

As he says in the opening section of this book, Lama Zopa Rinpoche used verses from both these books as motivation for the day's teachings, meditation and other Dharma activities at courses he taught in the 1970s—the one-month courses at Kopan Monastery in Nepal and the other long courses he taught at that time. His format was to recite a verse and then explain it, ending with an entreaty such as: "Motivate like this, so that the action of listening to the Dharma becomes the cause of enlightenment, thinking, 'I must release all sentient beings from all suffering and the cause of suffering and lead them to the most sublime happiness of enlightenment and the cause of happiness. Therefore I must achieve enlightenment. In order to achieve enlightenment I must complete the realization of the whole graduated path. Therefore I am going to listen to the teaching on the graduated path.'" He would then move onto the subject he was teaching. This is how he would start each morning discourse, no matter what the main subject matter was—a brief teaching on bodhicitta and a request to listen with bodhicitta motivation.

It is mainly from these morning motivations that this book has

been compiled. Rinpoche generally chose no particular order to the verses he used, with a few exceptions where he worked through the first chapter of Shantideva's text, taking a verse each day. Whereas Shantideva develops an idea within his first chapter and it's therefore easy to use verse order to present Rinpoche's commentary on them, Khunu Lama Rinpoche's verses seem to have a "thought for the day" kind of randomness and he would return to a theme at various times. For that reason I have arranged his verses together according to content rather than verse order.

Because the text of this book comes from the short (and sometimes not so short) motivations Rinpoche gave each day, sometimes a theme hasn't been explained as fully as it would have been in a main teaching, and sometimes the same point is repeated in different verses. I've pruned a little but wanted to keep the flavor of Rinpoche's motivational teaching. I suggest that you use this book as Rinpoche intended when he gave the talks, as motivations, thoughts to take with you as you do whatever comes after. Rather than read it as a book, maybe take one verse or one section and read that before you start your day or your meditation session, and use that as the focus for what you do from then on. Just as Khunu Lama Rinpoche wrote one verse a day as a motivation for his day, we can read one verse a day for the same reason. I have been continually inspired while editing this collection of commentaries and I hope you will be as inspired reading them.

The LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE grew from the understanding that students of early Kopan courses had of the importance of recording Lama Yeshe's and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's teachings in full. Over the

decades we have collected more than 2,000 teachings—ranging from a single evening’s discourse to a full three-month retreat. This collection was formalized in 1996, when Lama Zopa Rinpoche established the ARCHIVE. In 2007, Publishing the FPMT Lineage commenced, a project to make accessible Lama Zopa’s teachings on the lamrim—the graduated path to enlightenment as explained in Tibetan Buddhism.

For this book I collected and assembled as many of Rinpoche’s motivations that used the verses of Khunu Lama Rinpoche and Shantideva as possible. The whole text was then edited. The edited text comes from verbatim transcripts that have been checked for accuracy, therefore we can be confident that what is here is exactly what Rinpoche taught. Mistakes and confusion belong one hundred percent to the editor.

Compiling this text from so many sources, with Rinpoche teaching to different audiences at different times, there will inevitably be some sections that reflect others. Hopefully these will only serve to reinforce the message rather than create any sense of tedium. I have used Rinpoche’s own translations of the verses, checking them against the other translations available, especially Stephen Batchelor’s translation of *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* and Gareth Sparham’s of *The Jewel Lamp* (published as *Vast as the Heavens, Deep as the Sea*), both excellent and poetic translations.

I worked with ARCHIVE documents from over one hundred courses. How many hours of labor does that represent for all those many people involved? And how many people have actually been involved in the creation of this book? I can’t start to name names; there are just too

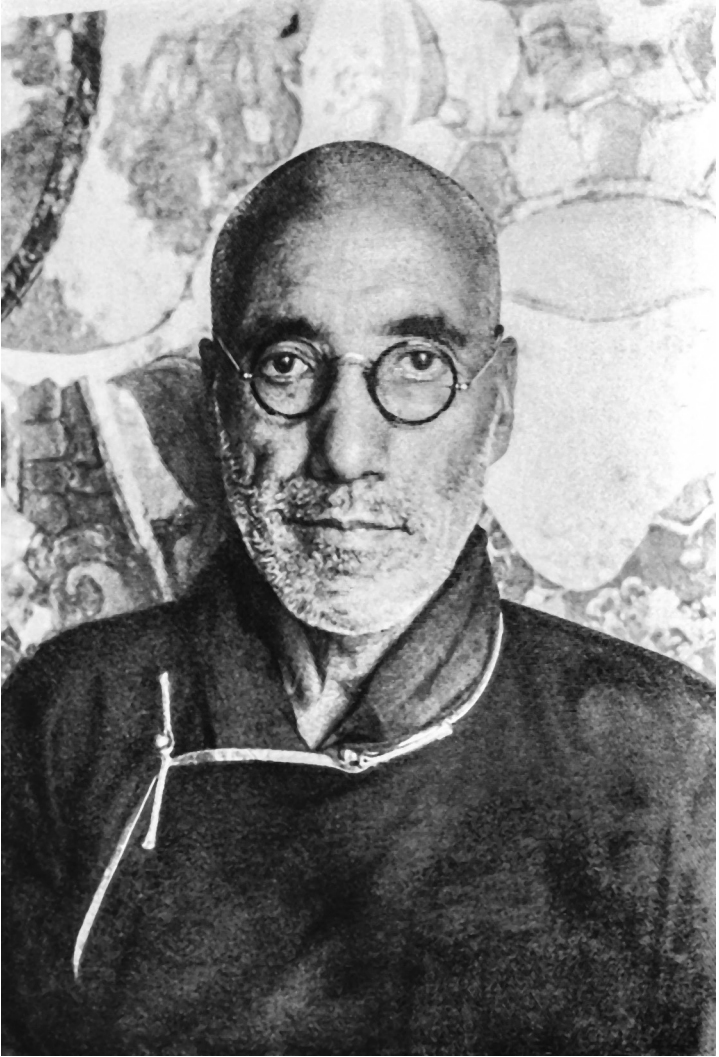
many. All I can do is offer each and every one of you who have given so much a huge thank you.

But most of all, I wish to thank from the bottom of my heart Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the inspiration for all this, the source of all this incredible knowledge and a living example of how one person can make a huge difference, and how everything is possible when one's mind has compassion and wisdom. We read about bodhicitta; he is bodhicitta. May whatever small merit is gained from the creation of this book be dedicated to his continued long life, health and the attainment of all his holy wishes and the wishes of all the great teachers, especially those of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Bath, UK
November 2020

PART ONE

KHUNU LAMA RINPOCHE:
THE JEWEL LAMP



... 1 ...

Inspiring Us to Develop the Awakening Mind

THE SUPREME MIND

HOW INCREDIBLE that we are here now, with this unbelievable opportunity! We not only have this human existence, but we also have what in Tibetan Buddhism is called a perfect human rebirth, a rebirth in which we enjoy the eight freedoms and the ten richnesses¹ that make this the very best time to develop our mind along the path to enlightenment, the one path that will guarantee us not just complete freedom from all suffering but the ability to help all other beings to that same blissful state.

This perfect human rebirth we have now gives us such a unique position, but besides being extremely difficult to find it is also extremely fragile, because we can die at any time. In any other rebirth, in the lower realms or the god realms,² we will be totally unable to create any virtue and so plant the seeds for future happiness. And even if we were to be reborn as a human being, it is very easy to see how few other

¹ Buddhist terms used in this book can be found in a comprehensive glossary on the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive website.

² There are six realms in cyclic existence: the three lower realms of the hell beings, the hungry ghosts and the animals and the three upper realms of the humans, demigods and gods.

humans share our good fortune in being free from poverty, illiteracy, oppression or any of the many other sufferings that plague our world. The most amazing thing of all is that we have met the teachings of the Buddha and we have the inclination to study and follow them. We need to see the uniqueness of this opportunity we now have and to make the most of it by following the Buddhadharma, the method that will definitely lead us from happiness to happiness.

All of the Buddha's teachings are solely to lead us out of suffering and into the peerless happiness of liberation and full enlightenment. All 84,000 teachings are summarized in his teaching on the four noble truths, the first discourse he gave after he became enlightened under the bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, over 2,500 years ago. Everything we study about Buddhism comes into these four noble truths: the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering and the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. Furthermore, it can all be summed up in the Buddha's wonderful quote:

Do not commit any nonvirtuous actions,
Perform only perfect virtuous actions,
Subdue your mind thoroughly—
This is the teaching of the Buddha.

With the first two noble truths the Buddha showed suffering in its entirety and the origin of that suffering. The third noble truth is the truth of cessation, where he showed that it is certainly possible to cease this seemingly never-ending round of contaminated birth after

contaminated birth. The fourth noble truth is the truth of the path that leads to cessation. Every word the Buddha uttered is purely to lead to the cessation of suffering, so this fourth noble truth encompasses the entire Buddhist path. We refrain from harming others by not committing any nonvirtuous actions and we help them by performing only virtuous actions, and this is all done through subduing our deluded mind. This is what is called the Dharma. Whenever we follow his teachings by renouncing nonvirtue or by creating virtue, we are practicing the Dharma, whether we call it that or not, whether we consider ourselves Buddhist or not.

In Tibetan Buddhism these incredible teachings have been classified into a system that makes them easy to study and actualize, called the graduated path to enlightenment (Tib: *lamrim*). There are three main areas we need to develop: *renunciation* of samsara, *bodhicitta*, which is the altruistic intention to become enlightened in order to enlighten all sentient beings, and *right view*, the understanding of emptiness. In the lamrim, these three areas are set out in a progressive series of teachings, from the need for a spiritual guide at the very beginning to the most subtle minds that are needed for enlightenment at the very end. In the lamrim we will find everything we need to take us all the way to the ultimate state of enlightenment.

In fact, I can definitely say that the lamrim is the very quintessence of the Dharma. When the great Indian teacher Atisha went to Tibet from the Buddhist university of Nalanda in India in the eleventh century, he condensed everything the Buddha taught into this graduated path, with nothing missing. After that, the great Tibetan teachers such as Lama Tsongkhapa wrote commentaries on the lamrim, and

to study these commentaries is to see just how the lamrim presents the whole picture.

Without studying the lamrim it is very difficult to appreciate how precious and rare our current situation is. Perhaps we try to meditate, perhaps we pray or read sutras, perhaps we call ourselves a Buddhist, but without a good background in the lamrim it is unlikely we will be able to grasp how crucial it is to practice Dharma and do nothing but practice Dharma. It's the most important thing in life. And of all the aspects of the Dharma, the very heart is bodhicitta.

There are many things we can develop in order to progress on the path, such as equanimity, the wisdom of how things exist, an understanding of karma and so forth, but the greatest thing we can strive for is the peerless mind called bodhicitta. "Bodhicitta" is a Sanskrit word that just means the mind of enlightenment, with *bodhi* meaning "awakened" or "awakening" and *citta* meaning "mind." This is the mind that strives for complete enlightenment in order to best be able to benefit all sentient beings. It is the mind that completely, spontaneously, continuously works for nothing other than the benefit of all living beings. A person who possesses such a priceless mind is called a bodhisattva.

From countless rebirths until now we have only ever done things for our own happiness, often at the expense of others. With bodhicitta, we put self-interest aside and work solely for others. The "happiness" our self-cherishing has sought for us has in fact been a fantasy, and, as we can see when we study subjects like the four noble truths, any mental state poisoned with attachment to sense pleasures—what we would normally consider worldly happiness—is actually suffering, in that there is an underlying dissatisfaction that will lead to future grosser

suffering. On the other hand, when we put that selfish mind aside and start working for others, we effortlessly attain, as a byproduct, a real sense of happiness that will never let us down. Not only that, we are developing our mind toward its ultimate potential, the fully awakened mind of enlightenment. As I often say, real happiness begins when we start cherishing others.

This perfect human rebirth we have is incredibly rare. We need to be aware of how rare and fragile our situation is and determine to not waste even a second of this life we have. By seeing that attachment to the pleasure of this life is still in the nature of suffering, we need to renounce it all. Like honey on a razor blade, it may seem sweet and desirable, but if we try to grab at it we will only experience suffering. It is a matter of recognizing samsaric pleasure as suffering and firmly renouncing it.

Each of the three principal aspects of the path is vital. We can develop single-pointed concentration, we can renounce the whole of samsara, we can even realize the emptiness of all phenomena without developing bodhicitta, but we can't become fully enlightened unless we have bodhicitta. Without bodhicitta we can't enter the Mahayana, the Great Vehicle, that allows us to become free from not only the gross defilements but even the subtle obscurations to knowledge that block us from full enlightenment. Only with this can we free ourselves from even the most subtle suffering.

Releasing ourselves alone from suffering is not enough. There are infinite sentient beings having to endure incredible suffering. How can we just work for ourselves when they are helplessly drowning in the great ocean of samsaric suffering? They have benefited us, not just

in this life but in all our previous lives. They have been our mothers, our fathers, our friends—we have had every possible relationship with every being—so we can't turn our backs on them now. In order to repay them for the great kindness they have shown us we must guide them out of their suffering. We must help them find true happiness and especially the happiness of full enlightenment. But we can't do that until we ourselves are enlightened. Therefore, the motivation we must start every day with, every action with, is this wonderful bodhicitta motivation, to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

Bodhicitta is the fuel that propels our rocket to the goal of enlightenment as quickly as possible. We must not waste a moment because every moment we delay, not only are our kind mother sentient beings suffering, but we could also lose this most precious life at any time. Every causative phenomenon—anything that is a product of causes and conditions—is in the nature of impermanence, and our body is no exception. We all know we will die one day, but for most of us that day seems too far in the future to worry about. That is entirely wrong. We could die at any moment. Tens of thousands of people who woke in their bed this morning will not return to it this evening, dead for some reason or other, and very few of them had any notion of what awaited them during the day. Our next inhalation might not be followed by an exhalation. That is a fact. That is how fragile this life is, whether we deny it or not. Therefore, we must not waste a second of this precious life. And the very best use we can make of this life is to develop bodhicitta.

A bodhisattva becomes a buddha based on bodhicitta. Training the mind in bodhicitta is the best method to quickly and extensively purify

the negative imprints on our mindstream that currently block us from attaining any of the realizations we need to develop toward buddhahood. Even if we knew all the scriptures by heart and even if we were experts at practicing the Highest Yoga Tantra meditations of both the generation and completion stages, none of this would be the cause of attaining enlightenment without bodhicitta.

There are many stories of meditators who spent their life meditating on tantra, generating themselves as a deity such as Yamantaka, but who, due to their unskillful tantric practice, were reborn as a hungry ghost in an aspect similar to their visualized deity. This happened because they focused only on the tantra and forgot the lamrim practices of renunciation, bodhicitta and emptiness.

To waste even one second of this perfect human rebirth is a loss far greater than losing diamonds equaling the number of atoms of this world. Even if we had wealth equaling that of all the human and god realms combined, that wealth would do nothing to assure our genuine happiness or the happiness of others. One brief moment of a mind of bodhicitta will do that, however, and hence it's far more valuable than any worldly object. We need to consider our life in light of this, examining whether what we do every day brings us closer to enlightenment or whether we are just chasing after worldly goals such as career and possessions that consequently tie us further to the suffering of samsara. If we are still unable to separate from the self-cherishing attitude that places our own interests above those of others, we need to consider the terrible disadvantages of self-cherishing and the wonderful advantages of cherishing others and we need to see what an incredible loss such a self-centered life is.

When our mind is attached to worldly pleasures no matter what we do, it will be wasted. It will not be a Dharma action, a virtuous action that leads us from suffering and toward true happiness. It will only lead to more attachment, more aversion, more ignorance, more dissatisfaction, more suffering. Even though we try to do a spiritual action, such as meditating, saying prayers and so forth, it will still not be Dharma because it will be tainted by self-cherishing. No action can be a Dharma action and a worldly action at the same time, and unless it is a Dharma action it will surely lead us into further suffering.

No matter how privileged our life is, how many possessions and friends we have, how many enjoyments we are able to experience, no matter how pleasant our future life will be, this is all in the nature of suffering. It is still in bondage to suffering, and because we are locking ourselves more and more into self-cherishing it can only lead to terrible suffering in the future, probably to rebirth in one of the lower suffering realms as an animal, a hungry ghost or a hell being.

On the other hand, bodhicitta is the best method to attain our own wishes and the wishes of all other sentient beings, those infinite other sentient beings from whom we have received all our past, present and future happiness. They have been responsible for every happiness we have ever experienced, no matter how big or how small, and the best way to repay that kindness, the only real way, is to become enlightened ourselves and to then be perfectly equipped to guide them from suffering to perfect enlightenment. This is why we must train in the lamrim path and especially study bodhicitta.

Of the two aspects of the Buddhist path, wisdom and method, the wisdom side is understanding the nature of reality, which generally

means understanding emptiness, and the method side is mainly to do with developing ways of attaining this most precious mind of bodhicitta. Love, compassion, equanimity, morality—whatever positive aspect of our mind we develop leads us to bodhicitta. These methods come from Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and were expounded by the unsurpassable teachers like Manjushri, Lama Tsongkhapa and Shantideva.

In *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, the great bodhisattva Shantideva says,

[1:7] Having checked for many eons what is most beneficial
To bring sublime happiness to infinite sentient beings,
Shakyamuni Buddha and all the buddhas have discovered,
It is to have a mind imbued with bodhicitta.

There are two profound methods for developing bodhicitta. The first is the seven points of cause and effect—seeing all beings as our mother, recalling their kindness, determining to repay their kindness, love, compassion, the special intention to take responsibility for their happiness, and bodhicitta itself—and the second is equalizing and exchanging the self with others. Only by practicing these Mahayana techniques can we not only overcome our own problems but also be able to perfectly work for the happiness of others. We see that all sentient beings are suffering in samsara and how unbearable that is, and from the great compassion that arises with this thought we generate the supreme mind of bodhicitta.

VERSES OF INSPIRATION FROM KHUNU LAMA RINPOCHE

The supremacy of bodhicitta is the message of the wonderful book written by Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen Rinpoche, called *The Jewel Lamp: A Praise of Bodhicitta*.³ It is quite similar to Shantideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, not in its content (Shantideva leads us through the six perfections of a bodhisattva), but in its ability to inspire us to try to achieve the mind of bodhicitta. *The Jewel Lamp* is a collection of verses all in praise of bodhicitta, and Khunu Lama Rinpoche's sole message is that bodhicitta is the very best mind to have. With bodhicitta, all other realizations will come; without it, we can only progress so far. Developing bodhicitta is the best, the most sublime method, and it is the cause for great joy to understand this and see we all have the potential to realize such a mind.

This book is all about the skies of merit we receive from bodhicitta, a subject I never tire of telling people about. The benefits of bodhicitta are boundless; if we tried to explain them all the explanation would never end. We should read books like Khunu Lama Rinpoche's and Shantideva's again and again. The first chapter of *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* is purely about the benefits of bodhicitta and it is utterly inspiring.⁴ Every single benefit brings skies of merit and there are countless benefits.

Reading these verses about bodhicitta is very inspirational for ourselves or others. The verses might not reflect a person's culture or

³ Translated into English as *Vast as the Heavens, Deep as the Sea*.

⁴ See Part Two of this book.

religion, but they could never alienate anybody. A good heart is everybody's religion. Bodhicitta is all about cherishing others, giving our life to others. The message these verses give, as all teachings on bodhicitta do, is that the self-cherishing attitude is one that harms others to get what we want, but ultimately that harms us too, whereas the attitude cherishing others brings great joy to others and as a byproduct to ourselves. There is no other way to true happiness.

Therefore, it is extremely beneficial to read the verses that Khunu Lama Rinpoche wrote in *The Jewel Lamp* and Shantideva wrote in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. These are gems, bright lamps that light our way, reminding us constantly that there is no mind more beneficial, more crucial than the mind of bodhicitta.

New Year or a birthday is a time to think of the future. Rather than getting drunk it's much better to make a strong determination to use every means possible to bring true peace and happiness to our mind by renouncing selfishness and only cherishing others. That is the only New Year's resolution that makes sense; that is the only worthwhile birthday present. Instead of singing *Auld Lang Syne* or *Happy Birthday*, we can recite some of these wonderful verses.

Because bodhicitta is all about benefiting others, every single benefit of bodhicitta only comes about by relying on other sentient beings. Sentient beings are the root of all our good qualities. From them we develop qualities such as patience, generosity, love and so forth. Every single realization a bodhisattva has on the path to enlightenment is purely from the kindness of other sentient beings. Therefore, this precious mind of bodhicitta is supreme in that all good qualities flow from it.

Because there could be no bodhicitta if there were no other sentient beings, we owe every happiness we have to all other sentient beings. When a mosquito bites us, we can feel angry and try to kill it or we can realize that the mosquito, like all other beings, has been our mother again and again in our countless previous lives and has helped us in innumerable ways, and that even now, even as it is biting, it is allowing us to develop patience and that it is merely trying to feed itself and its children. One tiny prick that itches for a little while is not a great sacrifice to make. This is the kind of choice we need to make all the time when we choose between the narrow mind of self-interest and the huge mind of bodhicitta. One brings untold suffering in exchange for a little temporary relief and the other brings untold happiness and skies of merit, rocketing us toward the completely awakened mind of enlightenment.

KHUNU LAMA RINPOCHE'S BIOGRAPHY

Before we look at some of the verses from Khunu Lama Rinpoche's book, I would like to mention something of his holy actions, just to get some small idea of his practice.

His life history is amazing, something that we can't imagine. Even just understanding a little about how he lived can generate incredible devotion. He was a yogi who didn't have even one single atom of attachment. Whatever action he did—speaking, eating, even just walking—was completely free from even the smell of attachment.

Khunu Lama Rinpoche, Tenzin Gyaltzen, was born in 1894 in the Kinnaur region of Himachal Pradesh, northern India, which shares

a border with Tibet. The people there revered him and called him “Khunu” Rinpoche (meaning “precious one from Kinnaur”). When I met Rinpoche in the 1970s, he told me he was not Padampa Sangye⁵ but his first incarnation was a disciple of Padampa Sangye.

From a very early age, Khunu Rinpoche studied the scriptures, memorizing the *Diamond Cutter Sutra* as a young boy. He quickly became learned in all aspects of Buddhism, including teachings in Vajrayana, something which is not common at all with Tibetan lay people. At that stage he hadn’t received many tantric teachings, but he had received many Mahayana Sutrayana teachings, including on Shantideva’s *Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*.

He spent a long time in Tibet, studying and teaching. This great bodhisattva was exactly like the ancient pandits of the Six Ornaments,⁶ Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti and so forth, who wrote all the major commentaries on the sutras, the teachings of the Buddha. He even looked similar physically. In Tashi Lhunpo, the seat of the Panchen Lama, and in Lhasa, he studied subjects such as grammar and poetry rather than the traditional texts. Then, in Kham, he studied the most important Buddhist scriptures as well as Sanskrit, and after that he went to

⁵ Padampa Sangye, was a wandering Indian yogi and spiritual master who brought Indian Buddhist teachings to China and Tibet. He lived at the time of Milarepa and taught in the Tingri region of Tibet and is quoted as saying that by holding the guru as more exalted than the buddhas all realizations will come. Lama Zopa Rinpoche says he transformed into a flower as he waited for Milarepa in the Tibet-Nepal region to see if Milarepa would still recognize him, which of course he did. (Rinpoche also cites Milarepa becoming the flower to test Padampa Sangye.) He is author of *The Hundred Verses of Advice*, published with commentary by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche as *The Hundred Verses of Advice: Tibetan Buddhist Teachings on What Matters Most*.

⁶ The six great Indian scholars are Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Dignaga and Dharmakirti.

Varanasi, the sacred town on the River Ganges in India, to complete his Sanskrit studies. I heard he was an amazing Sanskrit scholar, as well as knowing other Indian languages. I think he even knew a few words of American! He certainly knew the three American states of California, Washington and New York.

Whatever he studied he could remember perfectly. Anything from anywhere, any Buddhist teachings, sutra or tantra, any teachings from other traditions such as Hinduism—nothing was forgotten in the slightest.

When he was living in India in the early years he was exactly like a sadhu, naked except for a piece of red cloth wrapped around his middle, living the simplest possible life. Rinpoche lived among the sadhus and they liked him very much, sometimes offering him food. Even though he lived with them in caves and on the street and looked like them, and even though he obviously had great respect for them, his practice was nothing like theirs.

He had realizations, the experience of the path. He was incredibly rich inside, a great holy being. Day and night, all the time his heart practice was bodhicitta. For us, for myself and ordinary people, the heart practice is the self-cherishing thought, but for beings such as Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen Rinpoche, day and night, the heart practice is bodhicitta. Even though the quality of his knowledge of sutra and tantra, of all the teachings, of the complete path to enlightenment, was as extensive as the sky, still he practiced bodhicitta with his whole heart, renouncing the self and cherishing others. And if Rinpoche gave advice to anybody who came to see him or take blessings from him, this was the main advice.

When Rinpoche traveled from Varanasi to Bodhgaya, he went to the only Tibetan monastery there at the time. I think it had been there since the time when Tibet was independent. He asked for a place to stay, but because they didn't know him and he looked like a sadhu they didn't give him a room and so he slept outside on the cement floor. If you have been to a Gelug monastery, you will know that the standard layout is a gate leading to a garden situated in front of the actual monastery, and around the garden is a cement balcony. This is where Rinpoche slept for many days.

Before he was given a room in Bodhgaya by the Tibetan monastery, Khunu Lama Rinpoche often sat in the street and recited texts aloud, in order to benefit the people by purifying their negative karma. He used to sit where people came to circumambulate the Mahabodhi stupa, the great stupa that marks the place where the Buddha was enlightened.

Once, when I was in Mongolia, I visited a traditional Mongolian doctor, somebody who uses urine as a treatment. While there, I noticed an old text on his desk. I was curious and asked if I could see it. The first line said that whoever heard this text would have their negative karma purified. I thought it would be very useful to borrow the text and go outside and read the text aloud for all the beings there, in the same way that Khunu Lama Rinpoche did. Whenever I went into the marketplace with the text and a cushion to sit on, however, it was always filled with shoes. It was a huge area, as big as a central square in a European or American city, but it was completely filled with shoes: Mongolian shoes, Mongolian boots, all sorts of footwear. I couldn't find one place to sit down. I then thought of doing it outside the doctor's house but so few people passed by somehow it didn't happen. I suspect Khunu

Lama Rinpoche reciting the texts aloud around the Mahabodhi temple was far more effective.

Throughout his whole life he led an ascetic life, a very pure monastic life, never keeping possessions, no matter how much people offered him. There was no distinction in Rinpoche's mind with what was offered, whether it was garbage or gold. If he didn't give it straight back, the offering just went under his bed, like it had no owner. Rinpoche always gave anybody who came to see him Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra to recite. When Rinpoche lived in Bodhgaya and went to circumambulate the stupa, he used to pick up bodhi seeds and give them as a blessing to the people.

When His Holiness the Dalai Lama went to Bodhgaya, he knew Khunu Lama Rinpoche was there and asked him for teachings on Shantideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, showing devotion to him as a virtuous friend, as a guru. He received an extensive commentary on it from Rinpoche. I think also His Holiness Ling Rinpoche and His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche studied some poetry and Sanskrit from Khunu Lama Rinpoche.

After Khunu Lama Rinpoche had given teachings to His Holiness the Dalai Lama he immediately become very well known to the Tibetans, just like turning on an electric pump causes a fountain to shoot into the air. Before, nobody had come to receive blessings from him, but afterwards people realized what a great being he was and came to him for blessings in their hundreds, forming long lines from the guest room connected to the monastery that Rinpoche had been given all the way along the street.

People judge by external appearances. Before, people had dis-

regarded him, thinking he was nothing more than a useless sadhu without checking what wisdom he had. If he had had a tall, elegant body and a long, white beard and had worn a smart, long robe they might have decided he was a learned master and a great guru and respected him without His Holiness' endorsement. They waited days to see Rinpoche but he rarely left his room, not even to eat his one meal a day—he didn't have a proper kitchen at all—and maybe just coming out for the toilet. I heard he only went for *pipi* once a day.

There was one monk who was still unable to see him after waiting for many days, so when he saw the monk serving Rinpoche enter his room with his food he snuck in behind the monk. He was kind of angry about being kept waiting for a long time and asked Rinpoche why he had made it hard for him. Rinpoche replied that people who got to see him probably had a relationship with him in previous lives, whereas people who weren't previous lives' disciples or who didn't have a connection with him (or were even angry with him) weren't able to see him easily.

Although he was not a monk and Rinpoche said in teachings to Tibetans that he lived in the eight lay precepts, actually in practice he kept the 253 precepts of a fully ordained monk. He lived in the precepts perfectly, like a great yogi. In a public place like a market Rinpoche walked looking straight ahead, utterly undistracted by the confusion around him, just as Shantideva recommends in his *Guide*.

He studied all four traditions of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism: Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyü and Gelug. I think this happened mainly due to the different presentations of the teachings he received from the lineage lamas. The essential path is the same, the goal is the same; the

different teachings all talk about the base, about samsara, about true suffering, and the true cause of suffering. His writings were very sweet, like wonderful poetry. Like the previous great pandits, he was knowledgeable in the five great qualities or excellences, such as diagnosis, hygiene, logic and so forth.

Rinpoche was not only an expert in Buddha's teachings but also in other religions such as Hinduism. He could explain them all incredibly well, incredibly clearly. Usually when Rinpoche began teaching, if there was time, he would introduce those other religions to show the distortions in their views and how their path didn't lead to nirvana. Then Rinpoche would start talking about the Buddha's teaching, about the Dharma and about the four traditions with their different presentations.

Rinpoche had received teachings on emptiness from lamas from all the traditions and although he himself was from the Nyingma tradition he would explain emptiness according the perspectives of all the other traditions and not just his own. In that way he explained it completely correctly. His audience was often composed of lamas from all traditions, although mostly Gelug geshes and incarnate lamas. Rinpoche would not only explain the teachings from one school's point of view but would also show very clearly each school's side in his presentation, saying things like, "It is this way according to this school and that way according to that school." Because his explanations were very clear, without any confusion, everybody was completely satisfied. It was incredible to be learned not only in one school but in all four.

His holy mind was like a vast library, like those they have in the great Tibetan monastic university libraries, with thousands and thou-

sands of volumes. All the teachings that came from the holy mouth of Shakyamuni Buddha were collected into the Kangyur and all the commentaries on his teachings by the great Indian and Tibetan pandits into the Tengyur, with hundreds of volumes in each collection. Rinpoche could remember them perfectly. Even when he was quite old, his mind was still very sharp and clear. Ordinary people like us suffer terribly as we get old; our mind becomes dull and confused and we can no longer remember even the few things we have learnt in our life, and certainly not the more subtle points of the Buddha's teachings, but Rinpoche could remember and explain any point perfectly.

If Rinpoche's practice was like a sky at night full of bright constellations, my practice is like stars in the daytime. I requested a commentary on *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* but he didn't give it; instead he gave me an oral transmission alone in my room. He was so focused that when the postman banged on the door he didn't even look around but just kept on with the text. The postman knocked quite loudly for a long time. When Rinpoche reached the ninth chapter on wisdom, I think I didn't have the karma to hear it because I immediately fell asleep. Before I was not even sleepy, but as soon as Rinpoche started to give a commentary on the wisdom chapter, sleep came. That's how thick my ignorance was. It happened only at that time. I think that there was a lot of negative karma to be purified and consequently it became an obstacle to realizing emptiness. There's no doubt that I need to do many years of purification.

Later, I was fortunate enough to receive the commentary of *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* from Khunu Lama Rinpoche at the Bodhgaya monastery where the incarnate lamas used to give teachings. At

one time, very early on, I lived there with many other incarnate lamas or geshe. I received an oral transmission of Rinpoche's own *Jewel Lamp* a couple of times, as well as Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* when I was in Nepal. I first received the lineage of the Third Dalai Lama's *Essence of Refined Gold* from Rinpoche. I remember at that time Rinpoche explained the very difficult concept of dependent arising by simply using his fingers. When he held up his middle and ring fingers, the middle finger was long and the ring finger short, but then he changed the positions of the fingers and the ring finger was then long. Thus, all things depend on all other things. This was simple and marvelous, and that was Rinpoche's incredible skill at teaching.

At that stage, there were very few Dharma books translated into English, just His Holiness's *Opening the Wisdom Eye* and a few more, therefore Rinpoche later advised me to translate *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* into English. He said that teaching bodhicitta would never cause any confusion in people's minds. Unlike other subjects, it's a subject that even people with no interest in the Dharma will agree on. Somebody else translated Shantideva's book before I could start, however.

The last time I saw Rinpoche was in Kathmandu. It was much smaller then, much more primitive, with lots of open fields and fewer houses, and not many monasteries around Boudhanath stupa. He offered me some fruit, taking it from under his table, and advised me that the monks at Kopan Monastery should subdue their minds. (There was no nunnery at that time.) I'm very pleased that after that Kopan has had many excellent teachers who have been able to help the Sangha there do just that, people like Khen Rinpoche Lama Lhundrup, who was a

very qualified teacher and a disciple of Lama Yeshe, with incredible knowledge and incredible bodhicitta. Under his guidance the teaching program at Kopan developed quickly, and now Kopan even has its own geshe.

Khunu Lama Rinpoche advised us to always recite *Praise to Shakyamuni Buddha*.⁷ This is a prayer that His Holiness the Dalai Lama does daily. This has become a tradition not only at Kopan but in all the FPMT centers, all because of Rinpoche.

After some time, Rinpoche left for the Padmasambhava site in India, where Padmasambhava was born from the lotus in the lake.⁸ I really wanted to go there and take teachings and commentary on thought training but I hadn't created the karma. Later, returning to the place where he was born, Rinpoche passed away. He was in meditation when he passed away and stayed in meditation for quite a few days.

THE JEWEL LAMP

The Jewel Lamp: A Praise of Bodhicitta was written by Khunu Lama Rinpoche as a kind of daily diary, writing a verse a day for about a year. He wrote it in 1959, the year the Chinese invaded Tibet and His Holiness the Dalai Lama fled to India.

Understanding and constantly reminding ourselves of the skies of benefits that bodhicitta brings is unbelievably worthwhile. This is the overall purpose of Khunu Lama Rinpoche's book, to cause us to feel inspired and joyful that such a mind is possible. For that reason, back

⁷ See *FPMT Essential Prayer Book*, 2021, pp. 69–71.

⁸ Tso Pema, a sacred lake in Himachal Pradesh, India.

in the early 1970s in the courses I led at Kopan Monastery in Nepal, I often used to start the day's teachings with a quote from *The Jewel Lamp*. This is where the teachings in this book come from.

The English translation of the book is called *Vast as the Heavens, Deep as the Sea: Verses in Praise of Bodhicitta*. This is an excellent title, reflecting what Rinpoche says of this precious mind:

[123] Just as the heavens are vast
This bodhicitta is vast.
Just as the seas are deep
This bodhicitta is deep.

Do Everything with Bodhicitta

WHATEVER WE DO, WE SHOULD DO IT WITH BODHICITTA

WHATEVER ACTION we do with a selfish motivation is not only a complete waste of time, it causes only further future suffering. On the other hand, any action done with a selfless bodhicitta motivation is utterly worthwhile. Therefore, every action we do, *every* action, should be done with the thought to benefit others. As Khunu Lama Rinpoche says in *The Jewel Lamp*:

[338] When you walk, walk with bodhicitta.

When you sit, sit with bodhicitta.

When you stand, stand with bodhicitta.

When you sleep, sleep with bodhicitta.

[339] When you look, look with bodhicitta.

When you eat, eat with bodhicitta.

When you speak, speak with bodhicitta.

When you think, think with bodhicitta.

Twenty-four hours a day, every action we do should be done with bodhicitta, not for ourselves but for others. No matter what action we

do, if it's done with the mind cherishing others it's a Dharma action, one that will lead us to peerless happiness and lead all others to peerless happiness. On the other hand, as long as our actions don't oppose the self-cherishing thought, they are worldly actions, done out of worldly concern, and can only result in increasing our ignorance and in having to experience future suffering.

I was so inspired by Khunu Lama Rinpoche's verses that I thought it might be good to advertise them for people to see them and bring them into their lives. You can have the verses printed on a cup and remember them when you drink coffee or have them as a bumper sticker on your car. (The car I use in America is covered in Dharma slogans!) One way I actually did this was by having some people produce bookmarks with these ideas on them. They became very popular. We modified the verses for the bookmark, which finally said,

Live with compassion

Work with compassion

Die with compassion

Meditate with compassion

Enjoy with compassion

When problems come, experience them with compassion

It is possible to do every action with bodhicitta. When we eat, we can eat to satisfy our greed or we can eat to sustain ourselves in order to best help others.

The purpose of our life is to help free all beings from suffering. That's the reason we are alive; that's the reason for our survival, each

day, each hour, each minute—to eliminate all the suffering of every kind mother sentient being. With this motivation, every second of our life becomes incredibly meaningful, not narrow but infinite like the limitless sky. It gives meaning to every tiny thing we do. With a bodhicitta motivation, every action becomes a Dharma action; every action becomes immense, with great, great meaning.

When we generate bodhicitta, such as saying the refuge and bodhicitta prayer with our palms together to the Buddha, we collect far greater merit than making offerings of buddha fields equaling the number of grains of sand of the Ganges river, filled with jewels, diamonds, silver and gold. If the benefits could materialize, even the sky would not be enough to hold them.

These verses are very important because they clearly show us that everything we do must be done with bodhicitta. It is hypocritical to pray to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings and then, a few minutes later, continue to work purely for our own happiness. Again, Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[201] Going somewhere, remember bodhicitta.

Sitting down, remember bodhicitta.

Lying down, remember bodhicitta.

Standing up, remember bodhicitta.

During a meditation session, there is generally nobody there to make us angry and there are generally few distractions to bring about strong attachment in our mind. Therefore, the thought of being selfless and serving others comes more easily. When we are in the street, at work,

out with friends, out shopping and so forth, the selfless mind does not arise as easily and yet this is exactly when we most need it. In meditation it is easier to have a calm mind; outside of meditation is when the real test comes. Whenever we meet an object that disturbs the mind, either through attachment or aversion, we need bodhicitta.

Khunu Lama's advice is that in our everyday life, whatever action of body, speech or mind we do, we need to know the most skillful way of beginning the action—the motivation we have before we begin. That skillful way is bodhicitta. Once we have firmly fixed bodhicitta in our heart, whatever action we do will only be of benefit to ourselves and to others. This is how we should spend our day, from the moment we wake up in the morning until the moment we go to sleep in the evening.

No matter how mundane it appears on the surface, any action done with a bodhicitta motivation becomes holy Dharma. It becomes the cause for happiness in future lives, for liberation and for full enlightenment, and it even becomes the cause for the happiness of this life. This is the infallible method to free ourselves from samsara, and so we are doing the best work for ourselves, but because every action is only to benefit others it also becomes the source of happiness for countless sentient beings.

It is mentioned in the lamrim texts that for whatever we do to become Dharma there must be three things: the preparation, the actual body and the completion. The preparation is the motivation, transforming the mind from a negative one—a mind overwhelmed by the eight worldly dharmas, the attachment clinging to this life—into Dharma, in order to save ourselves from the suffering of the lower

realms. Even more important than that is to make whatever we are doing—walking, eating and so forth—the cause of liberation and enlightenment. When our action is unstained by the self-cherishing thought, when it is done with bodhicitta, the pure mind cherishing others, it becomes the cause of enlightenment. Every step we take with bodhicitta is the cause of enlightenment.

Every thought should be with bodhicitta

Any action done with a sincere Dharma motivation for the happiness of future lives or for liberation—not just saying the words without feeling them in the heart—will create great merit, but with the ultimate motivation of bodhicitta, done sincerely from the heart purely for others, we create unimaginable merit, shooting us to enlightenment incredibly quickly.

This is of course particularly true of our Dharma practice. Whenever we do a Dharma activity, it can be a pure Dharma action, suffused with bodhicitta, or a worldly action, a nonvirtuous action disguised as something holy. Khunu Lama Rinpoche advises,

[98] If you are going to start something, start it with
bodhicitta.

If you want to think about something, think of it with
bodhicitta.

If you want to examine something, examine it with bodhicitta.

If you want to watch something, watch it with bodhicitta.

Whatever Khunu Lama Rinpoche advises comes from his own direct experience, from his own practice. He is not just saying dry words; every word has great meaning. Here he tells us we must start each action of our body, speech and mind with bodhicitta. Before we start any action at all we need to ensure that it is done with a good heart, and we do that by remembering bodhicitta.

From the moment we wake up to the moment we go to sleep, the very last action of our day, if we can always start each action with bodhicitta then every moment of our day becomes holy Dharma. It becomes the cause of happiness in this life and beyond this life, and the method to liberate ourselves and all other sentient beings from the sufferings of samsara.

Beginning each action with bodhicitta becomes the cause for enlightenment because we are doing that action for the sake of others—not just hundreds or thousands or millions, not just billions but *all* other sentient beings. Because the number of beings we are benefiting with our action is infinite, the merit we accumulate with the action is infinite. And if we have taken one or more of the vows we can take as a Buddhist, then that infinite merit continuously accumulates.

In our Buddhist practice, we need to study or think about a subject, examine it thoroughly and then in meditation analyze it until it becomes a realization. All these phases of coming to know a subject such as impermanence and death should be done with a bodhicitta motivation. To begin any action with bodhicitta is to free ourselves from the self-cherishing thought that turns that action into nonvirtue. Then whatever Dharma activity we do doesn't become just mouth Dharma, just words coming through the mouth without any mean-

ing. Everything is done sincerely, from the heart, purely for the sake of others.

When we meditate we need to have a firm foundation of bodhicitta otherwise as we try to concentrate on a subject, reflecting on it, analyzing it, trying to fully understand it, the superstitious mind will arise, interfering with what we are trying to do. Whenever there is self-cherishing, there is space for the unsubdued mind to arise. Then, we can spend hours alone in our meditation room thinking we are in meditation when all that is happening is that our internal television set is playing program after program to us, keeping us completely preoccupied. We have our own samsaric television station transmitting programs on anger and attachment to us all day, teaching us self-grasping perfectly. We can become so absorbed in this that we spend our whole day there, even forgetting to eat.

Then, when we come out of our meditation room we feel very depressed because we realize we have wasted a huge amount of time. We might impress other people, looking like a great meditator, perfectly using our *dorje*, bell and *damaru*, but we know our perfect human rebirth is being wasted like this.

If we want to think about something it should be done in the light of bodhicitta. Rather than thinking about our own problems, we should be thinking about others with compassion, day and night, all the time. Dwelling on our own problems just makes them seem bigger and bigger. Our partner criticizes us and, thinking our relationship is finished, we dwell on it over and over and the problem becomes huge. So much time gets wasted with this kind of self-obsessed thinking. The best thinking is thinking of bodhicitta.

What's the point of dwelling on our own personal problems? Soon enough we will be separated from them. The friends we love, the people who give us a difficult time, money worries, health worries—all these will cease to exist in a very short time. When we die, and that could be at any moment, the only thing that will matter is our state of mind. With a positive state of mind we can be assured of a fortunate rebirth; with a negative state of mind our next life will be one of incredible suffering. These are the only two choices. By remembering the causes of the lower realms and of the upper realms we need to determine to spend every moment meaningfully and hence ensure we will have a fortunate rebirth.

By thinking about bodhicitta, meaningless actions are automatically stopped. Whatever we do is transformed into virtue, into holy Dharma. We concentrate on all other beings, on their terrible sufferings and on how to best help them. Great compassion for them naturally arises and whatever problems we might have naturally fall away. From thinking that we are the most important thing in the universe and all others are insignificant, we come to understand that we are just one, totally insignificant, whereas all others are infinite and they are the important ones. Instead of self-love we change the object to loving others.

How much we can help others, how quickly we can lead them from suffering, depends on how quickly we can develop bodhicitta. Therefore, Khunu Lama Rinpoche advises us to examine everything with bodhicitta. The route to enlightenment is a long one and we must learn many skills, but each must be seen within the framework of bodhicitta.

We must watch with bodhicitta. Here Khunu Lama Rinpoche is referring to the practice of mindfulness. All the time, every moment, from morning to night, we should be mindful of our actions, watching the mind vigilantly to ensure we never commit nonvirtuous actions. Without watching our mind there is no way to practice holy Dharma. Without constant awareness of what our mind is doing there is no way to transform it from nonvirtue into virtue. And of course, no way to transform it into bodhicitta.

It's very good to develop mindfulness, but we can be mindful and nonvirtuous at the same time. We can watch the mind very carefully, "Now I am eating. Now I am lifting the spoon to my mouth. Now I am chewing the food. Now I am swallowing the food. Now it is going into my stomach. Now I am taking another spoonful of food." And so on and so forth, watching the act of eating very carefully but never addressing the attachment we have to that food. And to steal something like a piece of expensive jewelry we have to be *very* mindful, checking when the owner of the jewelry we want is away or asleep, watching that we are silent as we creep in, recognizing the place where the object is, making sure we don't trip up as we run away. There is a lot of mindfulness in stealing! Similarly, we can be mindful we are getting angry without doing anything to remedy that emotion.

Therefore, it's not sufficient just to be mindful. We must be *virtuously* mindful, to not only be aware of what is happening in our mind every moment but to observe whether or not it is beneficial for others. We can see whether it is a mind possessed with self-cherishing or one cherishing others. By ensuring whatever we do starts with bodhicitta, we can always create virtue. Let's say we are doing our

daily meditation practice. We start with a bodhicitta motivation and then about halfway through the practice we check again in order to see that our mind is still in that same virtuous state, that it hasn't slipped in any way. It's easy to do our practice for the happiness of this life alone but we need to make sure this doesn't happen. Again, as we end our practice we need to check that our mind is still one with bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta as our heart practice is like the foundation of a house. It should be there no matter what we do, no matter how we feel. Without a firm foundation, the house will crumble; with a firm foundation we can build whatever house we want. With bodhicitta, whether we are happy or sad, well or sick, living in a city in a high-pressure job or in a cave in meditation, whether we have friends or are completely alone, whatever we do, however we feel, we have that foundation that will take us all the way to enlightenment.

*Bodhicitta mindfulness*⁹

Because we are habituated to self-cherishing, thinking only of others does not come naturally to us. We therefore need skillful methods to develop the habit of caring for others. A very useful practice is to take each one of our everyday actions and relate it to helping others. *The Noble Great Vehicle Sutra: "The Jewel Cloud"* has a list of actions and how they can be seen as specific Dharma actions. In *The Wish-fulfilling Golden Sun*, the book I tried to write for the early Kopan courses but never

⁹ See Rinpoche's *Cultivating Mindfulness of Bodhicitta in Daily Activities and Bodhisattva Attitude*, pp. 203–14.

really finished, I took the bodhicitta mindfulness practice described in this sutra as an exercise in thought transformation, although I adapted it somewhat. Another teaching I gave on this practice has also been made into a book, *Bodhisattva Attitude*.

The practice is to apply a bodhicitta motivation to every single action of the day. If we can do this, our life becomes incredibly meaningful; a day full of actions with this motivation is a day full of bodhicitta. Whether we are walking, standing, sleeping or sitting—whatever we do brings benefit to all sentient beings, to every dog, every cat, every insect, every worm, every fish in the Pacific Ocean, beings so small you can only see them with a microscope or as large as a mountain. When we get up in the morning, from our heart, we should think that we are going to act in accordance with bodhicitta. When we go to bed, we should think that we are going to do so with bodhicitta. In bed, we should examine our motivation to ensure that it does not become the opposite of bodhicitta.

For instance, when you get up in the morning, think as you arise that all sentient beings are rising up from the great ocean of samsaric suffering. Think that, and recite a short prayer to that effect. And then, after that, every action relates to an aspiration you have for all sentient beings. While getting dressed, pray that all sentient beings are clothed in “shyness and shame,” that is, they are conscious of any action that harms themselves and others and refrain from that action, thus ensuring they never create negative karma. Putting on a belt, think that all sentient beings are bound by the three higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom, and taking off a belt, think that they are released from the bonds of karma and delusion.

When you clean your room, especially before a meditation session, you can think you are sweeping away all defilements, and when you sit in a cross-legged position you pray to lead all sentient beings to immovable concentration and to enlightenment. Whenever you do prostrations, you can visualize you are leading all sentient beings in those prostrations. When you offer flowers or incense, pray that the bad odor of impurity is removed from sentient beings' minds. When you light a candle, imagine the darkness of ignorance being destroyed in the minds of all sentient beings.

In this way, not one action of your day is wasted. Washing yourself, imagine the stains of all sentient beings' delusions are washed away. Preparing food, as you slice the vegetables imagine that the knife is Manjushri's sword of wisdom, cutting through wrong views, and that all sentient beings' ignorance, holding the I to be truly existent, is destroyed. Similarly, when you make a fire, even if these days that means turning on the stove, think that you are burning all sentient beings' delusions in the fire of transcendental wisdom.

Possibly you already have a practice you do before you eat, even if it is just saying OM AH HUM to bless the food, but you can add a bodhicitta mindfulness activity by seeing the hunger that all sentient beings have for happiness is sated by your food offering.

Whatever Dharma activities you do during the day can be enriched with a bodhicitta motivation. Meeting your guru or teacher you can pray that all sentient beings meet such a peerless teacher. Looking at holy objects such as stupas or statues, you can pray that all sentient beings attain the holy body, speech and mind of a buddha. Whenever you discuss the Dharma you can imagine your audience is all sentient

beings, praying that they understand all the points of the Dharma and quickly attain all the realizations.

As you move about during the day, you can likewise use all your actions in this way. Entering any place you can pray that you are able to lead all sentient beings to the city of the sorrowless state, which means liberation and enlightenment. As you leave a place you can imagine leading all sentient beings out of the prison of samsara. You can imagine opening a door as opening the door of the hells to release all those suffering beings, and in the same way closing a door is closing the door to the lower realms for all beings.

Wherever you go, you can feel you are leading all sentient beings to enlightenment. If you are going down a hill or descending in an elevator, you can think you are going to the lower realms in order to free all the beings there. Being in a quiet place, you can pray that all sentient beings are freed from the noise of confusion, the minds of attachment, aversion and ignorance.

Whatever you are reading, you can imagine all sentient beings reading the holy Dharma without confusion, and whatever you are writing, you can imagine all sentient beings understanding even the most subtle points of the Dharma.

Helping others, you can imagine yourself as Chenrezig or you can imagine all other sentient beings as Chenrezig; both you and all others are imbued with great compassion and only doing work for others.

Taking medicine is no longer solely to alleviate some physical or mental problem you have, but you are taking it to remain healthy in order to be of most benefit to all sentient beings. You can visualize the medicine as nectar, the essence of the Medicine Buddha's holy mind,

saying the Medicine Buddha's mantra over it and in that way ensuring it doesn't become the cause for self-cherishing to arise.

Even going to the toilet can become a Dharma activity. You can imagine your pipi or *kaka* as dark smoke, which is all the delusions of all sentient beings, going into the mouth of Yama, the Lord of Death, whose mouth is the toilet bowl. As you flush, by reciting OM AH HUM, the waste is transformed into nectar, pleasing Yama, and all the delusions are flushed away, completely eliminated.

Finally, when you go to sleep at night you can dedicate for all sentient beings, determining to lead all beings to full enlightenment.

We do thousands and thousands of actions every day. Each one of those actions can be nonvirtuous or virtuous, depending on our motivation, but we can take it even further than that. Each action we do, no matter how trivial, can be made into a bodhicitta activity by engaging in this bodhicitta mindfulness practice. It means that every moment of our day, every action of our day, is solely for the welfare of all other sentient beings. This is incredible.

WHATEVER WE FEEL, WE SHOULD REMEMBER BODHICITTA

Any emotion should come from bodhicitta

In the same way that whatever we do should be done with bodhicitta, whatever we feel should be imbued with bodhicitta. Physical or mental pain, physical or mental pleasure—any emotion, any state of mind whatsoever should never be separated from bodhicitta. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says this in various verses,

[89] When you are depressed, remember bodhicitta.

When you are scared, remember bodhicitta.

When you suffer, remember bodhicitta.

When you are happy, remember bodhicitta.

[90] When your mind is weak, remember bodhicitta.

When you lose heart doing things for others, remember
bodhicitta.

When you become lazy, remember bodhicitta.

When you get upset, remember bodhicitta.

The practice of Mahayana thought transformation (Tib: *lojong*), particularly the practice of taking and giving (Tib: *tonglen*), is a wonderful tool whenever there is a painful or negative emotion. By taking on the suffering of others and giving them all our virtues and happiness, we transform our selfish concern, the reason we have such a negative emotion, into the path to enlightenment.

This is what Khunu Lama Rinpoche is saying with these verses. When hardship makes us miserable, it is the self-cherishing mind hating the thought of having to bear that hardship that is the suffering, not the hardship itself. We can apply the techniques of thought transformation to any problem we have, from a slight headache to a heart attack or cancer. Even though we aren't advanced enough to feel extremely happy about it, like the great thought transformation practitioners we can at least feel comfortable about the situation.

If we are depressed, we can remember bodhicitta and do the tonglen practice. We can meditate on the suffering of others and particularly

on those beings who are also depressed but in a much worse state than we are. Then, in our tonglen meditation, we take all the depression of all the depressed beings right into our self-cherishing heart with the in-breath, in the form of disgusting black smoke or sludge or things like scorpions, and then with the out-breath we give them all the good qualities and happiness we have, in the form of bright white light. The self-cherishing gets heavier and heavier, denser and denser, blacker and blacker until it explodes into brilliant white light, pouring out of us and into the other beings. If we do this meditation properly there is no way we can stay depressed for even a second; the gloom of our depression is instantly dispelled by the sun of bodhicitta. We destroy our own depression and we generate great compassion for all other beings. This is how powerful such a meditation can be.

Remembering bodhicitta, whatever fear we have disappears. Even if we have leprosy, cancer, epilepsy or some other terrible disease—whatever dangers we face—there is no fear in our heart. Normal people are terrified because their health and wellbeing are threatened, but we experience the disease on behalf of all other sentient beings and hence it is not wasted; it becomes a very worthwhile thing to experience. Instead of rejecting the situation, our mind accepts it and uses it to develop bodhicitta even more. When we feel fear, instead of allowing it to overcome us, we face it and accept it not just for our own sake but for others, taking the fear of all other beings. With bodhicitta, the fear of death is totally transcended.

Whenever we feel fear, we should meditate on bodhicitta. We might face the terror of being bombed in a war, being in an earthquake or

trapped in a burning house. If we ever find ourselves in such a terrifying situation, the best thing to do is meditate on bodhicitta. It is the most helpful thing, the very best preparation for whatever we are facing.

Even though we might have listened to many teachings on thought transformation, when we are told we have cancer or our partner leaves us, unless we remember bodhicitta, we will fall into misery because we see we are about to lose what we are so attached to. Bodhicitta, the mind that cherishes others, is the complete opposite of the self-cherishing thought, so when we meditate on bodhicitta all the fears that our attachment brings us cannot arise.

I remember there was a Swiss student who lived in Kathmandu who had very high blood pressure. I advised him to do tonglen. Each time he did this, and he usually did it for about half an hour, his blood pressure dropped a lot. This happened several times.

When high lamas are dying, they feel very happy, like they are going on a picnic or going back to their parents' home, so of course there is no fear. Even if they have not reached that stage, they can still die happily, thinking that their next life will be an even better opportunity to develop on the path and benefit others.

When we are happy, we still need to remember bodhicitta. This way whatever happiness we feel does not become confused with attachment and pride and other negative attitudes. Usually, we feel happy because we have obtained something we want, a desirable object, praise from others or the like, and this causes attachment to arise. Then our mind becomes disturbed, the very opposite of peace, and our self-cherishing increases. When we reflect on bodhicitta, however,

the mind does not become agitated and self-cherishing, desire, pride, arrogance and the other afflictions do not arise in connection with that object of pleasure.

Furthermore, we can use that happiness, that experience, on the path to enlightenment by dedicating it to all other sentient beings. In that way we have no need to avoid pleasurable experiences. By constantly working for others, whatever we experience, whether it's pleasant or not, is part of our path to enlightenment.

When we are weak, remembering bodhicitta makes us strong. Weakness comes from feeling inadequate, and when we are focused on helping others we develop strong willpower. Nothing is more important than helping them; that is our only wish, and hence we have no room for insincerity, carelessness and so forth. Feeling we can make a difference to others gives us great strength.

In that way, we overcome all laziness. At present there is a child's voice inside us saying, "I don't want to do any more meditation. I'm tired. It's boring. It's uncomfortable." And so on and so forth. If we look, we can find many reasons not to meditate. Maybe it's very cold in the morning and our bed is wonderfully comfortable. Laziness is not about being exhausted; it's about finding ways of avoiding Dharma practice. Enjoying gossip more than talking about the Dharma is a form of laziness. There are many different types of laziness.

By reflecting on the great suffering of sentient beings and the great kindness they have shown us, there is no way we can be lazy. These kind mother sentient beings have helped us again and again in so many ways and now they are suffering in the terrible lower realms, as hell beings, hungry ghosts or animals, or even as human beings in

suffering situations. They are utterly unable to help themselves; only we can do it.

Whenever we feel tiredness or laziness overcoming us, we should reflect on bodhicitta. Very often when I teach into the night, I see the students slouched over, their heads on their stomachs, not hearing a single word. With bodhicitta, this doesn't happen. By remembering the kindness of sentient beings and the suffering they are enduring, all tiredness disappears and all we want to do is to work for them ceaselessly.

Whatever problem happens in our life, the best solution is to think of bodhicitta. As Khunu Lama says,

[175] Meditate upon bodhicitta when afflicted with disease.

Meditate upon bodhicitta when sad.

Meditate upon bodhicitta when suffering occurs.

Meditate upon bodhicitta when you are scared.

Bodhicitta should be the first thing we think of. Instead of thinking of medicine, we should think of bodhicitta. Instead of thinking of money, we should think of bodhicitta. If we meditate on bodhicitta when we experience sickness, then we experience that sickness for all sentient beings. In this way, not only do we not torture ourselves when we are sick but we also experience it with happiness.

Even though the body might be suffering, our mind experiences only happiness. If our mind becomes sad, we experience that sadness for all sentient beings and it becomes so worthwhile. Any difficulty, danger or fear that we face, if we do so with bodhicitta it becomes a

cause for enlightenment, a reason for rejoicing, because we are experiencing it for all sentient beings, to free them from difficulties, danger and fear, and to lead them to full enlightenment.

This is unbelievable. When we meditate on bodhicitta, when we remember bodhicitta, the catastrophe we are experiencing is transformed into the path to achieve enlightenment for sentient beings, to bring all sentient beings to enlightenment. In that way, our suffering is transformed into happiness. If we have bodhicitta, regardless of whether we are carefree or our life is filled with problems, whether we have a home and many material possessions or nothing, our mind is happy and joyful.

Sick we are happy, well we are happy

If we have bodhicitta we are always happy, no matter what external circumstance occurs or how our body suffers. There is no difference to our state of mind whether we are in good health or poor health, whether we are fit and young or old and sick. Even if we are dying of a chronic disease, we are perfectly happy. In *The Jewel Lamp*, Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[296] When you have bodhicitta you are happy.

If you are sick you are happy, if you are well you are happy;

Even if you are dying you are happy.

Listening, studying, meditating, whatever you do,
you are happy.

With bodhicitta the mind is always happy. Because we only want happiness for others, it is of no concern to us whatever we experience. When we are well we are happy, when we are sick we are happy. Even if we are dying we are happy. Whatever we encounter, we remain very happy because we have bodhicitta. If there is great pain we are very happy to experience it because we are experiencing it for the sake of others. We experience sickness for the sentient beings, sort of as their representative, taking it on instead of them.

Disease is a natural thing in life; it happens whether we want it or not. What we do when we find we have a major disease is another thing. Even if we have a disease that medicine does not yet have a cure for, such as cancer, we can still be so happy by experiencing that disease with effortful bodhicitta. We can think we are experiencing that disease for the sake of all sentient beings. Even if we are dying, we can die for all sentient beings. To dedicate our life for the numberless sentient beings, so that not even one sentient being is left out, is naturally a cause for great happiness.

The higher bodhisattvas are able to make charity of their bodies, such as the famous story of the Buddha before his enlightenment when he gave his body to the starving tigers. No matter what pain the physical body might have, the spiritual body has no suffering; it is beyond old age and sickness. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that he admires the new bodhisattvas who are not yet beyond that and consequently undergo hardships and suffering despite the pain, whereas it's much easier for the higher bodhisattvas who are beyond that.

For a person with bodhicitta, the disease can be an excellent opportunity to develop even further on the path. The disease is not wasted;

it is made very worthwhile. The bodhisattva understands how to use the pain and discomfort of the disease in order to benefit others, and hence instead of recoiling from the thought of the disease, the bodhisattva embraces it. With bodhicitta, we experience the pain of that disease for the sake of others—for all sentient beings but especially for the beings who suffer from the same disease—and again we can do tonglen meditation, taking all their disease into us and giving them all our happiness. This is what bodhisattvas do when they get sick.

Bodhisattvas, whose holy minds are enriched with bodhicitta, sincerely wish to experience the suffering of others, and therefore their experience of pain is entirely different from ours.

Geshe Lama Konchog was a great meditator who, after many years meditating in a cave in the Himalayas, became a teacher at Kopan Monastery in Nepal. Once, when we were walking down the steps outside the old gompa in the rain, in the square where the Tara statue is, he slipped on the cement because it was so slippery. He fell heavily and must have hurt himself but he was unbelievably happy. He told me he instinctively, instantly felt that he had taken on my life obstacles with that fall and that was why he felt so happy. That really shows how he had trained his mind well in lojong, taking the suffering of others.

Having wished for the suffering of others, when a bodhisattva experiences it, they are very happy because they have achieved their wish. And this doesn't just have to be a mental thing. There are many stories of bodhisattvas who have literally taken on the suffering of others, such as leprosy, and in doing so have cured the sick being. This has happened many times with ascetic monks and meditators, but I have even heard of this happening in the West, in Italy. There was some-

body who had leprosy, his whole body was full of it, and there was nobody to take care of him, but a priest took the responsibility, dedicating himself completely to the patient. Without having that very precious mind that cherishes others more than ourselves, this practice is impossible.

At present, we are almost the complete opposite of this. Leaving aside a fatal illness like cancer, even if we just have a small toothache, we immediately forget everything but trying to be free from it. Any thought of seeking happiness for others goes out the window and all we can think about is happiness for this one poor suffering sentient being! If we have to go to the dentist, we demand to be let in first. We need painkillers for it, no matter what. If they don't help, we pay any amount to have pujas done, even though we don't even think of having pujas done when we hear of somebody else with a major problem. The self-cherishing attitude can't stand the slightest pain for even a second.

We should know that pain, illness, problems and all such things will happen, that is only natural, and we shouldn't be frightened or unhappy. Since we all want happiness, rather than dwelling on why our happiness is blocked, we should try to see it the other way. Whenever an undesirable thing happens, big or small, something opposite to our desire, we should train our mind, thinking we have found a weapon to destroy our self-cherishing thought. In that way, we should feel very happy. When our partner fights with us, when our most loved friend no longer cares for us, we can still be happy by using that situation as a bomb that totally destroys the self-cherishing thought.

And we can be happy even if we are dying, knowing that we will

never be reborn in the lower realms. The Kadampa Geshe Chekawa always prayed to be reborn in the hells in order to help all the hell beings, but at the time of his death he saw visions of a pure land, showing him where he would be reborn. He told his attendant that his prayers to be born in the hells had not succeeded. By the strength of his bodhicitta, his next rebirth was going to be in a pure land.

Other than developing bodhicitta, how else can we be happy? Following the self-cherishing thought can only mean endless suffering in the lower realms. Since beginningless time the self-cherishing thought has never let us have even one moment's happiness. It has always been our worst enemy. Whatever undesirable things that have ever happened to us, big or small, have been caused by it. Why not then practice thought transformation in this way, using our problems to destroy our self-cherishing and attain happiness and, ultimately, enlightenment?

Bodhicitta dispels negative emotions

No matter what occurs, with bodhicitta we experience it with an incredibly positive mind. Then, nothing can harm us; nothing can create negativity in our mind. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[42] Even though we are rich, any pride is dispelled;
 Even though we are poor, happiness is generated.
 Cultivating bodhicitta is the only thing
 That never betrays us in samsara.

When things are going well, we can be inflated with arrogance about our own accomplishments, proud of our possessions and disdainful of those not in our fortunate position. Conversely, when things are going badly, we can become obsessed with our own misfortunes, unable to think of anything else, jealous of those with more and angry with those who block our happiness. With the precious mind of bodhicitta, on the other hand, although there might still be times when things go well and times when they don't, there is no problem in the mind. Wealth doesn't lead to pride and poverty doesn't mean unhappiness.

Worldly people suffer terribly when they are poor and they see others with more. They feel jealous and long to obtain what the others have, even stealing to get it. This is common in the world: between couples, in groups, in whole societies and between countries. We can't trust samsaric things, whether possessions, money or reputation, nor can we trust samsaric relationships; they will cheat us every time. As long as we are in the cycle of death and rebirth called samsara, it's definite we will live with frustration and unhappiness while we are ruled by ignorance. Nothing lasts; there is nothing to trust and by following the deluded mind, we cheat ourselves.

The one thing that will never cheat us, the only thing we can rely on completely, is our own achievement of bodhicitta. Among all the minds, bodhicitta is the mind that is completely trustworthy. It's the pure medicine that will cure every disease and therefore it's the mind most worthwhile to cultivate.

Needing friends, we travel to many countries looking for happiness and freedom from problems, giving gifts to win friendship, trying to make people like us, and because of that we encounter all sorts of

problems of jealousy, animosity, greed and so forth. We could cultivate billions of friends in every country in order to always be happy, but we have no guarantee; they could all cheat us in some way.

Much more worthwhile is the cultivation of bodhicitta. Surrounded by an ocean of friends, we are never free from attachment, but with bodhicitta we have our best friend in our mind; it cannot be stolen, destroyed or killed. Because bodhicitta is something that nobody can take from us, it is therefore the most worthwhile friend to cultivate. We don't have to give material things to this friend, bodhicitta, or flatter it or pay it compliments; there's nothing to worry about. Even if we want the peace of this life, there's still nothing to worry about; we will certainly find greater peace than if we had billions of friends. Our closest friend can become an enemy, the creator of problems. With the inner best friend, however, the longer we live, the more content and happy our mind becomes. Our bodhicitta helps us subdue negative minds and always brings us closer to enlightenment.

Furthermore, Khunu Lama says,

[291] With bodhicitta one drives out feelings of pain.

With bodhicitta one overcomes harm.

With bodhicitta one cures unhappiness,

With bodhicitta one gets rid of fear.

Even if we don't have actual effortless bodhicitta, just effortful bodhicitta, by practicing tonglen we can easily eliminate any pain we have. And even if we are unable to totally eradicate pain, we are able to experience it to progress along the path. If we have bodhicitta, it overcomes

whatever harm a human or nonhuman tries to give us. Similarly, it cures any unhappiness or fear we have and allows us to use it on the path to enlightenment.

The Supremacy of Bodhicitta

BODHICITTA IS THE BEST THOUGHT

IN *The Jewel Lamp*, there are many verses that tell us how bodhicitta is the best, the supreme mind. Of course it is! It is the mind that wishes every single being be free from all suffering completely. What greater mind can there be than that? Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[21] The thought desiring to dispel
Every mistake from every sentient being
And to bring every being to full knowledge is bodhicitta.
Of all wonderful things, this is the most wonderful.

Among all the thoughts we can have, the very best, the most wonderful thought is bodhicitta. Why is that? Because it has incredible benefit for ourselves and for all others. It's the thought wanting to free every sentient being from every mistaken mind. The mistakes that prevent us from attaining total freedom from suffering are our wrong conceptions, which produce all the delusions and prevent enlightenment. Bodhicitta is more than wanting all beings to be free from physical problems—it is wanting all beings to be free from all gross and subtle delusions that create those physical and mental problems.

Can there be anything superior to that? In his *Guide*, Shantideva says much the same thing when he says that even wishing to cure sentient beings from a headache is an amazing mind, let alone from *all* unhappiness completely.¹⁰ The wish to free somebody else from a headache is a very beneficial mind, so the wish to free all beings from all headaches is a mind of incredible virtue. But if we extend that not just to one kind of temporary problem experienced by all sentient beings but to all the possible sufferings all beings can experience, gross and subtle, physical and mental, then that mind is unimaginable, incredible, the supreme among the supreme.

Bodhicitta is considered the best mind in the same way that the lotus is considered the most beautiful flower. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[10] As the *pundarika* [lotus] is the best flower among all the flowers,
 Bodhicitta is the best mind among all the virtuous minds.
 Therefore, since having it brings happiness in this life and all lives,
 It is worthwhile to always make effort to develop it.

Because we think of a lotus as the most beautiful flower, we revere it over all other flowers in the same way that we consider the diamond as the most valuable of all gems. Likewise, bodhicitta is the most wonderful mind; it's the most important thing in our life. An action that

¹⁰ See "The Cure for the World's Ills" in Part Two, Chapter 4.

grows from bodhicitta is the most beneficial action there can be, hence nothing is more worthwhile than developing bodhicitta.

This is what we should hold in the depths of our heart. Without bodhicitta, no matter what advanced practice we do, it will not bring the desired result of enlightenment. Just as we always want the best—the best flowers, the best clothes, the best jewelry—we should demand the best mind, bodhicitta. All other practices, such as concentration, renunciation and so forth, are ways of bringing about this most amazing mind.

To be assured that we can continue to develop our bodhicitta we need to ensure we have another perfect human rebirth. That is a priority because we can't realistically expect to fully realize bodhicitta in this life. Therefore, the teachings of the lower capable being on perfect human rebirth, impermanence and death, the three lower realms, refuge and karma are vital. We need to start now, this minute, because we never know how long we have left in this current human body.

Bodhicitta brings us every positive quality of mind, such as stability, courage and confidence. Khunu Lama Rinpoche asks,

[51] What is as dependable as bodhicitta?

What is as courageous as bodhicitta?

What is as confident as bodhicitta?

What is as peaceful as bodhicitta?

Bodhicitta is the mind that most benefits all sentient beings, without excluding one insect or one person, without discrimination on the basis of nationality, race, skin color, even eye color!

Furthermore, there is no courage like the courage bodhicitta gives us—the courage to practice the six perfections for however long it takes to attain enlightenment. For three countless great eons, the Buddha practiced each of the perfections, such as charity, giving his possessions and even his body away countless times. Even if it takes us three countless great eons, we must never lose heart. We need the courage that bodhicitta gives us.

For instance, there is the story in the *Jataka Tales* of the Buddha when he was a bodhisattva captain of a boat with five hundred traders on board. Through his clairvoyance, the Buddha knew there was somebody there who wanted to kill all those five hundred traders and he decided in order to stop this he would kill the man himself, saving him from committing the act of murder and saving all those traders, even though, because of his act, the Buddha himself would be born in the hell realm and suffer for an incredible number of eons. Because of his great compassion for the murderer he was willing to courageously give up his life. But what actually happened was that his incredible compassion brought him a hundred thousand eons closer to enlightenment.

Likewise, with bodhicitta, we naturally have great confidence in whatever we do. When we are a higher bodhisattva, having realized emptiness and therefore become free from samsara, we attain peerless peace and happiness, but even if we are still not free from samsara, we feel great peace. This is the power of bodhicitta.

BODHICITTA IS THE BEST PRACTICE

Bodhicitta brings meaning to any pursuit. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[325] If you want to be learned, practice bodhicitta.

If you want to be noble, practice bodhicitta.

If you want to be strict, practice bodhicitta.

If you want to be of benefit, practice bodhicitta.

Once we generate bodhicitta, because of the strong wish to benefit others, all the methods we need come naturally. In our mind there is nothing but the wish to best benefit others and therefore we naturally must have knowledge. We become learned not for reputation or any other worldly gain but because this is the best way to serve others.

For a person like me there is only concern for the self, but with bodhicitta we are concerned only for others and consequently we seek whatever method is best to lead others from suffering and into peerless happiness. As Maitreya explains in *Ornament of Clear Realization*,¹¹ those who wish to benefit others must understand the path. The individual liberation path, the bodhisattva's path—whatever path there is—should be understood and followed in order to do the best work for others. A Mahayana practitioner cannot ignore the wonderful teachings of the Hinayana; they are the foundation. Astrology, hygiene, languages, handicraft, art or whatever subjects that can be of benefit to others need to be studied. Although we might have no

¹¹ Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realization* (Skt: *Abhisamayalamkara*) is one of main philosophical texts studied in Tibetan monasteries.

inclination to follow other religions, if studying them benefits others it's very important that we do so. A classic example of this is His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who not only champions interfaith dialogue but also has yearly science seminars, where he has deep discussions with eminent scientists to make links between the ancient mind science of Buddhism and the new mind science of the modern world.

Bodhicitta inspires us to do whatever is beneficial. If we need to learn astrology to benefit others, we do; if we need to learn another language, we do. And, of course, we need the really vital subjects such as emptiness and the other realizations on the path. When we have bodhicitta, all these realizations pour down on us like cooling rain, without much effort at all. With bodhicitta, our understanding of emptiness develops until we realize it and we become an arya being. From that we develop further, destroying even the subtle delusions and completing all the realizations until we become a buddha. Without bodhicitta this is impossible; with bodhicitta it is definite.

Conversely, without bodhicitta nothing we do has much use. After all the years of education—primary school, high school, one degree at university after another—and all that money spent acquiring knowledge, we might end up as a top scientist or biologist, a famous psychiatrist or author, but still our mind is empty of anything worthwhile. There are still the same disturbing thoughts, the same dissatisfaction in the mind. Because all that education has just been dedicated to our own comfort, our own happiness, there is still no peace in the mind and our life is still filled with problems.

Not only that, even if somebody has studied all the sutras and tantras and can explain them very well—even if they can recite all 84,000

teachings revealed by the Buddha by heart—without bodhicitta it is very difficult for that person to offer extensive benefit to others. There are always mistakes. If they lecture about something, somehow it lacks flavor and people find it uninteresting. They might have a reputation for being learned but *also* for being boring. On the other hand, somebody with even very little education who has bodhicitta can be highly beneficial.

Khunu Lama Rinpoche says if we want to be a noble person we need to develop bodhicitta. “Noble” here means a moral person, somebody with a good heart. A good heart is wonderful but we need the ultimate good heart, with love and compassion for all sentient beings. To have some partiality means we have not yet attained bodhicitta. We might feel we have love for human beings and maybe some animals but not all. Perhaps we love kittens and puppies but have no thought of love toward repulsive creatures such as snakes and scorpions. Without bodhicitta, it is difficult to develop the causes of enlightenment, despite what we do. The good heart of bodhicitta covers all sentient beings.

Khunu Lama Rinpoche also says that with bodhicitta we naturally train to be “strict” or self-disciplined. It is very difficult to maintain self-discipline without bodhicitta because there is always a conflict between our external moral actions and what our self-cherishing wants.

Even if we live in a solitary place in silence, fasting every day, if our mind is devoid of bodhicitta there is not much advantage. Again, it becomes difficult to create the cause for enlightenment. Living in a cave without possessions, never seeing another sentient being, not

even a bird, living without food, doing a strict retreat, still there will be little benefit.

If we have bodhicitta then such practices would have great benefit. We are very strict in avoiding the self-cherishing attitude. Nothing becomes an ego trip; nothing diverts us from developing our potential toward full enlightenment. We automatically become “strict” in this way; we automatically dedicate all the actions of our three doors of body, speech and mind to others. We are incapable of doing anything that harms others and therefore we don’t create any negative karma at all. We become strict with nonvirtuous actions. Bodhicitta is the most meaningful strictness.

As I have said, the very last time I met Khunu Lama Rinpoche he advised me that the people at Kopan Monastery should do their best to subdue their minds. Lama Yeshe had told me to teach the Kopan monks the three principal aspects of the path—renunciation, bodhicitta and the right view of emptiness—and here Rinpoche was advising me to balance scholarly learning with subduing their minds. That made me think that everything we did at Kopan should be firmly based on a bodhicitta motivation.

This is what Khunu Lama Rinpoche advised and this is the path the Buddha followed. To practice without bodhicitta is to go along another path, one not shown by the Buddha. This is the heart advice from all the learned Indian and Tibetan teachers. Like the fire at the end of the eon that burns up the entire universe totally, bodhicitta burns all negative karma, all downfalls. It is the hook that brings all sublime realizations.

Just as knowledge, morality and self-discipline need bodhicitta, so

does everything we do when studying the path to enlightenment. As Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[36] Among existences to be known, the best existence is
with bodhicitta.

Among advice to be learned, the best advice is bodhicitta.

Among practices to be done, the best practice is bodhicitta.

Among meditations, the best meditation is bodhicitta.

Achieving this perfect human rebirth with its eight freedoms and ten riches is such a rare thing. We have met the teachings of the Buddha, we have met the virtuous friend and we have all these other incredibly rare and precious conditions—this perfect human rebirth gives us a unique and wonderful opportunity. If we can't make the most of this time by generating bodhicitta then our life is wasted. This is what Khunu Lama Rinpoche means when he says the best existence is with bodhicitta.

One day, one hour, even one minute that passes without having done this practice is a great loss. Whatever we do, wherever we are, we should always hold a bodhicitta motivation in our heart. The best advice we can listen to and learn is bodhicitta; the best practice we can do is bodhicitta.

In short, to progress quickly through the entire path, there is no way other than by relying on bodhicitta. Khunu Lama says,

[39] If you wish to proceed easily to the level
Of the knowledge of all modes of meditation,

What other method is there if you do not
Rely upon the bodhicitta of the Victor's children?

There is no other method to immediately progress to the state of omniscience. For example, some people only want to practice tantra, seeing it as the quick path to enlightenment, and consider the Sutrayana as inferior, kind of a lower practice.

If we do that, leaving out bodhicitta, no matter how many eons we practice tantra, working with the winds and channels and all that, we will never attain enlightenment. We must understand that tantra relies on the foundation, the practices that clean the mind: first correctly relying on a virtuous friend, then attaining all the lamrim realizations incorporated in the three higher trainings of renunciation, wisdom and bodhicitta. For tantra we have to clean away the garbage otherwise we will be trying to practice it with the self-cherishing thought. If there is no renunciation of samsara, how can our practice become Dharma? It can only be worldly dharma. Similarly, without the wisdom realizing emptiness, we can never be free from samsara. It is only with bodhicitta that our practice takes us straight to enlightenment. Trying to practice tantra without developing the three higher trainings will only lead to the lower realms. There is great danger.

BODHICITTA IS THE BEST POSSESSION

Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[85] If you possess bodhicitta,
Whether you're attractive or ugly doesn't matter,

Whether you have respect or possessions doesn't matter,
Whether you have any other virtue doesn't matter.

When we have bodhicitta we have the best beauty, the most beautiful shape, the most beautiful complexion.

Having some external beauty can bring many problems, but the beauty of bodhicitta can never cause problems. Similarly, when we own possessions or when we have the respect of others it's very easy to have problems such as greed, pride and so forth, but having bodhicitta can never cause problems. If we are in possession of bodhicitta, even if we don't have any other virtues it doesn't matter because with bodhicitta all our actions are virtuous. With bodhicitta, there is no selfish intention at all and so no way of harming others. With bodhicitta we create virtuous actions all the time, no matter what we are doing. Eating, sleeping, walking, anything at all, every action is completely selfless, therefore even if we don't consciously create any other virtuous actions, we are continuously creating merit.

Nothing matters but bodhicitta, because with bodhicitta all other positive qualities naturally happen. Bodhicitta is the best beauty now but with bodhicitta we can be assured of a beautiful body in our next rebirth without purposely aiming for that. There are many external advantages that happen as a side effect when we have bodhicitta. We naturally receive the admiration and respect of others without seeking it, and we receive whatever possessions we need in order to be of benefit to others without our having to make any effort. Therefore, trying to develop bodhicitta is the best preparation we can do, no matter what we want.

In that way, we can say that bodhicitta is the best possession. Of this Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[16] The bodhicitta of the Sons of the Victors
Is the source of all happiness and benefit.
How can even a wish-granting jewel
Be compared to this?

A wish-granting jewel is the most valuable thing in the universe, even more valuable than the treasures of the god realms, because it has the power to grant any worldly wish. It cannot, however, fulfill that most basic desire for true happiness.

In previous times, on auspicious days such as the full moon days, these most precious jewels could be taken from under the ocean by bodhisattvas who had created great merit. When they were placed on a banner on top of a house on a full-moon night, whatever material wishes the people might desire—money, a long, healthy life and so forth—would be immediately obtained. And so, the wish-granting jewel can grant any worldly wishes, making us the richest person in the world, bringing great success, granting us health and beauty and countless friends, cooling us when we are hot and warming us when we are cold. It can't, however, grant us the everlasting peace of enlightenment. Only the jewel of bodhicitta can do that.

Therefore we can easily see that it is far more worthwhile to try to attain bodhicitta than to possess even the most valuable of all possessions, the wish-granting jewel. Even though we don't have such a jewel or all the wealth of all the kings and rich people of this world, we

already have something far more valuable. We have met the Mahayana teachings and we have the wisdom to ascertain whether they are helpful or not. Whereas any material possession, no matter how valuable, can bring only limited benefit, the potential we have with this perfect human rebirth is limitless. With the methods shown to us through the teachings, including the more profound teachings of the Vajrayana, we can attain whatever goal we want quickly and easily. While we are in this situation, it's vital that we develop this potential as much as we can and try to cultivate pure bodhicitta. Now that we are incredibly fortunate, we must make the most of every moment, because we don't know when this opportunity might be snatched from us by death. Compared to most beings whose chances are unbelievably limited, compared to even the richest of the rich, we are incredibly fortunate.

BODHICITTA IS THE BEST MEDICINE

If samsara is a sickness we need to be cured of, bodhicitta is the best medicine. Of this, Khunu Lama Rinpoche says.

[286] By depending on the medicine of bodhicitta

All the diseases of the all-rising delusions will be cured.

Therefore, there is no question at all

That there is no better medicine in samsara than bodhicitta.

When Rinpoche refers to the diseases of delusions, he does not mean colds or cholera or physical ailments but the diseases that arise from self-cherishing, such as anger, jealousy, greed, miserliness and so

forth. Until we can cure ourselves of self-cherishing, we will always be plagued by all the other mental and physical ailments that are its offspring.

Delusions or defilements are called “all-rising” because with the self-cherishing attitude, whatever occurs in the mind is tainted by that attitude. Everything arises from this fundamental delusion. Our mind is called “unsubdued” because we have no control over our self-cherishing and hence no control over the mind. We must subdue our own mind and yet at present it is unsubdued, running whichever way, to this object of attachment and that object of aversion. It seems uncontrollable and yet, by relying on the medicine of bodhicitta, we can subdue it. Because this is the one complete antidote to all of samsara, there is no greater cure to samsara than this.

Bodhicitta is the medicine, the nectar, that cures not just the gross suffering we experience but also the subtle levels of suffering. In the *Four Noble Truths Sutra*, the Buddha shows us there are three levels of suffering: the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change and pervasive compounding suffering. The suffering of suffering is the suffering we all understand, the gross and subtle physical and mental sufferings that we all experience every day and that we all long to be free from.

The suffering of change is more subtle. It’s what we would call sense pleasure, or even happiness, the enjoyment we derive from experiencing some sense object due to our attachment to it. It’s the suffering of change because of its untrustworthy nature, being impermanent and momentarily changing. One day it will cease to exist; we either lose it or our relationship to it changes and it no longer gives us the enjoyment we first gained from it.

Pervasive compounding suffering is the suffering that underpins all of samsara and is the cause of the other two types of suffering. This association of body and mind—this entity we call “I”—is under the control of karma and delusion and is contaminated by the seed of delusion. Because of this, we generate delusions when we meet attractive, unpleasant or indifferent objects. These delusions then create mental, verbal or physical actions, karma, which leave imprints on our consciousness, and these imprints later become the causes that bring about our future-life samsara, our future-life association of body and mind, which again is never free from suffering.

Curing ourselves of the suffering of suffering is not enough. We need to transcend the attachment we have to sense pleasures and so, by renouncing samsara completely, free ourselves from the suffering of change. But only when we can eliminate the very subtle delusions will we be free from pervasive compounding suffering. This comes about by destroying self-cherishing, which is what bodhicitta does. Therefore, the only medicine that will completely cure the unbearable disease of samsara is bodhicitta.

When we overcome these three kinds of suffering with the nectar of bodhicitta, we turn our afflictive emotions into pure Dharma and this unclean body can become the body of a buddha. As Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[74] Just as the nectar called the philosopher's stone
 Turns iron into gold,
 Bodhicitta turns this unclean body
 Into the body of a buddha.

This corresponds to a similar verse in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, where Shantideva compares bodhicitta to the “best alchemy” turning base metal to gold.¹² And of course the reason we do this is not just for our own bliss, but principally to relieve the suffering of all others.

BODHICITTA BRINGS THE BEST BENEFIT

We rely on and have great reverence for those who wish for our well-being—our parents, our teachers and the gods—but none of these beings can bring us the benefit that bodhicitta can. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[9] A mother, a father, a teacher, even Brahma himself,
 May wish to help others,
 But how can that extend to every living being
 Like supreme bodhicitta?¹³

Brahma is the highest Hindu god and the Brahmins, the main priests in India, are very powerful because they follow the laws of their caste strictly, such as never telling even the slightest lie. Because of that, their prayers usually succeed very quickly. In previous times, Brahmins had psychic powers, such as being able to foretell the future. With such power they have the opportunity to benefit many people, but do they have the ability to benefit all equally?

¹² See “Transforming Lead into Gold” in Part Two, Chapter 3.

¹³ See “The Cure for the World’s Ills” in Part Two, Chapter 4.

The love of parents is immense. They naturally wish their children every happiness and would sacrifice themselves willingly to help them. Even teachers make great sacrifices to teach their students. But not even these great examples can compare to bodhicitta, which reaches every sentient being and can help all beings attain the supreme happiness of enlightenment.

In another verse Rinpoche mentions the other powerful Hindu gods. He says,

[317] Bodhicitta is the source of the benefit
 And happiness of all sentient beings.
 Not even the supreme among the gods,
 Brahma, Vishnu and Indra, have such a supreme thought.

Brahma, Vishnu and Indra have the ability to bestow unbelievable wealth, power, health and psychic powers on those who worship them, but can they do that for all living beings equally and can they lead all beings to the complete state of freedom from all suffering? Vishnu has the power to control many other gods but he does not have this ability.

Generating bodhicitta is the best way to bring benefits to others. Of this Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[110] When those who desire to benefit
 All sentient beings check to see what is best,
 They discover it is bodhicitta.
 How could anything else compare?

Those noble beings such as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha who, with their great compassion, investigated what is most beneficial for sentient beings, found that it is bodhicitta. Having attained this perfect human rebirth, having discovered not just the teachings of the Buddha but the precious Mahayana teachings, having met the perfect teachers, to do anything else is completely foolish.

Consider the trader who sets out to find profitable goods in other countries and comes across an island totally covered in precious gems. He sees them all and marvels at them, but then leaves the island with an empty ship because he is too lazy to pick them up. Even if that island contained all the jewels and other valuable things of this entire world, that example could still not compare to the waste of hearing about bodhicitta and not wanting to develop such a mind. That island full of precious jewels might have made the trader incredibly wealthy, but that wealth would diminish as he spent it. The wealth of bodhicitta can never diminish but can only increase. That is why it's incredibly important to constantly remember bodhicitta and constantly develop this most precious mind.

Bodhicitta is the mind we need if we are to truly benefit others, helping them in any way that is appropriate for them. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[22] If you wish to benefit all living beings, you need to have
bodhicitta.

If you wish to be a friend of all living beings, you need to
have bodhicitta.

If you wish to have the trust of all living beings, you need to
have bodhicitta.

If you wish to be the teacher of all living beings, you need to have bodhicitta.

Among all the actions that benefit sentient beings, the most beneficial ones are those done with bodhicitta. Among all the thoughts, the most beneficial thoughts are those of bodhicitta. There are many stories in the texts that show how the actions of the holy beings, motivated by bodhicitta, have greatly benefited sentient beings.

This is because any action done with bodhicitta is completely free from the sense of self and consequently without the self-cherishing attitude, that action can never become nonvirtuous, locked in attachment to the happiness of this life. Motivated only by the wish to help others, any action done with bodhicitta will be powerful and effective. Even normal daily activities become very effective with bodhicitta. Talking to people, helping them in small ways and so forth becomes of great benefit for them. Giving medicines or treating the sick becomes much more powerful; it can cure others' illnesses.

Because of our very limited mind and our partiality, wishing to help one person but not another, we are very limited in the help we can give to others. Even if we have the wish to benefit others, we don't wish to benefit *all* sentient beings—certainly not those who have harmed us. When we want to give charity we choose who we give to, giving to the pitiful looking beggar and avoiding the ugly one. Whatever benefit we can give to others is weakened by our flawed motivation.

With bodhicitta, however, because of the purity of the thought, even giving a few cents to a beggar creates skies of merit. This simple, small action can have the power to benefit not just that beggar but all sentient beings, without discrimination, to help release them from

all suffering and help them attain the sublime happiness of enlightenment. Therefore, for our actions to be of maximum benefit to all sentient beings, we need bodhicitta.

Similarly, we need bodhicitta so we can be a friend to all beings. At present we have friends, but again we are partial; we usually make friends because they can help us in some way. Our friendship comes with expectations. We want happiness and we expect that friend to make us happy, therefore we are not very concerned with helping that person, with showing them how to overcome their suffering and ignorance. When we do help them, there is always the self-cherishing attitude expecting something in return. Everything is done with a motivation of one of the eight worldly dharmas, therefore neither the help we give nor what we get in return will result in any real satisfaction to our friend or to us.

The friendships we now have are based on impure motives, thus when things change the relationships change. The friend of today can become the enemy of tomorrow depending on the external factors we judge that friendship by. If they make us feel happy they are our friend; if they upset us they are our enemy. This is not so with bodhicitta. When we have bodhicitta there is no discrimination—we don't judge friendships based on external conditions, on how rich or how beautiful that person is, or how much help we can receive. Rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, helpful or harmful, if we have bodhicitta all beings are our friends. This means there are never any problems, there is never any confusion.

We also need bodhicitta if we want others to trust us because with this pure mind we can never think of cheating people. If we have a

mind of self-interest, we will deceive people to get our own way and people will sense this, even if we don't actively do it to them. Seeing we are untrustworthy, they are wary of what we say. Without any self-interest at all, everything we do will only be for the wellbeing of others and because of that people will naturally come to trust us.

Similarly, if we want to teach others we need bodhicitta. Whatever we teach will only be of benefit to others. Everything a bodhisattva says or does is a teaching, because a bodhisattva will only act in a way that helps lead sentient beings to enlightenment and hence whatever they say or do will be pure Dharma.

When we have bodhicitta, nothing makes us dispirited. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[55] It seems to be one of the qualities of bodhicitta
 That the hardships of heat and cold, hunger and thirst and so
 forth
 That come when you do something to help others
 Do not get you down but rather give your spirits a boost.

When we work for others, when we do actions that benefit others, we don't get upset by heat and cold, hunger and thirst, being tired and so forth. In fact, we really enjoy it. This is just a small side effect of having bodhicitta.

At present, because of our self-cherishing thought, trying to help others is difficult, whereas for a bodhisattva it is effortless, and no matter what happens they are so happy. We want happiness and to avoid suffering but because of our self-cherishing it is hard to practice the

Dharma. Even if we try it never becomes pure Dharma because we are always distracted by sense pleasures. Locked into seeking the happiness of this life, we can't even think about attaining liberation.

However, for a bodhisattva, the thought of seeking the happiness of liberation for themselves alone is repulsive. The texts say it is like the stone used to clean your kaka but I usually compare it to used toilet paper. You don't reuse used toilet paper, you immediately throw it away. This is how bodhisattvas see cyclic existence. On the other hand, the thought of being born in hell in order to protect even one sentient being brings them so much happiness.

I really admire those people who work for charities voluntarily, working from the heart to help others, not doing it for money. That is really the best Dharma practice. Although we can spend years alone in a cave, doing the yoga of the winds, chakras and drops, there is a great danger that it won't even become Dharma but the cause for the lower realms instead. Whereas, with a good heart, to voluntarily work for the benefit of others is the best Dharma practice, one that will never get us down but will certainly make us extremely happy. If this happens without bodhicitta, just with a good heart, imagine actually enjoying being hungry or tired because we are so engaged in helping others.

The Unending Benefits of Bodhicitta

BODHICITTA BENEFITS OURSELVES AND OTHERS

OUR ABILITY to be of assistance to others comes, of course, from our desire to help them. With a mind of bodhicitta we can be of the greatest help. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[23] When those wishing to help others
Check up with their great compassion
What the greatest benefit can be,
They discover that bodhicitta is the best.

We don't have to investigate too deeply to see that every living being only ever wants happiness and to avoid suffering, and of course, that includes ourselves. How can we achieve this for ourselves and others? There is only one way, and that is by cultivating bodhicitta. Therefore, for our own benefit as well as for the benefit of others, we need bodhicitta. Of this Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[12] If you desire to benefit others
You should cultivate bodhicitta.
If you desire to benefit yourself, to take the joyous path,
You should cultivate bodhicitta.

Where all other methods ultimately fail is that they do not recognize the actual method to gain real peace. Many are good at developing great calm or a sense of contentment, but real peace is more than the suppression of suffering; it is more than the temporary absence of disturbance. Without bodhicitta, we can gain some happiness but not the total happiness of enlightenment.

It is virtually impossible to practice bodhicitta in any other realm than this one because of deep ignorance. The beings of the other realms have almost no opportunity to practice any degree of selflessness or to practice any Dharma at all. In the three lower realms the suffering is so intense that there is no freedom to think of any other being, but even in the god realms where there is incredible pleasure there is no freedom to practice in this way. They live in the most wonderful environment, with glorious palaces of lapis lazuli and precious jewels, and pleasure parks full of trees, and flowers more beautiful than we could believe. Their life is totally pleasurable, without the slightest trace of effort. And yet they are intoxicated by this pleasure and unable to create any positive karma at all.

Only we human beings, with our mixture of suffering and happiness, have the chance to go beyond self-interest. We are in such a precious situation, where the Mahayana teachings exist and we have the chance to practice them. Although we have still not fully developed the altruistic mind, we have the potential to do so and are working toward realizing that potential. This is a truly rare state.

Working for the welfare of others, we are also working for our own welfare. Practicing Dharma in order to attain the realizations that lead to full enlightenment also ensures that we can enjoy temporal plea-

sure. We can see this easily. For instance, a person who has a generous, loving personality has far fewer problems in life than somebody who is selfish and mean. People are always willing to help those who help others. This is commonsense. Life is easier and there is far less confusion. People who help others are always respected and even though they might not care about having a good reputation, one comes to them naturally.

On the other hand, selfish people create all sorts of problems for themselves and others. Life is confused and troublesome, and because others don't like them they rarely get what they want from people. They create conflict in the family and in the community. For such people, even gaining some temporal happiness is very difficult. Therefore, working for others is the best method for working for ourselves, and the supreme way to work for others is with bodhicitta. With bodhicitta we have the complete understanding of how to best help all other beings.

How can we bring peace to all beings, a total absence of disharmony, conflict and war, while we ourselves still have confusion and partiality? We might try many methods to help others but we are never able to distinguish the most effective methods. We are indecisive and doubtful because there is still the element of self-cherishing in what we do and hence our own interests conflict with the interests of others. With bodhicitta there is no conflict. What the others want and what we want are in complete accord, making them happy and making us happy.

The very first priority in gaining bodhicitta is ensuring that we have another perfect human rebirth in order to continue our journey. That

requires, first and foremost, entrusting ourselves to the Three Rare Sublime Ones: the Buddha as our peerless guide, the Dharma as our route out of suffering and the Sangha as our helpers along that route. Taking refuge in these Three Rare Sublime Ones is a necessary step to freedom. Even saying the refuge prayer has incredible power.

There is the story of a thief who was tricked into taking refuge. One day a thief saw somebody offering a fine piece of cloth to a meditator. Determining to steal it he followed the meditator to his hermitage. When he looked through the small hole in the wall where people could offer food, he saw the cloth on the meditator and he demanded it. The meditator said he just had to reach through the hole for the cloth if he wanted it, but when he did that the meditator grabbed both his hands and tied them to a pillar. Then, while the thief was trapped with his hands inside the room and his body outside, the meditator came outside and beat him with a stick, saying the refuge prayer over and over again, and making the thief repeat it. After each repetition, he hit him a little harder. The thief was so scared he ran away, without the cloth of course.

As he was returning home, night fell and he had to shelter under a bridge, but it was a place known to be very dangerous, with harmful creatures, hungry ghosts and spirits roaming about. Because they congregated under the bridge people always avoided it. The thief was terrified. He found a small cave nearby and huddled inside, thinking he would definitely be killed. Unable to think how he could save himself, he remembered the refuge prayer the old meditator had made him recite. He was very pleased and started to repeat the prayer, again and again, all night long. He thought how fortunate that there were only

three refuge objects. If there had been more, he would have received even more beatings and he would have been even more bruised and exhausted. He repeated the refuge prayer until morning and that night not one spirit came.

He was saved, not because of the words he said, but because he said it from the heart. Just speaking the words has little effect, but really taking refuge from the heart saves us from all harm. It's like asking a reliable guide to show us where to go when we are in a new country. If we trust them completely we won't get lost, but if we say we trust them but have our doubts and don't follow their advice, then we find ourselves having all sorts of problems.

Even taking refuge in one of the Three Rare Sublime Ones, such as having great faith in one member of the Sangha, can save us from rebirth in the lower realms, therefore, of course taking refuge in all three is even more powerful. Taking refuge is vital throughout our life, but especially when we die, because whatever ripens at the moment of death determines our next rebirth. If we can die with refuge, we are assured a favorable rebirth.

Bodhicitta cannot happen without refuge and enlightenment cannot happen without bodhicitta. Until we attain freedom from suffering we will always need the help of others, the buddhas, the bodhisattvas and the great masters who can show us the path. This is why we need refuge until we actually attain enlightenment. Only then are we self-supporting. "Self-supporting" is a term used in Buddhism to mean we have transcended the need for help from others. This is different from the worldly meaning of self-supporting, which is what people think of when they believe themselves to be independent, with a job and a

home and a bank account. To be self-supporting in the Buddhist way is to have attained at least the cessation of suffering, where we no longer have to rely on others to help us be free. The ultimate self-support, of course, is enlightenment, the state where we are totally free from the subtle dualistic mind, and the ultimate tool to gain that is bodhicitta.

A bodhisattva progresses through many levels, but even as a new bodhisattva they have the ability to benefit countless beings. The higher the level of attainment the greater the benefit, until the state of buddhahood is attained, and then the benefits are infinite. At the moment it is difficult for us to help others gain success in their quest for happiness and the avoidance of suffering because we have yet to achieve that ourselves. The benefit we can bring to others is limited. Not only that, even unintentionally we are bound to harm others in small or large ways because we are still not skillful in our methods. With bodhicitta, however, because our mind spontaneously and continuously only works for the benefit of others, we can avoid all harm and our ability to help will be much greater.

Bodhicitta helps us in every positive endeavor we have: helping ourselves, helping others, helping to spread the Dharma, and of course attaining all the realizations on the path. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[26] If you wish to help yourself, generate bodhicitta.
 If you wish to help others, generate bodhicitta.
 If you want to serve the Dharma, generate bodhicitta.
 If you wish the path to happiness, generate bodhicitta.

[216] With bodhicitta your own purpose is accomplished.
 With bodhicitta others' purposes are accomplished.

With bodhicitta you free yourself from the cause of fear.

With bodhicitta you find the antidote to delusions.

Besides helping ourselves and others, Khunu Lama Rinpoche adds that we should develop bodhicitta if we wish to serve the Dharma, free ourselves from all delusions and generate the path to happiness. Serving the Dharma does not necessarily mean working for a Dharma center or something like that; it can be whatever we do in our daily life. No matter what we do, we can transform our attitude and do it with a mind that cherishes others rather than one that works for our own wellbeing alone.

The selfish mind wakes in the morning with the thought, "I am going to work for my own happiness. I must have breakfast then go off to work to earn lots of money so I can have a comfortable life. This is what life is all about." Instead of that, instead of keeping busy day and night running around trying to fulfill the wishes of the self-centered attitude, concerned only with our own mundane happiness, we can work for others. With such a precious human body, to do anything less is shameful; it's kind of disgusting when we think about it. Working for others, living our lives with the three principal aspects of the path—renunciation, bodhicitta and right view—whatever we do will be of great benefit to others. Whether we are the director of a Dharma center or we work in the city, we will only be helping others.

Then, there will be fewer problems at work. We will no longer create any negative karma in our relationships with others. Everything will be highly beneficial. Instead of being in competition with others, trying to find ways to exploit them for our own ends, we will see ourselves as their servant, happy to do whatever will help them. If we

are an employee, we think we are working to help our boss and our customers; if we are an employer, we think we are developing our company in order to help our employees and our customers. It's all a matter of transforming our attitude. As Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[114] If you are concerned about stopping
 The suffering of not just yourself
 But of all sentient beings in the three realms,
 Bodhicitta is the best method, one you should never
 renounce.

Whenever we do something generous, we should feel great joy that we are working on destroying the selfish mind and that we will definitely one day be free from it. In the same way, when we see that we are being mean, we can see how this is the opposite of the bodhisattva's practice of generosity and determine to overcome it.

It is only due to bodhicitta that every sentient being can be free from the oceans of samsaric sufferings. That means if we have bodhicitta, this is what we must do. Even before the realization of bodhicitta, if we have effortful bodhicitta, it is amazing what we can do with such a motivation, by changing our self-cherishing to cherishing numberless other sentient beings. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[288] Sentient beings, who have been your mother and pervade
 the whole sky,
 Are the cause of all your happiness and freedom from
 suffering.

Therefore, to free them all from the oceans of samsaric
sufferings,
There is only bodhicitta.

For beginningless lifetimes we have only ever worked for one person—ourselves—and because of that we have never progressed on the path, whereas countless others, by renouncing the self and cherishing other sentient beings, have attained enlightenment. Those others, including Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, were once the same as we are now, suffering in samsara, and yet they have already become enlightened.

Meanwhile, we have continuously harmed ourselves, allowing our delusions to torture us. We follow the delusions thinking they will lead us to freedom but all they have done for us is give us every kind of suffering—not only sicknesses but every suffering in the six realms. There is no external thing that tortures us, only our own mind, thinking of samsara as pleasurable. We are like an insect flying into a flame, unable to see how hot it is, seeing it as something wonderful.

Every harm we have had to endure and every harm we have inflicted on other sentient beings, who are limitless like the sky, has come from the self-cherishing thought. Only by reversing this and cherishing others with the wonderful mind of bodhicitta can we overcome this.

BODHICITTA BENEFITS ALL BEINGS EQUALLY

With bodhicitta we can subdue our own mind and, by showing others the Dharma, we can help them subdue theirs. What sets bodhicitta

above all other minds is that it covers all sentient beings equally. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[72] With bodhicitta you subdue your own mind.

With bodhicitta you subdue the minds of others.

With bodhicitta you respect everybody.

With bodhicitta you see everybody with equanimity.

Having generated bodhicitta, whatever we do only increases that altruistic mind. Listening to teachings, studying, doing retreat, teaching others, working, relaxing—every action becomes a bodhicitta action. If we have been criticized or even beaten by others, rather than becoming the cause of irritation as it is now, it becomes the cause to further subdue our mind and increase the compassion we have. Somebody can steal all our possessions, badly hurt us or even kill us, but no animosity toward that person will occur in our mind at all.

Not only will bodhicitta subdue our own mind, but also because we respect all others equally and because we treat all others with complete impartiality, we do not create the cause for them to be disturbed by us, and hence our own bodhicitta helps pacify them. By teaching or by example, we can lead them toward this precious mind, and of course, when they in turn attain it then their own minds will be thoroughly pacified.

I heard about a geshe from Ganden Monastery who illustrates this incredible impartiality that bodhisattvas have. Although he was never considered a particularly learned geshe he was known as being very simple and good-hearted and with a good understanding of Dharma.

People were always happy to see him. He heard a commentary on *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* from the abbot of Namgyal Monastery, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's monastery in Dharamsala. After many years as *gekö*, the disciplinarian of the monastery, he left the monastery to try to live an ascetic life in solitary places. He moved from one area to another, always experimenting with the best way to attain the three principal aspects of the path, moving from one mountain to another, one forest to another, living with sadhus near Mumbai at one time and then moving to other holy places. During this time he was able to generate bodhicitta.

From Mumbai he went to Dharamsala at the invitation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He was quite unique even among the more ascetic monks because he walked everywhere. When he got as far as Delhi, he wanted to see the wonderful statues in Tibet House, and it took him three days to walk there from where he was staying at the Ladakh Buddhist Vihara. That's the way he traveled, walking the roads and simply dropping down anywhere when it was time to rest.

One day, there was so much rain that it became very uncomfortable. After checking, he was happy to discover that although his body was in a lot of discomfort with the wet, his mind was still very happy. He believed that renouncing negative karma means renouncing delusion, which means bearing whatever hardships are encountered.

When the rain finally stopped, he asked the women from a nearby village if he could use some branches to make a fire for some tea. Because he was a monk it was a moral downfall to take anything without first asking. Although the women agreed, when the owner of the

land came out and saw what was happening, he became so angry that he beat the geshe with a stick and kicked him severely.

The geshe told me that after he was beaten he didn't feel the slightest anger toward the landowner, and in fact felt incredible gratitude because the landowner had been able to benefit his mind hugely by the beating. He wanted to offer something to him to show his respect but, on reflection, decided not to offer the few rupees he had in case the other man might feel that beating people in general leads to getting money. When he later asked His Holiness the Dalai Lama about this, His Holiness more or less implied he should have offered the owner something.

His Holiness told the monk the story of Lama Serkhangpa, which means Lama Golden Leg. Once, when he was going around the villages for donations, he and his servants were attacked by robbers. They strung the lama up by the neck and legs and the head robber beat him severely, determined to see if Lama Serkhangpa really did have a golden leg. The shock of the attack was so severe that soon afterwards Lama Serkhangpa gave up his servants and went to a solitary place to do retreat. The unbelievable thought of renunciation came to him and he realized the shortcomings of samsara, all due to the beating the robber had given him. The other realizations of the path came quickly, and each time he remembered the great kindness of the robber. When he did, he put his hands together and thanked his guru, the robber.

This is how bodhicitta changes our life. Whatever the circumstance, whatever happens to us, if we place the other being above us, instead of receiving harm we only ever receive the cause to further subdue the mind. If we have bodhicitta, then just talking to somebody, let alone

giving teachings, becomes incredibly beneficial and subdues the mind of the person we are talking to. Even just seeing someone with bodhicitta subdues others' minds. When we ordinary sentient beings see a bodhisattva, we naturally feel great peace and happiness, like when we see the holy face of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

For a bodhisattva, seeing all beings as equal in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering, all superficial differences fall away. Whatever race, color, sex, religion or social class the person has, whether law-abiding or a criminal, respected or reviled—whatever the external appearance is, each sentient being is absolutely equal in that fundamental aspect and each is equal in deserving respect. For the bodhisattva this thought of complete equanimity arises spontaneously and effortlessly.

Seeing all beings in equanimity, there can never be any thought of partisanship, where we wish to benefit one instead of another. We wish for the welfare of all beings absolutely equally. We learn to respect all, and conversely, because we respect all, we gain respect from all others. Of this, Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[31] Without discriminating between rich or poor,
 Without discriminating between wise or foolish,
 Without discriminating between higher or lower,
 The bodhicitta that benefits all equally should be cultivated.

For a bodhisattva, all beings are worthy of compassion because all are suffering. Bodhicitta does not discriminate between rich and poor, wise and foolish. No matter how wise some beings seem or how stupid

others seem, all are the same in wishing to be free from all suffering and the same in being unable to avoid it because of fundamental ignorance. The bodhisattva sees this and hence makes no discrimination but seeks the wellbeing of all equally.

Enlightenment is impossible without bodhicitta, and bodhicitta is impossible without total equanimity. As long as we have any partiality then we are withholding our compassion and care from one sentient being in order to help another. That is not bodhicitta. Therefore, like Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, we need to show respect and compassion for all sentient beings regardless of what they are like. Whether they had taken refuge in him or not, whether they believed in him or not, they still received his guidance. That is the kindness of the Buddha's bodhicitta, which he received while he was training on the path.

A buddha comes from bodhicitta; bodhicitta comes from great compassion; and great compassion depends on understanding fully the suffering of each and every being—every hell being, every hungry ghost, every animal, every human, every demigod, every god, every intermediate state being. Therefore, it is upon the kindness of every sentient being that we develop great compassion, which leads to bodhicitta which in turn leads to full enlightenment. If we miss out one sentient being, we can't achieve enlightenment, or to put it another way, we rely on *every* sentient being to attain enlightenment. Therefore, every single sentient being is incredibly kind. Every hell being is incredibly kind, every hungry ghost is incredibly kind and so forth. All beings are incredibly, unbelievably kind, incredibly, unbelievably precious. Every happiness we have ever enjoyed, are enjoying now and will enjoy in the future is only due to the great kindness of

others. Therefore, isn't it right to respect them in the same way we respect the buddhas and bodhisattvas?

This is explained in Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realization*, in his seventy topics where he talks about the qualities of the Buddha. All the qualities of the Buddha are reliant on each sentient being. When we see an insect in the street, we should feel that our own enlightenment is dependent on that insect.

Shakyamuni Buddha worked hard for three countless great eons to attain enlightenment in order to be of most benefit to all other sentient beings. Once, he was a being just like us, and now we are on the same path he trod all those years ago. If we see all the actions we are doing to help others as another step on that path, then we are doing a bodhisattva's actions. How amazing that is! How fortunate we are!

For a bodhisattva there is absolutely no difference between somebody giving away a billion dollars or offering the most beautiful clothes and food, and somebody with intense hatred hacking at the bodhisattva's neck with a sword. The wish to help those beings will be exactly the same. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[263] You, bodhicitta, bring extensive benefits,
 Not only to those who have helped,
 But even to those evil beings
 Who have done you great harm.¹⁴

¹⁴ Compare this to verse 36 from chapter 1 of *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, which Rinpoche discusses in the section on "The Power of the Bodhisattva" in Part Two, Chapter 4.

When we become a bodhisattva we have transcended that partiality that sees one sentient being as a friend and another as an enemy. Even though all migratory beings have been friendly, antagonistic or indifferent to us countless times, we cherish them all equally, just as a mother loves her beloved child. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[169] Though other sentient beings have been friend, enemy
 or stranger,
 Bodhicitta is the nectar that has one taste,
 Showing all beings equal concern,
 Like a loving mother for her only child.

This is a good analogy. Children can be caring or naughty. They can even hurt their mother terribly—always being disobedient, disrespectful, giving her a hard time, never giving her any peace, never helping in any way—and she will still love them. They can be cruel, without any loving kindness at all, but from the mother's side she will still feel great affection for her child, seeing their behavior as like a disease that she wants to help cure in some way. Always concerned about the welfare of her one beloved child, all she wants is for her child to have happiness.

We use the example of the loving mother and her one beloved child because there is no other single example that can compare to this relationship. If the child is ill, maybe suffering from something like leprosy or dysentery, something that would repulse others, the mother feels no revulsion, only great love and compassion, and will do whatever is necessary to help her child. Day and night, she con-

stantly thinks only of her child's welfare. The bodhisattva feels *exactly* like that toward all the six realms' sentient beings. Just as the loving mother will do anything to make her child happy, they will do anything for sentient beings to bring them happiness, no matter how they are treated.

For us ordinary beings, there is nothing higher to cherish than ourselves, but no matter how much we cherish ourselves, that is nothing compared to how much a bodhisattva cherishes all migratory beings. This includes those who help and those who harm, the friend and the enemy. Just as we think we are incredibly important and precious, the bodhisattva thinks all beings are incredibly important and precious, and a bodhisattva's concern for others is incomparably greater than our concern for ourselves. Seeing how all other beings migrate from one suffering realm to another, always under the control of delusion and karma, without any freedom at all, bodhisattvas feel incredible compassion for all sentient beings in their heart.

When we have bodhicitta, even if all sentient beings were to rise up and attack us with hatred, that would not change how we felt about them. Even if a person were to change their attitude toward us, loving us one day and hating us the next, our attitude toward them would be unchanging. With bodhicitta, we don't have a single enemy because we always have love for all beings, regardless of the external conditions. No matter what they do, our one concern is to bring them happiness, as if they were our one beloved child.

BENEFITS NEVER END WITH BODHICITTA

Khunu Lama Rinpoche contrasts a bodhisattva's activities, whose benefits never end, with worldly activities, comparing the latter with the water tree¹⁵ that bears fruit only once. He says,

[17] After producing its fruit
 The water tree cannot give fruit again.
 Once bodhicitta produces a result, however,
 It continues to increase ceaselessly.

As we enjoy the fruit of a water tree—a tree that grows in dependence on the element of water—it doesn't increase, it decreases. This is completely different from bodhicitta, the inner all-wish-granting tree, where the more we enjoy the result, the more it increases.

Once the fruit from a water tree has been picked it produces no more; the crop can only be enjoyed once. In the same way, we have to work for samsaric pleasures before we can enjoy them, and then once they have been enjoyed, that's it; the enjoyment is finished and there can be no more. The happiness we experience from the all-wish-granting bodhicitta tree, on the other hand, never decreases and only ever increases.

This is the huge difference between the external results we see in the natural world and the internal results. We should not rely on external

¹⁵ Rinpoche consistently translates this as “water tree” whereas other translations (and the corresponding Shantideva quote) usually use “plantain.” Whatever the terminology, the meaning is the same—a tree that bears fruit only once.

results, the external enjoyments received from external crops, because we can never be finished with the work of trying to acquire such results. The inner crop we receive from the all-wish-granting bodhicitta tree is not like that in the slightest. We develop a good heart and because of that we gain true happiness. Because this happiness does not rely on external, unreliable objects, it does not naturally diminish in the way worldly happiness does.

This all-wish-granting bodhicitta tree causes us to turn away from meaningless work, the endless work of the external crops. This is something we need to start straight away, not in five years' time or when we have finished our university degree. Since we can't even be sure we will be here at that time, we must start this work of sowing our inner crop now. Whatever we do we can turn into the cause of reaping the fruit of the all-wish-granting bodhicitta tree by always setting our motivation as a bodhicitta motivation. Whatever we do, we must think, "It is not enough to be free from rebirth in the suffering lower realms or even the upper realms. Most sentient beings are experiencing incredible suffering, and because they are the objects from whom I have received all my past, present and future happiness, I must repay them. Therefore, I must achieve enlightenment in order to lead them to enlightenment."

The all-wish-granting bodhicitta tree bears endless fruit, even after enlightenment. Of this Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[13] Bodhicitta does not just give its fruit once or twice;
 Its benefits increase unceasingly until the omniscient mind
 is attained.

Even after that, the bodhicitta rain continues from the water
holder of the holy body,
Showering down benefits and nourishing the roots of sentient
beings' virtues.

“Water holder” means clouds, so another way of saying this is that an enlightened being brings the rain of the Dharma to all sentient beings, which allows them to develop their virtues. As we have just seen, the pure thought of bodhicitta means having the wish that all sentient beings attain enlightenment and hence the benefits from having such a mind don't finish until we reach enlightenment ourselves. However, they don't even finish then. Because a buddha works solely for all other sentient beings, the benefits of the bodhicitta developed as a bodhisattva continue and increase.

Upon reaching enlightenment the holy rain of Dharma falls from the buddha's holy body (Skt: *rupakaya*). That means the buddha manifests in whatever way most benefits others, in the enjoyment body aspect (Skt: *sambhogakaya*) to benefit higher bodhisattvas, or in the emanation body aspect (Skt: *nirmanakaya*) to benefit ordinary sentient beings. Just as rain from the clouds nurtures the plants that bring us worldly happiness, the holy Dharma from the enlightened beings nurtures the virtues that bring us inner happiness, a happiness that always increases until we attain enlightenment.

ONLY BODHICITTA DISPELS INNER DARKNESS

Night is characterized by darkness, but it is really the inner darkness that we need to fear. Of this Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[24] The coolness of the moon stops the suffering of heat.
The sky jewel [the sun] dispels darkness.
They cannot be compared to bodhicitta,
The only means of completely dispelling the delusions.

This verse is contrasting the external powers and the internal power of bodhicitta. Just as the sun dispels the darkness of night, bodhicitta dispels the darkness of ignorance. In another verse, Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[15] The sun, the moon, a lamp and a flash of lightning
Can dispel the external darkness,
But how can they dispel the internal darkness?
Bodhicitta is what can help completely destroy the darkness
in sentient beings' minds.

These verses are very powerful in that they show how limited external powers are compared to bodhicitta. The sun, the moon, a lamp in the dark, even a flash of lightning, have the power to eliminate external darkness, but even if there were billions of suns in the sky as well as billions of moons and continuous flashes of lightning, they might be able to dispel all the darkness from the world but they wouldn't have the power that bodhicitta has to destroy the inner darkness.

The best kind of light is the light of the Dharma, the wisdom and knowledge that illuminates the mind. By igniting the inner light within our mind, our inner darkness is destroyed. The Dharma has the power to do this, and of all the Dharma minds, the best is the mind of enlightenment, bodhicitta. Without relying on bodhicitta, we can

never destroy self-cherishing and will therefore always have to rely on external factors to try to avoid suffering and attain happiness. When we light the lamp of bodhicitta in our mind, on the other hand, we can completely destroy the inner darkness of our afflictions. That kind of work is entirely different from samsaric work. At first, because we are unskillful and muddled, it will require effort, but once we have attained bodhicitta there is no longer any need for effort. All our actions will effortlessly benefit others and ourselves.

Khunu Lama Rinpoche also compares the precious mind of bodhicitta to a wish-granting jewel or to nectar.

[25] Bodhicitta is the moon of the mind.

Bodhicitta is the sun of the mind.

Bodhicitta is the jewel of the mind.

Bodhicitta is the nectar of the mind.

The external moon can cool and soothe our body after a hot day but can do nothing about our internal worries. The moon of the mind, bodhicitta, can calm our worries. And just as the external sun can warm us when we are cold and can help the crops grow, the sun of the mind, bodhicitta, can stop the cold of ignorance and help grow the crops of virtuous thoughts, which means the realizations from the very beginning of the lamrim path all the way to enlightenment.

The jewel of the mind is bodhicitta. As we have seen, a wish-granting jewel can bring us any material wish, but the happiness this can give is nothing compared to the happiness of nirvana and the sublime happiness of enlightenment. This jewel of the mind brings

all happiness, including even a simple pleasure like a cool breeze on a hot day.

The nectar of the mind is bodhicitta. Here nectar means the very best medicine, that which has the power to cure all possible illnesses and to bring great bliss. External medicine can cure external illnesses, whereas the nectar of the mind can cure all the diseases of the mind, all the delusions, and hence cure all diseases forever.

The sun, the moon, the wish-granting jewel and the nectar of the gods are all examples used to illustrate the most valued of all phenomena, and yet even if we could fully appreciate the value of these precious things, there is no comparison at all between them and bodhicitta. Possessing them all is nothing compared to possessing a billionth part of the mind of bodhicitta because they can do nothing to eliminate our inner problems. Therefore, this most precious jewel of bodhicitta is the one thing we all need to obtain.

We all desire to have profit and to avoid loss, which means attaining happiness and being free from suffering. The achievement of bodhicitta is the greatest possible profit. Whether we have even heard the word bodhicitta, let alone understood what it is, this is what we are all craving.

ONLY BODHICITTA DESTROYS SELF-CHERISHING

For bodhicitta we need to purify

Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[57] Just as the wheel-turning kings do not go to impure places,
Bodhicitta cannot be realized in an evil mind.

If you wish to generate bodhicitta,
It's necessary to purify your mind using the four remedies.

While there is self-cherishing in our mind, all the other delusions such as anger, covetousness and so forth will flourish, leaving no way for bodhicitta to develop. Khunu Lama Rinpoche compares this to the great wheel-turning kings (Skt: *chakravartin*), those kings who rule over the four continents¹⁶ using only the Dharma to guide the beings of those continents. These kings will not go to impure places.

Therefore, we need to root out and destroy all the negative emotions that we currently harbor. We need to purify our mind using the four remedies—the four opponent powers of the object, regret, resolve and remedy. Based on strong *refuge* in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and *bodhicitta*, we look at the nonvirtue we have committed and have a genuine feeling of *regret*, reflecting on the shortcomings of creating negative karma, how this causes incredible suffering for ourselves and others, and how it blocks our path to enlightenment. Seeing how damaging those actions have been we determine not to repeat them—the power of *resolve*—or, if that is unrealistic, to not repeat them for a feasible period of time like a week, a day or even a few hours. Finally, with the power of *remedy*, we do a practice, like a purification practice or mantra recitation. Any virtuous practice that we do is a remedy to our negative karma, and therefore this fourth power can be reading a text that explains emptiness, meditating on bodhicitta or any virtuous action of body, speech or mind. It doesn't have to be a specific practice,

¹⁶ According to Buddhist cosmology, this universe consists of four continents grouped around Mount Meru.

as long as we base it on refuge and bodhicitta, combine it with strong regret and resolve not to do those negative actions again. While any Dharma action purifies our negativities, combining it with the practice of the four opponent powers makes it stronger and it becomes incredibly powerful.

The sword that cuts all afflictions

Bodhicitta destroys our delusions. In that way it is like a sharp knife that can easily cut down poisonous plants. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[41] Bodhicitta is like a sword
 That cuts the stems of the afflictions.
 It is the weapon that protects
 All sentient beings.

To get through a jungle we need a very sharp weapon, like a machete. Our delusions are like a thick jungle of poisonous weeds and bodhicitta is that weapon. It alone has the ability to cut through all our delusions.

We ordinary people have all sorts of weapons in order to get what we want. To get rid of our enemies and take what they have, we have guns, knives, bombs and planes. Bodhisattvas also have a weapon and that weapon is bodhicitta. With this weapon they can acquire exactly what they want, a fully renounced mind and the full realization of the absolute nature, emptiness. Bodhicitta is the most powerful weapon.

None of the external weapons of all the strongest governments—all the atomic bombs and rockets, all the billions of rifles and weapons—have any power at all to destroy our delusions and bring us happiness. Even if we detonated every atomic bomb in the world at the same time, this could not destroy or even diminish one single negative mind. External weapons can only bring harm to others, destroying others' lives and peace, and even though they might make us physically safer for a while they will also destroy our peace because we invariably use them with hatred and anger.

While an external weapon may destroy the physical body of our enemy, it can do nothing to eliminate the actual enemy, which is our own hatred, triggered by our self-cherishing. As long as we have hatred we will have enemies and no matter how many we kill there will always be more. Even if we could destroy every other living being in order to be safe, the internal enemy would still be there and we would still suffer. Therefore, trying to find peace by relying on external weapons and controlling others is nonsense; it is something that has no end and only locks us into greater and greater suffering.

The internal weapon, bodhicitta, is completely different. The mind wishing only to benefit others sees the real enemy, the self-cherishing thought, and does what is needed to destroy that. The more we use the internal weapon of bodhicitta, the more peace there is in our heart, the more help we can give to others and the closer we get to our ultimate goal of enlightenment.

Destroying the self-cherishing thought is the same as destroying all the external enemies there could ever be. We don't have to shoot even one being; we don't have to insult one being or try to ruin their

reputation. By destroying this inner enemy all external enemies are automatically destroyed at the same time because our external enemies come from the self-cherishing thought.

This is very easy to understand by simply relating it to our everyday life, to how much peace or confusion we experience based on how we see others. In our family, at work or with friends, when we cherish ourselves more than others there is more confusion, more conflict, more disharmony, more problems. At other times, when we have thoughts of loving kindness and compassion toward others, when we feel our happiness is less important than others' happiness, there is less confusion, more harmony, more peace—in short, more happiness.

With the precious mind of bodhicitta we have a happy, controlled mind, free from dissatisfaction or attachment. Even if we suffer pain in some way the mind remains happy. Even if we receive criticism or something is stolen from our house, the mind remains happy. Living alone or living with others, the mind remains happy. With loving kindness, compassion, patience, we never feel we are fed up with others. We never think we would sooner live alone in a forest than deal with others.

I remember an Australian student telling me one day he was going to go into the bush—in Australia there is a huge amount of bush—and just walk and be alone, camping and making lemongrass tea. He was just looking for some peace. He wanted a new experience in life, but unless he took a good heart with him there wouldn't be any chance of peace and satisfaction.

On the other hand, with bodhicitta it doesn't matter where we go, there will always be peace and satisfaction. When we see ourselves as

the servant of others, cherishing them more than ourselves, wherever we are there is happiness for ourselves and for them. We think, “My life is for others. The purpose of every breath is for others. Everything I do is for all other sentient beings, to serve them, to free them from all suffering, to lead them to enlightenment.” Because we have such an attitude, our problems naturally diminish and we are not troubled by the delusions of anger, jealousy and the like. Even if problems arise, they become weaker and weaker.

By destroying the self-cherishing attitude, we become the friend of every sentient being. There is nobody who doesn't love and appreciate the good heart. Everybody likes to be helped, to be shown some kindness, to be made happy. Therefore, when we have bodhicitta we are protected from the harms of the world. Even evil beings will not harm us. Bodhicitta is the foundation that stops us harming others and stops others harming us because the nature of bodhicitta is cherishing others, wanting to benefit them. Therefore we don't create any negative karma at all and consequently we can't experience the results of negative karma. In this way we can bring peace to our family, our society and the world.

We won't be free from samsara until we have destroyed our own fundamental ignorance, which means realizing the ultimate nature of reality. We are currently trapped in the delusion that things and events have their own nature, that they exist independently of other things, and the most dangerous mistake we make is to regard the I as a permanent, independent entity. From this basic wrong concept, all the other delusions flow—the three poisons of anger, attachment and ignorance, the negative minds like jealousy, miserliness, covetousness

and so forth, in fact all the 84,000 delusions. To be free from samsara, we need to cut the very root of samsara, and that means a direct realization of emptiness.

The false sense of a permanent, independent I is what must be destroyed. It is not as if there is no I at all, but there is no I that exists independently of the base, which is the group of five ever-changing aggregates. How the I is seen to exist, what it is in fact empty of and why it is the root of our problems is a vast subject that dominates the debates of the four schools of Buddhist philosophy, each school having a more subtle explanation of emptiness.¹⁷ It is possible to study this subject for many years and know everything there is to know about it, and yet to actually have little benefit from it. This is something that has to be actualized at a heart level, not understood purely intellectually.

That's why all the other subjects in Buddhism are equally as important as emptiness. Some people who don't know the correct way of practicing Dharma have a mind so hung up on emptiness that they don't bother to investigate the suffering nature of samara. Without having strong renunciation of samara, however much we meditate on emptiness our habitual nonvirtues can never be overcome. However skilled we become at explaining emptiness, there is no inner change and the old thoughts and ways remain, keeping us trapped in samsara forever. To escape samsara we must escape our habitual, self-centered thinking that places our needs before others'. This is why the renunciation of samsara and the realization of bodhicitta are every bit as vital as the realization of emptiness.

¹⁷ The four schools are the Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, Cittamatra and Madhyamaka.

To realize emptiness, we need the incredibly subtle mind that combines the clarity of single-pointed concentration with the profound analysis of emptiness. We can't do this without renunciation, and that can't come while we are still chasing the wishes of the self-cherishing attitude. We need a huge reserve of positive energy—merit—to purify our defilements, and that can only happen by creating nothing but positive actions. Only then can we realize emptiness and cut the root of samsara.

How can we acquire all this merit and destroy all these negative imprints? The best and easiest way is to concentrate on the cultivation of bodhicitta. When we do that, everything else will flow effortlessly and quickly. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says of this,

[8] Even with Saraswati in your throat it is extremely difficult
 To attain all success, but from the all-wish-granting
 bodhicitta tree,
 Which grows from the water of love and the ground of
 compassion,
 All wishes are obtained.

Saraswati is the deity of knowledge, music and science, and therefore to attain this goddess—to have “Saraswati in your throat”—is to easily achieve incredible wisdom. Any subject we undertake is easy; everything seems to flow without much effort. (Saraswati in Sanskrit actually means “she who flows.” Her Tibetan name, *Yangchenma*, means “melodious lady.”) Even so, it is difficult without bodhicitta to fulfill others' wishes. With bodhicitta, on the other hand, it is incredibly

easy, as exemplified by the all-wish-granting bodhicitta tree. Just as the wish-granting tree—the tree that has the power to grant all worldly wishes in the same way as a wish-granting jewel—grows from the earth and is nurtured by water, the all-wish-granting bodhicitta tree grows from the ground of compassion for all sentient beings and is nurtured by love. Attaining enlightenment without relying on bodhicitta is impossible, no matter how hard we try. If bodhicitta can bring about all the ultimate wishes of all sentient beings, which means liberation and enlightenment, then of course, as a byproduct, it can bring about all the temporary worldly wishes, such as happiness in this lifetime.

Usually the flight from New York to Delhi stops in London. We don't plan this; it just happens. In the same way, we are planning to travel from where we are now to the most sublime happiness of enlightenment, and on the way, as a kind of stopover, we experience all the temporary, mundane enjoyments of this and future lives. Therefore, bodhicitta is the most skillful method for attaining all goals: mundane happiness, emptiness, liberation and full enlightenment.

The nectar of bodhicitta destroys the poison of self-cherishing

Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[108] How could a living being
 Who possesses the ornament of bodhicitta
 Ever have ill will toward others?
 A bodhisattva abandons ill will naturally, without persuasion.

When we wear the ornament of bodhicitta there is no way we could ever harbor ill will toward any other being, no matter what that being might do to us. This is the power of bodhicitta. Our mind only ever thinks of benefiting other living beings, instinctively, spontaneously, without being told to do it. Destroying our own self-cherishing, we no longer harm others and because of that we are protected from harm ourselves.

The self-cherishing attitude is the creator of all hindrances. With it, we are constantly beset with problems; without it there can be no external problems because there are no internal disturbances. With a good heart, not even the realization of bodhicitta, we have no enemies because enemies are self-created. Whoever we meet, they are only friends. Because of our good heart we induce goodness in others. With loving kindness, with strong concern for others, we influence everyone around us, softening others' attitudes, bringing them to have thoughts of loving kindness. Rather than being ruled by self-interest and only creating negative karma by trying to grab what we want—and creating enemies and unpleasant situations in doing so—we only help others, protecting them from harm and in doing so we ourselves are protected from harm. Even extremely selfish people are influenced by our loving, caring attitude and become less selfish as a consequence.

A classic example of this is Lama Yeshe. Because of Lama's great attitude of loving kindness and bodhicitta, people who met Lama, even though normally they might have quite a negative personality, became good people around him. Toward others they might still be quite negative, selfish, impatient, with uncontrolled minds, but in Lama's presence they changed and were very loving to Lama and

would never think of harming him. So, Lama never found an enemy, a bad person, because Lama himself had that personality, being kind to everybody, being concerned for everybody. In Lama's kind presence, others naturally became kind. Just seeing Lama's holy body, just hearing Lama's holy words, their negative thoughts were subdued.

How we perceive somebody, as friend or enemy, is completely dependent on our own mind. How that person acts toward us, as a friend or enemy, is also up to us, up to our attitude. With a self-cherishing attitude we cultivate enemies, whereas by developing a mind of loving kindness and bodhicitta our world will be full of friends and we will never harm others or be harmed by them. This shows how extremely important it is to change our attitude from self-cherishing to cherishing others.

Whether we accept reincarnation or not, whether we accept the need for refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, we must accept this basic fact, that as long as we want happiness and to only have friends we must renounce self-cherishing, the creator of all hindrances. With a good heart, we are treated kindly. People wish us health and a long life and like us, regardless of whether we are wealthy or poor. Until we have attained bodhicitta, however, there will always be some problems, therefore it is vital to do whatever we can to cultivate this most precious mind.

Bodhicitta is like nectar that destroys the poison of self-cherishing. Of this, Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[257] When you have bodhicitta

You see self-cherishing as poison and stop it.

When you have bodhicitta
 You see cherishing others as nectar and embrace it.

Because self-cherishing is the most dangerous thing, we ordinary beings must be incredibly careful in this samsaric environment. Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, can live in samsara without being poisoned by it. In the *Wheel-Weapon Mind Training*, the great yogi Dharmarakshita offers the beautiful metaphor of peacocks that feed on poisonous plants and are not only unharmed but in fact the glory of their tailfeathers is enhanced as a result. In the same way, samsara is poison for beings overcome with self-cherishing but bodhisattvas thrive on it, for here is the field where they can most quickly develop to full enlightenment. Dharmarakshita says,

When the peacocks roam the jungle of virulent poison,
 The flocks take no delight in gardens of medicinal plants,
 No matter how beautiful they may be,
 For peacocks thrive on the essence of virulent poison.

Similarly, when the heroes roam the jungle of cyclic existence,
 They do not become attached to the garden of happiness and
 prosperity,
 No matter how beautiful it may be,
 For heroes thrive in the jungle of suffering.¹⁸

¹⁸ Vv. 1 & 2 of the *Wheel-Weapon Mind Training*, by Dharmarakshita, an eleventh-century Indian scholar and guru of Atisha, in *Peacock in the Poison Grove: Two Buddhist Texts on Training the Mind*.

No matter how beautiful the flowers and fruit of the plants in the medicinal gardens are, the peacocks have no attraction for them. Instead they eat the poisonous plants, thriving on what would make us sick, becoming healthy and magnificent as a result. Similarly, bodhisattvas shun a life of luxury and self-indulgence and thrive on working tirelessly for others, no matter how difficult it may be. These brave ones are not attracted at all by pleasure.

In the normal world, people think somebody is brave and heroic when they defeat an enemy and win the victory for themselves. In reality, selfishly taking something for yourself is creating negative karma, therefore that “hero” is a loser. Bodhisattvas are the true heroes, only ever performing actions to benefit others and never thinking of their own interests. They brave the dense jungle of samsara. In a thick jungle the sky is blocked by a tangle of trees and vines and getting anywhere is difficult and dangerous. Samsara is just such a jungle, filled with the forests of attachment, hatred and ignorance. The supermarkets and department stores are filled with the entangling forests of desire—the desire to buy and the desire to sell. Cities are full of the forests of anger, ignorance and desire. When we objectively observe people going about their busy lives in any city we will see they are stumbling through this jungle, their minds obscured as if by a thick fog. Even though it’s daytime it looks like night. Their delusions are so pervasive they can hardly see the sky.

When the brave holy beings enter this samsaric environment they are never tempted by the samsaric pleasures or material comforts they encounter—the beautiful gardens, the luxurious swimming pools, the expensive hotels—nor are they concerned with reputation or power.

They see clearly the shortcomings of samsaric attractions, the suffering below the surface.

Just as the peacocks use the poisonous plants to enhance their beauty, bodhisattvas use samsara with all its sufferings to complete the practices they need in order to attain full enlightenment. They use whatever they encounter to develop these most precious qualities, the six perfections of charity, morality, patience, perseverance, concentration and wisdom.

For instance, when they experience hardship they use it as a means to enhance their patience. There are three types of patience: the patience of disregarding the harm done by others, the patience of accepting suffering, and the patience of gaining certainty about the Dharma.¹⁹ Protected by these three types of patience, bodhisattvas work tirelessly for other sentient beings, voluntarily taking on their sufferings and difficulties. Like the peacocks that become healthier and have more glorious colors by eating poisonous plants, bodhisattvas, by taking the sufferings and problems of sentient beings upon themselves, purify their obscurations and accumulate extensive merit. This causes them to develop their minds and achieve enlightenment more quickly.

At present we can't eat poison and turn it into nectar. I think if we tried, we would be very sick. This reminds me of a particular plant that grows in the mountains in India and Nepal called datura. It's often fatal if taken and if it doesn't cause death, it can cause terrible hallucinations. It seems that goats can eat it and experience very pleasant effects, but not humans! Before the power of the drugs wears off, some

¹⁹ See Rinpoche's *The Six Perfections* and *Patience* for an explanation of these three types of patience.

people have very peaceful experiences, such as seeing a mandala, but many have very terrifying appearances, like seeing the ground turned into squirming worms, with everything moving.

I myself haven't taken datura but an American student who spent six months in Lawudo, near Mount Everest, tried it. He had a tent and he used to move around to different spots on the mountain. At that time there was no electricity up there, but he had electricity by using a solar panel to store the electricity during the day. Inside the tent it was very pleasant. One time he put his tent on the roof of the rock above the Lawudo cave, but while he was sleeping, every time he moved his head his sleeping bag made a squeaking sound that annoyed the dogs that were around. There was one that thought he was guarding the center and barked so loudly that he awoke the American. Every time he went to sleep his sleeping bag squeaked, the dog barked and he woke up. He got incredibly angry with the dog, not realizing it was his own head on the sleeping bag that was the cause.

One day the student found some datura growing some distance away from Lawudo and decided to cook it in a pot. I knew nothing about this until he came to tell me all his experiences. He said he had almost died. When we saw him it was some days later, otherwise we wouldn't have recognized him. He told us that after he had cooked and taken the datura he heard many noises, like people talking, and the whole ground started moving like everything was alive, like it had become creatures squirming everywhere. I think he had a very hard time. His mouth became very dry and his lips cracked. He managed to meet an Italian student who was retreating in a nearby village, who helped him recover from his frightening experience with the drug.

If he had known the effects of datura, of course he would have avoided it. Datura or any dangerous drug is nothing compared to the self-cherishing attitude, and yet we embrace self-cherishing like a priceless jewel. Bodhisattvas can see the poison of self-cherishing, but, unlike us, they can remain in samsara without being poisoned by it, like the peacock in the poisonous garden. We see the poison of working only for ourselves as nectar; bodhisattvas see working for others as nectar and, forsaking the bliss of nirvana, are able to bear whatever hardships, no matter how great, in order to benefit them. Seeing this, we need to do whatever we can to renounce our selfish attitude and likewise work solely for others.

Actually, comparing working for selfish concerns to poison is inaccurate because working for the self is far more dangerous than the most lethal poison. Poison can cause momentary discomfort, even agony, or at the most it can cut off our life, causing death. That is all. It has no power to destroy the achievement of ultimate happiness and the perfections. If we haven't created the negative karma to be reborn in the suffering lower realms, eating poison alone can't cause this.

Seeing working for the self as poison, bodhisattvas completely renounce it and instead embrace working for others. How could they do otherwise? They have a wisdom we do not. They see the truth beneath samsaric pleasures. For instance, we might have some Dharma knowledge, but we are still driven by self-interest. Perhaps we feel we have realized impermanence and death but when we are about to die there will probably still be fear because of the worldly thought that we are leaving this precious body, our loved ones and all our beloved possessions. Or maybe we feel because we are great

meditators we must at least die in a meditation posture in order for people to see how advanced we are. Even at the moment of death we are clinging to reputation! To die with bodhicitta, on the other hand, means we will die with the thought to only benefit others.

ENLIGHTENMENT COMES FROM BODHICITTA

To become a buddha, we must first become a bodhisattva. For that we need bodhicitta—bodhicitta is the vital ingredient in becoming enlightened. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[102] The omniscient mind arises only from bodhicitta.

Therefore, those who desire

The complete release from suffering

Find it greatly worthwhile to practice bodhicitta.

We can attain individual liberation without bodhicitta but going on to attain full enlightenment requires the destruction of even the most subtle self-cherishing. Therefore, bodhicitta is the key to enlightenment. There can be no such thing as a buddha who hasn't been a bodhisattva, a being with bodhicitta.

Within Buddhism there are two main divisions, Hinayana, which shows the path to individual liberation, and Mahayana, which shows the path to full enlightenment. Bodhicitta is a Mahayana practice, and although there is no “superior” or “inferior” path, if we are a Mahayana practitioner, the motivation should always be this most precious mind, and we should not allow ourselves to stray into the wish for the

great bliss that liberation from our own suffering brings. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[46] Bodhicitta is the great path that leads
 To the city of non-abiding nirvana,
 Saving you from falling into the two extremes,
 Of either samsara or everlasting happiness for yourself alone.

Nirvana is a wonderful state; it is total freedom from all suffering. For the Mahayana practitioner, however, it is not the final goal, which is to continue the journey until we attain complete enlightenment, where we are not only free from suffering but also able to remove even the very subtle stains in order to free all other beings. That's the goal, therefore we must not become stuck in the state of extreme bliss—where it's very difficult to see the suffering of others and hence to work for their happiness—but pass beyond it. This is why a bodhisattva should be careful to avoid the two extremes, the extreme of worldly pleasures and the extreme of the great peace of nirvana.

Bodhicitta is the road that leads us between these two extremes, straight to enlightenment, which Khunu Lama Rinpoche here calls “non-abiding nirvana” to distinguish it from the abiding nirvana of the arhat, where the mind rests in great bliss without the wish to move on. Attaining enlightenment by this route is a shortcut compared to first following the individual liberation path and attaining the state of an arhat, then remaining in great bliss for many, many eons before being awakened to the need to benefit others and only then following the Mahayana path to enlightenment. That is why it's most beneficial

from the very start of our Buddhist path to understand the amazing mind of bodhicitta and to always motivate whatever we do with the wish to benefit all other beings.

No matter what stage of the path we are at, bodhicitta is essential. Khunu Lama Rinpoche says,

[139] At the beginning, in the middle,
 And at the end, bodhicitta is the supreme thought.
 It is the indispensable method
 To attain non-abiding nirvana.

Bodhicitta leads us into understanding not only the extent of others' suffering but also why they suffer. We come to see how all sentient beings are confused by ignorance and stumble after things that can only make them suffer more, wrongly believing them to be the source of happiness. This is the spur that gives us the determination to attain enlightenment for their sakes, the beginning of our great journey. While we are on the path, bodhicitta is the mind that keeps our resolution firm. We feel that for all other sentient beings to continue suffering in the way they are is unbearable, and to have to wait eons before we ourselves are enlightened and can fully help them is unendurable as well. Therefore, we determine to take the lightning-quick path of Vajrayana, the tantric path, that allows us to become enlightened in one brief lifetime of this degenerate time. Vajrayana is like a rocket capable of reaching the moon in seconds, but it is useless without the fuel of bodhicitta. Therefore, bodhicitta is essential at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of our Buddhist path.

Bodhicitta is like the root of the tree and the future buddha we will become is its fruit. Just as the fruit of the tree is reliant on the tree's root, our future enlightened mind is reliant in developing bodhicitta, and our bodhicitta grows from our current practices where we develop love and compassion and the other virtuous qualities.

The great Indian philosopher Chandrakirti begins his treatise on emptiness, *A Guide to the Middle Way* (Skt: *Madhyamakavatara*), with verses of admiration for great compassion. He says,

Shravakas and those halfway to buddhahood arise from the
 Mighty Sage,
 And buddhas are born from bodhisattvas.
 Compassion, non-duality and bodhicitta
 Are the causes of the children of the Conqueror.²⁰

This is the road of the Great Vehicle, the Mahayana. Without bodhicitta, we can't enter the Mahayana, the path that leads to enlightenment. Khunu Lama Rinpoche reflects on Chandrakirti when he says,

[298] Without the life force of bodhicitta
 You cannot even enter the Mahayana.
 If that is so, how will you ever attain
 The supreme state of buddhahood?

²⁰ *A Guide to the Middle Way*, v. 1.

[154] Even though you practice calm abiding and special
 insight,
 And through the union of the two attain the level
 Of *shravaka* or *pratyekabuddha*,
 Without bodhicitta, complete buddhahood is impossible.

Without the essential life force, the life that flows through our body, none of the other powers can function. A corpse still has eyes, a nose and so forth, but without the primary life force these sense organs can't function. In the same way, all the other realizations on the path need bodhicitta to become the cause for enlightenment. By developing *shamatha* (calm abiding) meditation we can attain a very advanced state of concentration and even the levels of *shravaka*, or hearer, or *pratyekabuddha*, or solitary realizer. What those advanced practices can't do, however, is take us all the way to enlightenment, unless we have bodhicitta. Therefore, just as we zealously guard our life force, thinking of it as incredibly precious, we should do the same with bodhicitta. Whatever we do, wherever we travel, we are always very aware of things that might threaten to snatch our precious life force from us. In the same way, at all times we should guard against anything that might threaten our bodhicitta.

We are incredibly fortunate that we have the opportunity to develop this most amazing mind. We have met the Mahayana teachings on bodhicitta and we have the time and the inclination to study these teachings and to meditate on them. How incredible that is! And how rare that is.

It's worth thinking of how few people, let alone animals and other

sentient beings, have this opportunity. When we think about the billions of people on this planet, how many have the chance we have to develop on the path? We could have been born as a peasant or a migrant worker, we could have been born into a refugee family or in a war zone. There are many terrible lives we could have had that would mean nothing but poverty, hardship and misery, where there would be no freedom at all to do anything, where it would be just the most basic survival. The vast majority of sentient beings have no choice; they must kill, steal, lie or do any of the other nonvirtuous actions just to survive. A beggar has no choice, a soldier has no choice. Even a general in an army must order others to kill, creating terrible negative karma every day.

We have managed to avoid all of these types of existence. At this moment we are living in a situation where we can avoid creating negative karma. But we have been even more fortunate than that. There are comparatively few people who are able to follow any spiritual path. And of those who do, how many have met the Buddhadharmā, and how many of *those* have met the Mahayana? We can see that this is the one route not just to attain total freedom from suffering but to gain full enlightenment. This is why it is vital to habituate our mind to bodhicitta. This is why the time we have now is unbelievably rare and valuable.

This is why we must grasp the importance of attaining bodhicitta and why these inspiring verses by Khunu Lama Rinpoche are incredibly important.

PART TWO

SHANTIDEVA: THE BODHISATTVA'S WAY



Shantideva

A GUIDE TO THE BODHISATTVA'S WAY OF LIFE

THE GREAT BODHISATTVA Shantideva is loved by all Buddhists, especially Tibetan Buddhists. His name, Shantideva, is Sanskrit. *Shanti* means “peace” and *deva* means “god.” He is renowned for his book, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (Skt: *Bodhicaryavatara*), the most beloved and treasured book for many Buddhist practitioners.

If we want to study and practice Mahayana Buddhism, Shantideva's book is the perfect guide. It shows how to practice the most precious mind of bodhicitta and especially the six perfections that a bodhisattva, a being with bodhicitta, must practice to develop toward full enlightenment: the perfections of charity, patience, morality, perseverance, concentration and wisdom.

In the ninth chapter, the chapter on wisdom, Shantideva explains emptiness incredibly clearly, which means his book contains the key things we need to know to take us to enlightenment— bodhicitta and emptiness—and, as a bodhisattva, how to develop the qualities we need, such as generosity and patience. He shows us how to control our mind in order to destroy our selfish attitude and work only for others, the core of the bodhicitta teachings. He shows us how we must purify our delusions by confessing our negative karma and

other purification practices, and how important concentration is in our practice.

Every word of this remarkable book leads us toward the wonderful mind of bodhicitta, the altruistic wish to attain complete enlightenment in order to best benefit all other sentient beings. There are so many people who have never even heard of bodhicitta let alone received teachings on it, but even just hearing the word “bodhicitta” brings huge benefit. It energizes and inspires us and strengthens our determination to work for others.

A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life therefore shows us how to control our mind and develop our altruism, and how to understand reality, the truth of how things exist. Without such vital elements, no matter what we do, it can never be effective in making us happy. No matter how much money or how many possessions or friends we have, we will never succeed while the mind is not imbued with compassion and wisdom. Our friends can't guide us toward true happiness, but this book can. It's the cure for all our mental ills.

The first chapter of *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* is in praise of bodhicitta and shows us the benefits of realizing this precious mind. Like Khunu Lama Rinpoche's text, the verses of this chapter are full of inspiration. In many of the meditation courses I taught in the seventies, I used verses from this chapter with a brief commentary to start the morning session as motivation for the day's activities, hoping to inspire the students and show them how vital the mind of bodhicitta is. These motivational talks form the second part of this book.

I have received an oral commentary of *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, but the first time I received it

was from Khunu Lama Rinpoche, Tenzin Gyaltzen. This great bodhisattva pandit is inseparable from previous pandits such as Nagarjuna, Asanga and Shantideva.

SHANTIDEVA'S LIFE

A bodhisattva is a being who has bodhicitta, the mind determined to attain enlightenment for the sake of others. This is the sole determining factor for who is a bodhisattva. Wearing red robes and shaving the head doesn't determine this, nor does all the book learning in the world. It's the mind of enlightenment, that most amazing selfless wish to benefit others, that determines it. A bodhisattva can appear very ordinary and this was the case with Shantideva. When he first moved to the great monastic university of Nalanda, the other monks saw only a lazy person, utterly worthless, whereas he was already a bodhisattva.

Much has been written about this great bodhisattva. He had complete control over death and rebirth, completely the opposite to us ordinary beings who have no control at all. Every action of body, speech and mind was holy; there was not one thing he did that had even the slightest taste of self-cherishing. Every action, tiny and great, was done purely for others, to help release them from suffering.

Of the thousands of amazing pandits in the great monastic university of Nalanda he was peerless. He was a role model for anybody seeking the spiritual path. We should not only follow his advice in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* but we should see his remarkable qualities and how vital it is that we try to emulate him. We should learn about the way he led his life with such great compassion, with

a well-subdued mind leading to actions of body and speech that were also well-subdued, doing only what was of benefit to others and never doing anything for his own sake. His only desire was to lead other beings to everlasting peace and because of that he never had a problem; there was not the slightest bit of confusion or agitation in his life. Problems arise from the unsubdued mind, the mind grasping at the self, and when that is transcended, problems are transcended. The three poisons of ignorance, attachment and anger are destroyed in a being such as Shantideva because the egocentric mind, the self-cherishing thought, has been overcome.

We need to know it is possible to overcome egoistic concerns and we need guidance on how to do it, therefore we need beings like Shantideva. Like the Buddha, he is a teacher we can trust and an ideal we can look up to. We can't become completely like him immediately, but we can see that as we develop qualities such as compassion and equanimity, our self-cherishing diminishes and our problems lessen. Just as scrubbing a filthy pot takes many attempts and a lot of effort, scrubbing the mind of its delusions is a long-term job, a job that will probably take lifetimes. We need a long-term view and the inspiration that teachers and yogis like Shantideva can give us.

In the early 1970s, when I first started teaching Western students in Nepal, many people came in search of something more than the unfulfilling material riches of the West. They had read the biographies of the great yogis like Milarepa and Naropa and they wanted that simplicity and purity. Many found the actuality of developing the mind harder than they had thought and dropped out, but many stayed and turned their lives completely around. They saw that within the teach-

ings and within the examples set by these great yogis was everything they needed to take them all the way, not just to the complete peace of nirvana, but to full enlightenment, the mind that is fully awakened and only working to benefit all other sentient beings.

It's very interesting to see how the great beings such as Shantideva achieved enlightenment, and in doing so we see that we too can achieve it. It's definitely possible to transcend the petty concerns of this life and go on to attain the various realizations that are necessary on the path to becoming fully awakened. But it's not easy. We need strong determination, and that will only come when we can see the vital need for turning our backs on selfish concern and our confused, deluded way of thinking, and see what an incredible opportunity we have if we can persevere. At present, we admire and emulate worldly role models, such as rich businessmen and rock stars, the glamorous and influential, and because of that we trap ourselves more and more in the quagmire of samsara. Now, we need to change our role models to the truly admirable beings. We have living examples in beings like His Holiness the Dalai Lama and we have the examples that have inspired people for thousands of years, like the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, and the great yogis like Shantideva and Milarepa.

Shantideva was born in the eighth century CE in India, near Bodhgaya, where the Buddha was enlightened.²¹ He was highly intelligent.

²¹ Ringu Tulku's online biography of Shantideva says he was born in south India (some sources cite Saurashtra in Gujarat) to King Kalyanavarnam. He was given the name Shantivarnam. Alan Wallace's introduction to Shantideva's *Guide* (p. 11) says, according to the 16th century scholar Taranatha, like the Buddha he was born into a royal family but on the verge of his coronation Manjushri and Tara appeared to him and urged him not to accept the throne, so he left the kingdom and retreated in the wilderness, attaining siddhis.

When he was six he meditated on Manjushri. Because Manjushri is the manifestation of all the buddhas' wisdom, meditating on him is a very quick method to realize the absolute nature of things, emptiness. There are many stories of meditators in India and Tibet who have gained realizations of emptiness through meditating on Manjushri. When he was as young as six, Shantideva not only saw Manjushri but had a realization of him. Manjushri himself gave the young Shantideva many teachings, passing down the lineage of the profound path—the wisdom teachings—to him.

Shantideva was a prince, and after his father died the people asked Shantideva to become the king. Shantideva could not refuse the people and had to promise to become the king, but the night before the inauguration he had a dream. Manjushri was sitting on the king's throne and said to Shantideva, "The one son, this is my seat and I am your guru, leading you to enlightenment. We can't both sit on the same seat." When he awoke from the dream he realized that he could not accept the crown, that he should not enjoy the possessions of the king or live like a king.²²

He escaped and went to Nalanda, where the abbot ordained him, naming him Shantideva. For a long time he received extensive teachings on sutra and tantra from both the abbot and Manjushri. Although inwardly he was studying very hard and having realizations, externally he didn't appear to be doing anything. He also secretly composed

²² In another version, Rinpoche says Shantideva married a girl called Tara and when he realized he couldn't live with her he accepted being thrown into the river in a box, and thus escaped.

two texts, *The Training Anthology of Shantideva* and the *Compendium of Sutras*.²³

Nalanda was a vast and wonderful place, the greatest seat of Buddhist knowledge in the world. Thousands of scholars studied, debated and meditated there, not just normal students, but great pandits, whose inner knowledge of Buddhadharma gained them profound realizations. They wrote great treatises and developed incredible tenets on logic, as well as studying the sciences, art, medicine and so forth. I can imagine that Nalanda was a very busy and vibrant place, and yet, outwardly, Shantideva appeared to do absolutely nothing. He seemed a very lazy scholar. While the other monks studied, debated, prayed, did prostrations, engaged in debates and did all the jobs around the monastery that were needed, Shantideva appeared to do none of these. The other monks could see none of his inner qualities and they became quite contemptuous of him, calling him *bhusuku*, the “three recognitions,” which means eating (*bhu*), sleeping (*su*) and making kaka and pipi (*ku*), the only things they ever saw him do.

In fact, Shantideva was a hidden yogi, who already had great qualities. He was what is called *kusali*, which means having virtue; when it is used for a person it means one who does only virtuous actions but doesn't show virtue on the outside. Shantideva is invariably used as the prime example of this.

It appeared to many people that my guru Lama Yeshe, who is kinder than the three times' buddhas, was always busy doing things and enjoying himself and that he didn't meditate. They didn't see any external

²³ Whereas *The Training Anthology* (Skt: *Sikṣasamucchaya*) is still extant, *Compendium of Sutras* (Skt: *Sutrasamucchaya*) is no longer available in any translation.

signs of meditating such as physically sitting in meditation posture. Many people thought Lama was very worldly. They didn't recognize his inner practice, his inner realizations, but just judged him from the outside, from what they saw with their eyes. They didn't know that Lama was a great yogi who had very high tantric realizations, completion stage realizations, and freedom from birth and death. Lama could not be overwhelmed by samsara. He enjoyed sense pleasures without the shortcomings of samsara; he enjoyed them purely for the sake of other sentient beings, to benefit other sentient beings, without being overwhelmed by disturbing thoughts, by the three poisonous minds. Lama actually meditated all the time. People used to think that Lama, who was in constant meditation, was not meditating and that I, who never meditate, was meditating.

A kusali never shows on the outside that he is learned and has attainments; he doesn't do prostrations, make offerings or show anything like this. But he is accumulating extensive merit mentally by doing the practice of offering himself to the holy objects and making charity of himself to the sentient beings.

The other monks thought Shantideva was completely foolish and had no place at Nalanda. The Sangha—monks and nuns—are supposed to listen to Dharma subjects to repay the offering of the robes that people give them. The monks thought that he was just wasting the benefactors' offerings, which is the cause of much negative karma, and that he should be expelled, but because that was difficult unless somebody did something criminal or extremely outlandish, they devised a trick to get him out. In the monasteries, the monks had to memorize many texts on both philosophy and monastic discipline, which

they were then supposed to recite publicly by heart in the prayer hall. The other monks believed that Shantideva had not memorized anything, so they decided to invite him to recite a sutra teaching. They thought he would disgrace himself and would then be forced to leave the monastery.

The monks built a really high throne without any steps for the occasion, convinced that Shantideva would run away when he saw it. However, when he arrived, in front of the whole monastery, he asked whether they wanted him to recite a text from Shakyamuni Buddha or something not given before. Of course, the monks wanted something new to really embarrass him.

Suddenly he was there on the throne and nobody knew how he got there.²⁴ Then he started reciting the complete *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* from memory, like water pouring from a clear spring. In one session, without break, chapter by chapter, he explained perfectly and succinctly each of the six perfections of the bodhisattva's actions. When he reached the ninth chapter, the chapter on wisdom, he suddenly flew up from the throne, flying higher and higher until he appeared no bigger than a fly, and then he disappeared altogether. But the monks could still hear him teaching perfectly, as if he were still on the throne.

Needless to say, the monks were completely shocked at this amazing event. They had no idea he was a hidden yogi, a great bodhisattva and a holy person with great attainment of high realizations. The

²⁴ In another version Rinpoche says that he placed his hand on the throne and gradually pulled it down until he could easily get onto it.

teachings he gave had a profound effect on them. Those with heresy toward Shantideva developed great devotion. This was why he did what he did. A hidden yogi almost never displays his power, but Shantideva could see that this was what the Nalanda monks needed.

After that, he lived at Nalanda with great respect from the other monks. He also traveled and there are stories about him. In Magadha,²⁵ one of sixteen great kingdoms of ancient India, he became a servant to a group of five hundred people who held wrong beliefs. Once there was a terrible storm lasting many days and their food ran out. They were suffering so much and arguing with each other, saying that whoever went out to find food for them would be their leader and they would follow him. Shantideva, as their servant, went out to beg and returned with one bowl of rice. However, when he shared it among the five hundred it satisfied them all. In that way, he showed them that their beliefs were wrong and they willingly accepted what he taught them.

Also at that time there were about a thousand beggars suffering and near death because of a great famine. Through his psychic powers, Shantideva was first able to help them and then show them the teachings and lead them to perfect peace.

On another occasion, he was staying near the palace of the king of Arivishana. The palace was attacked by a group of cruel people intent on stealing the king's possessions, but Shantideva promised to protect

²⁵ The capital of Magadha was Rajagriha (Rajgir), where the Buddha gave the Prajnaparamita teachings. The Buddha spent most of his life in Magadha, which is situated in present-day Bihar.

the king and his people, and was able to control the bandits. The peace and prosperity that Shantideva brought to the land and the people made a powerful person jealous and he took the king aside, saying that Shantideva was cunning and would deceive the king. As proof he said Shantideva had defended the territory with a wooden sword, showing it was obviously a trick.

That made the king angry and he demanded that Shantideva show him his sword. Shantideva didn't want to, saying that seeing the sword would harm the king, but the king insisted, even if he was harmed. So, Shantideva asked the king to cover one of his eyes and he pulled the sword from the scabbard. It was wooden, but it gave off such a brilliant light that the king's eye that was open was blinded. He was terribly upset that he had doubted Shantideva and he apologized, taking refuge in Shantideva and taking teachings from him. In that way, Shantideva led him on the Dharma path. The sole reason Shantideva had gone to live in that kingdom was for this to happen.

After that he went south to Glorious Mountain, where there was a Hindu teacher called Shankaradeva who held wrong beliefs. Supported by the king, he debated with Buddhist pandits, not only debating with words but also with psychic powers. He made bets with his opponents, saying whoever lost the competitions would have their temple burnt down. Nobody could compete with Shankaradeva but Shantideva challenged him. During the competition, the Hindu teacher created a mandala of Maheshvara, their god, in space. Shantideva remained in the wind concentration, *prana*, and all of a sudden a heavy storm happened, blowing the entire mandala away. As a result, Shankaradeva lost, and since even with his psychic powers he could

not compete with Shantideva, he and many of his followers became followers of the Buddhadharma and helped to develop the teachings.²⁶

Shantideva was once like us, but he worked on his mind until he became completely free from delusions. Therefore, he is a great inspiration. There have been many yogis who have done this. What makes him incredibly special for us, however, is his book, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. Not only does it lay out everything we need to do to become enlightened, it does so in language that is beautiful and simple. It's a book that has inspired countless people since it was written over thirteen hundred years ago. It tells us that we too can develop our mind to the levels of realizations that the great masters have attained and shows us how to do it.

²⁶ See *The Nectar of Manjushri's Speech*, pp. 20–21, and *Butön's History of Buddhism*, pp. 260–61, for more details of these stories.

This Precious Life

THE RARITY OF THIS PRECIOUS LIFE

THE FIRST chapter of Shantideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* describes the benefits of developing the awakening mind, bodhicitta. As such, it is a perfect companion to Khunu Lama Rinpoche's wonderful verses that we looked at above. After bowing to the *sugatas*, the buddhas, and explaining his intention in writing the book, Shantideva starts by showing us how we must see this life for what it is, precious and fragile, and make the most of it. He says,

[1:4] This precious human body, qualified with its freedoms
and richnesses,
Is extremely difficult to find again.
If I don't obtain the benefits with this body,
How can I hope to attain a precious body again in the
future?

Only while we have this perfect human rebirth with its eight freedoms and ten richnesses can we create the causes to achieve all ultimate and temporal wishes. Therefore, we must not waste one second of this life. When Shantideva tells us to obtain the benefits with this body

he means we must do whatever we can to create the beneficial causes that will lead to another perfect human rebirth and to enlightenment.

The most beneficial causes we can create are to train the mind in sublime bodhicitta. If we are able to generate this mind we can achieve whatever else we wish: release from all suffering, peerless enlightenment and even temporal happinesses, such as another rebirth in the realm of the happy transmigratory beings. While we work selflessly to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all mother sentient beings without any expectations for our own temporal happiness, this just happens by the way.

If we don't create the causes for another perfect human rebirth now, how will it be possible in a future life when we don't have a human form? This is why doing everything we can to develop bodhicitta is vital and, because this life is fragile and we might die at any moment, we must do it *now*.

At present we enjoy freedom like very, very few other beings do. We are free from being born in any of the lower realms—as a hell being, a hungry ghost or an animal. In any of these unfortunate rebirths, totally overwhelmed by unimaginable suffering, we would be completely unable to practice any Dharma at all. Conversely, if we were born as a god in the desire realm we would be overwhelmed by sense pleasure and equally unable to practice Dharma, only using up all the positive karma we had created in the past until we finished it and fell back into the suffering realms.

We rarely think about the impermanence of this life and yet there is proof of impermanence all around us. Probably many of our relatives have died already. Certainly, great-grandparents and their parents and

parent's parents are long dead, but who among our living relatives will be alive this time next year? Who can say whether we will be alive this time next year or next week? And when we die, who can say where we will be reborn? This is something we really need to consider deeply.

Think about this. If you were to die today or tomorrow, what kind of existence would you go to? Where is your next destination? Think about where you might be now if you had died at any time in the recent past. You might now be a lobster in a restaurant tank, about to be plucked out and thrown into boiling water. Or you could now be a fish, flapping in the water, the fisherman's hook already through your mouth, his knife cutting your body and causing you such pain. You could be a worm on the ground, being attacked by an army of ants, swarming all over you and tearing you to pieces. Worst of all, you might have been reborn in a hell realm, suffering heat or cold that you could never have imagined, so intense your whole being feels nothing but the pain of it.

In any of these rebirths, there is nothing you can do. No matter how much you don't want the suffering you are experiencing, you have to go through it for however long it lasts, even if it is for eons. However, so far today you have not died. You are still alive. More than that, you are alive with this precious human body, able to practice the Dharma and determine by yourself whether you suffer or you are happy. You must realize how incredibly fortunate you are and never take this life for granted.

Even as a human, it's almost impossible to meet and follow the Dharma. How many humans have no opportunity to practice Dharma because they are not born in a religious country? And even if they

are, how many are unable to practice because they don't have perfect faculties, such as sight, hearing or intellectual capacity? How many are too obscured through having done extreme actions like the five immediate negativities or are clouded by heresy, not believing in such fundamental ideas as karma and reincarnation?

Maybe some beings are lucky enough to be free from these hindrances, but how many of those have faith in the Dharma, and especially faith in the graduated path to enlightenment, the lamrim? Faith in the lamrim is vital because without it we can study Buddhism extensively but still not learn that we have the power to transform our mind from nonvirtue to virtue. We can memorize all the five great treatises studied in the great Gelug monasteries—the *Abhisamayalamkara*, *Vinaya*, *Madhyamaka*, *Abhidharmakosha* and *Pramanavarttika*—and still be as thick-skulled as we were before we started, still as incapable of subduing our mind and of changing our self-cherishing attitude to one that cherishes others. The lamrim is the perfect tool to train our mind, showing us the road we must travel to subdue our mind. Its whole focus is this and by listening, reflecting and meditating on each of the lamrim topics we can develop all the special qualities we need to reach enlightenment.

We have faith in the teachings, we are here at a time when the Buddha has descended and we are able to follow the teachings. We have all the right conditions to attain bodhicitta and achieve full enlightenment. All these incredible conditions have come together to create this wonderful opportunity for us. When we think about all the other beings on this planet and how few have any of these conditions, it's truly amazing.

This is why Shantideva asks us if we can ever hope to find such a rebirth again. To attain anything we have to create the causes, and the causes for a perfect human rebirth are perfect morality, great generosity and stainless prayers for such a rebirth. This is what we have been diligently working toward for countless lives, and now we have it. That doesn't mean we can now sit back and enjoy it without any effort from our side. Unless we continue to create the causes for a perfect human rebirth, there is no way we will have one in our next rebirth. The texts compare the likelihood of obtaining a perfect human rebirth to the chances of a blind turtle rising to the surface of the ocean once every hundred years and sticking its head through a golden ring floating on the surface. Almost impossible!

With each breath we have the chance to create the causes for enlightenment but how can we be sure when that breathing will stop? Our life hangs on the simple act of breathing in and breathing out but how can we guarantee that the next in-breath will be followed by an out-breath? While we have this opportunity to create the causes for all possible good things—a better future rebirth, the cessation of all suffering and full enlightenment—we must use it. Otherwise, after the last breath we might find ourselves in the body of a hell being, having to endure unbearable suffering for many eons. This life and the life of that hell being are separated by only a breath.

Death can happen at any moment, in a few years, a few months, a few days, any minute. We just don't know. And at death, there are only two destinations to which we can go: the fortunate upper realms, the result of positive karma, or the terrible, suffering lower realms, the result of negative karma. In each day, in each moment, with each

action of body, speech and mind, we are making preparations for heading one way or the other. With the Dharma as our guide, we can consciously ensure that our next rebirth, and all our future rebirths, will be only fortunate ones. Therefore, every moment is a crucial moment, one where we need to decide whether to create virtue or nonvirtue, whether to create the cause of happiness and enlightenment or the cause of suffering.

In the *Precious Garland* Nagarjuna explains,

Desire, hatred, ignorance and
 The actions they generate are nonvirtues.
 Non-attachment, non-hatred, non-ignorance
 And the actions they generate are virtues.

From nonvirtues come all sufferings
 And, likewise, all bad transmigrations;
 From virtues, all happy transmigrations
 And the pleasures of all lives.²⁷

Everything—temporary happiness, ultimate happiness, day-to-day life problems and all the future lives' sufferings, the endless sufferings of samsara—is dependent upon our own mind. We have the potential not only to attain the happiness of future lives but also liberation from the whole of samsara, to which we are bound by delusion and karma. We can go even further than that, eliminating not only the

²⁷ Vv. 20–21.

gross disturbing-thought obscurations but also the obscurations to achieving the fully knowing mind and hence attain full enlightenment. In Tibetan Buddhism this is what is called the graduated path of the three capable beings. As Atisha explains in *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*,

Understand that there are three kinds of persons
 Because of their lower, middle and higher capacities.
 I shall write, clearly distinguishing
 Their individual characteristics.

Know that those who by whatever means
 Seek for themselves no more
 Than the pleasures of cyclic existence
 Are persons of the lower capacity.

Those who seek peace for themselves alone,
 Turning away from worldly pleasures
 And avoiding destructive actions
 Are said to be of middle capacity.

Those who, through their personal suffering,
 Truly want to end completely
 All the suffering of others
 Are persons of higher capacity.²⁸

²⁸ *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, vv. 2–5.

Working to simply attain a better future rebirth is the path of the lower capable being. When we see that being anywhere in samsara is suffering, like being in a nest of cobras or at the center of a raging fire, we are on the path of the middle capable being, and work day and night to free ourselves from all of it. For that we need the three higher trainings of morality, concentration and insight.

With the path of the higher capable being we see that all other sentient beings are also suffering in samsara, but unlike us they are incapable of freeing themselves. With that we completely renounce working for ourselves and dedicate our life to others, developing the peerless mind of bodhicitta and practicing the six perfections of charity, patience, morality, perseverance, concentration and wisdom. And because we can't stand the thought of all beings waiting those long eons until we attain enlightenment by following the Sutrayana path, we enter the Vajrayana path, through which we can attain enlightenment in one brief lifetime of this degenerate age if we have the right circumstances.

We are capable of all this because we have this human body and we are endowed with the eighteen amazing qualities of a perfect human rebirth. It is more precious than a wish-granting jewel, a jewel that will effortlessly and immediately grant us any mundane wish we ask.

It seems like a miracle. If we had been buying lottery tickets for years and we suddenly found we had won a billion dollars, we would think that was a miracle, but attaining a perfect human rebirth is far more miraculous and far more valuable than that. To have this opportunity and not make use of it, how can we hope to ever have this chance again?

LIKE A FLASH OF LIGHTNING

In the next verse Shantideva says,

[1:5] Just like on a dark, foggy night a flash of lightning
Shows up everything brightly for a brief second,
Likewise, in the street of this worldly life,
By the blessings of the Buddha a few beings generate merit.

On a completely dark, moonless night, when there is a sudden flash of lightning, we can see objects such as trees and the road with incredible clarity, but only for the briefest second. We are in the darkness—"street" here means samsara—and then we see the way to generate merit through the brief flash of Dharma we are shown. For the merest moment we have some direction and then it is completely dark again.

Shantideva uses the metaphor of lightning to show the rarity of this opportunity to meet the holy teachings we currently have. From beginningless time until now we have lived countless lives blinded by the fog of ignorance, without the light of Dharma, not having met the teachings of the Buddha or, having met them, not having practiced them. Therefore, it has rarely happened that we have created the causes for an existence such as we now have.

Now, miraculously, we are in the bright light of a perfect human rebirth where we have met the Dharma and been clearly shown the difference between nonvirtue and virtue, the difference between and the causes of suffering and happiness. If we don't do something now,

while we have such a chance, if we don't try to create positive actions with all of our energy, then this precious period will end just as the light from a lightning flash will end and we will be in darkness again.

In the light we see what we must grab, like seeing a precious jewel on the road, but if we don't grab it this instant it will be too late. If we fail to create the causes for another perfect human rebirth while we have this short time, due to the deep ignorance from our side, it will be extremely difficult to find the conditions in the future to work toward happiness, liberation and enlightenment.

To have a wholesome thought is very unusual. We human beings of this world seem overwhelmed by ignorance, continuously creating nonvirtue in the belief it will make us happy. We see what is worthless as valuable and because of that fall into great suffering. In *Songs of Spiritual Experience*, Lama Tsongkhapa says,

This life of leisure is even more precious than a wish-
granting jewel;
That I have found such an existence is only this once;
So hard to find yet like a flash of lightning it is easy to vanish;
Contemplating this situation it's vital to realize that all
mundane pursuits

Are like the empty grain husks floating in the winds
And that we must extract the essence of human existence.
I, a yogi, have practiced in this manner;
You, who aspire for liberation, should do likewise.²⁹

²⁹ *Songs of Spiritual Experience: Condensed Points of the Stages of the Path*, vv. 13 & 14.

A husk doesn't have any essence; it is merely the container of the kernel of grain. When the thresher is shaken, the grain falls to the ground and all the husks are blown away in the wind.

These verses explain the real meaning of life. This body with freedoms and richnesses is more precious than a wish-granting jewel and we should take the essence day and night. The real essence is not just to achieve power, fame or learning—even in Buddhadharma. None of these things gives real meaning to life. Even if we have scriptural understanding of all the sutras and tantras and can explain them by heart, we have still not taken the real essence. Taking the essence means realizing the three principal aspects of the path to enlightenment: renunciation, bodhicitta and right view or emptiness.

As mentioned in the sutra teachings of the Buddha, in the teachings of Lama Tsongkhapa, in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* by the great enlightened being Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo, and in the teachings of all the other great lamas, yogis and pandits, without practicing the three principal aspects of the path there is no way to live life in peace and happiness, going from happiness to happiness to full enlightenment.

Without renunciation, nothing becomes a cause of liberation; without bodhicitta, nothing becomes a cause to achieve enlightenment; and without right view, nothing becomes a remedy to cut the root of samsara. Practicing the lamrim, practicing these three, is taking the real essence of life. Meditating on the three principal aspects of the path every day brings us closer and closer to those realizations.

The extensive teachings of the Buddha and the commentaries by the Indian yogis and pandits and others are like the ocean, the lamrim is

like a boat, and the virtuous friend is like the boat captain who rescues us from danger and guides us across the river to the place we wish to go. And taking the three principal aspects of the path, the heart of the lamrim, is like taking jewels from the ocean. Without actualizing the three principal aspects of the path, no matter what great power we develop—clairvoyance, the ability to disappear, whatever—it is worthless. Whatever realizations we gain are unstable and we can slip back into gross negativity very easily.

Whatever success we have in the whole path to enlightenment, from the perfect human rebirth up to enlightenment, all depends on successfully devoting ourselves correctly to the virtuous friend through thought and action, which in turn depends on having a stable realization of guru devotion.

We have the opportunity now, at this moment, to ensure that we will never be lost in the dark again. This opportunity happens incredibly rarely. It has happened through the power of the Buddha and the guru and, as Lama Tsongkhapa says, we must extract the essence of this human existence, which is practicing Dharma purely. How many human beings are able to do this? Negativity is unbelievably powerful in this world and positive thoughts seem feeble in comparison, hence to be able to generate a positive mind is a wonderful thing. Bodhicitta can destroy all nonvirtue. This is the mind we should strive for at all times.

... 3 ...

Transforming Lead into Gold

ONLY BODHICITTA HAS THE POWER TO OVERCOME NONVIRTUE

WITH THE next verse, Shantideva emphasizes the strength of nonvirtue and the feebleness of virtue in this world, but shows us that nonvirtue can be overcome if we have bodhicitta. He says,

[1:6] How incredibly powerful the unceasing negativities are,
Whereas virtuous thoughts are so weak.
What other merit besides bodhicitta
Can overcome them?

What he's saying is incredible. Through the wonderful mind of bodhicitta it's possible to purify all the powerful nonvirtues that cannot be purified by other virtuous activities.

The reason few of us worldly beings have been able to overcome negativity is because the virtue we have created is feeble in comparison to the nonvirtue and we haven't created the powerful virtue of bodhicitta. We are unable to control negative minds arising and consequently unable to avoid negative actions and the suffering consequences of

those actions. Because of our habituation to negativity, other methods of purification are too weak. Only the mind of enlightenment, bodhicitta, is strong enough to overcome all negative minds. This is the most skillful thing to do, the wisest thing to do.

Even if we are trying to practice bodhicitta but don't know other skills—different philosophies, different arts, different therapies, different religions—since our training is in bodhicitta what we are doing is far more skillful than any of the other methods. The knowledge we have of the power of bodhicitta is far more useful than any worldly knowledge. If we wish to benefit others, we need the pure thought of bodhicitta; if we wish to benefit ourselves, we need the pure thought of bodhicitta. Of all the tools that the Dharma gives us, bodhicitta is the one that can best lead us from following these harmful minds because bodhicitta destroys our self-cherishing, the root of our problems.

Bodhicitta is incredibly powerful. Without it our nonvirtues will always flourish; with it we can overcome them incredibly quickly. It is like the fire at the end of the eon that destroys the whole universe, burning everything up, even Mount Meru. Likewise, all negative karma and obscurations are burnt up completely in the intense fire of bodhicitta. The great teachers say that just one meditation session training in bodhicitta leaves an impression on the mind that is more powerful, more beneficial, than a hundred years of continuous purification without bodhicitta motivation.

The benefits of generating bodhicitta are so vast we simply can't fathom them. We can say that having bodhicitta will bring this and that benefit, but really the benefits are beyond number and incom-

prehensibly huge, so much so that only the buddhas with their omniscience can comprehend them. Of this, Shantideva says,

[1:7] Having checked for many eons what is most beneficial
 To bring immediate sublime happiness to infinite sentient
 beings,
 Shakyamuni Buddha and all the buddhas have discovered
 It is to have a mind imbued with bodhicitta.

When Guru Shakyamuni checked for many eons the best method to benefit all sentient beings and to help them to enlightenment, he discovered it was bodhicitta. Besides that, incalculable living beings, too many to be counted by the ordinary mind, have become fully enlightened by relying on bodhicitta. This shows how vital bodhicitta is. Because this is the conclusion the Buddha reached when investigating what the most worthwhile mind was, and because countless holy beings have attained enlightenment based on bodhicitta, we should develop bodhicitta. No action we do that helps us develop bodhicitta can ever be meaningless. Whether we call it meditation or not, whatever we do in life that helps us cultivate the pure bodhicitta motivation is the essential meditation.

If a virtuous action done without bodhicitta can ensure a favorable future rebirth for us or even the bliss of nirvana, how can we even contemplate what an action with bodhicitta can bring? But even the most positive action done without bodhicitta, one resulting in the complete cessation of suffering, has limits in its benefits, whereas the benefits of the smallest, simplest action with bodhicitta are limitless.

In the *Sutra Requested by Viradatta*, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha says,

If the merit of the awakening mind were to take physical form
It would fill the whole of space and extend even beyond that.

A bodhisattva's only wish is to release sentient beings from suffering and lead them to enlightenment. That depends, of course, on the bodhisattva attaining enlightenment, which in turn depends on their attaining bodhicitta. Therefore, bodhicitta is the prime, supreme cause of the happiness of all sentient beings.

When Shantideva says "sublime happiness" he means there is no higher, no greater happiness beyond enlightenment and this can be obtained "immediately" or quickly. There is nothing to gain beyond that. As we have just seen, with this perfect human rebirth there will never be a better time, and possibly there will never be another time. Even though we might not attain bodhicitta in this life, if through continuous meditation our mind can become as close as possible to this realization, it is possible that in our next life we will be born with strong intuitive compassion, greatly wishing to benefit others, wanting to never give harm to others. Then again, without experiencing many difficulties, we will be able to meet the teachings of the Buddha in general and specifically the Mahayana teachings, and again meet a Mahayana guru and continue to practice and develop bodhicitta.

Attaining the wonderful mind of bodhicitta should be our main concern, our only concern. For instance, when the great pandit Atisha saw his disciples or other people in the street, he didn't greet them with "Hello, how are you?" as we probably would. All the common greet-

ings, like asking “How are you?” or “Are you well?” revolve around material wellbeing, which didn’t concern Atisha at all. His greeting was always, “*Sems sang po shu nge?*” which we can translate as “Did you have a generous thought?”

Atisha was the founder of the Kadam tradition, whose teachings are based on bodhicitta and thought transformation. Just as for us the essence of all our activities is self-cherishing, working only for our own comfort in this life, for the Kadampa masters the essence was selflessly working for others, based on attaining bodhicitta. They could see the infinite benefits of bodhicitta for themselves and all others.

We can see how a bodhisattva can help people by simply thinking about Atisha’s life. Through his great bodhicitta he undertook the long trip from Nalanda in India to Tibet to teach the barbaric Tibetans, and seeing they could not comprehend the complex philosophies of the Abhidharma texts studied at Nalanda, he wrote *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, a short, easily understandable but profound summary of the entire Buddhist path that became the basis for the system of teachings called the graduated path to enlightenment, the lamrim. The lineage of his teachings exists even now and continues to benefit countless sentient beings such as ourselves. Even though we weren’t able to recognize the different delusions before and hence have never known why we suffer, now due to Atisha’s clear and simple outlines we know how to make life meaningful by practicing the lamrim meditations. This is all due to the power of his bodhicitta.

With bodhicitta, whatever we wish to do will be successful because it is untainted by self-cherishing. We will be free of problems because problems are all to do with the self not getting its way; consequently, if

we have no regard for the self we will have no problems. The closer we come to attaining bodhicitta the easier and more effortless our work for others will be, and when we do finally realize bodhicitta, we will continuously, spontaneously, joyously and effortlessly work solely for all others. This is the best, the highest work, and one that will enable countless others to quickly attain great bliss.

Whether from the elements, from other humans or non-humans or from being wrapped up in the affairs of this life, whatever distractions we have at present are easily overcome by bodhicitta. Our goal in doing a retreat might normally be beyond us but when we retreat with bodhicitta we can succeed in whatever we want, whether it is our own personal spiritual development or being able to quell famines, earthquakes or floods.

Bodhisattvas are able to bring limitless benefit to limitless sentient beings. They can cure sickness by the power of their compassion. If we taste even the leftovers of their meal, we can be cured from major illnesses; even drinking the pipi of a bodhisattva can cure disease. By just touching or blowing on a person or animal, a bodhisattva can cure a disease that no medicine has been able to. Without reciting certain powerful mantras or doing specific powerful practices, by the power of bodhicitta alone, a bodhisattva can effortlessly do such things.

There was a monk who, through not practicing Dharma well, became a spirit after he died. The spirit possessed a girl in a village near Lhasa and she became crazy. It is normal when this sort of thing happens to call in a lama and get him to do a practice called *chöd* (slaying the ego), but when the lama started to do the practice, the possessed girl stood up and beat him, scaring him away. Around this time a sim-

ple monk from one of the three great monasteries near Lhasa—Sera, Drepung and Ganden—was in the village begging for alms. The family, desperate to help their daughter, asked if the monk could release her. He sat down and didn't do any special ritual, as the family had expected, but simply meditated on the four immeasurable thoughts and bodhicitta and thus generated compassion. The spirit that possessed the girl recognized the prayers from his previous life and was subdued. He told the monk that the previous lama had tried wrathful mantras on him but that had only increased his anger, whereas hearing the prayers about bodhicitta had reminded him of his previous life and made him see how much he had been hurting the poor girl. With compassion for the girl, the spirit told the monk he would leave the girl and never bother her again, which he did, and the girl was soon better.

In a more recent example, there was a rich Indian family in Mumbai that was plagued with many difficulties, such as financial problems in their business, car accidents, people falling down stairs and things like that. This was caused by a family member who had died with great ill will and who had become a very malicious spirit. In fact, this spirit was like a main spirit, with many other malevolent spirits working for him, as if he were the boss and the other spirits his servants. Although the family was able to see the spirit, nobody else could, and the pujas that the swamis did for them had no effect. The family had great respect for His Holiness the Dalai Lama and in desperation they asked him for help. He asked a meditator called Geshe Jampa Wangdu, a simple monk who lived a very ascetic life in a cave under a rock in Dharamsala, to go to Mumbai to help.

While at the Indian family's house he did no special preparations but simply stayed there for a few days with an interpreter and meditated. After he returned to Dharamsala the family sent His Holiness a letter telling him that the spirit had gone and the problems had stopped. Simply by meditating on the lamrim, through his deep realization of emptiness and compassion, Geshe Jampa Wangdu was able to subdue the spirit. In that way he was able to solve the problem that nobody else was able to solve.

Bodhisattvas can relieve the suffering of others by averting natural disasters. If a drought threatens, they can bring rain; if a flood threatens, they can stop it. There is the story of the bodhisattva Monlam Pelwa, who stopped a flood that happened near Lhasa. Nobody could stop it, but he wrote on a stone, "If Monlam Pelwa is a bodhisattva, then by that truth may the water be turned back." He then left the stone in the path of the oncoming flood, and before the water reached the stone the flood receded. Just through the power of bodhicitta, without having to recite prayers or do special practices, simply writing on a stone, the bodhisattva was able to turn the flood back.

In the Buxa Duar refugee camp, where I spent eight years, the local Indian people suffered incredibly from too much rain or not enough, depending on whether the monsoons came or failed. The people began to rely on the monks to help them. When there was a drought, the monks would go down to the river and do a short puja, and very often before they had returned to the monastery there would be rain. Whether it rained or not depended on spirits such as nagas interfering with the lives of the farmers because they were disturbed in some way.

By the monks doing pujas, through the power of the bodhicitta generated, the spirits would be pleased and hence the rains could come.

Despite all the hardships, the bodhisattva who became Guru Shakyamuni Buddha persevered for three countless great eons to attain enlightenment, motivated by seeing the great suffering of all sentient beings and knowing he must do everything possible to alleviate it. He knew that once he had initially attained bodhicitta he needed to develop it to its ultimate and achieve the full awakening of the enlightened mind. This is the knowledge that all bodhisattvas and buddhas hold. This is what Shantideva means when he says that all the buddhas have seen that bodhicitta is beneficial for all the countless beings, that it is the best way to bring them sublime happiness, the supreme state of buddhahood. Having this supreme jewel of a mind means that whatever we do is done purely and therefore the result is obtained much more quickly. Thus, because the result is only to benefit others, we are able to do that skillfully and quickly and on a vast scale.

All sentient beings want to avoid all the countless sufferings of samsara but they don't understand that the only way to do that is to practice Buddhadharma. Even though they don't realize it, they need more than just relief from the gross physical sufferings, they need relief from all suffering and that means attaining a better rebirth and progressing on the path to enlightenment. For any of these aims to succeed, bodhicitta is needed. In his next verse, Shantideva says,

[1:8] For those who wish to pacify the myriad sufferings of
samsara

And to relieve all sentient beings from their sufferings,
And, besides, who wish to enjoy the myriad happinesses,
Bodhicitta should never be renounced.

Here Shantideva shows the twofold benefit of bodhicitta, where we have the ability to destroy all our own suffering completely and therefore attain all the levels of happiness, while at the same time guiding all beings from their suffering into limitless joy. Whatever happiness we wish is ours, from mundane happiness to the happiness of the god realms, and of course the great happiness of nirvana, the sorrowless state, all the way to the ultimate state of full enlightenment. All this is accomplished by bodhicitta, therefore we should never at any time forsake the wish to attain bodhicitta and, when we do attain it, we should hold it forever at the core of our heart.

If we want great happiness, if we want ultimate happiness for ourselves, we must cultivate and keep bodhicitta. If we want great happiness, ultimate happiness for all others, we must cultivate and keep bodhicitta. Bodhicitta should be the motivation for everything we do, from studying the Buddhadharma to simple everyday activities. With bodhicitta as our only goal, we are making the most of this life, the best preparation for our death and the best insurance policy for all our future lives.

Even having the chance to train our mind in bodhicitta for one minute is unbelievable. Just a minute's meditation on bodhicitta prepares the way for a happy life and a wonderful death and gives us the chance to secure a rebirth where we can continue our spiritual path.

This is the pure thought, the essence of which is solely caring for

others more than we care for ourselves. This is a total thought transformation, from our current sense that we are the center of the universe, the most important thing in our world, to one where we are the willing servant of all other beings, the least important of them all. This is not a mind that is exclusive to Tibetan Buddhists. It can, and should, be cultivated by everybody, no matter what religion, skin color, profession or age. It should be cultivated by rich and poor, by parents and children—by everybody.

The sufferings of samsara that have been with us all since beginningless time are countless and endless, and ordinary, mundane solutions will not rid us of them. The best solution, the only solution is to generate bodhicitta. This is the one infallible remedy to all our own sorrows and the one way we can help all others be relieved of their sorrows. This is the meaning of this verse, how of course with compassion and bodhicitta we focus solely on others and hence are able to benefit them hugely, but also because of the power of that selfless wish we are able to ultimately benefit ourselves.

So this wish encompasses everybody. Perhaps if there were a being who genuinely wished only to continue in the suffering realm, who wished never to have even the slightest samsaric or divine happiness, our altruistic wish would not be relevant. That being wouldn't want or need our help and consequently, for that being alone it would be unnecessary to practice the stages of the path all the way to bodhicitta and enlightenment. But such a being doesn't exist. All beings want only happiness and freedom from suffering. No matter what manifests on the surface, even if they seemed to embrace suffering as if they loved it, still they are seeking some kind of happiness. All beings

want complete happiness, the happiness of liberation, but most don't know what liberation is and hence they crave only mundane happiness, mistaking it for real happiness. Without our altruistic help they will be denied even mundane happiness.

Therefore, it is not enough that we ourselves want to be free from all suffering; we need to see that all sentient beings have exactly the same right to be happy as us and we need to work solely for their happiness. And we need to start now. There is no use in delaying and thinking we will practice Dharma tomorrow or when we retire. That pure motivation to attain enlightenment in order to free all sentient beings from suffering can be generated right now, right this minute.

Because it's impossible to harm any living being with the pure thought of bodhicitta, we are bringing peace to all living beings; we are bringing peace to the world. Whatever actions we do, whatever words we speak, whatever thoughts we have, they are all solely to lead others from suffering and into happiness.

Negative emotions are the cause of disturbances and anger, of fights and disharmony. On a personal scale they break up friendships and families; on a world scale they cause wars and countless deaths and misery. The altruistic mind, on the other hand, causes only peace, to our friends, to our family, to the world and to ourselves. So, just as the disturbed mind brings all suffering, the bodhicitta attitude of peace brings all happiness. Therefore, this is the quickest way to bring world peace.

No matter how many people work tirelessly, no matter how many organizations and government bodies spend countless billions of dollars, all trying to stop war and bring peace, if they only focus on

developing external factors and ignore the real cause of disharmony and conflict, the selfish mind, then they will all fail. We need to work toward defeating the selfish mind by developing the selfless mind in ourselves and by helping others develop it.

The problems of this world do not lie with not having enough material things but in the minds of hatred and greed. Because of neediness, people take what belongs to others or feel jealous when somebody has more. One person hates another and wants to harm them; one country sees another as the enemy and invades it to take its resources. But the problem is not lack of external resources, it is lack of inner peace. War can never bring peace. To kill another being for our own happiness is nonsensical even on a mundane level; on a deeper karmic level it is a fundamental cause of terrible suffering. Peace is only possible through destroying our inner enemy, ignorance, not external enemies.

As we have seen when we looked at the wonderful verses from *The Jewel Lamp*, Khunu Lama calls bodhicitta the best medicine, curing all diseases.³⁰ This is why we should never renounce bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the best medicine, the best method, the only way to ensure the great peace of enlightenment for ourselves and others. Nothing else will get us there. If we have not generated bodhicitta, this should be our one great goal; if we have generated it, we should never let it degenerate and must always remind ourselves of its supreme importance.

³⁰ See “Bodhicitta Is the Best Medicine” in Part One, Chapter 3.

BODHICITTA TRANSFORMS OUR BODY INTO A BUDDHA'S BODY

A being with bodhicitta, a bodhisattva, is an object of great respect, no matter what their external appearance is. Of this, Shantideva says,

[1:9] The very second bodhicitta is attained
By the poor, suffering being bound in the samsaric prison,
That being is called a Child of the Enlightened Ones
And is revered by both humans and worldly gods.

In the very second that we attain bodhicitta we become an object of prostration for worldly people and samsaric gods. We take the name “Child of the Enlightened Ones” because, just as a child is physically created by the union of their father and the mother, we have attained bodhicitta through taking refuge in the Three Rare Sublime Ones—Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, his Dharma teachings and his Sangha—and will become a buddha by depending on them.

Shantideva shows us that even though we are trapped by delusion in samsara, “bound in the samsaric prison,” if we can attain the mind of bodhicitta, the very second we attain it we become a holy being to be revered by all. All other human beings and higher samsaric gods will prostrate to us and admire us, no matter what our external appearance might be.

As we saw in the section on *The Jewel Lamp* where Khunu Lama Rinpoche says bodhicitta is the best beauty, it does not matter how ugly or poor we are by worldly standards, we become an object of reverence

because of our amazing altruistic mind. A bodhisattva might be a beggar, they might be penniless and filthy, with torn rags for clothes and dirty matted hair; externally they might look and act completely crazily, but because of their bodhicitta, in the very second they generate it, they are considered a holy being, an object of veneration. A rich businessman, on the other hand, might have the cleanest, most spotless complexion and the most immaculate and expensive clothes but can never be an object of respect. No matter how rich, how learned, how influential or how famous, they can't receive this name or be venerated in that way. Somebody who has realized emptiness and removed all gross delusions, becoming an arhat, is still not considered a child of the buddhas like a bodhisattva is.

Becoming a bodhisattva is an incredible thing. With the power to lead all of us out of the sufferings of samsara, the bodhisattva's mind has the power to shake samsara. It is said that when someone first attains bodhicitta, not only does the physical world shake, so do the thrones of the buddhas.

There is nothing more beneficial or powerful than this mind and consequently the great Dharma practitioners value even the slightest suggestion of it more than even the highest psychic powers. The Kadampa Geshe Chengawa asked one of his disciples, Geshe Tsultrim, which he would prefer to have: psychic powers or lamrim realizations. He could have many magical powers, the eight common siddhis, single-pointed concentration that lasted for eons and the five forms of clairvoyance, all these amazing powers. Would he prefer that or one lamrim realization? Of course, the answer is that one lamrim realization is infinitely preferable.

We have had all these powers numberless times in the past. We have been a formless realm god numberless times in the past as a result of the perfect concentration we attained, but these powers have not helped us in the slightest. One lamrim meditation, on the other hand, would be of incredible benefit. One lamrim realization, such as impermanence or karma, is worth more than any mundane thing. While these common siddhis might seem unbelievable to us, they are nothing compared to the smallest atom of Dharma. To see very far, to have knowledge of past and future lives, to travel anywhere instantly without any resistance—these are all powers that can definitely be developed through great concentration, but they are totally insignificant if they don't lead us toward liberation or enlightenment. The mind of awakening is more precious than all these mundane accomplishments.

Some texts compare bodhicitta with a wish-granting jewel and all the other worldly treasures. No other treasure, or even all other treasures in all the universes, can compare to a wish-granting jewel. Likewise, the texts compare a king's child with any other child. A king's child, even as a tiny baby before being able to speak or write, even before being able to walk or talk, is still more important and more revered than the highest noble by way of their position. Although still a baby, they have the power to control a whole kingdom. In the same way, a bodhisattva, no matter what external manifestation or how poor or uneducated, has earned the title "child of the buddhas" and receives more respect than even the arhats.

The buddhas are all overjoyed when a being attains bodhicitta and becomes a bodhisattva, calling them the child of the buddhas because, just as a prince has the potential, as the future king, to serve his whole

country, the bodhisattva has the potential when they have realized enlightenment to serve all sentient beings. Nothing could make the buddhas happier.

The big difference between an arhat and a bodhisattva is the mind of bodhicitta. An arhat may have a direct realization of emptiness and may have eliminated all the gross delusions and therefore be free from all suffering—an incredible accomplishment—but they do not have the mind that seeks the ultimate happiness of all living beings. The poorest, lowest bodhisattva, one who has just attained bodhicitta and is just starting on the bodhisattva's path, does have this inestimable mind and so in that respect is the richest person in the world and the one most worthy of respect.

Where a bodhisattva has trod—the atoms of the dirt of their footprints—becomes an object of prostration, an object of veneration. Even though a bodhisattva has not attained full enlightenment or eliminated all gross and subtle delusions or developed all positive qualities to their ultimate in the way a buddha has, still a bodhisattva is an object of respect for all the buddhas. The Buddha himself has said, “Those who devote themselves to me should prostrate to the bodhisattvas, not the buddhas.” He also said, “Even if a bodhisattva wanted to travel by chariot purely for their own pleasure, I would willingly pull it for them.”

We need to purify and collect merit to attain bodhicitta, but when we have bodhicitta it purifies countless eons of negativity and accumulates infinite merit. The Kadampa Geshe Nyukrumpa³¹ says,

³¹ Nyukrumpa Tsöndrü Bar (1042–1109) was a student of Chengawa and is in the Kadampa lineage of pith instruction. For a teaching by him, see *The Book of Kadam*, pp. 588–98.

“Merely having bodhicitta purifies vast amounts of negativity, collects vast amounts of merit and dispels all distractions to the practice of Dharma as well.” Here, he is talking from his own experience.

That’s why Shantideva, Khunu Lama Rinpoche and many of the other great pandits emphasize that nothing else matches the awakening mind. Therefore we should make bodhicitta our great project, no matter how difficult it is to cultivate or how long it takes, even if it takes many lifetimes.

In the next verse Shantideva says,

[1:10] Like the best alchemy, the supreme paint,
Which turns base metal to gold,
Bodhicitta transforms my body into the priceless jewel of
a buddha’s body.

Therefore I need to firmly and strongly hold the awakened mind.

Does the West have a special paint or something that has the ability to turn ordinary base metal into gold? I suspect not or there wouldn’t be any iron left anywhere; it would all be gold. There is a story about Nagarjuna becoming the manager of Nalanda Monastery. At that time there was a terrible famine in India and the thousands of monks of Nalanda had very little to eat. They asked Nagarjuna to become the manager, hoping he would be able to help them. To do that he produced a special elixir that turned metal into gold, and, taking many pieces of iron, he created gold from them, selling it to buy food for the monastery. Then he went out and helped the many starving people around, turning iron into gold and thus being able to buy food for all

the people. He was also able to build many temples and stupas in this way. Of course, this transformation does not only require a base metal and an elixir; it needs the power of the mind as well.

Nagarjuna could do this because there was such a huge difference between the value of base metal and gold. One is practically worthless and can be picked up on the road, rusting and useless; the other is to be truly prized. In the same way, this normal, impure body we have is nothing compared to the body of a being with bodhicitta. Just as it seems impossible that cheap metal can be turned into priceless gold, it seems impossible that in this very body we could attain bodhicitta and transform our body into the body of a buddha when we consider the way we are controlled by delusion and karma. It is possible, however. Through the power of bodhicitta, our body can become an enlightened being's body, completely without defects, completely pure, completely clean.

An ordinary being's idea of cleanliness is being cleansed of exterior dirt. When we have dirt on our body we wash it with soap and water and our body is clean. This cleanliness is always unsatisfactory and temporary. We always need more soap and more water and more rubbing, and still, sometime later, our body is dirty and smelly again. This is because the nature of the body is polluted, having been caused by karma and delusion. While that is so, there will never be an end to the need for soap and water and effort. As long as the mind is not cleansed of obscurations we have eons of soap and water and smelliness to endure. Only when the body is not caused by karma and delusion will we be able to stop the continual round of getting dirty and having to become clean.

Our present body is full of impurity. It is a bag filled with bones, marrow, flesh, blood, bile, excrement and so on and so forth. There is not an atom that is not impure, because it is the product of karma and delusion. Nagarjuna explains that this body is the container of thirty-two impurities. This is the reality, but it doesn't appear to us in that way. We see the body as clean, as desirable—the complete opposite of reality. All the things that fill up a septic tank come from this body. Food is clean before it enters our body but, as Khunu Lama Rinpoche says, nobody wants to eat it after it has left our body.

Bodhicitta can completely turn that around, turning this impure body into the holy body of a buddha. The enlightened being's holy body has not one tiny defect or delusion—it is a completely pure, holy body, the creation of a completely pure, holy mind, an omniscient mind. How is it possible to go from this impure body we now have to the completely pure body of a buddha? It seems impossible. But the vital ingredient—the elixir that turns metal into gold—is bodhicitta, which turns an impure mind and body into a pure mind and body. This is the alchemy of bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta has that much power. The merit gained through attaining bodhicitta is so great that it has the potential to destroy all the 84,000 delusions, eliminating all the gross and subtle delusions of our mind. Of course, to destroy the very root of ignorance, we must realize the absolute true nature of self and phenomena, but that is impossible without a huge accumulation of merit and wisdom and bodhicitta is the means of doing this. This is why bodhicitta is the “priceless jewel,” the elixir for turning delusion into wisdom.

Shantideva then says we must firmly and strongly hold this pre-

scious mind. Here he shows us this as an instruction; it is not a piece of hypothetical knowledge. This is something that anybody wishing to cease all suffering and attain enlightenment must understand and diligently work toward. This advice is vital. It is like a drink for a person dying of thirst.

It is very important to fully understand the importance of attaining bodhicitta. This is not a mind we can attain effortlessly and quickly. Given the delusions we carry around all the time, it will need a lot of effort and take a long time, therefore we need great determination to persevere. Only by seeing its importance will we be able to do this. To climb a high mountain we need to make extensive preparations, buying tents, sleeping bags, food, good boots and so forth. To attain the mountain of bodhicitta we also need to collect all the necessary conditions. This is a mental mountain we are climbing, not a physical one, and reaching the top is an arduous journey, but far more worthwhile than scaling the highest mountain. The equipment we need for this trip is the precious human body with its eight freedoms and ten riches, which we have, and therefore to use it for anything less is incredibly foolish.

Every day the television news is full of stories about violence, not only in the Middle East and other places but in the streets and homes of Western cities. There is incredible suffering—killings, torture, poverty—happening all over the world and it is increasing. These problems don't come from outside but from the minds of us all. I feel the real solution to world peace is to establish more meditation centers where people can do retreats and practices, including taking vows such as the eight Mahayana precepts. The real solution to world

peace starts with us, through determinedly stopping harm to all other beings. As long as we are controlled by delusions, others can harm us and we can harm others. The solution is to destroy our delusions. Our delusions are the real terrorists destroying our peace. By following them we are allowing ourselves to be led into great suffering. Like the terrorists destroying the Twin Towers, our delusions are blowing up our own enlightenment, our own liberation, our happiness for future lives, our own peace of mind.

The moment we start practicing Dharma we start distancing ourselves from our delusions. If we follow our delusions, nothing we do becomes Dharma; if we stop following delusions, everything we do becomes Dharma. Then we will gradually be able to actualize the path and overcome our delusions, making it impossible for them to arise again by eliminating the seed of delusion. By developing the path still further, we then cease even the subtle faults of the mind, the subtle imprints left by ignorance, the concept of inherent existence, and achieve full enlightenment.

In the next verse Shantideva says,

[1:11] With his limitless mind, the One Leader of the World
 Has thoroughly investigated and seen it is so precious.
 Therefore, because it has such great value, all beings wishing
 to be free
 Should firmly hold the thought called bodhicitta.

The One Leader of the World is of course an epithet for Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, the perfect leader, the one to lead all sentient beings

from suffering to full enlightenment. The Buddha is omniscient; he has the ability to faultlessly perceive infinite objects of knowledge simultaneously. He sees every single existence of all three times: past, present and future. There is no way we can comprehend the scope of his understanding. If we tried to explain all the qualities of the Buddha's mind we would never be finished. Not until we ourselves attain enlightenment will we fully know all the qualities of the Buddha.

With his infallible wisdom, through thorough investigation, the Buddha checked and saw how precious bodhicitta is. He saw that bodhicitta is the source of happiness of *all* beings: all worldly beings, all beings who have transcended worldly existence and even the fully awakened beings. There is no happiness that does not arise from bodhicitta. Every single pleasure we worldly beings have ever experienced, even a gentle breeze on a hot day, has arisen from bodhicitta. This is not talking about transcendental happiness, which comes once we have achieved one of the great Mahayana paths, which, of course, requires bodhicitta; this is simply talking about ordinary worldly happiness. There is not one single worldly happiness that has not come from bodhicitta.

We can see this quite simply when we consider karma. All happiness comes from virtuous actions; it is impossible to experience happiness from nonvirtue. How are virtuous actions created? Only by practicing Dharma, which means following the guidance of the enlightened beings, the buddhas. Where do buddhas come from? From bodhisattvas, and bodhisattvas are born from the wonderful mind of bodhicitta.

As the only source of all happiness, we should strive to attain bodhicitta and when we have it we should firmly take hold of it, never letting

it degenerate in the slightest. There is nothing on earth that can compare to the mind of bodhicitta, no phenomenon, no experience, no pleasure. There is no material object, no jewel, no achievement that compares. Everything else is utterly worthless in comparison.

We need to begin to develop this mind right now, this very moment. We simply don't know how long we have before we leave this body and take another, and, unless we can take the mind of bodhicitta with us into the next life, we have no way of knowing when we can even try to develop it again, let alone attain it.

BODHICITTA CONSTANTLY BEARS FRUIT

Shantideva says,

[1:12] All other virtues are like a water tree
 That bears fruit only once and then perishes.
 But the perennial bodhicitta tree not only always bears fruit
 But also increases unceasingly.

Here Shantideva compares all other virtues and the wonderful mind of bodhicitta with two kinds of tree. The water tree³²—a tree that grows by relying on the water element—bears fruit once. After the fruit from a water tree has been picked it stops producing; the crop can only be enjoyed once. This is like virtues created without bodhicitta, where we do something virtuous and will attain a good result from it, but after

³² See note 15 for Rinpoche's use of the term "water tree."

that result has ripened we cannot receive any further benefit from it. The all-wish-granting bodhicitta tree, on the other hand, continuously bears fruit in that the happiness we gain from bodhicitta just creates more seeds of virtue and more happiness; it is never ending and always increasing.

Of course, it is good to always create virtue, but we should be aware of the limits of normal virtue, virtue not inspired by bodhicitta. The result is experienced just once and then it is finished. Unless we do another virtuous action we will not be able to experience the happy result. If we perform an act of charity or refrain from stealing, for instance, in our next life that positive karma can result in our obtaining a human body with all its great enjoyments, but once we have experienced that particular result it is finished. There are no further positive results from that act that allow us to gradually generate the whole path to enlightenment.

With bodhicitta, on the other hand, the results never finish until we attain enlightenment. The more we enjoy the positive karma accumulated with bodhicitta, the more it increases. Our good qualities naturally develop, we enter the Mahayana path and, as we progress through the levels of the bodhisattva, our skill at benefiting others and our wisdom develop. Then, after attaining enlightenment, the results of bodhicitta never finish. We unceasingly continue working for all sentient beings until each is enlightened.

These are times of degeneration, where beings are overwhelmed with negative minds and it's almost impossible to meet the Dharma, but somehow we have met these profound, infallible, pure holy teachings shown to us by the enlightened beings. How did we come to

have this incredible opportunity? It's not purely from our own side, our own efforts; it also comes from the bodhicitta generated by the enlightened beings. As a result of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's bodhicitta, we have the chance to develop our inner wisdom, to discriminate between virtue and nonvirtue. Even though we have been blind in previous lives, now, in this degenerate time, we have this chance. This seems almost impossible but it is here, due to the Buddha's bodhicitta, born when he was a bodhisattva.

He was not eternally a buddha, forever with an enlightened mind. Before his enlightenment he had an ordinary mind like ours, a samsaric mind living in ignorance. Attaining enlightenment was not a spontaneous thing, done without effort. For that he had to follow the path to enlightenment and slowly achieve realizations on the path. As he did his delusions gradually decreased and his merits gradually increased until he attained enlightenment. His mind opened like a lotus and his understanding grew until there was not one existence he did not perceive.

Similarly, as we follow the path, our mind will open like a lotus. Developing bodhicitta is the quickest way to be able to experience all the external objects without error. Through bodhicitta our qualities increase unceasingly. Upon achieving enlightenment, we are able to do limitless work for all sentient beings, spontaneously and effortlessly. Therefore, even after enlightenment the benefits of bodhicitta still haven't finished. So, you can see how training in bodhicitta gives the greatest possible meaning to this human existence.

Bodhicitta is something we can completely trust. It completely frees us from all fear. Of this Shantideva says,

[1:13] Just as I can free myself from great danger
 By relying on an influential or brave person,
 Bodhicitta can free me from inexhaustible negative karma in
 a second.
 Then why don't conscientious beings rely on this?

If we commit a terrible crime and are caught, we will certainly be punished by the law. At that time we have great fear. What can we possibly do? The only recourse is to throw ourselves on the mercy of a great person, a judge or a highly placed politician—some immensely influential person—and plead to be saved from punishment. Perhaps, by confessing our guilt and vowing never to do it again, we will be let off or at least given a lighter sentence.

Just as an influential person can free us from the danger of jail, bodhicitta can free us from the danger of our negative karma. Here, when Shantideva talks of the “inexhaustible negative karma” he is referring to the five immediate negativities: killing one’s parent or an arhat, drawing blood from a buddha or causing disunity in the Sangha. These are deeds so negative that by doing any one of them, when this life finishes we will “immediately” be reborn in the hell realm, that is without any other life intervening. We will then have to experience eon after eon of the most unbearable suffering without the slightest respite. Of course, this is a good reason for us to be terrified.

Here, Shantideva tells us that even if we have created such heavy negative karma, just as a person afraid of being punished relies on a great person to be released from that great danger, we need to rely on

bodhicitta to be released from the danger of the consequences of our negative actions.

Just as the criminal needs to confess their crime to the influential person, we need to face up to our negative actions, to confess them in purification practices. The stronger our bodhicitta motivation, the stronger and more effective our confession will be. With a strong bodhicitta motivation, heavy negativities created over several lifetimes can be purified in a very short time. This is why Shantideva says that bodhicitta has the power to protect us from the consequences of having committed any of these five immediate negativities or even all five together. This is why we should entrust ourselves to bodhicitta.

Shantideva finishes the verse by asking, “Why don’t conscientious beings rely on this?” Of course, anybody who is conscientious, who has investigated and seen how they can be saved from all suffering, will see that this will happen only by having trust in bodhicitta, and of course that is what they will do. That is what we should do too. When we need to cross a busy city street, we are aware of all the dangers, very careful and very conscious not to make a mistake. This type of mind, conscientiousness, is one of the most important minds we can have, because it allows us to watch our karma and ensure we don’t create negativity.

When we have conscientiousness we are very careful of every action of body, speech and mind, watching for any nonvirtuous action that we might do. Somebody who is not conscientious, on the other hand, is heedless of any nonvirtue, or may even be aware but dismissive, thinking that it doesn’t matter. Perhaps they think an action will have no consequences or that the results might be so far in the future that

they will probably disappear. This lack of fear of the consequences of karma leads to terrible nonvirtue and suffering.

If our doctor tells us we have cancer, we are overcome with self-cherishing, crying out in self-pity that nobody could ever suffer like we do. Through compassion, through thought transformation, we can reverse that and actually use whatever problem we have to develop our mind and become truly happy. As we have seen, in the wonderful technique of taking and giving, *tonglen*,³³ we take other sentient beings' sufferings and the causes within ourselves, destroying our ego, and then give them all our happiness, our merit, our body—we give everything to other sentient beings. We dedicate this for others and think they have received whatever they need, and that we have caused them to actualize the paths of method and wisdom, and then they all become enlightened. It is such a brave mind and if we do it powerfully enough there is no space at all for self-cherishing. When that happens, there can be no suffering, only happiness.

Even having compassion collects incredible merit in our daily life, therefore how much more so if we can develop *bodhicitta*. Many of the realizations we need along the path to enlightenment need huge merit, especially the mind that directly realizes the nature of reality, emptiness. It is like the need for millions of dollars before starting a huge project, such as building a dam to bring water to millions of people. Emptiness is our multimillion-dollar project, and only the funds that *bodhicitta* brings will do that. If we focus on only benefiting

³³ See also “Whatever We Feel, We Should Remember *Bodhicitta*” in Part One, Chapter 2.

others, realizing emptiness will come by the way. That is the power of bodhicitta.

This was the advice that Tara gave Longdöl Lama Rinpoche, a great yogi from Sera Je Monastery. He was so advanced he was able to see Tara, the female deity who is the embodiment of all the buddhas' holy enlightened actions. Tara advised him to practice tonglen, saying that if he did, the realization of emptiness would naturally come as a consequence.

All negative minds and suffering come from self-cherishing; all positive minds and happiness come from bodhicitta. From self-cherishing comes anger and attachment, and from them come jealousy, bitterness, meanness, low self-worth and the many other negative states that plague our life. Their antidote is destroying self-cherishing, which means developing the mind cherishing others, which means compassion and bodhicitta. With bodhicitta, even if every other sentient being becomes angry with us, harms us, takes all our possessions and so forth, we only ever feel great compassion for them. With such a mind, no negativity can ever arise. Naturally, this is the quickest route to free ourselves from the great danger of the negative mind and to attain full enlightenment. When we are conscientious of our actions we will see this and then, of course, we will rely only on bodhicitta.

In the next verse, Shantideva shows how bodhicitta burns up negativity like a great fire.

[1:14] Just like the fire at the end of an eon,

Bodhicitta destroys all great negativity in an instant.

Its limitless benefits were explained

To the bodhisattva Sudhana by the wise Lord Maitreya.

If from morning until night every single action of the three doors of body, speech and mind is done with a bodhicitta motivation—with aspirational bodhicitta if not engaging bodhicitta³⁴—we accumulate extensive merit. There is no need to go to an isolated place for this, like a cave in the Himalayas. This is something we can do in the middle of a busy city while we are leading our normal life, working in an office or doing business in a shop. Each action done with the motivation of bodhicitta accumulates unimaginable merits in such a short time, even in a second. Similarly, all the heavy negative karma we have done in this life and in all past lifetimes, all those obscurations get purified in one second.

I think the meaning of this verse is quite clear. The end of an eon Shantideva refers to is the end of this world system. There are said to be four great eons in one cycle of a world system—an eon of *evolution* when the world system comes into being, of *existence* when sentient beings exist, of *decay* and of *emptiness*. Buddhas only appear during the eon of existence, when there are beings capable of benefiting from them. The very end of the world system's physical existence occurs at the end of the third eon, when all becomes empty. At that time there is a great destruction with the final decay of the four elements of earth, water, wind and fire. The last is the karmically created fire that consumes everything else, leaving not an atom of substance.

³⁴ Aspirational or wishing bodhicitta is the wish to attain full bodhicitta; engaging bodhicitta is where the mind has moved beyond the wish and is actually engaged in practicing the six perfections on the basis of having taken the bodhisattva vows. Although Rinpoche does not comment on the verses in this context, Shantideva makes the distinction between the two types of bodhicitta in the *Guide*, chapter 1, verses 15 & 16, where he says that they are the “mind that aspires to awaken and the mind that ventures to do so.”

I saw an example of intense fire in Hawaii when some students took me to a volcano. We saw a stream of molten lava but we couldn't get anywhere near it because it was too hot. We think of lava as being incredibly hot, but even that isn't hot enough to melt the rocks underneath. The fire at the end of the universe is far hotter than that.

To us, such heat is unimaginable. In the same way, the power of bodhicitta to destroy negativities is equally unimaginable. In one second, bodhicitta has the power to purify all delusions, like that fire at the end of the world system. As we saw before, even if we have committed one or more of the five immediate negativities, bodhicitta has the power to purify the karmic consequences of that action. It is said that just one meditation on bodhicitta where even a hint of that mind is left on the mindstream is worth more than a hundred years of continuously trying to purify the mind without bodhicitta.

In the Mahayana teachings there are many stories about bodhisattvas who dedicated their lives for others, thus showing the advantages of developing bodhicitta and the disadvantages of not developing it. There are thousands of pages of texts that expound the advantages of bodhicitta in this way. Shantideva specifies that this was explained by Maitreya, the great bodhisattva and the next buddha of this fortunate eon, to his disciple Sudhana.

In a sutra, the Buddha says,

Bodhicitta is the seed of all the buddhas' realizations.

It is like the field from which all sentient beings' white dharma increases.

White dharma simply means virtuous actions, as opposed to black dharma, the worldly dharmas or actions that are motivated by concern only for this life. He compares bodhicitta to a field, the soil from which we receive everything. The soil is the foundation for the plants and the materials we need to create our universe. Similarly, bodhicitta is the foundation of all our peace and happiness. And just as the food, shelter and so forth that come from this soil protect us from harm, bodhicitta protects us from all suffering. It's the means for us to destroy our only enemy, the self-cherishing thought. Bodhicitta can destroy it instantly and completely.

... 4 ...

Working for All Sentient Beings

THE CURE FOR THE WORLD'S ILLS

SHANTIDEVA EXPLAINS the infinite merit we create every moment when we have bodhicitta. He says,

[1:21] If having the thought merely
To relieve sentient beings of a headache
Is a positive motivation that
Creates unimaginable merit,

[1:22] Without question [so much more] merit is created
By wishing to eliminate the limitless suffering
Of all sentient beings
And lead them to infinite happiness.

This is the unbelievable scope of the bodhisattva's vision. If we have a headache, of course we want to cure it. There is nothing special in that mind. If we want to cure the headache of somebody else, that compassionate wish creates a lot of merit, and the wish to cure the headaches of many beings creates much more merit. Thinking in hundreds, we accumulate much more merit. If, like a bodhisattva, we wished to cure

the headache of every single sentient being, then the merit created would be incalculable.

This is just considering one small discomfort, a headache. A bodhisattva wants to cure all sentient beings not just of one headache or of all headaches but of all physical and mental sufferings entirely. Seeing the depth of misery that all beings are sunk in, the bodhisattva's goal is relief from even the tiniest suffering, and of course that means relief from all the great sufferings, including the suffering of the hell beings, hungry ghosts and animals. Because the number is infinite, the merit is infinite. All bodhisattvas are working tirelessly to help all sentient beings realize their full potential and gain boundless happiness and full enlightenment. Is it any wonder that at every moment a bodhisattva creates infinite merit?

Next Shantideva says,

[1:23] Do fathers and mothers
Have such a benevolent intention as this?
Do the gods and teachers
Or even Brahma have it?

[1:24] If those beings have never even dreamt
Of having such an attitude
Even for their own sake,
How could it ever arise for the sake of others?

[1:25] This intention to benefit others,
Which other beings fail to generate even for their own sake,

Is the most sublime, wonderful jewel of the mind;
Its birth is an unimaginable marvel.

The beneficial intention is of course bodhicitta. Shantideva here shows how rare this thought is. He focuses on our parents and the gods and teachers, great wise beings, but asks us to consider whether even they, who care about our welfare so much, have this inestimable thought. Even Brahma, the king of the Hindu gods, does not have bodhicitta.

Shantideva was writing in India in the eighth century and of course he used examples like Brahma. These were the greatest beings in the Hindu pantheon, with great powers, able to see into the past and future, able to control the lives of an incredible number of people. They didn't have bodhicitta.

This mind is so vast, so incredible, that normal worldly people cannot even conceive of it. Even our parents, no matter how kind and caring they are to us, don't have bodhicitta. No matter how much love and compassion they might feel toward us, the bodhicitta attitude would be something utterly unknown to them. Brahmins are said to be people who never tell lies, and hence their speech is very, very powerful and they succeed in whatever they pray for. In previous times they were also famous for being able to tell the future and past. Although the gods have much more power than normal people, they are not free from partiality and prejudice, therefore the mind of bodhicitta is beyond them.

These sentient beings—our parents, the Brahmins, the samsaric gods—all want to be free from all suffering and want the same for those they care for, but even in a dream they couldn't conceive of

being free from *all* suffering for themselves, meaning liberation and enlightenment, let alone for all other sentient beings. Here, Shantideva shows us just how rare bodhicitta is.

To have such a powerful thought arise, wanting to release all other beings from suffering and the causes of suffering, first we have to deeply understand our own suffering and see that all other sentient beings are suffering in the same way. Even if we say the words “all sentient beings” with the mouth, still in the depths of our mind our own happiness is paramount, and we hold this like a Mount Everest above all other things. This is because we have neither taken our understanding of our own suffering deep enough, to where we can see that all our suffering stems from self-cherishing, nor have we taken our understanding of others’ suffering to the level where great compassion arises.

Without this understanding there is no way we can generate bodhicitta. No matter how much we long for it, it just won’t happen. For bodhicitta to be generated we must generate great Mahayana compassion and that needs a deep understanding of the suffering of all sentient beings, not just the mouthing of sweet words. Changing our attitude from being self-centered to only thinking of others is a remarkable thing, an incredibly rare thing, like having a rainbow in our room. It is such an amazing thing that it might well seem impossible, but if we work on attaining it strongly enough it will happen. Shantideva says the birth of this altruistic attitude is an unimaginable marvel. In the next verse, he calls its benefits unfathomable:

[1:26] How can the mind fathom the depths
Of the benefits created by this precious mind,

The cause of all the joy for all sentient beings
And the medicine that cures all their suffering?

The source of all happiness is bodhicitta. It's the source of all the joy of the world and the medicine that cures the world of all suffering. Seeing the depth of the suffering of all other sentient beings, we can do nothing but work tirelessly to relieve them of that suffering, and that means becoming enlightened ourselves in order to lead them to that same state. We please sentient beings by offering them the Dharma, the one route out of their suffering and to peerless happiness. Skilled in wisdom and full of compassion, we are able to help sentient beings in whatever way they most need it. For those in need of material things, we are able to help them acquire them; for those who are starving, we can help them have food. We can help those trapped in floods and give support to those with relationship problems. Bodhicitta enables us to do whatever is needed to best help sentient beings. In this way bodhicitta becomes the cause of joy of all sentient beings.

Even if other people know nothing about bodhicitta, they get a peaceful, joyful feeling from being near somebody with bodhicitta. A bodhisattva is utterly without harm and only ever helps others, always taking more care of others than of themselves. This love and compassion emanates from them, bringing such joy to others. A bodhisattva is always tirelessly working for others' benefit.

The benefits of bodhicitta can never be imagined. The depths of the benefits of such a mind are unfathomable, infinite. Because we want peace for ourselves and for the whole world, anything other than following this mind, developing this mind, is foolish. We are always managing our time, trying to work on something to bring peace to

ourselves and other beings, but until now it has always been done in an unskillful way. With bodhicitta, we can immediately see what is best for others and immediately do it. Therefore, it is necessary to train and develop such a precious mind.

The reason I often start my talks with an explanation of bodhicitta is because of its importance, and because even hearing about this wonderful mind fills us with joy. It is vital to see that the source of all suffering is the egocentric mind, the self-cherishing thought, and the source of all happiness is the mind cherishing others. There is no way of freeing ourselves from the egocentric mind other than through bodhicitta. Therefore, even hearing about bodhicitta is incredibly important.

In every city and town in the world there are a huge number of temples, churches, stupas, monks, priests and so forth, but to hear the teachings on bodhicitta is extraordinary. It's like being in a top-class jewelry shop with all the diamonds and gold on display, but in order to find the most valuable jewel of all hidden in the back, first we must know it exists.

THE MOST WORTHWHILE MIND

Talking about how beneficial bodhicitta is, Shantideva says,

[1:27] If even just having a beneficial intention
 Is much more meritorious than venerating all the buddhas,
 What need is there to mention working to obtain
 The happiness of all beings without exception?

We need to consider Shantideva's first point in this verse, that wishing to benefit others is more beneficial than making offerings to all the buddhas. When we have convinced ourselves of that, it's easy to see that working to benefit *all* sentient beings is even more extraordinary. This far surpasses making offerings to all the buddhas.

In the *Adornment of the Mahayana Sutras*,³⁵ Maitreya says that benefiting one sentient being is more meaningful than making offerings to not just one buddha but to buddhas and bodhisattvas equal in number to the atoms of the world. This benefit of bodhicitta is reflected in Shantideva's verse. How can it be that merely wishing to benefit one sentient being is greater than making offerings to all the buddhas? Because helping sentient beings is the very best offering we can ever make to the buddhas.

There are many ways in which we can help sentient beings and I'm not just talking about the dogs and cats we keep—whether for their happiness or ours, that's another question—but also insects and *all* beings. Actually, perhaps we should also keep insects such as mosquitoes and spiders as pets, especially the ones we don't like! Whatever sentient beings we benefit—domestic animals, insects, hell beings, hungry ghosts, people—and however we help them—by giving medicine, material help, explaining the Dharma and so forth—we can always combine the two actions of making charity to sentient beings and making offerings to all the buddhas.

Whichever way we help sentient beings becomes the best offering

³⁵ Also known as *Ornament of the Great Vehicle Sutras*, this is a major work of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy. Published as *The Universal Vehicle Discourse Literature* by Robert Thurman et al.

to the buddhas because the buddhas cherish all beings and the only motivation for anything they do is to best benefit others. Therefore, if we are helping others we are doing their work. It's like a mother feeling great joy when she sees her child helping the neighbors, spontaneously working with a good heart.

Even if we make offerings to all the enlightened beings, filling up as many buddha fields as there are grains of sand in the River Ganges with seven kinds of jewels and offering it to that many buddhas, it cannot compare to the mind of bodhicitta, thinking of benefiting all sentient beings. Making such extensive offerings to such powerful objects creates unbelievable merit, but how can that action done without bodhicitta compare to even the smallest action done with bodhicitta?

No matter how vast the benefits are of making such extensive offerings, they are still limited. The benefits of bodhicitta are limitless, and so even a small action done with a good heart—not even bodhicitta but the mind that leads to bodhicitta—is able to bring limitless benefits. Of course, I would never suggest to anybody that they should give up making offerings! Making offerings, even just a grain of rice to one holy object, brings incredible benefit, unbelievable benefit. One flower placed on our altar at home can create the cause for countless lifetimes of indescribable happiness and therefore it is far more precious than all the wealth in the world, but without bodhicitta such an offering will always be limited.

Shantideva continues by showing how bodhicitta can benefit all sentient beings:

[1:28] As much as sentient beings only ever want to be free
 from suffering
 They run toward it, always creating more suffering.
 As much as they only ever want happiness,
 Like their own enemy they ceaselessly destroy the cause
 of happiness.

[1:29] For those devoid of happiness
 And overwhelmed by suffering,
 Bodhicitta brings every happiness
 And destroys every suffering and the continuity of suffering.

[1:30] It even destroys ignorance.
 Is there any virtue comparable to this?
 Is there any friend equal to this?
 Is there any merit similar to this?

Worldly beings look to the dissatisfactory sense objects for happiness and hence they are always frustrated. In striving for worldly pleasure they create nonvirtue and ensure future suffering. Wanting to be free from suffering, they run toward it. Bodhisattvas, with great compassion, make sentient beings satisfied by showing the way to real happiness, the happiness of the Dharma. They show them the way out of their suffering by helping them understand its causes and the methods to eliminate those causes. They introduce them to the wisdom that understands the absolute true nature of reality and explain what

practices to adopt and what practices to avoid, thus dispelling sentient beings' ignorance.

Shantideva then asks what is comparable to this—what virtue, what friend, what merit? The bodhisattva, the child of the buddhas, does such inestimable work for others that any action done with bodhicitta eclipses any other virtue we can think of, it is beyond the help and joy even our best friend can bring us and it creates far more merit than the greatest merit of any other action done without bodhicitta.

Any other virtue we create without a bodhicitta motivation will be limited; any action we do with a bodhicitta motivation will be limitless, and consequently no virtue can compare. Any friend, no matter how loving, will be partial, whereas bodhicitta is utterly impartial, working equally for all sentient beings, and therefore it is the best friend. As we have seen, we can create amazing merit through offering to holy objects and so forth, but that is nothing compared to the merit we create when we do any action with bodhicitta.

This quotation explains how powerful and beneficial any action is when it is done with the realization of a bodhisattva, with great compassion, great love and with the wisdom understanding the absolute true nature, how it benefits the bodhisattva and all sentient beings. By understanding the great benefits of bodhicitta in this way, we are inspired to seek out teachings on it and to do whatever is necessary to train in this wonderful mind.

THE MIND MOST WORTHY OF RESPECT

Shantideva says,

[1:31] When somebody is praised
 For repaying a good deed
 What need is there to mention
 The bodhisattva who helps without being asked?

[1:32] When somebody is honored for just
 Giving a tiny morsel of plain food
 Disrespectfully to a few sentient beings,
 That only brings them temporary satisfaction

[1:33] What need is there to mention
 The bodhisattva who brings the peerless bliss of the sugatas
 To countless sentient beings,
 Fulfilling all their needs?

We admire people who help others. Helping somebody when they are about to be caught or unjustly punished, saving somebody from hunger or cold—such deeds are considered very praiseworthy. When we are helped, we are very thankful and often feel that we would like to repay that kindness in some way. If even temporary help for worldly problems is considered a thing of admiration, then infinitely more is the work of the bodhisattva, who helps countless sentient beings in far more profound ways without us having to ask for that help and without any wish to be repaid in any way.

For ordinary beings, fulfilling their desire depends on receiving material things. Being primarily concerned with their own welfare, equating material possessions to happiness—this is what pleases them. They would be utterly indifferent if we told them that somebody had achieved certain realizations or had become a bodhisattva—they probably wouldn't even understand what we were talking about—but having ten dollars in their pocket fills them with joy. Offer them a chance to hear a lama or have a few dollars and they would certainly choose the money.

Bodhisattvas and buddhas, on the other hand, care only for our welfare. When we ask a normal person for help, we don't get it or we get it with strings attached, but the help we get from bodhisattvas comes without depending on us asking for it or any expectation of payback, because of the incredible compassion that bodhisattvas feel for us and all sentient beings. Caring more about us than themselves, they have dedicated their whole life to helping us sentient beings. Whether asked or not, they spend all their time concerned with how best to guide others. Without us asking, the bodhisattvas cause us to create positive karma so we can be saved from suffering. If that is the case, why wouldn't we admire these bodhisattvas far more than the most helpful worldly being?

Seeing this, we should determine to repay their great kindness, but how? The best way to repay the kindness of the bodhisattvas and the buddhas is to do whatever pleases them, which is to only create virtue and never create nonvirtue and thus to become free from suffering and never harm other beings. Whatever we can do that works toward freeing ourselves from suffering and attaining liberation and

enlightenment is the best present to them, the best offering. They want nothing else. Pleasing them does not depend on them receiving something.

We please them when we practice Dharma as purely as possible. Even if we don't go on pilgrimages to visit holy places or make extensive flower offerings to holy objects, by trying to transform our mind from self-cherishing to cherishing others we are making the best offering to them. Trying to realize emptiness, the absolute nature of reality, is the best offering we can make to them.

Rather than dressing up and going out to a temple, church, Dharma center or whatever with much the same mind as when we dress up to go to the movies—with the mind always occupied with the eight worldly dharmas—we set about trying to transform the mind. Physically offering to holy objects or making beautiful things without transforming the mind cannot please them that much. To do the same actions, however, with a virtuous motivation—in other words, for our actions to become Dharma—*that* pleases them very much. When we can turn our backs on worldly concern and do every action with a virtuous motivation, we are making the best offering possible to the bodhisattvas and the buddhas.

THE POWER OF THE BODHISATTVA

The final verse of the first chapter says,

[1:36] I prostrate to the holy body of the bodhisattva
Who has attained the sacred thought of bodhicitta.

I take refuge in that source of joy
Who brings happiness even to those who give harm.

A being who has attained the wonderful mind of bodhicitta is a bodhisattva, a holy being, and hence is worthy of our veneration. We should prostrate to such a being.

I'm not sure what a "holy" being means in a Western context, but in Buddhism it firstly means somebody who has no thought clinging to the happiness of this life. Secondly, it's somebody who has destroyed the self-grasping ignorance by realizing the emptiness of the self. Such a person is holy. In this context, Shantideva calls the bodhisattva "holy" because the precious mind of bodhicitta has been actualized. The bodhisattva has overcome the self-cherishing thought and takes more care of others than of themselves. A bodhisattva is considered higher than a being who doesn't have bodhicitta but has a realization of emptiness. If such a being, dedicated completely to others, is not an object of prostration, not an object of refuge, then who else?

It might seem strange that Shantideva finishes by saying we should prostrate and take refuge in the bodhisattva, the source of happiness for all, even for those who have harmed them. This is interesting. Here, it is taught that having any relationship with a bodhisattva is very powerful. Of course, pleasing the holy beings brings untold benefits and harming them creates terrible imprints that bring great suffering in the future, but if we harm a bodhisattva, something worthwhile will still come from it because we have made that connection with a holy being. It's better to have a negative relationship with a bodhi-

sattva than none at all. Never meeting a bodhisattva doesn't plant the seed, it doesn't create the karma to meet that bodhisattva in a future life, which means we can't be helped by that bodhisattva in a future life.

From the bodhisattva's side, whether we help or harm them, they will feel the same degree of compassion for us. Living in the perfection of patience, whatever occurs will never create any anger at all. No matter how much a person might harm a bodhisattva, that person only becomes the object of compassion for the bodhisattva, who prays that the suffering sentient being will quickly be freed from all suffering and attain enlightenment. Being scolded, beaten, criticized, no matter what harm is inflicted, can never diminish the bodhisattva's compassion.

Even though we should always try to avoid it, if we did harm a bodhisattva we would benefit from the prayers that bodhisattva says for us. And because of the power of their bodhicitta, the success of that prayer would be quickly realized. Even if our relationship with the bodhisattva is negative, we have created the karma to have a relationship with them again and again in future lives and hopefully then it will be a positive one.

It is a wonderful thing to be able to copy these holy beings, the bodhisattvas, and aspire to skillfully benefit sentient beings as extensively as they do. It all depends on attaining the mind of bodhicitta, and that in turn depends on following the path, from guru devotion and the other lamrim topics of the lower capable being and of the middle capable being, and then developing all the qualities needed to enter the bodhisattva's path. For that, we should start each day and

each action with a pure bodhicitta motivation to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. It is crucial we generate this pure motivation in everything we do. We should think, “For the benefit of all kind mother sentient beings I must attain enlightenment as quickly as possible, therefore whatever I do must only ever be done out of pure bodhicitta.”

Bodhicitta is the altruistic attitude that cherishes all others and seeks to lead them to peerless happiness. It is the mind that completely, spontaneously, continuously works at nothing other than the benefit of all living beings. Can there be a more wonderful mind than this?

Of all possible states of mind we can have, bodhicitta is the most amazing because bodhicitta alone determines to free every single sentient being from suffering and place them in peerless happiness. This is the core of the verses I have quoted from Khunu Lama Rinpoche’s *Jewel Lamp* and the first chapter of Shantideva’s *Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*. By showing us the benefits of having such a mind, these two great bodhisattvas can inspire us to practice and do everything possible to attain it. I advise you to read these two books as often as you can and to take the inspirational verses there to heart, determining to do whatever possible to develop your compassion and wisdom and to quickly, quickly attain supreme enlightenment in order to free all sentient beings from suffering and bring them to the ultimate bliss of full enlightenment.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama usually finishes his dedications with this wonderful quote from Shantideva:

[10:55] As long as space remains,
As long as sentient beings remain,
So too may I remain,
To dispel the miseries of the world.

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LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE

The LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE (LYWA) is the collected works of Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche. Lama Zopa Rinpoche, its spiritual director, founded the Archive in 1996.

Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche began teaching at Kopan Monastery, Nepal, in 1970. Since then, their teachings have been recorded and transcribed. At present we have well over 12,000 hours of digital audio and some 90,000 pages of raw transcript. Many recordings, mostly teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, remain to be transcribed, and as Rinpoche continues to teach, the number of recordings in the ARCHIVE increases accordingly. Most of our transcripts have been neither checked nor edited.

Here at the LYWA we are making every effort to organize the transcription of that which has not yet been transcribed, edit that which has not yet been edited, and generally do the many other tasks detailed below.

The work of the LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE falls into two categories: archiving and dissemination.

Archiving requires managing the recordings of teachings by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche that have already been collected, collecting recordings of teachings given but not yet sent to the ARCHIVE, and collecting recordings of Lama Zopa's on-going teachings, talks, advice and so forth as he travels the world for the benefit of all. Incoming media are then catalogued and stored safely while being kept accessible for further work.

We organize the transcription of audio, add the transcripts to the already existent database of teachings, manage this database, have transcripts checked, and make transcripts available to editors or others doing research on or practicing these teachings.

Other archiving activities include working with video and photographs of the Lamas and digitizing ARCHIVE materials.

Dissemination involves keeping up with evolving technology and making the Lamas' teachings available through various avenues including books for free distribution and sale, ebooks on a wide range of readers, lightly edited transcripts, a monthly e-letter (see below), social media, DVDs and online video, articles in *Mandala* and other magazines and on our website. Irrespective of the medium we choose, the teachings require a significant amount of work to prepare them for distribution.

This is just a summary of what we do. The ARCHIVE was established with virtually no seed funding and has developed solely through the kindness of many people, most of whom we mention and thank sincerely on our website. We are indebted to you all.

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THE FOUNDATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE MAHAYANA TRADITION

The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) is an international organization of Buddhist meditation, study and retreat centers—both urban and rural—monasteries, publishing houses, healing centers and other related activities founded in 1975 by Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche. At present, there are more than 160 FPMT centers, projects and services in over forty countries worldwide.

The FPMT has been established to facilitate the study and practice of Mahayana Buddhism in general and the Tibetan Gelug tradition, founded in the fifteenth century by the great scholar, yogi and saint, Lama Je Tsongkhapa, in particular.

The FPMT website also offers teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama Yeshe, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and many other highly respected teachers in the tradition, details about the FPMT's educational programs, an online learning center, a link to the excellent FPMT Shop, and links to other interesting Buddhist and Tibetan pages. You can also find links to FPMT centers all over the world, especially those in your area, where you will find details of their programs offered.

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About Lama Yeshe: *Reincarnation: The Boy Lama*, by Vicki Mackenzie
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The Buddhadharma is the true source of happiness for all sentient beings. Books like this 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, the names of your teachers or holy images 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 chairs or 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.

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.

LAMA THUBTEN ZOPA RINPOCHE was born in Thangme, Nepal, in 1945. At the age of three he was recognized as the reincarnation of the Lawudo Lama, who had lived nearby at Lawudo, within sight of Rinpoche's Thangme home. Rinpoche's own description of his early years may be found in his book, *The Door to Satisfaction*. At the age of ten, Rinpoche went to Tibet and studied and meditated at Domo Geshe Rinpoche's monastery near Pagri, until the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959 forced him to forsake Tibet for the safety of Bhutan. Rinpoche then went to the Tibetan refugee camp at Buxa Duar, West Bengal, India, where he met Lama Yeshe, who became his closest teacher. The Lamas went to Nepal in 1968, and over the next few years built Kopan and Lawudo Monasteries. In 1971 Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave the first of his famous annual lamrim retreat courses, which continue at Kopan to this day. In 1974, with Lama Yeshe, Rinpoche began traveling the world to teach and establish centers of Dharma. When Lama Yeshe passed away in 1984, Rinpoche took over as spiritual head of the FPMT, which has continued to flourish under his peerless leadership. More details of Rinpoche's life and work may be found in *The Lawudo Lama* and on the LYWA and FPMT websites. In addition to many LYWA and FPMT books, Rinpoche's other published teachings include *Wisdom Energy* (with Lama Yeshe), *Transforming Problems*, *The Door to Satisfaction*, *Ultimate Healing*, *Dear Lama Zopa*, *How to Be Happy*, *Wholesome Fear*, *How to Face Death Without Fear*, *The Four Noble Truths*, *Bodhichitta*, *The Six Perfections*, *Patience* and many transcripts and practice booklets.

Gordon McDougall first met Tibetan Buddhism in Hong Kong in 1986, where he was the director of Cham Tse Ling, the FPMT center there, for two years. He was spiritual program coordinator of Jamyang Buddhist Centre, London, from 2000 to 2007, working with the resident teacher, Geshe Tashi Tsering, to develop the Foundation of Buddhist Thought. He has also led lamrim courses in Europe and India. Since 2008 he has been editing Lama Zopa Rinpoche's teachings for Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive and Wisdom Publications.

