

Lama Zopa Rinpoche



Teachings from the
Vajrasattva Retreat

*Land of Medicine Buddha
February – April, 1999*

TEACHINGS
FROM THE
VAJRASATTVA RETREAT



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LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

TEACHINGS
FROM THE
VAJRASATTVA RETREAT

Land of Medicine Buddha, February–April, 1999

Edited by Ailsa Cameron and Nicholas Ribush

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Through the merit of having contributed to the spread of the Buddha's teachings for the sake of all sentient beings, may our benefactors and their families and friends have long and healthy lives, all happiness, and may all their Dharma wishes be instantly fulfilled.

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

This book is an edited transcript of Lama Zopa Rinpoche's teachings at a three-month Vajrasattva retreat held at Land of Medicine Buddha, Soquel, California, from February 1 to April 30, 1999. The retreat was led by Venerable Marcel Bertels.

About 125 people participated in the three-month retreat, seventy-five of them full time, including twenty nuns and monks. In addition, Rinpoche offered weekend public talks, which were attended by many people from outside of the retreat. The Vajrasattva initiation on February 6 and the long life puja and Amitabha initiation on April 30 were attended by about 250 people.

Rinpoche's teachings during these three months were essentially of three types: the weekend public teachings, which tended to be discourses two to three hours in length; teachings at special events, such as a light offering meditation, two long life initiations, a Medicine Buddha puja preceding a *jang-wa* ceremony for the dead, and an animal liberation ceremony; and teachings during Vajrasattva retreat sessions, at which Rinpoche would often arrive unannounced and proceed to explain various parts of the practices being done at the time. Rinpoche's eagerly-awaited drop-ins were more frequent during the first part of the retreat—before he went to India for two weeks in March, to attend the Gelug conference in New Delhi organized by the FPMT—and the long discourses became more frequent after Rinpoche's return.

Rinpoche expressed his happiness with the retreat several times. For example, on February 9, Rinpoche explained one of the purposes of the retreat and why he was explaining the practices:

“One point I want to emphasize is that my purpose in telling you how to do this and that meditation or prayer is to educate you about how to guide a Vajrasattva retreat. If somebody later asks you how to do a Vajrasattva retreat, you will know what to explain to them. It's an education in how to do Vajrasattva meditation in order to make it effective. Doing Vajrasattva retreat is not simply about reciting the mantra and saying some prayers. It is about making the practice effective for your

mind, making it the quickest, most powerful way to transform your mind. You are learning how to make the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation the most powerful purification. It's an education in how to guide a Vajrasattva retreat, so that you, both sangha and lay people, can teach others how to do Vajrasattva retreat in the future. As well as this, you are learning how to do *Lama Chöpa*, or *Guru Puja*, in an effective way. The arrangement of the prayers helps you do the practice effectively."

On March 12, Rinpoche referred to the retreat as a learning experience: "This retreat has also been part of your Dharma education. You have gained experience yourself and you will also be able to teach others how to do retreat and the various other practices. This is very important. We always have a shortage of experienced people. We need so many spiritual coordinators at the centers. The number of centers is increasing all the time, and every center needs someone to guide people in the various retreats and practices. This retreat has also become part of your education, so that if you would like to help in one of the centers, you now know how to guide various practices. This is very, very important. . . .

"One point is that it is helpful for you to learn more about various practices—guiding lam-rim meditations is the main one, of course. The other point is that it helps you to help others, to benefit others. You can help others to purify their negative karma and to collect merit, so that they can have realizations of the path to enlightenment.

"We always have a shortage of spiritual coordinators at the centers, of people who can give advice on how to do retreats and various practices. The more such people we have, the more productive and beneficial to sentient beings we can make the centers. Even if there is a geshe at the center, we still need a spiritual coordinator or some other person who can lead meditations and practices and who can be consulted by the students. We still need that."

Finally, at the long life puja on the last day of the retreat, Rinpoche again expressed his satisfaction with it:

"Some of the retreat people I met expressed the wish to do this retreat again and were hoping another would be organized. This is an extremely good sign. However, by doing this retreat, whether you did the whole three months or just part of it, as much as you did, you have made your future lives that much easier—you have made it much easier to achieve realizations and have decreased the obstacles you will have to overcome.

Many obstacles—negative karma created in relation to your gurus, other holy objects and sentient beings—have been purified during this retreat. You won't encounter these in future lives. . . .

“Before, you may not have had that much feeling for Dharma, but now, after participating in the retreat, there's more of a Dharma feeling in your heart. Your heart has become more Dharma than before. That's a sign of having purified obscurations. You feel more compassion for others—that's one of the best signs of purification; more devotion to the Triple Gem, more devotion to the guru, more faith in karma than before—those are the best signs of purification.”

RETREAT SET-UP

Please see Appendix 7 for a detailed retreat schedule. The first session of the day was a combined *Lama Chöpa/Jor-chö* puja, especially arranged by Rinpoche. This and every other session of the retreat began with prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas. On approximately half the days of the retreat we took the Eight Mahayana Precepts.

There were four or five Vajrasattva sessions every day. On the days there were four, there was a discussion group usually led by one of the nuns or monks, focusing on details of the various levels of precepts and other matters pertaining to purification. After prostrations, each Vajrasattva session would begin with recitation of a glance meditation on the lam-rim, using texts such as Lama Tsong Khapa's *The Foundation of All Good Qualities* or *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, Losang Jinpa's *All the Important Points of the Lam-rim*, or *Calling the Lama From Afar*. There were three Vajrasattva sadhanas used: a long, a medium and a short. The long one was usually done for the day's first Vajrasattva session and was a slightly modified version of the sadhana compiled by Lama Yeshe. Once a week we also did the Heruka Vajrasattva tsog that Lama composed. For these practices and Lama Yeshe's complete Vajrasattva teachings, see *The Tantric Path of Purification* (Wisdom Publications).

During the breaks between sessions, and especially during the long afternoon break, retreat participants did their karma yoga jobs, thus ensuring the smooth running of the retreat. The gumpa was kept clean and light, many, many water bowls were offered, beautiful flower displays

were made, paths were swept, dishes were washed and in general, everything was well taken care of.

THE NEW TRADITION

During this retreat Rinpoche introduced what he referred to as a “new tradition” within the FPMT. This is greatly clarified during the teachings in this book, but basically, Rinpoche explained how to meditate on regret, impermanence and death, and bodhicitta in the early stages of purification practices like the Thirty-five Buddhas and Vajrasattva recitation-meditation, and how to meditate on emptiness before doing dedication.

THE *FPMT PRAYER BOOK*

The retreat also introduced to the FPMT Venerable Connie Miller’s prototype of a standardized book of prayers and practices to be used throughout the organization, prepared on behalf of the International Office’s Education Department. All the practices done during the retreat were to be found in this excellent manual. Each retreat participant was asked to evaluate the book at the end of the retreat and copies have been further distributed to various FPMT centers for wider evaluation. Since everything we did during the retreat is in the *Prayer Book*, we have not included these practices in this book.

ABOUT THE EDITING

We have not been able to check this work with Rinpoche, therefore it is possible that it contains errors, all of which are our responsibility. If you have questions about anything in the book, please contact the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive or the FPMT Education Department at International Office in Soquel, California.

This book is a slightly more than lightly edited, day by day transcript of Rinpoche’s teachings during the Vajrasattva retreat. The paragraphs in quotation marks are what Rinpoche was suggesting people think. Generally, round brackets are around Rinpoche’s asides, square brackets around the editors’ insertions. Less common Tibetan and Sanskrit terms are italicized the first time only, unless they form a key part of the discussion or might

be misunderstood if not in italics; also, they are phoneticized according to their approximate pronunciation, not their transliteration.

The content of Rinpoche's comments and clarifications during retreat sessions for the most part should reveal the context. Again, we have not included here the relevant parts of the texts or prayers upon which he was commenting as they are all in the *Prayer Book*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Rinpoche for his eternal kindness and compassion for his many students and for being the constant and awe-inspiring example of what is possible that he is. With special gratitude we thank him for having organized the Vajrasattva retreat. May we all become like him.

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Wendy Cook of the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive taped all the teachings and organized the transcription of the tapes by Vens. Paloma Alba, Chantal Carrerot and Tenzin Namdrol, who completed the entire job within a short time of the retreat finishing. We are grateful for their excellent, dedicated work.

*Ailsa Cameron
Chenrezig Institute
Eudlo, Qld., Australia
September, 1999*

*Nicholas Ribush
Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive
Weston, MA, USA
September, 1999*

“I’m not telling you why we should benefit others because it is something that you haven’t heard before. Those who have received lam-rim teachings have heard this many times. I’m doing it to remind or inspire those of you who already know these things and to inform those of you who don’t, but need to know. Why? Because this is the most important education of all. This is more important to know than anything else in life. This is the most important thing you will ever learn.”

—*Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche*

PROLOGUE

PRACTICING GURU DEVOTION WITH THE NINE ATTITUDES

“I am requesting the kind lord root guru,
Who is more extraordinary than all the buddhas—
Please bless me to be able to devote myself to the qualified lord guru
With great respect, in all my future lifetimes.

“By realizing that the root of happiness and goodness
Is correctly devoting myself to the kind lord guru,
Who is the foundation of all good qualities,
I shall devote myself to him with great respect,
Not forsaking him even at the cost of my life.”

Thinking of the importance of the qualified guru,
allow yourself to enter under his control.

1. Be like an obedient son—
Act exactly in accordance with the guru’s advice.

2. Even when maras, evil friends and the like
Try to split you from the guru,
Be like a vajra—
Inseparable forever.

3. Whenever the guru gives you work,
no matter how heavy the burden,
Be like the earth—
Bear it all.

4. Whatever suffering occurs (hardship or problems)
When devoting yourself to the guru,

Be like a mountain—
Immovable (your mind should not be upset or discouraged).

5. Even if you are given all the difficult tasks,
Be like a servant of the king—
Perform them with an undisturbed mind.

6. Abandon pride.
Be like a sweeper—
Hold yourself lower than the guru.

7. No matter how difficult or heavy the burden,
Be like a rope—
Hold the guru's work with joy.

8. Even when the guru criticizes, provokes or ignores you,
Be like a faithful dog—
Never respond with anger.

9. Be like a boat—
Never be upset to come or go for the guru
At any time.

“O glorious and precious root guru,
Please bless me to be able to practice in this way.
From now on, in all my future lifetimes,
May I be able to devote myself to the guru like this.”

If you recite these words aloud and reflect on their meaning in your mind, you will have the good fortune of being able to devote yourself correctly to the precious guru from life to life, in all your future lifetimes.

If you offer service and respect and make offerings to the precious guru with these nine attitudes in mind, even if you do not practice intentionally, you will develop many good qualities, collect extensive merit and quickly achieve full enlightenment.

Note

The words in parentheses are not to be read aloud. They are added to clarify the text and should be kept in mind but not recited.

Colophon

Written by the highly attained lama, Shabkar Tsogdrug Rangdrol. Translated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche at Aptos, California, in February, 1999. Edited by Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive Editing Group at Land of Medicine Buddha, March, 1999. The editors are responsible for any errors.

Saturday, February 6

EVENING: VAJRASATTVA *JE-NANG*

LAMA YESHE'S TRADITION OF VAJRASATTVA RETREAT

First, I want to say that I'm very happy to see everyone. I want to express how extremely happy I am that this Vajrasattva retreat was planned and that so many of you have taken the opportunity to do it, have given yourself time to do the retreat.

Also, some of us are direct disciples of Lama Yeshe, our virtuous friend whose holy name is difficult to mention and who was kinder than all the buddhas of the three times—our doing Vajrasattva retreat would be most pleasing to Lama Yeshe. Others here might be indirect disciples of Lama Yeshe. Previously, there was no such system of giving disciples the commitment of doing a Vajrasattva retreat after they'd taken the Vajrasattva *je-nang*, or permission to practice.

In other traditions, it is very common to do Vajrasattva retreat before taking a Highest Yoga Tantra initiation and doing the retreat of such a deity. In Solu Khumbu, in the mountains of Nepal, where I was born, there is a system of doing all four major preliminary practices before doing a retreat on each deity. Even though there are many other preliminary practices, the four major ones are guru yoga, Vajrasattva practice, prostrations and mandala offerings. The preliminary practice of guru yoga is mainly done to receive the blessings of the guru in order to achieve realizations of the path to enlightenment; Vajrasattva practice and prostrations with meditation on and recitation of the holy names of the Thirty-five Buddhas are done to pacify obstacles; and mandala offerings are done particularly to collect merit, the necessary condition to have realizations of the path to enlightenment.

I'm not sure whether you have to do 400,000 of each of these four preliminary practices before doing each deity retreat, but this is the general system in the Nyingma tradition in Solu Khumbu. As far as I am

aware, this is not a common practice in the Gelug tradition at the present time. The nine preliminaries are done before a three-year retreat on a deity, but there is no precise instruction to do the four preliminary practices before retreat on each deity. It is generally advised that you do some preliminary practices to purify and to collect merit before you begin a retreat, so that no obstacles arise and the retreat can be successful, but no particular number is mentioned. For example, you might make some *tsa-tsas* or do some Dharma protector pujas for the success of the retreat.

Giving a commitment to do Vajrasattva meditation-recitation in retreat after a Vajrasattva je-nang is not common generally in the Gelug tradition. Lama Yeshe, with his skillful means and his compassion for us, his students, kindly started this tradition of practice. It is extremely good that people have to make the commitment to do the retreat after they have received the Vajrasattva je-nang. In this way, many people have had the opportunity to purify many eons of negative karma through taking a Vajrasattva je-nang, or blessing, and then doing Vajrasattva practice and retreat—not just reciting some big number of mantras but also doing meditation. Since Lama started this tradition, many thousands of people have benefited.

I don't remember the exact year that Lama started this tradition. It was when we were in Nepal, living in the old house at Kopan. It doesn't exist any more; it's now been transformed into another mandala. It was an old house built in the British style by the previous king of Nepal, King Mahindra, for his astrologer. We lived in that house for quite a number of years, perhaps six or seven. Then, around the time of the Sixth Kopan Course, it housed the Western Sangha and was the place where they did morning puja, especially *Jor-chö*, the preparatory practice. Those times were very good times. It still is a very good time. I think *we* have to make it a good time.

I think that Lama gave the first Vajrasattva initiation to three students, Jan Willis and Robbie and Randy Solick. These three Americans were the first disciples of Lama's Vajrasattva initiation. They received the initiation and then did retreat in Ram's house, which is close to Kopan Monastery. Ram is a Nepalese man who worked at Kopan in the early times; he used to help with the building and at the beginning he sometimes also cooked. Ram and his family lived downstairs, and they rented the upstairs to Western students. They had a fire downstairs, so the

upstairs would fill up with smoke. I think they enjoyed very much doing Vajrasattva retreat in a room full of smoke. Actually, I remember that one time they did have some difficulty with the smoke.

Giving Vajrasattva je-nang with the commitment to do Vajrasattva retreat started at that time, and since then groups have been doing retreat at Kopan, at Tushita Meditation Centre in Dharamsala, and at other centers. I think in recent years there has been a group Vajrasattva retreat almost every year at Tushita.

Since Lama started this tradition, there has been unbelievable benefit. Many thousands of people have been saved from the lower realms, from spending many eons suffering as hell beings, hungry ghosts or animals. They purified many negative karmas, the obstacles that interfere with the generation of realizations of the path to enlightenment. By taking the Vajrasattva initiation and doing Vajrasattva practice and retreat, many thousands of people have been brought closer to the path to enlightenment. Thus, they have come closer to enlightenment and closer to being able to free numberless beings from all their suffering and its cause and bring them to full enlightenment. It has had this great benefit.

By making the time to do this retreat, you are also making preparation for death, your own death. Perhaps you will cause all the people who are doing hospice work to lose their jobs! They will have no one to take care of because you will have liberated yourself. By doing this retreat, you are becoming your own guide and liberating yourself.

By making powerful preparation for your own death, you even make it much easier for other people when they die. Your happy, easy, peaceful death enables other people to have less worry and fear at the time of death. Your happy, peaceful death causes others to rejoice and inspires them to practice Dharma, to practice the good heart. Your death causes devotion to develop in the minds of others, and that devotion will bring them to enlightenment. That devotion will bring them so much happiness, including all the realizations of the path to liberation and enlightenment. Through that devotion they can achieve all happiness, up to enlightenment.

We can also use this Vajrasattva retreat as a long life puja for the Buddha of Compassion, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The activities of buddhas depend on the karma of sentient beings, on our state of mind.

Our karma determines how long we can see the Buddha of Compassion in the form of this particular human body that benefits so many sentient beings in this world. Therefore, our doing this Vajrasattva retreat definitely becomes a means to ensure the long life of the Buddha of Compassion, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, as well as other holy beings. Besides pleasing Lama Yeshe, our doing Vajrasattva retreat is also very pleasing to the holy mind of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The most powerful purification comes when you do something that pleases the virtuous friend. This is the most powerful way to purify whatever obstacles you have to achieving realizations of the path to enlightenment—or, in other words, to achieving happiness. Only through purifying obstacles can realizations be achieved.

We can make an offering of this retreat to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. At the end we can count up all the mantras recited by all the people who did the retreat and offer it to His Holiness as an offering of practice. We can also dedicate the retreat to the successful accomplishment of all His Holiness's wishes. It is a very critical time at the moment, so it would be very good to dedicate the retreat, the merit we will collect every day, to the success of His Holiness's wishes.

BENEFITS OF VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE

It is mentioned in tantric texts such as the Guhyasamaja commentary that reciting even twenty-one Vajrasattva mantras stops the multiplying of negative karma and blesses the mind. And reciting 100,000 Vajrasattva mantras can completely purify all negative karma. It can purify the ten non-virtuous actions and even the broken root vows of a fully ordained monk or nun. Even if a fully ordained person has received the four defeats by killing a human being, stealing, having sexual intercourse and telling the big lie (saying that they have realizations when they know that they do not), they can completely purify these heavy negative karmas by reciting 100,000 Vajrasattva mantras.

It is also mentioned in the root tantric text, *Zag-gyü theg-nyi gyü-pa*, that one of the benefits of Vajrasattva practice is that it can purify the five uninterrupted negative karmas (having killed the mother or father of this life, caused disunity among the sangha, killed an arhat or caused blood to flow from a buddha). Having committed one of these negative

karmas, without the interruption of rebirth in another realm, one falls down into the major hell realm immediately after one's death. As well as these five uninterrupted negative karmas, negative karmas such as cheating the *tathagatas* and abandoning the holy Dharma are purified. We abandon, or avoid, the holy Dharma when we think, "Oh, what use is this to me?" when we encounter any of Buddha's teachings in which we don't have any faith or interest or which we can't understand, such as the philosophical scriptures. Criticizing or rejecting any of Buddha's teachings is abandoning Dharma.

Tibet has four Mahayana traditions, and Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo mentions in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* that criticizing the other traditions is avoiding the holy Dharma. This happens, for example, if Nyingma or Kagyu followers criticize the Gelug teachings by saying that they are not pure, or if Gelugpas criticize the teachings of the other traditions. So there is no doubt that Mahayanists who criticize Hinayana teachings and Hinayanists who criticize Mahayana sutra or tantra teachings are avoiding the holy Dharma. These are very heavy negative karmas. In the *Lam-rim chen-mo*, Lama Tsong Khapa quotes from a sutra that explains having abandoned the holy Dharma is much heavier negative karma than having destroyed all the stupas in this world.

Vajrasattva practice can purify all the heavy negative karmas of having avoided the holy Dharma, degeneration of lay precepts and ordination vows, and any other negative karma, or unrighteous action. It can also purify the mental pollution that comes from the negative karma of wrong livelihood. The *Jor-chö* commentary mentions five types of wrong livelihood that can pollute the mind and become a very heavy obstacle to realizations. All these heavy vices can be purified through Vajrasattva practice.

The root tantric text *Theg-nyi gyü-pa* by the great master Kunying [Kunga Nyingpo] then concludes, "When Vajrasattva becomes stabilized in the heart of a practitioner, that practitioner achieves all realizations, both common and sublime." This is also explained in the commentary to this root tantra by Sakya Shenying [Sherab Nyingpo].

It is also explained in the Yamantaka teachings that the hundred-syllable mantra pleases one's special deity, which means the deity with which you practice oneness day and night.

INCREASE OF NEGATIVE KARMA

In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo gives the following example. If we kill one tiny insect today, a mosquito or a louse, and we do not purify with Vajrasattva practice before we go to bed, the negative karma becomes double by tomorrow, triple by the third day and so on. By increasing day by day, after fifteen days that one small negative karma becomes as heavy as our having killed a human being. And after eighteen days, Pabongka Rinpoche says, it will have increased by a factor of 131,072. This means that one small negative karma that we failed to purify at the end of the day will go on increasing day by day. As the months and years go by, it will keep on increasing until by the time of our death that one small negative karma will be huge, like the size of this earth.

That one small negative karma will become so heavy that it will make death very difficult and many future lives as well. It will cause us to abide for an inconceivable length of time in the lower realms, where we will experience unimaginable suffering. And even when we are reborn in a human or deva realm, we will have to experience many suffering results of that negative karma.

Reciting the Vajrasattva mantra just twenty-one times at the end of the day can stop that small negative karma from multiplying the next day. Not only will it stop that, but it will stop the multiplying of all the negative karmas collected with our body, speech and mind during that day. By multiplying day by day, each of the negative karmas we collected today, if they were materialized, would become as heavy and huge as a mountain the size of this earth. Reciting the Vajrasattva mantra just twenty-one times at the end of the day stops the multiplication of all these negative karmas. It can also purify all the negative karma created that day and all the negative karma created in this life and in our past lives as well. Therefore, there is no doubt about the benefit of reciting a much larger number of mantras, such as 100,000. The benefit and power of that is unimaginable.

PREPARATION FOR THE VAJRASATTVA JE-NANG

The Vajrasattva je-nang, or permission to practice, involves graduated

activities from the side of the lama and from the side of the disciple. The preparation from the side of the lama includes self-generation, front generation, blessing the vase and so forth. The graduated activities from the side of the disciple include rinsing the mouth, making prostrations, receiving the flower and offering a mandala. Before the mandala offering, however, we need to give a *torma* to the interferers who interfere with the granting and receiving of the Vajrasattva je-nang.

Of course, saying that you should visualize me as Vajrasattva is like saying that you should think of kaka as gold. However, visualizing the lama as Vajrasattva has a special purpose for the disciple.

According to the Theravadin way of devoting correctly to the virtuous friend, you respect and obey the abbot as if he were like Buddha. The Mahayana Paramitayana way is to look at the essence of the virtuous friend as Buddha. Now, according to the Mahayana tantra way of devoting to the virtuous friend, not only do you look at the essence of the virtuous friend as Buddha, but you visualize even the aspect as the pure form of Buddha. You stop your view of the virtuous friend as an ordinary person and then practice a pure view of the virtuous friend in the aspect of a buddha, in the form of a deity. Since we are practicing Mahayana tantra, the meditation involves the practice of pure appearance, in which you visualize the virtuous friend in the aspect of a buddha—in this case, Vajrasattva.

Transform your body, speech and mind, as well as your own merits of the three times, into clouds of offerings that decorate the entire universe, and then offer them without any clinging, in order to receive the permission to practice, or blessing, of Vajrasattva.

VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE WITH PROSTRATIONS

If there is enough space, in the one or two afternoon sessions, rather than sitting, you can do prostrations while reciting the Vajrasattva mantra. In these particular sessions it is easy to fall asleep, though in which session it is easy to fall asleep depends on the individual person. My suggestion is that in the one or two sessions after lunch, you do the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation with prostrations. In this way you will also be using your body to purify and to collect inconceivable merit. With each prostration, you will collect inconceivable merit. While doing the prostrations, you

still do the same meditation of purification, with nectar coming from Vajrasattva and purifying you. Visualize numberless buddhas in all directions, think that they are the guru in the aspect of Vajrasattva, then make the prostrations.

FOUR POWERFUL MEANS OF ACCUMULATING MERIT

Four powerful means of collecting extensive merit, good karma, are explained in the lam-rim teachings at the end of the topic of karma.

1. *The power of attitude.* The first is the power of the attitude, which means bodhicitta, through which we can collect infinite merit.

2. *The power of the object.* The second is the power of the object, and the highest or most powerful object is the virtuous friend. As I often mention, ordained sangha are a more powerful object with which to collect merit than the parents of this life; arhats are more powerful than ordained sangha. One bodhisattva is a much more powerful object than numberless arhats; one buddha is a much more powerful object than numberless bodhisattvas; and one virtuous friend is a much more powerful object than numberless buddhas. For you, one virtuous friend is the most powerful object with which to collect merit.

A Dharma connection is established the moment you make the decision that someone is your guru (not just a guru in general but your own guru) and recognize yourself as their disciple, and on the basis of this determination, receive even one verse of teaching or the oral transmission of a few syllables of a mantra. Even if from their side that virtuous friend is an ordinary person, your Dharma connection creates power and makes that person the most powerful one in your life. This is the person with whom you can create the most extensive merit.

Also, the power of any harmful action done in relation to these objects increases from your parents of this life up to the guru. The karma is so powerful that you can start to experience its result as sufferings, or problems, in *this* life.

There are three types of karma: karma that you create and see its result in this life; karma that you create and see its result in your next life; and karma that you create and see its result after many lifetimes.

With these powerful objects, you create the karma whose result you see in this life. Even if you cause a small harm—for example, show some slight disrespect—to one of these objects, from your parents up to the guru, because the object is so powerful you start to experience its result, suffering, in this life. And even if you perform a small good karma, offer a small service, to one of these objects, the good karma is so powerful that you start to experience its result, happiness, in this life.

I normally liken the guru-disciple relationship to putting two batteries together, which creates the power to give light. It is similar here. Making the decision in your mind and establishing a Dharma connection create the power; the Dharma connection makes the guru the most powerful object in your life.

If you visualize numberless buddhas, think that they are the guru in the aspect of Vajrasattva, and then make prostrations, you are prostrating to the most powerful object possible. Therefore, you collect the most extensive merit.

3. *Living in vows.* The third powerful means of collecting extensive merit is living in vows. If you are living in ordination or you are a lay person who lives in the five or eight lay vows, any merit you collect in your daily life becomes very powerful. Living in vows increases any merit that you collect in daily life.

I often mention the example given in the sutra, *Heaped Jewels*. On one hand, say every being in the three realms (desire, form and formless realms) becomes a wheel-turning king and each one makes a light offering to the buddhas with a Pacific-like ocean of butter and a wick like Mount Meru. (A wheel-turning king is the most powerful king. He has complete control over not just one country but one entire human continent. As a result of his past merit, his wealth and power are incomparable; no other king can match him. The teachings also explain that a wheel-turning king is able to fly around Mount Meru. Wheel-turning kings exist only in the times when the human life-span is 80,000 years. They existed at such times in the past.)

On the other hand, say one person living in ordination makes a tiny light offering to the buddhas with butter the size of a mustard seed and a wick the size of a hair. This person who is living in vows collects far greater merit than all those other beings of the three realms who became

wheel-turning kings and made such extensive light offerings to the Buddhas.

The Eight Mahayana Precepts

Therefore, if you are doing retreat, whether or not you have taken the five lay vows (though it is good if you have taken them), it is especially good if you can take the Eight Mahayana Precepts. If it is a long retreat, you can take both breakfast and lunch but then not eat after twelve o'clock.

According to His Holiness Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche, you can't drink juice after lunch, but I think you can have clear apple juice or any other kind of juice that is clear, without any pulp in it. Rinpoche said that you can't drink juice, but I think that if you check the fine details, the main point is whether the juice contains any substances that can become kaka in the stomach—or outside the stomach! I'm joking! I think you keep the vow more precisely if you drink clear juice that has no pulp in it.

Rinpoche mentioned juice but he didn't say anything about tea. I didn't get the opportunity at that time to ask about tea. I am talking here about milk tea. Usually I try to use a lot of water. I mean, I should do it every day, but on the days when I take the Eight Mahayana Precepts, I try to make the tea very watery, as light as possible. In this way the vow is kept more neatly. I'm not sure about Tibetan tea. Tibetan tea has butter and some has milk, some doesn't. It depends how the tea is made.

Theravadin monks don't drink milk tea. I'm not sure whether they drink it in the morning, but after twelve o'clock they don't drink milk tea. One time after I had been to Australia, I went to Sri Lanka with Thubten Yeshe, who was then a nun. I'm not sure where Lama Yeshe was at that time—perhaps teaching at the university in America. Thubten Yeshe was helping me as secretary-attendant in Australia. She had been to Sri Lanka before, and she suggested that since Sri Lanka was on the way from Australia to Nepal, we should go on pilgrimage to Kandy, where there is a holy relic of Buddha's tooth. Sri Lanka is not on the way from Australia to Nepal;

but, to keep the story short, I agreed to go.

We stopped one night in Colombo, then the next day we went to Kandy, where we stayed in a very old English hotel close to the temple that has the Buddha's tooth. In the morning I went to the temple. I took a copy of *Bodhicharyavatara* with me and read it aloud. I tried to read very loudly because every five minutes a group of tourists came into the temple and I thought they might hear it. After that I did some full-length prostrations. Because full-length prostrations are not traditional there, everybody was very curious. Some monks were watching me.

At the end, nobody was there except one man, the caretaker of the temple. He asked me to come with him, and I thought, "Where is he going to take me?" Thubten Yeshe wasn't there; she was in the hotel. The thought occurred to me that in India people are sometimes kidnapped and hanged; the kidnappers then make a fire below the body and produce oil from it. This thought came into my mind. I wasn't at all sure where he was going to take me. Anyway, he took me upstairs. Actually, I think the monks asked him to invite me upstairs before I left.

There were two monks upstairs, and they were very happy to meet a Tibetan monk. I think they had met other lamas in the past. They asked me, "Would you like milk or tea?" I said, "Tea." But from my point of view tea meant tea with milk not black tea. In India tea means with milk, so I said "tea" with the expectation of milk tea. I didn't have any other idea of tea. They then brought me black tea. From their point of view, tea meant black tea. This was good as they don't drink milk tea after 12 o'clock. By asking for tea, I succeeded despite myself. Anyway, this is just a story.

If you are drinking milk tea, make it as light as possible. I think the very strict way to keep the vow would be to drink just black tea, as the Theravadin monks do.

If you are taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts for an extended period, you can eat both breakfast and lunch. To keep the precept properly, however, you should not eat after twelve o'clock.

By taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts, you increase the

merit from the many virtuous practices you do during the retreat; the merit from each practice that you do is increased unbelievably. It is good to keep this in mind. It is very good to take the Eight Mahayana Precepts from time to time during your normal working life, but it is especially good to take them during retreat. The point here is that we are trying to purify our mind as powerfully as possible. The more we can purify and the more merit we can collect, the easier it will be for us to achieve enlightenment. Even though we don't have realizations of lam-rim at the moment, living in these vows is something that we can practice immediately. The teachings of the Buddha can be divided into two categories: scriptural understanding and realizations. Living in vows is part of the realizations of the teachings of the Buddha. Even though we don't have other realizations at the moment, this is something that we can do right now. This is the power of living in the vows.

4. *The power of phenomena.* The fourth power that helps to collect extensive merit is the power of phenomena. This means that in terms of giving, it is giving of Dharma that collects the most extensive merit. Teaching Dharma to other sentient beings, whether it is an oral transmission or a commentary, collects extensive merit. Through explaining one stanza, four lines, of Dharma to one sentient being, one collects much more merit than if one had given every one of the numberless sentient being in the desire, form and formless realms the whole world filled with gold.

These four powers—the power of the intention, the power of the object, the power of living in vows and the power of phenomena—are the means we can use to collect the most extensive merit, which means the most good karma, the most good luck.

VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE WITH PROSTRATIONS

Before discussing the four powers, I was talking about doing prostrations while reciting the Vajrasattva mantra. The most important point is the power of the object. You have to remember the guru and be aware that

the guru is oneness with Vajrasattva. You can practice this awareness while you are doing the prostrations and reciting the mantra.

You can count the mantras while you are doing the prostrations. Using a short mala, as the Chinese usually wear, is a very easy way to do this. Many people in Hong Kong and Singapore wear a short mala, but with beads as big as those in Six-armed Mahakala's big mala.

It's very good to do prostrations because then you are also using your body to collect merit. You work very hard and spend a lot of money to take care of your body, so now you are using it to create the cause of enlightenment. You are making it useful by using it to achieve enlightenment in order to enlighten numberless sentient beings. This gives meaning to and makes worthwhile all the expenses you have incurred to take care of your body.

Your parents also suffered so much to look after your body. For so many months while you were in the womb and for so many years afterwards, they sacrificed their lives to take care of your body. They bore many hardships for many years to care for your body. Now you are making their sacrifice meaningful. By using your body to practice Dharma, you purify obstacles and collect merit in order to have realizations of the path to enlightenment. This gives meaning to your parents' sacrifice; it gives meaning to their suffering so much and creating so much negative karma for so many years in order to take care of you. What you are doing here now—using your body to practice Dharma, to do Vajrasattva retreat and prostrations—gives meaning to all the time and effort they spent on you. You were the sole focus of their attention, day and night, for so many years. And they incurred many expenses in taking care of you, using money they earned with much hardship after many years of study, starting from kindergarten, struggling to find a job and so forth. You are now giving meaning to all the effort that they put into caring for you.

Actually, my motivation was not to talk about this topic—my plan was to talk about the hell realms, our past residence, and the hell sufferings. So I think it is now time to go to bed!

WHY IS IT DIFFICULT TO PRACTICE DHARMA?

What makes it difficult for us to practice Dharma? Dharma comes very

naturally to some people. They find it very easy to practice, and Dharma is oneness with their life. Like water flowing, Dharma practice comes very naturally to them; they do not find it hard. Many of us, however, find it difficult to practice Dharma. The obstacles are not outside. The obstacles that make it difficult for us to practice Dharma are not outside; the obstacles are our own mind, or within our own mind. It is our attitude, our way of thinking, that makes it difficult for us to practice Dharma.

If you are not concerned about the future but only concerned about this life, about your present comfort and happiness, you will find it difficult to practice Dharma. Your attitude, your way of thinking, your concern for what is happening right now rather than in the future, make it difficult to practice Dharma. It looks as if the difficulty comes from the side of Dharma, but the difficulty comes from the side of your own mind. Difficulties in life have to do with how you make decisions in your life.

With one way of making decisions, it becomes very easy and natural to practice Dharma; with another way of making decisions, you find it impossible or very difficult to practice Dharma. It all has to do with your decisions in life, whether you are concerned about your comfort and pleasure right now or about your long-term happiness; whether you are concerned about yourself or about others. This determines whether or not you find it difficult to practice Dharma. When you are concerned about yourself, it is difficult for you to practice Dharma, to make your actions become Dharma. When you are concerned about others, however, Dharma comes naturally. Whether you are doing retreat or not doing retreat, your life naturally becomes Dharma. If your concern is your own immediate happiness, you find many obstacles to practicing Dharma, to living in vows.

You need to switch your concern from now to the future, to the more important long-term happiness of enlightenment, liberation from *samsara*, or at least a good rebirth in your next life. This life is very short. The appearance of this life that we have now is not long; it's very brief. And not only is it short, but it can stop at any time. If you think about this in your daily life, there will be no obstacles to your Dharma practice. There will be no obstacles to the activities of your daily life becoming Dharma, and you will have no obstacles to any Dharma practice that you do, such as taking and living in vows. The obstacles appear to come from outside, from other people. It seems that this person and that person are

making your life difficult. However, it all comes from your own mind. Even though it appears that way, if you analyze the situation, you find that it all has to do with your own attitude, your own way of thinking.

THE THREE TYPES OF SUFFERING

This samsara, these aggregates, this association of body and mind, is caused by karma and delusions. Because these aggregates are created by the impure cause of karma and delusions, they are in the nature of suffering. This is why these aggregates experience suffering.

That these aggregates are contaminated by the seed of disturbing thoughts could be one meaning of “pervasive.” Meeting a certain condition causes delusion to arise, then again one suffers. When we meet an object of desire, for example, the emotional mind of desire arises and then tortures us. The arising of these disturbing, emotional thoughts is one suffering. The main suffering for most people is not hunger, thirst, heat or cold but emotional suffering. The main suffering is mental problems, sickness of the mind. This is what causes so many people to commit suicide, despite their having many friends and much wealth. Most of our suffering comes from emotional problems, from mental sickness, not from hunger and thirst or heat and cold.

These aggregates are contaminated by the seed of disturbing thoughts. On top of that, these aggregates are under the control of karma and delusions. This means that when they meet certain objects of the senses, there is an experience of pleasure, but when we analyze that pleasure, we discover that it is only suffering. Our hallucinated mind sees that feeling as pleasure, and we believe it to be pleasure; but in the view of the detached mind, in the view of the mind of Dharma wisdom, that feeling is only suffering.

The mental pain from desire, anger, jealousy and so forth and physical pain are the suffering of suffering. When these aggregates encounter different conditions, we experience different types of suffering. And even the feeling of indifference is suffering, because these aggregates are contaminated by the seed of disturbing thoughts. In *Liberation in the Palm*, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo explains that feelings of indifference are counted as part of pervasive suffering. Any feeling that arises through contact with sense objects is only in the nature of suffering.

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

There is no happiness, no pleasure, in samsara that we have never experienced. There is no new pleasure to be experienced. We have experienced every samsaric pleasure numberless times. And there is no new samsaric suffering to experience; we have experienced them all numberless times. It is just because we do not remember our past lives that when we encounter problems, it seems to us that we are experiencing the problem for the first time. It is not for the first time. We have experienced that problem numberless times in our past lives. Think, "This time I *must* free myself forever from this samsara, from this ocean of suffering that I have experienced numberless times during beginningless rebirths."

Even if you achieve this, however, you have still not found the real meaning of your life. Even an ant has this attitude of seeking happiness for the self. Even tiny insects that can only be seen through a microscope have this thought. Ants keep themselves unbelievably busy with this thought of seeking happiness for the self; it causes them to run up and down non-stop to collect food. If this is your attitude, there is no difference between you and an ant.

The purpose of your life is to free the numberless other beings from all their suffering and its causes and bring them from happiness to happiness to the peerless happiness of full enlightenment. This is the real purpose of your life. Benefiting other sentient beings is the real purpose of being alive as a human being. Being alive for an hour, a minute or even a second is for the purpose of achieving enlightenment in order to enlighten all sentient beings.

Cherishing the I opens the door to all problems, to all sufferings. The minute you cherish the I, you have a problem in your life. The minute you cherish the I, there is unhappiness in your life; there no peace or satisfaction in your heart. Cherishing the I is itself the problem. It creates problems; it opens the door to problems. Cherishing others, on the other hand, opens the door to all qualities and to all happiness, including enlightenment. The minute you cherish others, you open the door not only to your own happiness up to enlightenment but to the happiness of all other living beings. Why?

As a result of you, the one person, generating bodhicitta, the thought that cherishes others, the numberless hell beings will be liberated

from all their sufferings and achieve all happiness. Your bodhicitta will make numberless hell beings achieve enlightenment and all happiness. The bodhicitta of you, just one person, will cause numberless hungry ghosts to achieve enlightenment. Your bodhicitta will free numberless animal beings from all their sufferings and cause them to achieve enlightenment, which includes all other happiness. The bodhicitta of you, just one person, will free numberless human beings from all their problems and cause them to achieve enlightenment. Your bodhicitta will free numberless asura and sura beings from all their sufferings and cause them to achieve enlightenment. And the bodhicitta of you, the one person, will also cause numberless intermediate state beings to achieve enlightenment.

Without talking about all animals, let's just consider one type of animal, fish. The bodhicitta of you, the one person, will free numberless fish from all the sufferings of samsara and cause them to achieve enlightenment. Even this is wonderful. It is incredible that even one type of animal, the numberless fish that live in the ocean, will become enlightened because of your bodhicitta. This is wonderful! And even in the animal realm, there are countless numbers of each different type of animal.

Your bodhicitta, your thought of cherishing others, opens the door to happiness for numberless other living beings. The bodhicitta of you, the one person, is the source of happiness for the rest of the numberless living beings. Therefore, the situation is urgent. It is unbearable for you to delay generating bodhicitta for a day, for an hour or for even a minute. It is unbearable for you not to have this realization. Because other sentient beings are suffering so much and they need happiness so much, they need you to change your attitude from cherishing the I into cherishing others. This can't wait. The need for your bodhicitta is a million times more urgent than a heart attack victim's need for emergency treatment in a hospital. The need for your bodhicitta is a million, billion, trillion times more urgent. You must change your attitude from cherishing the I into cherishing others.

Also, if there is just one sentient being in your life whom you don't cherish—for example, someone who doesn't like you and always criticizes you and puts you down—there is no enlightenment. If you don't cherish this person, you can't achieve enlightenment. If you cherish this person, you can achieve enlightenment. Therefore, this person is the

most precious one in your life. This one sentient being is the most precious in your life, because by cherishing that person you can achieve enlightenment. You can cease all the defilements of your mind, liberate yourself from all suffering and achieve peerless happiness with all the realizations; and you can then enlighten the numberless other sentient beings. Therefore, this person is the most precious one in your life.

Since all suffering comes from cherishing the I, the I is to be renounced forever. Since he or she is the source of all your happiness, this one person is the object to be cherished forever. And every single sentient being is exactly the same as this one person. Every single one of them is the source of your happiness and extremely precious to you.

All your happiness of the three times comes from good karma. Your good karma is the action of buddha, or came from buddha; buddha came from bodhisattva; bodhisattva came from bodhicitta; bodhicitta came from great compassion; and great compassion is generated in dependence upon the kindness of the existence of suffering sentient beings. Simply by existing, suffering sentient beings help you to develop compassion, to be liberated from the oceans of suffering, and to become enlightened. Therefore, you receive all your past, present and future happiness, including enlightenment, by the kindness of each sentient being. Therefore, each sentient being is the most precious object in your life, more precious than Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, which come from each sentient being. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are the objects in which you take refuge in order to be free from all the defilements and all the sufferings of samsara, especially the lower realms. They are the objects to which you pray and in relation to which you collect merit in order to achieve realizations of the path to enlightenment. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha come from each sentient being; they depend on the kindness of the existence of each suffering sentient being. Therefore, each sentient being is the most precious object in your life.

In your life, there is nobody to work for except other sentient beings. There is no purpose in living your life except to work for sentient beings. Any work other than that for sentient beings is meaningless.

Now, what sentient beings want is happiness and what they do not want is suffering. So, what should you do? Your job is to free all sentient beings from all their suffering and its causes and bring them to enlightenment. And you should do this by yourself *alone*. There is no other

means to do that except by first achieving full enlightenment yourself. To achieve enlightenment, you need to actualize the steps of the path to enlightenment; to do that, you need to purify the negative karma and defilements, which are obstacles to realizations. It is for this reason that you are going to take the Vajrasattva je-nang. In your heart feel that you are taking the initiation purely for the numberless other sentient beings, who have been your own kind mother numberless times.

Now we'll do a five-minute initiation! Well, maybe a little longer.

OBJECTS OF REFUGE

Absolute Sangha are those with the wisdom that directly perceives emptiness, which causes the cessation of all defilements and suffering. You label “Sangha” on that. When you take refuge in Sangha, your main focus should be that they are your guides, or helpers, who are helping to liberate you from samsara, from all the defilements.

Generally, we can talk about absolute Buddha and conventional Buddha. The absolute Buddha is the dharmakaya, the holy mind of wisdom. The conventional Buddha is the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya aspect Buddhas. Dharma also has conventional Dharma and absolute Dharma. Conventional Dharma is the scriptures that explain the three levels of the paths—the Hinayana, Mahayana Paramitayana and Mahayana Tantrayana paths. Conventional Sangha means four members who are living purely in full ordination but who do not have realization of absolute Dharma. Taking refuge normally includes taking refuge in all these.

[The initiation was given.]

Sunday, February 7 (A)

AFTERNOON: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Rinpoche: Are there one or two questions?

Nick Ribush: In the Vajrasattva sadhana, Lama Yeshe said to visualize either Heruka or Vajradhara as the object of refuge. Then, before the nine-round breathing meditation is done, Lama said to absorb the object of refuge and yourself appear as Heruka or Vajradhara, according to what you had visualized. After the absorption, you have the clear appearance of yourself as Heruka or Vajradhara, but without holding divine pride. If you haven't had a Highest Yoga Tantra initiation, what should you do at that point?

Rinpoche: Then you hold ordinary divine pride. Not special divine pride, but ordinary divine pride, whose continuity has no beginning and which thinks not only that the I is not merely labeled but also that "I'm ordinary."

Nick: Rinpoche, my question is, because you are not supposed to visualize yourself as a deity if you haven't had the initiation, do you then just visualize yourself in your ordinary form?

Rinpoche: You can generate yourself as an American guy or an Australian guy! I think Lama's explanation might be based on people who have received a Highest Tantra initiation such as Heruka. If you haven't received a great initiation, you can think that the refuge merit field, whether you have visualized Heruka or Vajradhara, melts into light and is absorbed at the point between your eyebrows. This is what is normally explained in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* and in other commentaries. The texts explain that even if you cannot visualize the merit field melting into light and absorbing into you through your crown, you can think that it absorbs into you at the point between your eyebrows and then blesses your body, speech and mind. The blessing can be received in this way.

In the case of the Guru Shakyamuni Buddha meditation, when I checked with Denma Lochö Rinpoche, Rinpoche said that even if you haven't received a great initiation, which means from one of the lower tantras or from Highest Yoga Tantra, you can still visualize yourself as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. This is an exceptional case because Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is the founder of the present Buddhadharma. This was Rinpoche's answer, though I'm not sure whether every lama would say the same thing. I asked the question because in the early Kopan courses we started this tradition of becoming Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. You become Guru Shakyamuni Buddha for a little while, and then become a sentient being again. For a little while you are high, and then you have to come down....

This was Denma Lochö Rinpoche's answer. When I then asked about visualizing yourself as Medicine Buddha, Rinpoche said that in the case of Medicine Buddha, you might first need to receive a great initiation.

I think that Lama's advice was for people who had already received a great initiation of Highest Yoga Tantra, such as Heruka.

Student: If we were at the empowerment last night, are we empowered to visualize ourselves as Vajrasattva if we haven't received a Highest Yoga Tantra initiation?

Rinpoche: No, you are only permitted to visualize your nose as Vajrasattva! The blessing of the holy body, holy speech and holy mind, which is called a je-nang, or permission to practice, is actually supposed to come after a great initiation, according to Lama Tsong Khapa's *Great Graduated Path of Tantra* and the main tantric scriptures. This short initiation, the permission to practice, is based on having first received a great initiation. This is why the meditation during the initiation involves generating yourself as a deity.

Of course, this is not strictly true because during the preparation for a great initiation, there is the inner initiation. After the bodhisattva and tantric vows are granted, in the case of Highest Yoga Tantra, or just the bodhisattva vows in the case of the lower tantras, an inner initiation is given to generate the disciple as the son of the vajra master. The term "son" is not used in dependence upon the characteristics of the body but of the mind. This term is used because it is normally the son who becomes the king. The daughter becomes the queen, but does not

become the king. Because this example is applied here, the disciple is called “the son of the vajra master,” but it has nothing to do with the body.

The ordinary form of the disciple melts into light and goes through the mother’s body into the womb, where the disciple then generates into the deity. Before this, however, the disciple has not necessarily received a great initiation.

Initiations like the Vajrasattva je-nang should be based on generating oneself as the deity. The foundation should be the disciple generating as the deity after having taken the vows. On that basis, the blessings of the deity’s holy body, holy speech and holy mind are then granted. This is why, generally speaking, you should have previously taken a great initiation, which permits you to generate yourself as a deity and to practice tantra, either the yoga with signs or the yoga without signs of the lower tantras or the generation and completion stages of Highest Yoga Tantra.

Therefore, if you have previously taken a great initiation, either of one of the lower tantras or of Highest Yoga Tantra, you are qualified to receive the complete blessing, the complete je-nang, when you take any of the blessings of the deity’s holy body, holy speech or holy mind because you are allowed to do all the meditations of generating yourself as the deity and so forth.

Otherwise, without a great initiation, you receive some blessing rather than the actual je-nang, and the blessing that you receive depends on the qualities of the lama and on the devotion of you, the disciple. In dependence upon the disciple’s devotion and the lama’s qualities, the disciple receives at least some blessing, some protection. The lama visualizing the disciple as the deity can give some protection to the disciple. Through the disciple’s devotion and the lama’s qualities, the disciple receives some blessing of the deity, but not the complete je-nang. If you can take a great initiation, it means that when you take all these short initiations, or blessings of the deity, you then receive the complete je-nang, or permission to practice.

Of course, after you have taken a great initiation, either of the lower tantras or Highest Yoga Tantra, you have to attempt as much as possible to keep the samaya vows. To be able to keep everything purely, first of all you need stable realization of the three principal aspects of the path to enlightenment. With stable concentration, you then practice the yoga of

the generation stage, in which you look at everything as pure. You look at your own body as the deity's holy body, the place as the deity's mandala and so forth. On the basis of the lam-rim, you are able to keep vows, including tantric vows, more purely.

With stable realization of the generation stage, everything appears to us as pure—our own body and those of others appear as the deity's holy body, and the place appears as the mandala of the deity. By looking at everything as pure, as manifestations of the deity, you then see everything as pure. Without this realization, we constantly collect negativities because in every second we see so many objects as ordinary. After discussing this point, two geshe reached the conclusion that it is better not to practice tantra because otherwise you collect so many negativities in each second through seeing objects as ordinary. Since it is impossible to keep difficult vows such as seeing everything as pure, they thought it better not to take a great initiation of tantra. Their conclusion is that taking a tantric initiation creates more obstacles to achieving enlightenment.

Lama Atisha responded that the view of the two geshe was like a blind yak eating grass. When a blind yak eats grass, because it cannot see all the grass that is available, it eats just a small part of what is there. Lama Atisha said that the two geshe made their comment because of their lack of knowledge that there is a powerful practice of purification called Vajrasattva with which you can purify these negativities.

Lama Atisha explained, "Practicing Vajrasattva is like throwing one stone and chasing away a hundred birds." Vajrasattva, a powerful purification practice, can be used to purify at one time all the negativities collected from breaking the subtle tantric vows, which are very difficult to keep. Even though you have collected negativities like a car collects dust when left out in the open, Lama Atisha advises that you can wipe them all out at once by doing Vajrasattva practice.

Therefore, the conclusion is that even though we are unable to keep all the tantric vows, especially the subtle ones, after we have taken a great initiation, if we do the powerful practice of Vajrasattva we can still achieve enlightenment.

THE RARITY OF TANTRA

Generally speaking, most of the people who take a great initiation cannot

keep every single tantric vow, but it is a great and very rare opportunity. It is just this one time that we have a precious human body. And we have not only a precious human body but a perfect human body qualified by eight freedoms and ten riches, which is much more rare. It is just this one time that we have this, so it is just this one time that we have the opportunity to practice Dharma. Being able to be a human being again in our next life depends on our creating the cause to be born human, which means living in pure morality. It is only on the basis of this that we can receive a human body, and there are many obstacles to living purely in vows. There are many obstacles from within our mind, and because of these there are also many external obstacles. To achieve a perfect human body we need to create all the causes for all eighteen qualities, and it is extremely difficult to create these causes.

On top of this, meeting the Buddhadharmā, even the Hinayana teachings, is extremely rare. It is even more rare and difficult to meet the Mahayana teachings, which enable us to cease not only the gross defilements but even the subtle ones; which contain the skillful means of achieving enlightenment. It is especially rare to meet the Mahayana tantra, which has the skillful means of achieving enlightenment in one lifetime, and even more rare to meet Highest Yoga Tantra, which contains the greatest skillful means of all. Through practicing Highest Yoga Tantra, we can achieve enlightenment in the brief lifetime of the degenerate age or even within a few years.

Meeting tantric teachings is much rarer than meeting the Mahayana Paramitayana teachings. As often mentioned during initiations, the *uttamvara* flower grows only when Buddha descends on this earth, only in that fortunate time. It does not grow during all the other eons. When Buddha passes away, this flower then decays. This flower is used as an example for the rarity of Buddha's descent and of our meeting Buddha. Meeting tantric teachings, however, is much rarer than Buddha's descent in this world and our meeting Buddha. This example is normally mentioned during initiations to help us to generate happiness at having met the tantric teachings.

The door to enter Buddhadharmā is refuge and the door to enter tantra is initiation. It is also mentioned during initiations that of the one thousand buddhas who will descend in this fortunate eon, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is the first one to teach tantra. Most of the other

buddhas will not teach tantra. The seventh one, Gyalwa Senge Nada, who is an embodiment of Lama Tsong Khapa, will teach tantra, but after that, so many buddhas will not teach tantra. The last buddha promised to teach whatever Dharma the previous buddhas taught, so for this reason, it is assumed that the last buddha will also teach tantra. It is not that only Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and the other two buddhas know tantra and the rest of the buddhas do not. It is because the sentient beings who live during the times of the other buddhas do not have the karma to meet and to practice tantra.

Analyzing in this way makes us realize how fortunate we are. It enables us to recognize our incredible opportunity and to appreciate the good karma that we must have created in the past. It then inspires us to practice tantra. It gives us the courage to take tantric vows and to attempt to practice tantra. When our mind is weak and we feel unable to take initiation and practice tantric vows, we can strengthen our minds by clearly recognizing how rare this one-time opportunity is and how fortunate we are to have it.

Sorry, I talked for a long time.

Student: Could you give some instructions as to how you should practice if you have not had an initiation and cannot visualize yourself as a deity?

Rinpoche: You can visualize Vajrasattva on your crown or in front of you and do the meditation. Not being able to visualize yourself as the deity doesn't mean that you do not have an object of concentration. Your meditation object is Vajrasattva. When you do the practice, Vajrasattva is the main object of meditation.

Christina Lundberg: If you took the Vajrasattva initiation as a great initiation, during the mantra recitation and the sadhana, do you see yourself as your own special deity saying the Vajrasattva mantra?

Rinpoche: If you have taken a great initiation, you can see yourself as Vajrasattva. If the Vajrasattva is from Highest Yoga Tantra, which means embracing the wisdom mother, you need to have had a great initiation of Highest Yoga Tantra. A lower tantra initiation is not enough. The single aspect of Vajrasattva, which means the father alone, is a lower tantra aspect, but I'm not sure whether it belongs to Charya Tantra or Kriya Tantra. It needs to be checked. Kriya Tantra has three divisions: lotus

race, tathagata race and vajra race; I think lotus race is the lowest division. To visualize yourself as a Kriya Tantra deity, I'm not sure whether, strictly speaking, you need to have received the initiation of that deity or of one from a higher race. It is something that also needs to be checked.

If the single aspect of Vajrasattva belongs to Kriya Tantra, I think it would be okay to visualize yourself as Vajrasattva if you had received a great Chenrezig initiation. If it is Charya Tantra, however, I don't think that a great Chenrezig initiation qualifies you to do that. It needs to be checked.

If you have received a Yamantaka or Kalachakra initiation, for example, you can visualize yourself as Vajrasattva father-mother. In a great initiation of Highest Yoga Tantra, you visualize Vajrasattva during the vajra master initiation. Therefore, if you have received a Highest Yoga Tantra initiation, you can definitely visualize yourself as Vajrasattva father-mother and recite the mantra at your heart.

As I explained before, having received a great initiation in the past means that you are fully qualified, so you actually receive the complete je-nang, the permission to practice a deity. Otherwise, in dependence upon the lama's qualities and your devotion, you receive some blessing of the deity; but you do not receive the complete permission to practice, the complete blessing of the deity. This is always specified by the lama during the initiation.

Actually, the strict way of giving je-nangs is by restricting them to people who have received a great initiation. People who haven't received a great initiation are not meant to hear the meditations of generating themselves as a deity. There is a tradition of certain je-nangs—the initiations of long-life deities, for example—being given publicly by great lamas, such as the tutors of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. During the je-nang, however, the lamas specify the meditations that the disciples are and are not allowed to do if they have not received a great initiation. There is a tradition of giving je-nangs in this way, but to be really strict, only people who have received a great initiation should be there. It seems to mainly depend on the lama. I think from the initiations I've given, I'll be making many visits to the hell realms.

The permission to practice given last night does not qualify you to visualize yourself as Vajrasattva; it was not a great initiation. To visualize yourself as Vajrasattva father-mother you need to have received a great

initiation, which involves the vase, secret, wisdom and word initiations. These four initiations definitely plant the seeds of the four kayas, which we need to achieve in order to do perfect work for all sentient beings. At the very least you need to receive the first one, the vase initiation, which gives you permission to visualize yourself as a deity. Unless you receive that, whether from the lower tantras or from Highest Yoga Tantra, you cannot visualize yourself as a deity.

For example, His Holiness Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche used to advise that it would be better for people to take the great Chenrezig initiation before they do *nyung-näs*, because they are then more qualified to do nyung-nä practice. Their nyung-nä practice then becomes perfect. Rinpoche emphasized that I should give the great Chenrezig initiation before nyung-näs. In one way giving the initiation also helps the lama to keep the vow not to reveal the secrets of tantra. There is no question of this with the great lamas, who are enlightened beings, but it helps Mickey Mouse lamas like me.

3

Sunday, February 7 (B)

EVENING: FINAL VAJRASATTVA SESSION

MOTIVATION FOR THIRTY-FIVE BUDDHAS PRACTICE

“The purpose of my life is to free all sentient beings from all their suffering and bring them to full enlightenment. To do this, I myself must achieve enlightenment, so I must actualize the steps of the path to enlightenment. Therefore, I need to purify all my defilements, negative karmas and downfalls.”

Think of the lower realms, of the hell realms. “If I were now in a hell realm, how would it be? I would be totally overwhelmed by suffering, by the heaviest suffering of samsara. I would have no freedom to practice Dharma.”

Then think, “Even though I’m not dead yet, my death could happen at any moment. At any moment, I could be there in the most terrifying hell realm, the Unbearable Suffering State. Therefore, without even a second’s delay, I must purify all my defilements, all my negative karmas, all my downfalls. Therefore, I’m going to do prostrations with the meditation-recitation of the Thirty-five Buddhas, *The Confession of Downfalls*, to cause all the happiness up to enlightenment to all sentient beings; in other words, to benefit all sentient beings.”

Your attitude should be one of wishing to purify, but at the end expand your attitude to include others with the wish to benefit all sentient beings by bringing them all the happiness up to enlightenment. With the strong wish to purify in order to benefit others, you then do the prostrations. Even if we do just a few prostrations, if we do them with this strong thought of purifying in order to benefit others, each prostration and recitation of each of the Thirty-five Buddhas’ names becomes extremely powerful.

FEELING PURIFIED AT THE END OF THE PROSTRATIONS

After the prostrations are finished, it is very important to generate strong faith that you have been completely purified of all defilements, negative karma and downfalls. You are completely purified by beams emitted from all the holy objects in the merit field and by the power of the Thirty-five Buddhas' names. The names of the Thirty-five Buddhas are unbelievably powerful; reciting each name once purifies so many eons of negative karma. Reciting the name of the first Buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha, just once has the power to purify 80,000 eons of negative karma. You can think of this from time to time during the prostrations, but it is especially important to generate this strong faith of having been purified at the end. In a commentary to Vajrasattva, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo mentions that it is important to generate strong faith when Guru Vajrasattva explains that the negative karma has now been purified. How much negative karma is purified is determined by how much faith we can generate. Our mind creates the negative karma, but our mind can also purify it.

Of course, there is a dedication already included within the Thirty-five Buddhas' prayer, but at the very end, when you have stopped prostrating, you can say, "Whatever merit I have collected by doing prostrations, making offerings, confessing, rejoicing, requesting the Buddhas to have stable lives and to turn the Dharma wheel, I dedicate it all for sentient beings to achieve enlightenment."

CALLING THE GURU FROM AFAR

When you recite *Calling the Guru From Afar*, it's not just a question of reading the words; you have to do the meditation. Visualize your root virtuous friend on your crown, with the awareness that he encompasses all the buddhas. It is with this awareness that you should do the practice *Calling the Guru from Afar*. Meditate on the kindness of the guru and make a strong request to the guru, just like a child calling for its mother. Just as children totally rely upon their mother and appeal to them for help, make a strong request to the guru. Visualize Lama Yeshe or your root virtuous friend on your crown, then recite the prayer.

At the end, recite the verse, “May I never rise heresy even for one second in the actions of the glorious guru. May I see whatever actions are done as pure. With this devotion may I receive the blessings of the guru in my heart.” This is an extremely important prayer, because generating negative thoughts such as anger, heresy and so forth is the heaviest obstacle to achieving your own success and the success of others. Your own success refers to your achieving enlightenment, with cessation of all the faults of the mind and completion of all the realizations. The success of others refers to your bringing all other sentient beings to enlightenment. Since generating negative thoughts towards the guru is the heaviest obstacle, this prayer is extremely important.

Those who have received a great initiation of Highest Yoga Tantra can meditate here on the guru entering the heart. Or you can meditate that the guru melts into light, absorbs into you at the point between your eyebrows and blesses your body, speech and mind.

GENERATING YOURSELF AS HERUKA

At this point [in the long Vajrasattva sadhana, after having taken refuge], those who have received a great initiation of Heruka can generate themselves as Heruka, as Lama describes. That is up to the individual.

MOTIVATION FOR VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE

Next we have to generate a pure motivation for doing the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation so that our practice becomes pure Dharma. This can be a continuation of the motivation we generated before the prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas.

Generate strong renunciation of this life, a strong wish to cut attachment to this life, to samsaric happiness and perfections. Generate renunciation of samsara by thinking very strongly of impermanence and death, that your death could happen at any moment, which means that you could be in the lower realms at any moment. Therefore, you must purify right now, without even a second’s delay. And you must purify not just for your own happiness but for that of all sentient beings. Try to generate some feeling of bodhicitta, the altruistic thought to achieve enlightenment

for the sake of other sentient beings. Think, “I must free the numberless sentient beings, who are the source of all my past, present and future happiness, from all their sufferings and bring them to enlightenment. Therefore, I’m going to do the Vajrasattva meditation practice.”

Simply to feel, “Oh, I’m going to be reborn in the lower realms; therefore, I must purify,” is rather self-centered. Even though that thought does happen, it should somehow lead to your practicing Vajrasattva for others. You should feel in your heart that you are doing the Vajrasattva practice for the numberless other sentient beings.

There is, perhaps, no need to recite “I myself will become Heruka for the sake of all living beings...” In its place you can have a very short break, just to again strengthen your bodhicitta motivation for doing the Vajrasattva practice. Perhaps you can meditate for three seconds on renunciation, two seconds on bodhicitta and half a second on emptiness! Just leave a very short silence in which you generate a strong motivation of impermanence and death, and bodhicitta. Then simply start visualizing Vajrasattva.

RINGING THE BELL AT THE END OF THE MANTRA RECITATION

At the end of the mantra recitation, you can recite the Vajrasattva mantra together and ring the bell. When we do sadhanas, in some parts the ringing of the bell is an offering and in other parts, such as here with the Vajrasattva mantra, it is to meditate on emptiness. The sound of the bell is to remind us that the way all phenomena exist is by being merely labeled by mind, so nothing has inherent existence. Even though everything appears inherently existent to us, no phenomenon has inherent existence. Every phenomenon is totally empty. With this awareness, you ring the bell and meditate on the meaning of the sound of the bell. And the bell itself signifies wisdom, emptiness. Also, in emptiness, there is no I, no creator of negative karma; there is no action of creating negative karma; there is no negative karma created. Meditate also on this.

THINKING THAT THE NEGATIVE KARMAS ARE PURIFIED

When Guru Vajrasattva says, “Your degenerated commitments are now cleansed and purified,” generate very strong faith that, as I mentioned before, all your defilements, negative karma and degenerated samaya vows have been completely purified, just as Vajrasattva says.

To be more specific, you can also think that you have completely purified all the negative karma you have collected with your body, speech and mind during beginningless rebirths; that you have completely purified all the pratimoksha, bodhisattva and tantric vows you have broken during beginningless rebirths; and that you have completely purified the heaviest negative karmas, those in relation to the guru, collected during beginningless rebirths. Try to see your mind as totally free and pure.

MAKING THE VOW NOT TO COMMIT NEGATIVE ACTIONS AGAIN

Before Vajrasattva absorbs within you, to complete the remedy of the four powers, you apply the power not to commit negative actions again by saying, “From now on I will abandon all the negative karmas that I can. The subtle ones, which are difficult to give up, I will abandon for either one day, one hour, one minute or at least a few seconds.”

ABSORPTION

Because of the commitment you have made, your crown-Vajrasattva is extremely pleased with you. Vajrasattva melts into light and absorbs within you. Those who know the Highest Yoga Tantra meditation of the guru absorbing into the heart can do that at this point.

The three doors mentioned here refer not to your gross body, speech and mind but to your subtle body, speech and mind. The body and mind have three levels—gross, subtle and extremely subtle. Here it is referring to the extremely subtle level. This is also a secret subject, but in any case, I have already mentioned it.

DEDICATION

When you do Vajrasattva meditation in daily life, you normally do the dedication at this point. You do the dedication with awareness that you; the action of dedicating; the merits; the goal to which you dedicate the merits, enlightenment; and the sentient beings for whom you dedicate are empty of inherent existence. By looking at all these as empty, you then dedicate, “Due to these merits may I achieve Guru Vajrasattva’s enlightenment and lead all sentient beings to Vajrasattva’s enlightenment.”

Or you can look at everything as a dream. You, the action of dedicating, the merits, enlightenment, the sentient beings—everything is like a dream. It’s like you are doing the dedication in a dream. When you do this, the understanding that naturally comes in your heart is that nothing is real, nothing exists from its own side. You then fulfill the definition of a pure dedication. As mentioned in *The Seven-point Thought Transformation*, “Abandon food mixed with poison.” What is the poison here? The poison is the concept of inherent existence. When your dedication is not mixed with this poison of the concept of inherent existence, it becomes pure.

Another way to dedicate is to do what I normally do—say “merely labeled this” and “merely labeled that.” Covering everything with the term “merely labeled” has the same effect; the understanding that comes into your heart is that everything is empty. You use the words “merely labeled,” but it causes you to understand that everything is empty.

You can do this dedication here or at the very end of the session.

“Due to the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and other sentient beings, may Jaffa’s father, who has passed away, all those whose names have been given to me, who rely upon me and for whom I have promised to pray, and all those who have passed away immediately be liberated from the lower realms, never ever be reborn in the lower realms. May they always receive a perfect human body with the four Mahayana Dharma wheels (which means always having all the necessary conditions to practice Mahayana Buddhism, such as being born in the right environment, in the right family and with the opportunity of meeting and practicing Mahayana Buddhism and actualizing the path). By

being ordained in the teachings of the Buddha as a child, may they not waste their lives from the time of their youth. By meeting perfectly qualified Mahayana virtuous friends and only pleasing their teachers' holy minds, may they be guided by them. Because of that, may they train their minds well in the three principles of the path and then complete the ripening of their mind in the generation stage and in the liberating path of the graduated completion stage, and thereby achieve the unified state of Vajradhara, which has seven qualities, including continuous compassion, great bliss and so forth. May they quickly achieve all this.

“Whenever I hear that a sentient being is sick, may my hearing about it cause that sentient being to immediately be healed. Whenever I hear that a sentient being has died, may my hearing about it cause that sentient being to immediately be liberated from the lower realms and reincarnate in a pure land, where they can become enlightened, or receive a perfect human body in all their future lifetimes and achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible. If the being is simply born a human being, they may have no opportunity to practice Dharma, so may they receive a perfect human body and then achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible by meeting a perfectly qualified Mahayana guru and the Mahayana teachings.”

Monday, February 8

MORNING: EIGHT MAHAYANA PRECEPTS CEREMONY

THE EIGHT MAHAYANA PRECEPTS

Taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts [see Lama Zopa Rinpoche's *The Direct and Unmistaken Method*, Wisdom Publications] today is for your happiness and the happiness of all other sentient beings from now up to enlightenment. Taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts becomes the means to accomplish all that. In regard even to your own happiness, relying upon or practicing this is of the utmost need. Your need to do this practice is a billion times more urgent than your need to go as quickly as possible to a hospital when you have a heart attack. You should feel an urgent need to do this practice for your own happiness, from now up to enlightenment, as well as for the happiness of the numberless other sentient beings.

Living in these eight precepts means abstaining from eight negative karmas that harm you and other sentient beings directly or indirectly. You can understand that abstaining from these eight negative karmas naturally becomes a source of happiness. It is a root of happiness for you and for other sentient beings.

SPECIFIC BENEFITS OF THE INDIVIDUAL PRECEPTS

Explanations are given of the general benefits of the eight precepts and of the specific benefits of the individual precepts. From those two, today we will concentrate on the specific benefits of the individual vows.

The benefits of avoiding taking the life of others, or killing. This is the basic cause of long life—you will live long and not have sicknesses in all your future lives. No matter how many hospitals you visit and how much treatment you have, if you haven't created the good karma from your side—for example, by living in the morality of abstaining from killing or

harming others—you cannot have a long life no matter how many hospitals and other health organizations or medicines exist. No matter how many hospitals, doctors and medicines there are in the world, having a long life is based on first having good karma. It is all based on morality. There has to be good karma from the side of the person. Without this, no matter what is set up externally, nothing can help give someone a long life. External factors can help only on the basis of the person having good karma, such as that from practicing the morality of abstaining from killing.

Many diseases are based on this negative karma of killing, including even the inability to digest food. Many people have problems with their digestion throughout their whole life. This sickness is not the only one caused by the negative karma of killing; it is one of many. This is mentioned in the *Tenth Bhumi Sutra*.

Another benefit of abstaining from killing is that you become glorious, or magnificent, now and in the future. These good results are not related only to future lives; when the karma is powerful, it can also affect this life. You become glorious, or radiant, similar to the way we see His Holiness the Dalai Lama or we saw His Holiness Ling Rinpoche.

The benefits of avoiding taking what has not been given, or stealing. In all lifetimes, you will have perfect enjoyments and receive them effortlessly. You will receive things just by wishing for them. Also, no one will interfere with your enjoyments by confiscating or stealing them.

These benefits will not only come in future lives. When the karma is powerful, changes can happen even in this life, so don't think that karma begins only after this life and there is nothing you can experience in this life. For example, at the beginning you might be able to make very few or very poor quality offerings, but as you continue the practice of making offerings to holy objects or of making charity to other sentient beings, you are gradually able to make more extensive and better quality offerings and more extensive charity. As a result of your good karma, you can have perfect enjoyments, so your offerings to the merit field and your charity to others can become better and better and more and more extensive. Because you created the cause through your previous small offerings and small acts of charity, sooner or later in this life, you can make better and more extensive offerings.

Kadampa Geshe Potowa, I think it was, explained this in relation to the offering of incense. At the beginning, he offered incense using a plant that grows on high mountains; it looks like hair and has a very nice scent. Because he offered this incense to holy objects, later he gained many advantages and was able to make better and more extensive offerings of incense. This is an example of how karma works, of how your life can become better even in the immediate future.

The benefits of living in the morality of abstaining from the sexual act. The eight precepts of the Lesser Vehicle path refer to abstaining from any sexual misconduct, but here in the Eight Mahayana Precepts it is any sexual act. The benefits of living in this vow are that in all lifetimes you will have a beautiful body and a beautiful complexion. I guess this will save a lot of expenses on cosmetics and plastic surgery. You won't need to have a big operation on your face to straighten this bit and stretch that bit back and forth. I heard that it's very expensive! Keeping this precept will also incidentally save you a lot of money. The only problem is perhaps that it will cause other people to lose their jobs. There won't be any need for shops full of cosmetics, for all those billions of different cosmetics in different colors. Anyway, I'm joking.

Another benefit is that you will have perfect sense organs. When we know the benefits, we can automatically understand that someone has some physical disability as a result of not having practiced this or that morality. When you hear about the shortcomings of the complete ten non-virtuous actions, you naturally understand the good results that you will achieve through living in the morality of the ten virtues. By hearing about the positive results, the benefits, of living in the precepts, you come to know the causes of various problems such as being born with an imperfect or ugly body, with missing limbs or imperfect senses.

Physical disabilities cannot be explained simply by an imperfect egg or sperm, as scientists tend to do. It is just a condition for the problem, not its main cause. There might be an imperfect egg, with some cells missing or something, but you need to explain why the imperfect egg happens. The answer is incomplete. Even though the cause is traced back to a defective egg or sperm, this is not the final answer because it is talking only about the physical condition. We are still left with the question, "But what causes the defective egg?" Here, by understanding the benefits

of abstaining from the sexual act, you come to know its opposite, the result of sexual misconduct, or the sexual act that becomes negative karma.

The benefits of abstaining from telling lies. In all lifetimes you will not be cheated by others. In our daily lives, whenever we find that somebody has cheated us, we should immediately remember that we are experiencing the result of having told lies in the past. Rather than just becoming upset and angry and making ourselves unhappy and rather than putting all the blame on someone else, we should think, “This is the result of my past negative karma of telling lies.”

In this way, our delusions—the three poisonous minds of ignorance, anger and attachment—and our negative karmas become only inspirations; they remind us that from now on we should be careful in our practice of morality, we should practice the morality of abstaining from telling lies. When we encounter problems in our life, remembering the cause that we created in the past only encourages us; it gives us the strong determination to abandon the cause of the problems. We resolve, “From now on I will not create the cause of this problem. Instead I will create its opposite, the cause of happiness.”

Another benefit of abstaining from lying is that everyone values our speech, everyone believes what we say. In our daily lives, when we say something and other people don’t listen to or don’t believe us, when our speech is powerless, we should realize that this is the result of our past negative karma of telling lies. This sometimes happens in our daily lives.

The other way, someone who normally doesn’t listen to others somehow has to accept a particular person’s request, even though it is a difficult one. This is because that particular person has power in his speech. He comes in, asks for something, and somehow the other person naturally has to accept. There is a reason for this. It comes from the past good karma that person created by living in the morality of abstaining from telling lies.

The benefits of abstaining from drinking alcohol. In all lifetimes you will have a great memory. This can be to do with past lives, but I also think you can tell that much of it is the result of this life. The memory of a person who lives in pure vows is very clear. Take Geshe Sopa Rinpoche,

for example. There are eight prayers, including *The King of Prayers*, a praise to Maitreya Buddha and a prayer to be born in Maitreya's pure land, that are normally recited for others.

[The morning tea bell is heard outside.] The donkeys are coming! From Tibet. The horses and mules in Tibet always have bells, so that sound reminded me of Tibet, of donkey bells.

Geshe-la said that he had not recited those eight prayers since leaving Tibet, which was about forty years ago. In Tibet, those prayers are recited every day when all the monks do puja in the assembly. When I was in Madison during the commentary on great insight, it happened a few times that a Tibetan or Western person passed away and Geshe Sopa Rinpoche was asked to pray for them. I respected very much the way that Geshe-la took care of each request very precisely. I thought it was fantastic. He paid very special attention when he was requested to pray for someone who had died. He called the monks who were around and had everyone pray together in the room. This is fantastic, because there is a lot of benefit for the people who have passed away. Because those praying, principally Geshe-la himself but also the other geshe, are all living in pure vows, their prayers have a lot of power.

One of the people Geshe-la did prayers for was a Tibetan man who used to take tourists to the very high mountains in Nepal. I think he died when his airplane crashed. He was a very good man with a big family; it seems that everyone loved him very much because he was so kind-hearted. I think that his daughter has some association with the Hyatt Hotel in Chicago.

After he finished reciting the eight prayers, Geshe-la said, "I haven't recited these prayers since I left Tibet, but it is OK—I can remember all of them!" I mean, forty years is a long time.

The point I am trying to make is that it seems the good memory is the result not only of past lives but of this life. The way you live your life has an immediate effect on your mind. There can be a positive result even in this life if you lived in morality in the earlier part of your life.

Other benefits of living in the morality of abstaining from alcohol, abandoning alcohol, are that all your senses become clear and that you have perfect wisdom.

Many people become like vegetables later in life; they are not dead but they are unable to function. It could be the result of past karma, but

I think much of it has to do with the karma of this life, with how they lived earlier this life. If you study how these people lived, if you analyzed their attitudes and their behavior, you might be able to see how this particular problem happened; otherwise, there is no way to explain it. Without knowing the karma, there is no way to explain it.

The benefits of avoiding sitting on high or expensive thrones and beds. This means sitting on such a throne or bed without a Dharma reason, without the thought to benefit others or show respect to the teachings. Sitting on high or expensive thrones and beds with a motivation of attachment that clings to this life, pride and so forth becomes negative karma. Here, “high” means higher than a cubit.

By living in this vow, you will always be praised and respected by others. In this way, you will be able to benefit others. When others praise and respect you, you can bring them into Dharma, into the path to enlightenment. Also, especially if you are a bodhisattva or an ordained person, praising and respecting you helps others to create good karma.

Another benefit is that you have many enjoyments, such as comfortable bedding and animals to ride when you travel. The text says specifically that you receive many things to ride on, which means animals, but I think you can include here other vehicles such as cars and airplanes.

The benefits of avoiding eating at the wrong time. In all lifetimes you will have perfect crops and you will receive drink and food without any effort. Difficulty in obtaining the means of living comes from not practicing the morality of abstaining from eating at the wrong time in the past and from eating with attachment.

The benefits of avoiding perfumes and wearing garlands and ornaments. In all lifetimes your body will have a scented smell—not a scented smell from the shops, but one that comes naturally from the body. I remember in Solu Khumbu when I was very young, there was a small incarnate lama with a naturally scented smell. It made a strong impression on my mind. You also notice this smell when you meet some lamas. It is not like the smell of perfume; it is a holy kind of smell.

Different scents such as different manufactured perfumes have

different effects on the mind. Some perfumes make you feel serene and peaceful; others have the opposite effect, causing you to generate attachment.

Other benefits are that your body will have a good color, a beautiful shape, and many special signs similar to those on the bodies of holy beings.

The benefits of living in the vow of avoiding singing and dancing. In all lifetimes you will have subdued conduct, with a very subdued mind and body. The sound of Dharma will also come continuously from you. We meet people like this in our daily life; when the person talks, the Dharma always comes out in their conversation. This could also refer to reciting prayers and mantras.

MOTIVATION FOR TAKING THE EIGHT MAHAYANA PRECEPTS

Think, “It is not sufficient just to receive a deva or human body in my next life, just to avoid being reborn in the lower realms. This alone is not the ultimate meaning of my life. And even to be free from samsara is not the ultimate meaning of my life. Sentient beings, who are numberless, who are like the sky, are the source of all my past, present and future happiness. The ultimate goal of my life is to free them from all their suffering and bring them to enlightenment. To do that, I need to achieve enlightenment, and for that, I need to actualize the path to enlightenment, which depends on the root, living in morality. Therefore, for the benefit of each sentient being, for all happiness up to enlightenment of each sentient being, I’m going to take the Eight Mahayana Precepts.”

VISUALIZING THE LAMA AS GURU SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA

Because the practice of the Eight Mahayana Precepts comes from Kriya Tantra, in addition to looking at the lama as the Buddha in essence, you have to visualize the lama as the Buddha in aspect. Visualize the lama from whom you take the precepts as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha [or Avalokiteshvara, as in *Direct and Unmistaken Method*]. Think that he is surrounded by all buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and that you are taking the precepts in their presence.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WISE HORSE AND GREAT ELEPHANT

The precepts ceremony text might sound a bit funny when it says that Buddha is like a horse or an elephant, but there are reasons for this. “The wise horse” is a horse with the capacity, or skill, to carry its rider very carefully to wherever the person wants to go. Even on a dangerous road, the wise horse walks so carefully that it never disturbs its rider. Buddha carefully guides sentient beings to enlightenment in a similar way, so that they are not harmed or disturbed. As talked about in stories, the wise horse is a special horse that can fly.

The reason that Buddha is likened to “the great elephant” is that just as the elephant is very powerful and can carry very heavy loads, Buddha takes on the total responsibility of freeing the numberless suffering sentient beings from all their oceans of samsaric suffering and its cause, and bringing them all happiness, including that of enlightenment.

By understanding the essential meaning of these examples, you feel devotion to Buddha; you feel closer to Buddha.

THE DEFINITION OF SUNRISE

If you are doing practices such as nyung-näs, there are different ways of defining sunrise. It can refer to the sun rising in your area, with sunlight actually reaching your area. Or, as explained by Pabongka Rinpoche and in the sutras, it can refer to dawn-time, when a whitish light starts to appear in the east. Even though the rest of the sky is dark, when there is a little bit of white in the east, this beginning of the dawn is the very beginning of the day. In nyung-näs, soup or some other food is offered early on the third morning. When you made the commitment not to eat “until sunrise tomorrow,” if sunrise is defined as the beginning of the day, when the sky is whitish in the east, you can then eat something at this point, before you start another nyung-nä. This is just to be more precise in keeping the commitment. If you have defined “sunrise” as when it is light at the place where you are, however, you should then eat after that time.

THE PRAYER OF THE PRECEPTS

When you read the phrase “in order to benefit them,” think of bringing temporary happiness to other sentient beings; and with “in order to liberate them,” think of bringing them ultimate happiness and benefit—liberation from all the sufferings of samsara and complete enlightenment. Ultimate benefit, or happiness, refers to both liberation from samsara and great liberation, enlightenment.

While saying “...in order to benefit them, in order to liberate them, in order to eliminate famine, in order to eliminate sickness...,” think that the reason you are taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts is to bring all these benefits to sentient beings and to stop all their problems. Remember all the sick people in hospitals or at home and think, “I am taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts for all the sentient beings who have the karma to be sick.” Think of all the people who are dying from AIDS; think of all the people who are dying from cancer. Here today you are doing something that is of the most practical benefit to them.

The prayer at the end can be abbreviated as follows: “Just as the previous tathagatas practiced the Eight Mahayana Precepts to benefit all sentient beings, I’m also going to keep the Eight Mahayana precepts until sunrise tomorrow in order to cause all these benefits to all sentient beings.”

Without a wandering mind you must then generate the strong determination that you have received pure ordination of the Eight Mahayana Precepts in the presence of your guru, visualized as Buddha, and of all the ten direction buddhas and bodhisattvas.

DEDICATION

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I, the members of my family, all the students and benefactors of this organization, as well as all other sentient beings complete the *paramita* of morality by keeping morality purely and without pride.”

Next dedicate for everyone to generate bodhicitta within their mind.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by others and myself, may the father and mother sentient beings have happiness, may

the three lower realms be empty forever, may all the bodhisattvas' prayers be accomplished immediately and may I be able to cause all this, by myself, alone.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, which are empty from their own side, may I, who am empty from my own side, achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment, which is also empty from its own side, and lead all sentient beings, who are all empty from their own side, to that enlightenment, which is also empty from its own side, by myself alone, who is also empty from its own side.”

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Tuesday, February 9 (A)

MORNING: VAJRASATTVA SESSION

THE FOUR POWERS

I would like to outline the four powers in relation to the Vajrasattva practice, just in case they're not clear to everybody. In long sadhanas, the reason that we recite the refuge and bodhicitta verse again before the Vajrasattva practice, even though we have begun the sadhana with refuge and bodhicitta, is to make sure that we practice the remedy of the four powers. It is to ensure that our confession is perfected with the remedy of the four powers.

The teachings mention that when a person falls down on the ground, they get up by depending on the ground. In a similar way, we purify any negative karma collected in relation to the holy objects of guru, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha by taking refuge and we purify any negative karma collected in relation to sentient beings by generating bodhicitta, which means by depending on the sentient beings. This is the power of dependence. Some people translate it as “the power of reliance.” This translation is also fine, as we purify negative karma through relying on refuge and on bodhicitta. In terms of the power of dependence, we purify negative karma through depending on Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha and on sentient beings. I think that both translations are meaningful.

The prayer book mentions the power of regret, or the power of reflecting on the shortcomings of negative karma. The term for this is *nam-pa sün-jin-pa'i tob* in Tibetan. *Sün* means mistakes and *jin* means giving. It means giving the blame to the negative karma for whatever specific problems you experience. The power of regret is mentioned at the end of the long Vajrasattva sadhana, just before Guru Vajrasattva says that everything has been purified, but it should also come before you recite the Vajrasattva mantra or while you are reciting it.

The way to do this is to first think of the definition of negative karma, or non-virtuous action. A negative karma is any action that brings a result of suffering. This is the general definition of a negative karma, or non-virtue. To make the definition more specific, we can say that a negative karma is any action that is motivated by a non-virtuous thought. This can mean ignorance or anger, but we should think in particular of attachment, because we live most of our life with the non-virtuous motivation of the attachment that clings to this life. For ordinary beings like us, our usual attitude is one of worldly concern. This means that during each twenty-four hours, all our activities become non-virtues, because our motivation is worldly concern. It is like this from our birth until our death, and it has been like this throughout our beginningless rebirths. Because this has been our attitude, our actions have become non-virtue. This applies even to those who are practicing Dharma. We think that we are practicing Dharma, but while we might create some virtue, we mostly create non-virtue because our motivation is the attachment that clings to this life.

Once you have clarified what non-virtue is, you can then see that all your actions throughout your entire life have been negative karmas. You have this broad perspective. On this basis, the result can only be suffering and obstacles to realizations.

After this, consider all the times that you have broken your pratimoksha, bodhisattva and tantric vows, not only in this life but also in past lives. Breaking these vows has very heavy shortcomings.

On top of that, think about the heaviest negative karmas of all, those collected in the relationship with the virtuous friend. These include harming the holy body of the guru, disregarding advice, disturbing the holy mind, generating angry or negative thoughts towards the guru and giving up the guru. You have done these negative actions in this life and in beginningless past lives. This is the heaviest negative karma.

When you examine each of these different negative karmas in this way, you can see the whole package. What needs to be purified—the obstacles to achieving enlightenment and to doing perfect works for all sentient beings—becomes very clear.

Then feel strong regret. The teachings say that you should feel as if you have swallowed a deadly poison. If there's poison in your stomach, you'll immediately do everything you can to get rid of it. In the same

way here, you can't wait even one second to purify all these negative karmas. Since death can happen at any moment, you *must* purify them all. It's unbearable to delay freeing yourself from all these negative karmas for even one second.

Think like this just before you start to recite the Vajrasattva mantra or while you are reciting it. This is the way to practice the power of regret.

The power of the remedy, *nyän-po kün-tu chö-pa'i tob*, refers generally to any virtue because virtue is the remedy that purifies negative karma. Here, taking refuge, generating bodhicitta, meditating on Vajrasattva and reciting the mantra are all part of this power of the remedy.

At the end of the sadhana, after Vajrasattva says that you are purified, you practice the power not to commit the negative actions again. This is how you perfect the practice with the remedy of the four powers. It is very important to do this when you do Vajrasattva retreat. Make sure that you practice the four powers, and as strongly as possible.

THINKING THAT THE NEGATIVE KARMAS ARE PURIFIED

The literal translation from the Tibetan [of *rig-kyi bu*, “child of good family”] is “son of the race,” but the term “son” has nothing to do with the physical body. It is similar to “vajra master's son” in an initiation.

Generate strong faith that all your defilements, negative karmas and degenerated samaya vows have been completely purified. Everything has been purified.

Next, practice the power of not committing the negative actions again. As I mentioned yesterday, make the vow so that it does not become telling lies or it lessens the vice of telling lies.

Guru Vajrasattva is extremely pleased with you and absorbs within you. Your body, speech and mind are blessed in the essence of Vajrasattva's vajra holy body, holy speech and holy mind.

In emptiness there is no I, no creator; there is no action of creating negative karma; there is no negative karma created. All these are totally empty—not space, but like space.

With continual awareness of everything as empty, dedicate the merits.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I achieve Guru

Vajrasattva's enlightenment and lead all sentient beings to Guru Vajrasattva's enlightenment by myself alone." When you say "Guru Vajrasattva," remember the absolute guru.

GURU DEVOTION WITH THE NINE ATTITUDES

If you have realized guru devotion—which means by looking at the guru as buddha, you see the guru as buddha—you have no problem, because no matter what action or aspect you see, you always have the understanding that it is the action or aspect of buddha and that every single action or aspect of buddha is meaningful. Buddha does nothing other than benefit others. If you have realized that the guru is buddha, no negative thoughts about the guru come at all; your mind is totally protected. The realization of guru devotion totally protects your mind; it makes your mind very pure towards the virtuous friend.

When you don't have this realization, however, many difficult negative thoughts can arise, especially when your wishes are not fulfilled. The times when you expect something from the virtuous friend and it doesn't happen, or the opposite of what you expected happens, are very difficult because you don't have the realization of guru devotion. Because you don't see the guru as buddha, your mind doesn't have any protection. At such times, when your mind becomes troubled, this prayer, *Practicing Guru Devotion with the Nine Attitudes* [see Prologue], is extremely good. These nine attitudes are like an atomic bomb landing on the negative thoughts. I don't know which country the atomic bomb belongs to, I don't know whether it's America or Russia. . . .

Personally, I have found this prayer very powerful, so I thought it might also be useful to you. You can recite it in the guru devotion section of the lam-rim, and it's especially powerful to recite when your mind is having difficulties in relation to your guru.

I haven't had the oral transmission of this particular prayer, which is a translation from a text by Shabkar Tsogdrug Rangdrol, but it is contained in Lama Tsong Khapa's *Lam-rim chen-mo*. The essence is there in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, but it is not presented in this style. It is not described in detail in Lama Tsong Khapa's lam-rim, but the presentation is unique. It is like an atomic bomb. It mentions very precisely to do this, this, this. There is commentary on the nine attitudes in Lama

Tsong Khapa's *Lam-rim chen-mo*. I think it might be in Lama Tsong Khapa's middle-length lam-rim as well.

The stories of the lives of Tilopa, Naropa, Milarepa and the other lineage lamas in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* are commentaries to this prayer. Many people are aware of Milarepa's life-story, and you can relate everything Milarepa experienced to this prayer. Besides not giving Milarepa teachings or initiations, Marpa gave him only a hard time, scolding and beating him and making him work hard. Milarepa's story is a commentary to these verses.

I think it is extremely good to use this prayer in the guru devotion section of the lam-rim meditation.

Practicing guru devotion with the nine attitudes is in Lama Tsong Khapa's lam-rim, but I thought that this prayer might be beneficial in relation to the Maitreya Project.

6

Tuesday, February 9 (B)

AFTERNOON: VAJRASATTVA SESSION

MOTIVATION FOR THE THIRTY-FIVE BUDDHAS PRACTICE

“The purpose of my life is to free all sentient beings from all their suffering and its causes and bring them to full enlightenment. To do this, I myself must achieve enlightenment, and for this, I must actualize the steps of the path to enlightenment. Therefore, I need to purify all my defilements, negative karmas, and downfalls.”

Think, “If I were now in the hell realm, how would it be? I would be completely overwhelmed by the heaviest suffering of samsara.”

If a burning incense stick drops on your body, you can't stand it; you immediately have to brush it off. If even a spark lands on your body, you can't stand it; without even a second's delay, you have to put it out or brush it off. If you find unbearable even a tiny spark of fire from the human realm, there is no way you could bear to suffer for many eons in the hell realm. One second of hell fire is unbelievably hot, many billions of times hotter than the fire of the human realm. Because it is extremely heavy suffering, experiencing even one second of hell fire is like suffering for many billions of years. Besides that, you have no freedom to practice Dharma.

“Now, this could actually happen to me, even in this moment, because death can come at any time. It could happen right now. Therefore, I must purify all my defilements, negative karma and downfalls right now. Without delaying even a second, I must purify right now. Also, in order to cause all happiness up to enlightenment to every one of the numberless sentient beings, I'm going to do prostrations with the *Confession of Downfalls*, reciting the names of, and meditating on, the Thirty-five Buddhas.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEMORIZING THE NAMES OF THE THIRTY-FIVE BUDDHAS

If one person leads the prayer and the rest of the people do not recite it because no one has memorized the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas, only that person will get the benefits of reciting the names. Those who haven't memorized the names will get the benefits of making prostrations, but they won't get the benefit of reciting the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas. This is a great loss. How is it a great loss? Take the very first name, that of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, for example. By reciting Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's name, you purify 80,000 eons of negative karma; if you don't recite his name, this doesn't happen. Reciting each of the Thirty-five Buddhas' names purifies a certain number of eons of negative karma or a particular negative karma. Reciting each name just one time purifies many eons of negative karma.

If someone told us that we would not get cancer for six eons, we would think it was fantastic. Or that we would not get a migraine headache for sixty years. We can understand that very clearly, and we would think, "Oh, that's fantastic!" Leaving aside the six eons, even if someone told us that we would not get cancer in this life, we would regard it as fantastic, as unbelievable good fortune. Now here, in relation to the practice of the Thirty-five Buddhas, we are talking about not getting cancer and other problems for six thousand eons, seven thousand eons, because we have purified that many eons of negative karma, which is the cause of not only sickness but all problems and obstacles. Cancer is just one tiny drop from the ocean of samsaric sufferings. Being able to purify even two thousand eons of negative karma is an incredible advantage. If death is going to happen right now, in the next moment, the most important thing is purification. The most urgent thing to do is to purify our negative karma.

[The lights suddenly come on.] We must be actualizing the clear light of death! Anyway, bless the lights with OM AH HUM, OM AH HUM, OM AH HUM.

If you were about to die, which would you prefer to be given—a billion dollars or the chance to purify this life's negative karma? Which is more important? Which is more precious? Of course, purifying even one negative karma before we die is much better than receiving a billion or even a trillion dollars.

My point is that if only one person recites the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas, only that person receives the advantage of all this purification. The people who don't recite don't receive this advantage. This is like one person eating a meal on behalf of a group of people, while the rest of the people do not eat. That one person eating food doesn't fill the stomachs of the other people; it doesn't stop their hunger, does it?

It is similar here. For the one person who recites the prayer, reciting the name of each buddha purifies many eons of negative karma, but this doesn't happen to the rest of the people. Each one of the Thirty-five Buddhas purifies many eons of negative karmas, but the people who do not recite the names do not receive all this advantage. When we were doing the Hayagriva retreat at Vajrapani Institute, I made a regulation that during the retreat everybody had to memorize the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas.

When I hear some of the names in English, they sound different. When I say "Buddha of Sandalwood" in English, it makes me think of sandalwood; but that picture of sandalwood doesn't come in my mind when I say the name in Tibetan, even though it has the same meaning.

After the Thirty-five Buddhas, recite the names of the seven Medicine Buddhas, who are extremely powerful not only for healing but for success generally. The Medicine Buddha did many prayers in the past for sentient beings to be granted all their wishes, to have their prayers actualized, through reciting the name and the mantra of Medicine Buddha. It is very important to do this practice. Kachen Yeshe Gyaltzen and other recent lineage lamas also recited the names of the Seven Medicine Buddhas after reciting the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas. This is very good and makes the practice very powerful.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE PRACTICE

At the end of the prostrations, think that nectar beams are emitted by all the beings in the merit field and enter within you and purify all your defilements, negative karma and downfalls. Everything is purified. Nothing in the slightest is left in your mental continuum.

Then meditate that in emptiness, there is no creator of negative karma, there is no action of creating negative karma, there is no negative karma created.

Finally, dedicate. “Due to the merits collected by having done prostrations, made offerings, confessed, rejoiced and requested the gurus to have stable lives and to turn the Dharma wheel, may I achieve enlightenment in order to enlighten all sentient beings.”

BENEFITS OF RECITING LAM-RIM PRAYERS

One purpose of reciting the lam-rim prayer is to use it as a motivation. The other point is that each time we recite a prayer that contains the essence of the whole path, it makes our mind closer to the realizations of the path to enlightenment. In other words, it makes us closer to enlightenment and to our being able to enlighten all sentient beings. This is the main reason that we are doing this Vajrasattva retreat. The main reason for doing Vajrasattva purification practice is not to be healthy or to have a long life, but to have realizations of the path to enlightenment so that we can benefit others by liberating them from all their suffering and bringing them to enlightenment.

Therefore, as often as possible, at the beginning of each session we should recite one of the lam-rim prayers as the motivation, to bring our mind closer to the realizations of the path to enlightenment. Because each lam-rim prayer has a different presentation, reciting different lam-rim prayers, like eating different types of food, has a different effect on the mind. Also, you’d get bored if you recited the same prayer all the time.

GENERATING AS HERUKA

Since we are not doing the Heruka practice, you can leave the part about generating yourself as Heruka. Recite the refuge verse, then leave a short silence in which to generate a strong motivation of bodhicitta.

MOTIVATION FOR VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE

Feel strong regret, then generate strong thoughts of impermanence and death, that death might happen right now. After that, generate strong bodhicitta motivation. Think of the lower realm sufferings, the general sufferings of samsara and of the living beings who are experiencing all

these sufferings. Remember how kind and precious other living beings are, then think, “I, myself alone, must take full responsibility for freeing all living beings from the ocean of samsaric suffering and its cause, the defilements, and for leading them to enlightenment. I must achieve enlightenment in the quickest way possible, because it is so unbearable that sentient beings are suffering in samsara for even one second; it’s like they are suffering for eons. Therefore, I am going to do the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation to purify all my obscurations, defilements, negative karma and downfalls.”

DEDICATION

Before making the dedication to achieve Vajrasattva, we should meditate on emptiness as follows: “In emptiness there is no I, no creator; there is no action of creating; there is no negative karma created. Everything is totally empty, non-existent from its own side. Everything is empty—not space, but like space.” We are not meditating on space, but that everything is empty, like space; empty of existence from its own side, like space.

With our mind in the state of this awareness we then dedicate the merits.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I achieve Guru Vajrasattva’s enlightenment and lead all sentient beings to that enlightenment by myself alone.”

I’d just like to make a few comments about the dedications. There are some additional general dedications in the Guru Shakyamuni Buddha meditation booklet, *A Daily Meditation Practice*, which are good to do at the end of the sessions. You can divide these dedications so that you do a few at the end of each session. In this way, they all get done each day without your needing to do them all together at the end of the final session, which would take a long time.

At the end of the morning session of *Guru Puja*, which is basically guru yoga practice, you should do the very important dedication, “Due to the merits of the three times created by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I, the members of my family, all

the students and benefactors of this organization, and all the rest of the sentient beings meet only perfectly qualified Mahayana gurus in all our future lifetimes. From our side may we see them only as enlightened beings. May we do only actions most pleasing to the holy minds of the virtuous friends. May we be able to fulfill all their holy wishes immediately.”

This dedication contains four very, very important prayers: to meet perfectly qualified gurus, to see them only as enlightened beings, to do actions only most pleasing to their holy minds and to fulfill their holy wishes. We should do this dedication every day, because without the accomplishment of these prayers, nothing can succeed. We cannot achieve realizations or enlightenment. This dedication is extremely important as a means of ensuring that in this life and in all our coming lives we will be able to practice better. If we can practice in accordance with these four prayers, we will achieve enlightenment without any obstacles. This is the essential key to our ultimate success—completing our Dharma practice and being a perfect guide to lead other sentient beings to enlightenment.

Do this dedication prayer at the end of the morning session and divide the others among the remaining sessions so that you do a few at the end of each.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may any sentient being who hears me, touches me, remembers me, thinks about me, talks about me (whether praising or criticizing), abuses me or treats me badly, simply by having made that connection with me, never ever be reborn in the lower realms. May those sentient beings immediately be liberated from all disease, spirit harms, negative karma and defilements and quickly achieve enlightenment, by actualizing the whole path, especially bodhicitta.

“May I immediately be able to heal anyone with a sickness that is difficult to cure or has no cure, such as cancer, AIDS or arthritis, and especially anyone whose mind has become crazy and uncontrolled because of spirit possession and so forth. When that person is dying, simply by seeing me, hearing my voice or being touched by me, may they immediately be freed from all their worry and fear and feel incredible bliss and peace

in their heart; and may they be able to reincarnate in a pure land where they can become enlightened.”

We need to specify “a pure land where they can become enlightened” because there are pure lands from which sentient beings can again be reborn in the lower realms. We are dedicating for rebirth in a specific type of pure land, one from which sentient beings can never be reborn in the lower realms and where they can become enlightened.

This prayer can be added to the dedications in the meditation booklet. Generating this wish every day builds the potential to sooner or later be able to benefit others in this way.

GENERATING AS HERUKA

I now see why Lama wrote here in the long sadhana to generate yourself as Heruka. It is because later you have to make an inner offering. In order to bless the inner offering you have to generate yourself as a deity; the ordinary I cannot bless the inner offering. To bless the inner offering you need the pure appearance of yourself in the deity’s holy body and to hold divine pride, “I am Heruka.” It is only with this deity yoga that you can bless the inner offering, in order to dispel interferers and purify the offerings—which appear ordinary, or inherently existent, to you—in emptiness. In Highest Yoga Tantra, you have to generate offerings with three qualities: the aspect is the offering, the essence is emptiness of inherent existence and the function is to give great bliss. To generate offerings with these three qualities, you need to generate yourself as a deity.

If you haven’t received a Heruka initiation but have received a Yamantaka initiation, for example, you can generate yourself as Yamantaka and do the blessing, visualizing as nectar and so forth according to Yamantaka practice. The same applies if you have received the Kalachakra great initiation.

If you haven’t received a Highest Yoga Tantra initiation, you don’t need to bother about generating yourself as a deity. You just make the offerings.

MAKING OFFERINGS

Each time we make offerings with *argham*, *padyam*, *pushpe*, *dhupe*..., whether in the section of offering in the *Guru Puja* or in the Vajrasattva practice, it is good to remember all the offerings—all the lights, all the flowers, all the waterbowls—that have been made here. You can also visualize offerings. Then you collect unbelievable merit. Some people can visualize clearly; others cannot. However, everyone can offer all these many physically performed offerings.

Take the many lights here in this gumpa, for example. I'm not sure how many there are, but let's say that there are one thousand lights here. By offering these one thousand lights to Vajrasattva or to the *Guru Puja* merit field, you immediately create one thousand causes of enlightenment. If there are five thousand lights, simply by thinking, "I am offering all these lights," in that second you create five thousand causes of enlightenment—and that means incidentally, you also create five thousand causes to achieve liberation from samsara and five thousand causes to achieve good rebirths in your future lives.

This is my daily advertisement—an advertisement to inspire people to create good karma. People advertise hotels or companies on huge billboards on major roads. Before you reach the hotel it has already been advertised for miles. There are advertisements everywhere—in *Time* magazine, in airline magazines. So this is my advertisement.

Making one offering to Buddha results in a good rebirth not just in one life but in hundreds, thousands, of lives. Why? Because karma is expandable. From even one small good karma, you can experience the result for many lifetimes. It affects not just one life, but many different lifetimes, because karma is more expandable than external phenomena. If you plant one small seed, you can grow a huge tree with many thousands of branches, and hundreds of thousands of seeds can come from that tree. Karma, however, is even more expandable than such external phenomena.

Making offerings is just one means of creating good karma; there are many other practices. With each of these practices, you incidentally take care of this life. You incidentally take care of everything in this life—your health, long life, wealth, success. Even if you are not attached to this life, your Dharma practice incidentally takes care of this life. Even

though it is not your motivation, you achieve the result. As is said in the lam-rim teachings, if you plant a seed in the ground and it has all the conditions (water, nutrients and so forth) necessary for growth, no matter how much you pray for it not to grow, it will grow. It is similar with the merit that we create through making offerings, prostrations and so forth to the merit field. No matter how much you pray not to achieve enlightenment, you will achieve enlightenment from that, because once there is the cause of enlightenment, you achieve the result of enlightenment.

Many offerings might have been physically arranged, but you don't think of them when you are actually making offerings. However, your visualization of offerings might not be clear—perhaps not even one offering is clear; so sometimes it might be better to think of the physical offerings. They are already there, so it's just a question of your mind thinking to offer them. That is all you have to do. Someone else has put effort into setting up all the offerings—the only effort you need to make is to think of them and offer them mentally. With these waterbowls, for example, you create many thousands of causes of enlightenment in that second.

I started this tradition of making extensive offerings in Taiwan about five years ago. In Kaohsiung there is a nunnery that has supported the Kopan monks and nuns. I led a Medicine Buddha retreat there, during which I gave a complete commentary on the mandala offering, as well as some commentary on the seven-limb practice and some other preliminary practices. Not all, but some of the nuns are interested in lam-rim. They had been studying lam-rim before with some other Chinese students involved in lam-rim study groups.

When I said that I wanted to make extensive offerings, the abbess of the nunnery went to buy many orchids, which are very expensive flowers, and the other nuns were very energetic in setting up very beautiful offerings.

From Kaohsiung I went to the Taipei Center, where I started the same tradition, with the setting up of many sets of seven offerings in the gumpa. I also started the tradition at the Taichung Center. When I went to Nepal, I then started waterbowl offerings in a room on the roof of the gumpa. The room, which has glass walls, was actually built as an outside dining room, but after I got back it turned out not to be for eating but

for waterbowls. I bought about seven hundred stainless steel bowls in Nepal. They are very good because they are light, shiny and very easy to keep clean; they don't become covered inside with rust the way brass bowls do. Some people offer water in rusty brass bowls because they think they must be very holy, or something, because they are Tibetan bowls. But brass bowls are very dirty and sometimes even the water becomes dirty.

I wasn't satisfied with the one room because all the bowls could not be used, so I had another room built on the roof. Two nuns have been offering these bowls there for a long time. One nun, Gloria from Hong Kong, offered the bowls for two or three months. Zug-ku also offered for some time. Gloria spent so much time out in the sun offering the bowls that her right arm, which was not covered by her zen, became dark while her left arm was white. Maybe in Western terms this was a good thing, some kind of success!

When I was staying at Tushita in Dharamsala, I thought to build a similar room there for offerings as there is a lot of space outside. So I've produced the idea, but my stay in Tushita was too short to get anything built.

My main concern regarding the house in Aptos was to have a large room for offerings. In the offering room there, which is not an actual room, there are about 4,000 lights, many small ones and some big ones, the beautiful Chinese lotus lights. There are now also more than 250 water bowls—probably 257, as Pam and Karuna gave another set of crystal bowls yesterday. There are also flowers in our garden, but the flowers are now asleep, doing sleep meditation—in the clear light! [So we can't offer them.]

I thought that if some people have the time and there is the space out here on the verandah for some tables, more offerings of water bowls could be done.

It is very good for meditation centers even to hire people to do the offerings. Paying people to make extensive offerings is extremely worthwhile. It is not a waste of money, because those people get paid for their work of making offerings, and the people who sponsor them gain much merit. Tibetan monasteries and even rich Tibetan families have someone to make offerings every day. Rich families have a shrine room, so they support one monk, whose responsibility it is to clean the shrine room

and make very good offerings every day. The monk takes care of the shrine room and the family takes care of the monk, offering him food and a bed in the shrine room. Even if the family members themselves don't have time to do more than come to the gompa to make three prostrations and to pray, the monk takes care of the work of cleaning and making offerings.

I suggested to Tara Institute in Melbourne that they hire one person especially to make extensive offerings. Everybody else could then put some money into the cost of buying the offerings. Each time the students from the center do a sadhana, they could then think of the offerings that had been set up on the altar at the center and offer them. Also, while they were travelling back and forth to work in their cars, they could simply think of the offerings and offer them. This is such an easy way to collect extensive merit. Even if you yourself don't have time to make such offerings, you can collect unbelievable merit by organizing something like this.

This would help many people with difficulties in their life, those who have problems finding a job, who have problems with their work or who have obstacles to success in business. Arranging these extensive offerings would help all the students, because it helps everybody to create good karma, which can change their lives and make them easier. It is very profitable. Just as there are many ways to make business, there are many ways to create merit, or good karma, the cause of enlightenment. It is also helpful for the people who need to offer many water bowls as part of their preliminary practices.

We are coming now to the time of the Chinese and Tibetan New Year, with the start of the fifteen special days when Buddha showed his miraculous powers to subdue particular sentient beings. For every one of these fifteen days the merits from every practice we do are multiplied one hundred million times. The merit from each offering is increased one hundred million times. One light offering becomes one hundred million light offerings, one water bowl offering becomes one hundred million water bowl offerings, and it is the same with prostrations. It is good to make more offerings during this period; everybody can then make the offerings. Some people have to put in the effort of physically making the offerings, but then everybody gets the chance to make extensive offerings, so it's very good. Giving other people the chance to make many

offerings is also a way that you can help bring happiness to others and enable them to achieve enlightenment quickly.

GENERATING AS A DEITY

Now, those people who haven't received a great initiation don't need to bother about generating themselves as a deity. Those who have received a great initiation can visualize themselves as Heruka, Yamantaka, Kalachakra or any other deity whose initiation they have received; you can individually generate yourself as that deity. Basically, the offerings in the various Highest Yoga Tantra practices are similar; there are different mantras, but the visualization and blessing of the offerings are basically the same.

Even though the self-generation as Heruka can be recited, each individual can decide which deity to practice, and it should be specified that those who haven't received initiation don't need to do that, you can drop that out.

USE OF BELL ALONE FOR INVOCATION

I don't know the reason for it, but normally the bell is rung without playing the *damaru* for the invocation of [and offerings to] the wisdom beings and the initiating deities. There is just the ringing of the bell. Sometimes there is no music offering to these deities, not even the *mudra*, but it seems to depend on which tantric tradition a particular monastery follows. Most Gelug monasteries usually follow the traditions of the Upper Tantric College or the Lower Tantric College, but some Gelug monasteries have their own tradition, based on the practices of their founding lama.

It seems, however, that normally only the bell is played for the wisdom and empowering deities. With Vajrasattva itself you can play the *damaru* as well.

THE POWER OF REGRET

The outline in the *FPMT Prayer Book* has "The prayer of the opponent power"—in other words, the power of regret—at the end, after you have

already recited the Vajrasattva mantra. As I mentioned yesterday, you should generate regret for the negative karma you have created either before you start to recite the Vajrasattva mantra or along with the recitation. Your Vajrasattva meditation then becomes very powerful. The outline in the Prayer Book should be changed, so that it comes before the mantra recitation at the point where you request Vajrasattva to purify all your negative karmas; otherwise, you are practicing the power of regret after you have already finished the meditation.

Also, the sub-heading “Absorption” is in the wrong place. It should not be where Vajrasattva says, “O child of good family...,” but just before “Dorje Nyem-ma Karmo is transformed into light...”

Yesterday I left out one point. I forgot to mention that after you generate the thought of regret in a broad way by considering the general definition of non-virtuous actions of body, speech and mind, you then think about the ten non-virtuous actions; you reflect on how many of the ten non-virtuous actions you committed today, on the way you have committed them again and again in this life, and on how you have committed so many during beginningless rebirths. After that, if you have taken pratimoksha, bodhisattva or tantric vows, you consider all the vows that you have broken. On top of that, you then reflect on how many times you have created negative karma in relation to your gurus, the heaviest obstacle of all. By reflecting on negative karma in this way, you get the broad view of what you need to purify and your regret becomes very strong. It is very, very good to practice in this way because you cover everything that needs to be purified.

MEDITATING ON EMPTINESS

At the point in the sadhana where Lama talks about bliss and voidness, “the bliss of shunyata” and so forth, you should meditate on emptiness. You can also think, as I often mention, that there is no creator, no action of creating and no creation.

Right after you have meditated on emptiness, with continuation of the same awareness, you dedicate with *Ge-wa di...* and *Jang-chub sem-chog...* The dedications then become very powerful.

THE POWER OF NOT COMMITTING NEGATIVE ACTIONS AGAIN

After Vajrasattva tells you that your broken pledges are cleansed and purified, stop for a short while to practice the power of not committing negative actions again. As I mentioned yesterday, you promise to abstain from negative karma—with the subtle negative karmas that are very difficult to abstain from completely, you promise to abstain from them for one hour, one minute or at least a few seconds. By making this strong determination, you perfect the remedy of the four powers, which makes your confession very powerful.

You must do this practice of the power not to commit negative actions again. It is not mentioned here in the sub-headings, so it would be good to write it in as a guide to the practice.

If you practice the remedy of the four powers, your confession is perfect. Therefore, you won't have to experience the four suffering results of a complete negative karma—the ripening aspect result, rebirth in the lower realms; and the three results that are later experienced in the human realm. These three are creating the result similar to the cause, experiencing the result similar to the cause and the possessed result. Experiencing the result similar to the cause of killing, for example, means that your life is harmed or shortened by others or you experience a lot of sickness. The possessed result of killing is that you are born in an unhealthy environment where there are many dangers to life from sickness and so forth and a lot of fear. With perfect confession, you won't have to experience these four suffering results.

Tuesday, February 9 (c)

EVENING: FINAL VAJRASATTVA SESSION

VISUALIZATION WITH *CALLING THE GURU FROM AFAR*

On the crown of your head visualize your root virtuous friend, who is the encompassment of all the buddhas. Think, “All the buddhas manifested in this form in order to guide me. All the buddhas manifested in this ordinary form, to my ordinary mind, in this mistaken form, to my mistaken mind, to save me from the lower realms, from all of samsara and all the defilements, and to bring me to full enlightenment, which is the total cessation of all the faults of the mind and the completion of all realizations.

“May I never rise heresy even for one second in the actions of the glorious guru. With the devotion that sees every action done as pure, may I receive the blessings of the guru.

“Pal-den tsa-wa’i...”

MOTIVATION FOR VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE

“Since my motivation is worldly concern, attachment clinging to this life, my activities today mostly became negative karma. It is the same for this week, this month, this year and since my birth—most of my actions became negative karma. And during my beginningless rebirths, I have created uncountable negative karmas, the results of which I have not finished experiencing. On top of that, during beginningless past lives, I have created heavy karma by committing the ten non-virtues; by breaking pratimoksha, bodhisattva and tantric vows; and by committing negative actions in relation to my gurus.

“If I died now, I would immediately reincarnate in the lower realms. And it is uncertain when I could come back, when I could again receive a perfect human body with which to practice Dharma. Because of my

negative karmas, I would have to experience eons of suffering in the hell realms.

“Practicing Vajrasattva right now is the best solution. I am unbelievably fortunate to have this opportunity to do Vajrasattva meditation-recitation. Therefore, I *must* purify right now, without even a second’s delay.

“For one hell being, my kind mother, who is the source of all my past, present and future happiness, to be suffering in the hell realm for one second is unbearable to me; it is as if that being is suffering for many eons. I must liberate it immediately from all its suffering and bring it to enlightenment.

“But there are numberless hell beings, and they are all the same in that they are the source of all my past, present and future happiness. They are experiencing unbelievably heavy suffering, so I must liberate them without even a second’s delay.

“For one preta being, who is the source of all my past, present and future happiness, to be experiencing the heaviest suffering of hunger and thirst for even one second is unbearable to me; it is as if it is suffering for eons. But there are numberless hungry ghosts, who are the source of all my past, present and future happiness. They are so precious in my life. Their suffering is unimaginable, so I must liberate them without even a second’s delay and bring them to enlightenment.

“For one animal being, my kind mother, who is the source of all my past, present and future happiness, to be experiencing the unimaginable suffering of the animal realm for even one second is unbearable to me; it is as if it is suffering for eons. I must liberate them without even a second’s delay and bring them to enlightenment. Now, there are numberless animals, my kind mothers, who are the source of all my past, present and future happiness. It is much more unbearable that numberless animals are suffering, so I must liberate them without even a second’s delay and bring them to enlightenment.

“Because my mind is hallucinating, I don’t see that human beings are totally hallucinating and trapped in the suffering of samsara. In reality, for one human being, the precious being who is the source of all my past, present and future happiness, to be suffering in samsara even for one second is unbearable to my mind; it is as if that person is suffering for eons. But numberless human beings, who are the source of all my

past, present and future happiness, are experiencing unimaginable suffering, so this is much more unbearable. Therefore, I must liberate them and bring them to enlightenment, without even a second's delay.

“It is the same with one asura being or with one sura being. My hallucinating mind doesn't see their suffering, but in reality they are totally hallucinating and experience only suffering. For them to suffer even for one second is unbearable to my mind, as if they are suffering for eons. I must liberate them without even a second's delay. It is even more unbearable that there are numberless asura and sura beings suffering in this way. Therefore, I must liberate them and bring them to enlightenment without even a second's delay.

“It is the same with one intermediate state being. Its suffering for even one second is unbearable, as if it is suffering for eons. But there are numberless intermediate state beings. I must liberate them and bring them to enlightenment without even a second's delay.

“Therefore, I must achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible”—or you can think, ‘without even a second's delay.’—“To do this, I need to actualize the path to enlightenment. Therefore, because I need to purify my defilements, negative karma and downfalls, I am going to practice Vajrasattva.

“My Vajrasattva meditation-recitation is purely for each hell being, each preta being, each animal being, each human being, each asura being, each sura being, each intermediate state being. It is for each and every sentient being, including the members of my family and even my enemies.” If your parents or other members of your family have passed away, you can think that you are doing the Vajrasattva practice for them. Or if somebody has been very kind to you in the past and you want to do something for them, you can think of them.

GENERATING AS HERUKA

Since no offerings are involved in the short sadhana, you don't need to become Heruka.

THINKING THAT THE NEGATIVE KARMAS ARE PURIFIED

From the holy mouth of Vajrasattva, “Son of the race (or lineage), all

your negative karmas, defilements and degenerated samaya vows collected during beginningless rebirths are completely purified.”

Think that your mind becomes totally pure, as Vajrasattva says. There is not the slightest negative karma or defilement left. There is nothing left of the ten non-virtuous actions. There is nothing left of the negative karmas from having broken the three types of vows. And there is nothing left of the heaviest negative karmas collected in relation to the guru. Everything has been completely purified. Nothing in the slightest is left on your mental continuum.

CONCLUDING PRACTICES

Now practice the power of not committing negative actions again.

Because of this practice, Guru Vajrasattva is extremely pleased with you and absorbs within you. Your own body, speech and mind become inseparable from Vajrasattva’s vajra holy body, vajra holy speech and vajra holy mind.

In emptiness, there is no I, there is no action of creating negative karma, there is no negative karma created. Everything is empty, like space. Keep your mind in the state of emptiness for a while.

With this awareness of emptiness, dedicate the merits: “Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I achieve Guru Vajrasattva’s enlightenment and lead all sentient beings to that enlightenment by myself alone.”

DEDICATION

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and by all other sentient beings, may I, the members of my family, all the students and benefactors of this organization—especially those who sacrifice their lives to offer service to sentient beings and to the teachings of the Buddha through this organization—and those who rely upon me—whose names were given to me and for whom I promised to pray—have long and healthy lives and immediately accomplish all our wishes that accord with the holy Dharma.

“May we actualize the steps of the path to enlightenment, Lama Tsong Khapa’s stainless teaching, which unifies sutra and tantra, especially

bodhicitta. May we completely actualize all these teachings in this very lifetime, without even a second's delay." This is a very important dedication.

"May all the meditation centers and the centers that offer service to others, such as the hospices and the leprosy project, become wish-fulfilling for all sentient beings, immediately pacifying their sufferings of body and mind. In particular, through receiving all their needs, may all the meditation centers be able to spread the complete teaching of Lama Tsong Khapa in the minds of all sentient beings.

"May all the projects of this organization receive all their needs. For example, just here at Land of Medicine Buddha there are many projects to be accomplished—the hospice, the Medicine Buddha temple, 100,000 stupas, the school and so forth. May all the rest of the projects of this organization, including Rockin' for Freedom and the 500-foot Maitreya Buddha statue, succeed immediately through receiving all their needs. May the 500-foot Maitreya Buddha statue be completed in one second through receiving everything that is needed.

"May all these centers, projects and statues cause the generation of loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta in the minds of all sentient beings. And due to that, may no sentient being ever experience anything undesirable, such as war, famine, disease, earthquake, or danger from fire, water and so forth. May these undesirable things cease to exist even in name. May all these centers, projects and statues cause all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible."

This is the ultimate goal, the ultimate purpose. We can then dedicate for the teachings of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and Lama Tsong Khapa to spread in all directions and to flourish forever.

"May all the virtuous friends, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Lama Ösel Rinpoche, have stable lives and may all their holy wishes be accomplished.

"Like Lama Tsong Khapa, may Lama Ösel Rinpoche be able to offer benefit as extensive as the sky to all sentient beings by showing the same qualities that Lama Tsong Khapa had.

"May anybody whose name has been given to me, for whom I have promised to pray or who relies upon me, all those who have passed away, and the numberless sentient beings who are now suffering unimaginably in the lower realms be liberated immediately from all those heaviest sufferings of samsara and reincarnate in a pure land where they can immediately

become enlightened; or may they receive a perfect human body in all their future lifetimes and achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible through meeting a properly qualified Mahayana guru and the Mahayana teachings.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may just my hearing that someone is sick cause that person to recover immediately. And may just my hearing that somebody has died cause that sentient being to immediately be liberated from the lower realms and reincarnate in a pure land where they can become enlightened. Or, if that person is born as a human being but with no freedom to practice Dharma, may that person receive a perfect human body and, by meeting a perfectly qualified Mahayana guru and the Mahayana teachings, achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.”

If possible, do this last dedication as above, to make it broader and unique.

THE PURPOSE OF GIVING ADVICE ON HOW TO DO VAJRASATTVA RETREAT

One point I want to emphasize is that my purpose in telling you how to do this and that meditation or prayer is to educate you about how to guide a Vajrasattva retreat. If somebody later asks you how to do a Vajrasattva retreat, you will know what to explain to them. It's an education in how to do Vajrasattva meditation in order to make it effective. Doing Vajrasattva retreat is not simply about reciting the mantra and saying some prayers. It is about making the practice effective for your mind, making it the quickest, most powerful way to transform your mind. You are learning how to make the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation the most powerful purification. It's an education in how to guide a Vajrasattva retreat, so that you, both sangha and lay people, can teach others how to do Vajrasattva retreat in the future. As well as this, you are learning how to do *Lama Chöpa*, or *Guru Puja*, in an effective way. The arrangement of the prayers helps you do the practice effectively.

LAMA ÖSEL'S LONG LIFE PRAYER

It would be very good to recite Lama Ösel's long life prayer every day. If

you want, you can recite the Mickey Mouse long-life prayer maybe once a week. You should recite Lama Ösel's long-life prayer because Lama Ösel can bring real benefit. This "benefit" doesn't necessarily mean a large number of people; it doesn't necessarily mean having many billions of disciples. The disciples can be very few, perhaps only ten, but there can still be incredible benefit. With even one disciple there can be incredible benefit—but that's another topic. People usually think of benefit in terms of a large number, like hundreds of thousands or billions, but benefit is not defined by number alone. Sometimes one person is of more benefit than hundreds of people. Benefit depends on many factors. Someone can bring great benefit through a large number of people or through even one person.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS

After Nagarjuna's *Praise to Mahakala*, you can read a few of the dedications, recite Lama Ösel's long-life prayer, then on alternate days recite "Der-ni ring-du. . ." the final dedication prayer at the very end of *Jor-chö*, and *Losang Gyal-ten-ma*, the prayer for the spread of Lama Tsong Khapa's teaching.

Reciting *Losang Gyal-ten-ma* is very good because it describes the special qualities of Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings; so it also becomes a meditation on the path. It is a prayer to meet Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings—"to meet" means to actualize the path within you. The real meeting is having not only scriptural understanding, but realization of the path taught and actualized by Lama Tsong Khapa. Intellectual understanding of the path is a type of meeting, but it is not the real meeting. The real meeting is when you actually experience the path, when your mind is transformed into Lama Tsong Khapa's path.

There are different prayers for the flourishing of Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings. *Losang Gyal-ten-ma* is the common one, and there is another by Pabongka Rinpoche, which defines all the special qualities of the whole lam-rim path. When you do some research and compare Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings to other teachings, you can see the difference. There is a special clarity in the teachings of Lama Tsong Khapa.

RINPOCHE'S BODHICITTA HAT

This hat is made of cloth from the robes of the Shakyamuni Buddha statue in Lhasa, the statue that was blessed by Buddha himself. The cloth came from that statue in Tibet. Ribur Rinpoche made a hat for himself and gave me this one. Rinpoche told me to wear it all the time.

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Wednesday, February 10 (A)

MORNING: VAJRASATTVA SESSION

MOTIVATION FOR VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE

Your motivation should combine generating the feeling of regret, the thought of impermanence and death, and bodhicitta. I have already explained this. In short, think of the definition of non-virtuous action. Think of the non-virtuous actions that you have committed in this life and of the numberless non-virtuous actions you have committed in past lives. Consider then the heavier negative karmas, the ten non-virtuous actions. Think of the ten non-virtuous actions that you have done today, in this life and numberless times in your past lives. Next, think of the pratimoksha, bodhisattva and tantric vows that you have broken today, in this life and numberless times in your past lives. Finally, think of the heaviest negative karmas, those created in relation to the guru through harming the holy body, not following the advice, disturbing the holy mind, disrespecting, criticizing, giving up and so forth. Think of any of these negative karmas that happened today, of the many times they have happened in this life and of the numberless times they have happened in past lives.

Then think, “Many people who are the same age as I am have already died, and many others are dying today. It is amazing that so far death hasn’t happened to me. It’s a miracle. My death could happen at any moment, but I have this incredible opportunity to purify before I die.”

Also think, “The purpose of my life is not just to achieve happiness for myself, but to free every single hell being, hungry ghost, animal, human, asura, sura and intermediate state being from all their suffering and bring them to enlightenment. To liberate them, I *must* achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible. Therefore, I need to purify all my obstacles, defilements and negative karmas.”

Alternatively, you can think, “All the buddhas manifested as Vajrasattva to purify me” or “My guru manifested as Vajrasattva to purify me.

I'm very fortunate to be able to do this practice; therefore, I'm going to do this practice for the benefit of all sentient beings." In this way, your motivation also contains meditation on the guru's kindness.

CONCLUDING MEDITATIONS

Vajrasattva says, "How's my darling?"! No, he says, "All defilements, negative karma and degenerated samaya vows you have collected during beginningless rebirths up to now are completely purified."

Next practice the last power, the power not to commit negative actions again.

Because of your promise, Guru Vajrasattva is extremely pleased with you; he melts into light and absorbs within you. Your own body, speech and mind become inseparable from Vajrasattva's vajra holy body, holy speech and holy mind.

You can also dedicate with the awareness that everything is like an illusion, like a dream.

In emptiness there is no I, no creator; there is no action of creating, there is no negative karma created. All other phenomena are also totally empty of existence from their own side.

With this awareness that everything is empty, dedicate the merits. "Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I achieve Guru Vajrasattva's enlightenment and lead all sentient beings to that enlightenment by myself alone."

Wednesday, February 10 (B)

AFTERNOON: VAJRASATTVA SESSION

MOTIVATION FOR VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE

For the motivation, generate regret for all your defilements, negative karma and downfalls; reflect on impermanence, with the strong thought that death can happen at any moment; then generate bodhicitta. Think in the way that I mentioned before.

Think, “One of the benefits of not dying so far is that I can do this Vajrasattva retreat and purify all my past negative karmas. It’s an unbelievable opportunity. How fortunate I am!”

As I mentioned before, now generate bodhicitta.

Think, “If I die now without purifying all these defilements, negative karma, downfalls and degenerated samaya vows, especially those created in relation to the guru, I’ll go to my next life carrying a burden of heavy negative karma the size of the earth. I will then endlessly experience the sufferings of samsara, the result of these negative karmas. Besides that, I will have no realization of the path to enlightenment. Besides the fact that I will not achieve enlightenment, or even liberation from samsara, I will not even achieve a good rebirth.

“Since every single sentient being is the source of all my past, present and future happiness, I’m going to do the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation so that I myself can achieve enlightenment in order to enlighten every single sentient being. I will free every single hell being, my kind mother, from all their suffering and bring them to enlightenment. I will free every single preta being, my kind mother, from all their suffering and bring them to enlightenment. I will free every single animal being, my kind mother, from all their suffering and bring them to enlightenment. I will free every single human being, my kind mother, from all their suffering and bring them to enlightenment. I will free every single asura being, my kind mother, from all their suffering and bring them to

enlightenment. I will free every single sura being, my kind mother, from all their suffering and bring them to enlightenment. I will free every single intermediate state being, my kind mother, from all their suffering and bring them to enlightenment.”

We are also going to do the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation for the long life of all our gurus, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and for the accomplishment of their holy wishes. And if you have anybody that you want to help, such as family members or friends who are sick or have many problems or who have died, you can do the Vajrasattva practice for them.

CONCLUDING PRACTICES

Guru Vajrasattva says, “Son of the race, all your defilements, negative karma, downfalls and degenerated samaya vows are completely purified.” Generate very strong faith that it has happened just as Guru Vajrasattva says.

Practice the last power, the power not to commit negative actions again, by thinking, “From now on I will abstain from those negative karmas that I can. And I will abstain from the subtle negative karmas, which are very difficult to abstain from, for one day, one hour, one minute or at least a few seconds.”

Guru Vajrasattva, extremely pleased with your determination to do this practice of changing your mind and your actions, absorbs into you.

In emptiness there is no I, no creator. There is no action of creating. There is no negative karma created. All other phenomena are also totally empty from their own side. They are all empty—not space, but like space.

With continuous awareness of everything as empty, dedicate the merits. “Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I achieve Guru Vajrasattva’s enlightenment and lead all sentient beings to that enlightenment by myself alone.”

Please also dedicate to generate bodhicitta. “Due to the merits of the three times, *Jang-chub sem-chog rin-po-che...*”

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Wednesday, February 10 (c)

EVENING: FINAL VAJRASATTVA SESSION

VISUALIZATION WITH *CALLING THE GURU FROM AFAR*

Visualize your root virtuous friend above your crown and meditate on guru devotion. By looking at the guru as buddha, see him as buddha. “In essence, the guru is the encompassment of all the buddhas. The guru appears to me in this ordinary aspect,” which means in a form that shows the aspect of having suffering and delusions, “in the view of my ordinary, mistaken mind, in order to liberate me. He appears in this aspect in order to save me from the lower realms, from samsara, and from all the defilements and to bring me to enlightenment.”

After reciting *Calling the Guru from Afar*, recite the following two verses.

“May I never arise heresy even for one second in the actions of the glorious guru. With the devotion that sees whatever action is done as pure, may I receive the blessings of the guru in my heart.

“*Pal-den tsa-wa'i...*”

MOTIVATION FOR VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE

As I mentioned during previous sessions, your motivation for practicing Vajrasattva should also include practicing the power of regret. Generate a strong feeling of regret by reflecting on all the different types of negative karma and degenerated samaya vows that you need to purify. Then generate a strong thought of impermanence and death, remembering especially that death could happen at this moment. After that, generate strong bodhicitta. Dedicate your practice during this retreat, every mantra recited, purely for sentient beings, for you to achieve enlightenment in order to free every single sentient being—every hell being, every hungry ghost, every animal, every human, every asura, every sura, every

intermediate state being—from all their suffering and its causes and bring them to enlightenment.

Also dedicate the retreat or the mantras you recite to the long life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and other virtuous friends and to the accomplishment of all their holy wishes.

TASTING TSOG

When you offer tsog on days when you have taken the Eight Mahayana Precepts, I suggest that instead of biting the tsog, just touch it with your finger and taste it in that way. You can taste the *bala* and *madana* in the same way.

Thursday, February 11

EVENING: FINAL VAJRASATTVA SESSION

LAMA TSONG KHAPA'S PRACTICE OF THE THIRTY-FIVE BUDDHAS

Even though there are some people who are unable to do prostrations because there is not enough space in here, they still have the opportunity to recite the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas while sitting or standing. Reading the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas, which are in the prayer book, gives you an unbelievable opportunity to purify negative karma. As I mentioned the other day, reciting each name once purifies so many eons of negative karma. What we are trying to do here, not just with the Vajrasattva practice but through various means, is to purify our negative karma and defilements as much as possible and to collect extensive merit.

I once asked Denma Lochö Rinpoche why, while Lama Tsong Khapa did so much practice of the Thirty-five Buddhas, there is no mention of his having done the preliminary practice of Vajrasattva recitation many times. In Lama Tsong Khapa's life story you hear only that he did many hundreds of thousands of prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas. Lama Tsong Khapa actually saw the Thirty-five Buddhas in his cave at Wölka. When he first saw the Thirty-five Buddhas, he saw their holy bodies but they had no heads. It was only after Lama Tsong Khapa prefixed the name of each buddha with the title "tathagata" that he saw the Thirty-five Buddhas with heads. Tathagata, or *de-zhin shog-pa* in Tibetan, could be translated into English as "Gone As It Is" or "Mind Gone in the Sky of Emptiness."

Only the holy mind of a buddha can directly see the two truths at the same time. While directly seeing the absolute truth, a buddha's holy mind can at the same time directly see the conventional truth. I'm not completely sure, but I think that higher bodhisattvas can see the two truths together, but cannot see them directly. Only a buddha's holy mind

can directly see the two truths at the same time. In the *Lama Tsong Khapa Guru Yoga*, the verse that praises Lama Tsong Khapa's knowledge refers to understanding directly and simultaneously all objects of knowledge, or the two truths, which is a special quality of the buddha's holy mind.

So, "Gone As It Is" means that the mind is flying, or is gone, in the sky of emptiness, directly perceiving the very nature of phenomena as it is.

After Lama Tsong Khapa added the title "de-zhin sheg-pa," he was able to see the Thirty-five Buddhas with their heads. Lama Tsong Khapa started this tradition. In the Sakya, Kagyu and Nyingma traditions, the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas are recited without the title "tathagata," or "de-zhin sheg-pa." Just the name is recited.

When I asked Denma Lochö Rinpoche this question about why there was no mention of Vajrasattva, but only mention of Lama Tsong Khapa's having done practice of the Thirty-five Buddhas so many times, Rinpoche answered that it is because if you do the Thirty-five Buddhas practice just one time well, you can purify the very heavy negative karma of the five uninterrupted negative karmas (having killed your father, your mother or an arhat; caused blood to flow from a Buddha; or caused disunity among the sangha). All these can be purified by doing confession with the Thirty-five Buddhas practice well just once. Rinpoche gave this as the reason for Lama Tsong Khapa doing so many prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas.

There are also stories of the lam-rim lineage lamas doing many prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas. Je Drubkhangpa did one thousand prostrations a day. His disciple, Purchog Jampa Rinpoche—a very high lama at Sera Monastery and an embodiment of Maitreya Buddha—did three hundred prostrations every day even when he was very old. Lama Atisha's life story mentions that he was still doing prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas when he was showing the aspect of being very old and shaky. It was said that even though he was old, either Purchog Jampa Rinpoche or Lama Atisha, I don't remember which, did prostrations like a running wolf.

In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, it mentions that Lama Tsong Khapa realized emptiness and achieved many other realizations through doing prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas.

The great advantage of having memorized the Thirty-five Buddhas prayer is that you can recite it in the car while you are going to work.

Since you spend so much time driving back and forth between home and work, it is good to spend the time doing prayers or reciting the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas. You can also recite it when you are flying by plane. You can recite the prayer from a book, but it is so much easier if you can recite it by heart because it means that you can purify at any time. Since reciting the names even once purifies so many eons of negative karma, it's a great loss if you don't recite them. And here, if you don't recite while everyone else is reciting, you yourself incur a great loss. It also means that you will take longer to purify your negative karmas and to have realizations. It will take you longer to achieve enlightenment, which means that the numberless other sentient beings who have karmic connections with you, and depend on you, have to suffer longer.

Therefore, you must realize what a precious opportunity you have right now. This present time is the most precious time. If you don't take this opportunity to practice, it is a great loss. There is no greater loss for you than this. As I mentioned the other day, it's a greater loss than losing a million dollars. It's a greater loss than losing zillions of dollars. When their business collapses and they lose a million dollars, some people become crazy with *lung* and want to jump off a bridge or off the roof of a building. Such a loss is nothing! What you lose is just something material; it means nothing. But here, if you don't take this incredible opportunity to practice, to purify and to collect merit in such an easy way, there is no greater loss than this. This is a much greater loss than losing billions of dollars or skies filled with diamonds or gold. Even if you own skies filled with diamonds, gold or wish-fulfilling gems, that alone cannot purify your negative karma or stop your rebirth in the lower realms. However, even if you don't own any of this wealth, reciting Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's name just once has the power to purify 80,000 eons of negative karma.

Reciting the name of any of the Thirty-five Buddhas can purify not simply negative karma but many thousands of eons of negative karma. Therefore, even losing that much wealth is nothing when compared to the loss of missing this chance to practice the Thirty-five Buddhas. This is such an easy way to purify and to collect extensive merit. Simply by reciting the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas, you can achieve unbelievable purification.

CALLING THE GURU FROM AFAR: THE MEANING OF JIN-GYI-LOB

As His Holiness often mentions in his teachings, in the expression *jin-gyi-lob*, *jin* means glorious and *lob* means transforming the mind into the path, into Dharma. Transforming the mind into the path means that you transform your mind into guru devotion through *seeing* the virtuous friend as buddha by *looking* at the virtuous friend as buddha. After transforming your ordinary thoughts toward the virtuous friend into guru devotion, you transform your mind into renunciation of samsara; you renounce the attachment that clings to samsara, to samsaric happiness and perfections. You then transform your mind from the self-cherishing thought into bodhicitta. You also transform your mind from ignorance, the concept of inherent existence, into the wisdom that sees all phenomena as empty (this wisdom includes the selflessness of the person and the selflessness of the aggregates). You then transform your mind from impure thought into pure thought. With this thought, you see everything as pure, as a manifestation of the deity. You see the place as the deity's mandala; your own body and the bodies of others as the deity's holy body, and sounds as mantras, the deity's holy speech. You transform your mind into the completion of the path, up to enlightenment.

You request blessings to transform your mind (*lob*) into these glorious, or magnificent (*jin*), paths. The expression *jin-gyi-lob* involves the transformation of your mind into the whole path, from guru devotion up to enlightenment. Each time we say *jin-gyi-lob* in *Calling the Guru from Afar*, we are making single-pointed requests to the guru. We are begging the guru to transform our mind right now, on this cushion, in this session. And we are not talking about transforming mind in general, some mind in the sky, but our own mind.

At the end of *Calling the Guru from Afar* recite the following verses.

“May I never arise heresy for even one second towards the actions of the glorious guru. With the devotion that sees whatever actions are done as pure, may I receive the blessings of the guru in my heart.

“*Pal-den tsa-wa'i...*”

MOTIVATION FOR VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE

Generate a strong feeling of regret, because for purification, this is the

most important of the four remedial powers. How much you purify, or lessen, your negative karma depends on how much regret you are able to generate by reflecting on the shortcomings of negative karma—of the ten non-virtuous actions, breaking samaya vows, and negativity collected in relation to the virtuous friend, the heaviest negative karma of all.

The power of regret, or of putting the blame on the negative karma, fits very well into the specific motivation for doing Vajrasattva practice.

The other place you can do this practice is when you begin the mantra recitation. You can begin by practicing this power, by generating a strong feeling of regret. Also, in the long sadhana, before you recite the mantra, you request your crown Vajrasattva to purify all your defilements, negative karmas and degenerated samaya—this can also be part of practicing the power of regret. With the recitation of the mantra, you can take time to think in more detail about all the negative karma that you have created. You can expand the subject by thinking of the various ways in which you have created negative karma.

Now meditate to generate a strong motivation of bodhicitta for doing the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation, ensuring that your motivation includes generation of the thought of regret.

CONCLUDING PRACTICES

Think, “From now on, the vows that I can keep, I will keep; the vows that are extremely difficult to keep, I will keep for one day, one hour, one minute, or at least a few seconds.”

Guru Vajrasattva, extremely pleased by your determination not to commit negative actions again, absorbs within you. Your body, speech and mind become inseparable from Vajrasattva’s vajra holy body, vajra holy speech and vajra holy mind.

In emptiness there is no I, no creator; there is no action of creating; there is no negative karma created. All phenomena are totally empty of existence from their own side. While your mind is in the state of emptiness, while you are seeing all phenomena as empty, as they are empty in reality, dedicate the merits.

DEDICATION

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I be able to bring benefit as limitless as the sky to all sentient beings, just as Lama Tsong Khapa did, by having the same qualities within me that Lama Tsong Khapa had, from now on in all my future lifetimes.”

It is extremely important to do this dedication every day in your daily life. You can understand the importance of this prayer by reading Lama Tsong Khapa’s life story and especially by studying his sutra and tantra teachings. Actually, you can understand its importance just by understanding lam-rim teachings correctly.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, no matter which universe, world, country, area or place I am, simply by my being there, may the sentient beings in that universe, world, country, area or place never ever be reborn in the lower realms. May they immediately be liberated from all diseases, spirit harms, negative karma and defilements, actualize the whole path to enlightenment, especially bodhicitta, and quickly achieve enlightenment.

“Simply by my being there, may the sentient beings in that universe, world, country, area or place who are blind immediately be able to see; may those who are lame immediately be able to walk; may those in a coma immediately wake up and recover; and may those who have cancer or AIDS immediately be healed. Simply by being there in that universe, world, country, area or place, may I be able to bring all these benefits. May I bring about whatever is most beneficial. May those with relationship problems become harmonious. May those who need to find a guru find a guru. May those who need teachings be able to receive teachings. May those living in poverty immediately receive wealth. May those unable to find a job find one. May everyone achieve perfect happiness. In this way, may I become wish-fulfilling for all sentient beings, like the bodhisattva Kshitigarbha, who brings infinite benefit to sentient beings.

“I will dedicate all the merits as the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times have dedicated their merits, and as Samantabhadra and Manjughosha realize. I dedicate all my merits in the best way to quickly enlighten all sentient beings.”

One piece of advice from His Holiness Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche is for you, at the end of your practice, to give away all your merits to all sentient beings. Give all your merits, including all the happiness up to enlightenment that results from those merits, to all sentient beings. Give everything to every hell being, every hungry ghost, every animal, every human being, every asura being, every sura being and every intermediate state being.

Doing this, we again collect infinite merit, which we now dedicate in the following way. “Due to these merits, may whatever suffering sentient beings have ripen upon me, and may whatever happiness and merit I have ripen upon all other living beings.”

LAMA ÖSEL’S LONG-LIFE PRAYER

You don’t need to recite the HRIH at the beginning of Lama Ösel’s long-life prayer. It was recited in the past, but there is no need to recite it from now on.

MULTIPLYING MANTRAS

After reciting the mantras that multiply each merit 100,000 times, recite the name of the buddha that not only increases each merit 100,000 times but also causes whatever prayers we have done to be actualized (...NGO WA DANG MÖN LAM....)

Then pray, “Due to the blessings of the eminent buddhas and bodhisattvas, due to unbetraying dependent arising and due to my special attitude—“attitude” not “altitude”!—may all my pure prayers be accomplished immediately.”

Friday, February 12 (A)

AFTERNOON: VAJRASATTVA SESSION

MOTIVATION FOR VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE

Think of the definition of negative karma, or non-virtuous action. It is an action that results in suffering, an action motivated by a non-virtuous thought—by ignorance, anger, and especially the attachment that clings to this life. “Ignorance” here means, in particular, ignorance of karma. Actions motivated by any of these non-virtuous thoughts are transformed into non-virtue.

Think, “In one day how many actions of my body, speech and mind became non-virtues? Taking into account the above definition, almost every one of my actions have been non-virtuous. And it has been like this for weeks, months, years; it has been like this from birth up to now, and throughout beginningless rebirths. I have committed numberless times all these actions that only result in suffering, especially the ripening aspect result of rebirth in the lower realms.

“On top of this, how many times have I committed the ten non-virtuous actions? How many of these ten non-virtues do I commit each day? Besides the negative karmas of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct, how many times each day do I commit the non-virtuous action of gossiping? How many times do I commit the negative karma of covetousness? Of ill will? In my everyday life, how many times do I commit these negative karmas of body, speech and mind? I have committed these negative karmas an inconceivable number of times in this life and I have committed so many more during my beginningless rebirths. I haven’t finished experiencing the suffering results of numberless negative karmas.

“On top of this, even when I have taken vows, I have broken them. Even when I have taken pratimoksha, bodhisattva or tantric vows, I have broken the root and branch vows. How many times do I break my vows in one day? How many times have I broken my vows in this life? How

many times in past lives?

“And how many times have I created heavy negative karma in relation to each of my virtuous friends? How many negative karmas have I created by breaking samaya, disregarding advice, generating heresy and negative thoughts and getting angry? How many times have I done this in this life? How many times have I done this in beginningless past lives? Even though I might not have created all these heavy negative karmas in this life, I have created them in past lives.

“Not only is my death certain to happen, but it could happen at any moment, even before this session is over. Before this session finishes, I could be in the lower realms, I could be experiencing the heaviest suffering of samsara in a terrifying hell realm, just as Buddha explains in the texts. I could be there at any minute. And with all the heavy negative karmas I have created, it is uncertain when I will again have the opportunity to practice Dharma once I have fallen down into a hell realm. Therefore, without even a second’s delay, I must purify all my defilements and negative karma.

“I am extremely fortunate to have met the Buddhadharma, especially the skillful tantric method of the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation, with which I can purify my negative karma. Just as one small spark can burn a whole forest, Vajrasattva meditation-recitation can purify all the negative karma collected over many eons. And purifying this negative karma is the best thing to do with my life right now.

“The numberless hell beings, who are the source of all my past, present and future happiness, are experiencing unimaginable suffering in the hell realms. I must free them from all their suffering and bring them to enlightenment.

“The numberless hungry ghosts, who are the source of all my past, present and future happiness, are experiencing unimaginable suffering. I must free them from all their suffering and lead them to enlightenment.

“The numberless animals, each of whom is so kind and so precious, the source of all my past, present and future happiness, are experiencing unimaginable suffering. I must free them from all their suffering and bring them to full enlightenment.

“The numberless human beings, each of whom is the source of all my past, present and future happiness, are experiencing unimaginable suffering. I must free them from all their suffering and its cause and bring

them to enlightenment.

“The numberless asura beings, each of them is so kind and so precious, the source of all my past, present and future happiness, are experiencing unimaginable suffering. I must free them from all their suffering and its cause and bring them to enlightenment.

“The numberless sura beings, each of whom is the source of all my past, present and future happiness, are experiencing unimaginable suffering. I must liberate them from all their suffering and its cause and bring them to full enlightenment.

“The numberless intermediate state beings, each of whom is so kind and so precious, the source of all my past, present and future happiness, are experiencing unimaginable suffering. I must liberate them from all their suffering and its cause and bring them to enlightenment.

“To free all sentient beings from all the unimaginable suffering of samsara and its cause and bring them to enlightenment as quickly as possible, I myself must achieve full enlightenment as quickly as possible. Therefore, I must purify all my defilements, negative karma and downfalls, which are obstacles to achieving realizations of the path to enlightenment. It is for this reason that I am going to practice Vajrasattva meditation-recitation.”

Think also that you are practicing Vajrasattva meditation-recitation for the long life of the Buddha of Compassion, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and other virtuous friends. You are doing the practice to pacify obstacles to their lives and to accomplish immediately all their holy wishes.

And you can also dedicate your practice of Vajrasattva meditation-recitation to a specific person, to a family member or a friend who is sick or dying or who has already passed away.

CONCLUDING PRACTICES

Look at everything—subject, action, object—as an illusion. Looking at everything, even Vajrasattva, as being like a dream, an illusion, dedicate the merits.

When you don’t examine carefully, everything looks as if it is there; but when you examine, it is not there. Everything appears to be inherently existent, even though there is not the slightest inherent existence

there. All phenomena are merely labeled by the mind, so look at everything as an illusion, as being like a dream, then dedicate the merits.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings—which are like a dream, an illusion, and appear to be inherently existent even though they are not—may the I—which is like a dream, an illusion, and appears to be inherently existent even though it is not, even though the I has never had inherent existence—achieve Guru Vajrasattva’s enlightenment—which is like a dream, an illusion, and appears to be inherently existent even though it is empty of inherent existence, even though it has never had inherent existence—lead all sentient beings—who are also like a dream, an illusion, and appear to be inherently existent even though they are completely empty of inherent existence—to that enlightenment—which is also like a dream, an illusion, and appears to be inherently existent even though it is not—by myself alone—who is also like a dream, an illusion, and appears to be inherently existent even though it is empty of inherent existence.”

Meditate on emptiness either during the Vajrasattva recitation-meditation or during the dedication. From the four powers, meditating on emptiness is the power of the remedy. Meditating for one second on emptiness is like an atomic bomb, it is unbelievably powerful in purifying delusions and negative karmas. Even thinking about emptiness, the very nature of phenomena, for one second brings powerful purification.

Even though all virtuous actions are the practice of the power of the remedy, virtuous activities without meditation on emptiness are like guns as weapons; even one second’s meditation on emptiness is like an atomic bomb.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, from now on, may every action of my body, speech and mind and everything that happens to me be most beneficial for other sentient beings. Whether I am rich or poor, am healthy or unhealthy, have cancer or do not have cancer, have a good reputation or a bad reputation, am praised or criticized, experience gain or loss, am living or dying, and even if I am born in the hell realms, may everything I experience in my life become most beneficial, through my

becoming enlightened and then causing all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment in the quickest way possible.

“I dedicate all these merits in the best way to quickly enlighten all sentient beings, as the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times have dedicated their merits, and as Manjughosha and Samantabhadra realize.”

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Friday, February 12 (B)

EVENING: FINAL VAJRASATTVA SESSION

CONCLUSION OF THE THIRTY-FIVE BUDDHAS CONFESSION PRAYER

When you have finished the prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas, with completion of the recitation of the Thirty-five Buddhas' names and the prayer of confessing downfalls, rather than simply stopping when the prayer is finished, stay a little while in silence and think very strongly that everything—all the defilements, negative karma and downfalls—has been purified through the nectar beams emitted by the merit field and through the power of the Thirty-five Buddhas' names. After that, think of emptiness, and then dedicate by saying, “Due to the merits I have collected by doing prostrations, making offerings, confessing, rejoicing, requesting the guru to have stable life and to turn the Dharma wheel, may I achieve enlightenment in order to enlighten all sentient beings.”

Right after the prayer is completed, stay a little while in silence and do these meditations, then recite the dedication prayer. It is very good to practice in this way. Reciting the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas purifies many negative karmas, but the practice is more powerful if you concentrate strongly in this way at the end.

MOTIVATION FOR VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE

Generate a strong motivation of bodhicitta. Dedicate your Vajrasattva practice to everyone—to every single hell being, hungry ghost, animal, human, asura, sura, and intermediate state being. Your bodhicitta should be based upon reflection on all your defilements, negative karma and degenerated samaya vows and on impermanence and death, that death can happen at any moment. The best solution is to immediately do the Vajrasattva practice, which can purify all these negative karmas.

DEDICATION

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, *Jang-chub sem-chog*...

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I be able to bring benefit like the sky to all sentient beings as Lama Tsong Khapa did, by having the same qualities within me that Lama Tsong Khapa had, from now on in all my future lifetimes.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, in whatever universe, world, country, area or place I am, simply by my being there, may the sentient beings in that universe, world, country, area or place never ever be reborn in the lower realms. May they be liberated from all disease, spirit harm, negative karma and defilements and be able to actualize the whole path to enlightenment, especially bodhicitta, as quickly as possible.

“Simply by my being in that universe, world, country, area or place, may the blind be able to see, the deaf be able to hear, the lame be able to walk. May those with sicknesses and those possessed by spirits that make them crazy and out of control immediately recover. May those with incurable diseases such as cancer, AIDS and so forth recover immediately. May those who are experiencing poverty or having difficulties finding the means of living find wealth. May those who are jobless be able to find jobs. May those who are looking for a guru be able to find a perfectly qualified guru and be able to receive teachings. May those who want to practice Dharma, to do retreat, be able to receive all the necessary conditions. May those who live in vows, the sangha, be able to receive all the necessary conditions, the means of living and so forth, to support the continuation of their practice. May the places where there are fighting and war immediately have peace, happiness and harmony. Simply by my being there in that universe, world, country, area or place, may everyone have perfect peace and happiness. Just like Kshitigarbha, may I be able to bring infinite benefit to sentient beings.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may those who have passed away whose name was given to me or for whom I promised to pray, those who rely upon me, immediately be liberated from the

unimaginable suffering of the lower realms and be reborn in a pure land where they can become enlightened. Or may they receive only a perfect human body now and in all their future lifetimes and achieve enlightenment quickly by meeting a perfectly qualified Mahayana guru and the Mahayana teachings.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I, the members of my family, all the students and benefactors of this organization, especially those who bear much hardship and sacrifice their lives to serve others and the teaching of Buddha through this organization, and also those who rely upon me, whose name was given to me and those for whom I promised to pray, have long lives and be healthy. May all our wishes that accord with the Dharma succeed immediately.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may all the meditation centers and the public service projects, such as the hospices, leprosy project and Dharma publications, become wish-fulfilling for all sentient beings. May they immediately pacify all the sufferings of body and mind of sentient beings and bring perfect happiness to others. Through receiving all their needs, may all the meditation centers be able to spread the complete teaching of Lama Tsong Khapa in the minds of all sentient beings. Through receiving all their needs, may all the projects of this organization succeed immediately. And through receiving everything needed, may the 500-foot Maitreya Buddha statue be completed as quickly as possible. May all these projects and statues cause all sentient beings to generate loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta in their minds. Due to this, may no sentient being experience famine, war, disease or any other undesirable thing; may no sentient being experience danger from the elements through earthquakes, floods, fires and so forth. May all these centers, projects, statues and so forth be able to cause all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

“May all the virtuous friends, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Lama Ösel Rinpoche, have stable lives. May all their holy wishes be accomplished immediately. Like Lama Tsong Khapa, may Lama Ösel bring benefit like the sky to all sentient beings by showing the same qualities as Lama Tsong Khapa.”

MULTIPLYING MANTRAS

Recite the mantras to increase each merit we collected today one hundred thousand times.

The last mantra (...NGO WA DANG MÖN LAM...) not only increases each merit 100,000 times but also actualizes all the prayers that we have made.

“Due to the blessings of the eminent buddhas and bodhisattvas, due to infallible dependent arising, and due to my special attitude, may all my pure prayers be accomplished immediately.”

CONTINUING VAJRASATTVA RETREAT AT HOME

Those who cannot stay to finish the Vajrasattva retreat but wish to continue to do the practice at home are most welcome to do so. Generally, the preliminary retreat instructions in the texts advise that one should finish a retreat in one place. Even when you are doing the preliminary practice of prostrations, when you are counting 100,000, 200,000, 300,000, 400,000 or whatever, the texts say that you should finish at one place. Generally, this might be a skillful means to ensure that you complete the practice, because there will be fewer obstacles if you do it in the one place. I think the reason might be that there are fewer obstacles, which means that you can continue the practice every day and complete it.

However, practices can be done in a loose way or a strict way. When doing retreat in a strict way and when visualizing yourself as a deity, the commentaries normally mention that you have to finish the retreat where you begin it; you have to finish the retreat on the same seat.

Recently Lillian Too from Malaysia was carrying a cushion with her, and she said, “I am carrying my cushion back home, so this way I can do the retreat on the same seat.” This thought never entered my mind. It’s a completely new idea.

In Vajrasattva practice, however, you visualize Vajrasattva on your crown; you don’t visualize yourself as Vajrasattva. And if you are not visualizing yourself as a deity, you can do the practice on different seats. There is no question of loose or strict retreat here; this is the normal instruction. Since in the case of Vajrasattva you are not visualizing yourself as Vajrasattva, those who cannot finish the retreat here can complete the 100,000 mantras by doing the practice every day at home, if they

wish. I think it is extremely worthwhile to do this, because the Vajrasattva practice then gets done, and as we have been thinking in the motivations, you never know when death will happen. I think it is very good if those who have to leave before the end want to continue the practice at home every day and finish their 100,000 mantras.

There are different versions of the Vajrasattva practice, including the very short sadhana that we have been using for one or two sessions each day. At home you can use whichever length Vajrasattva sadhana you like. I heard that some people who have to leave because they have to return to work were asking whether it is possible to continue the retreat at home. I think that continuing the retreat is extremely wise and extremely good, and I thank you very much.

Saturday, February 13 (A)

WEEKEND TEACHING

LIVING WITH COMPASSION

What is it that makes your life easy and free of confusion and problems? What is the source of all happiness and peace? What brings happiness and peace into your daily life and every happiness up to enlightenment, allowing you to bring happiness and peace to numberless sentient beings? It's your attitude—the unmistakable attitude with which you live your life, the attitude by which you live your life according to its meaning, fulfilling your purpose of having been born human.

What is that best attitude that gives the most meaning to your life? It is living with compassion, for the benefit of others.

When your attitude is that of simply seeking your own happiness, the attitude itself attracts many difficulties and creates obstacles to your own success. Even if you are trying to serve others, when your basic motivation is that of seeking your own happiness, you experience many ego clashes and personality problems in trying to work with other people. Whether you are working in a meditation center or an office, if you are self-centered, you will bring all kinds of useless garbage into your life, especially when associating or dealing with others. All kinds of emotional problems will arise.

So even though the work you are doing—working for the welfare of others—is good, your self-centered mind generates all sorts of harmful, unnecessary emotional thoughts—thoughts that are totally useless as far as your job is concerned; thoughts that make others unhappy and angry and disturb their minds. Thoughts such as anger and jealousy create much disharmony between yourself and others. These harmful emotions impede the success of your work, bring no peace, happiness or harmony, interfere with your work and your health, and can even create obstacles to your life, to your very survival. By leading you to suicide, such

thoughts can even cause your death—you're not killed by someone else; you're killed by your own emotional mind.

The moment you begin to cherish yourself is the moment you have created an obstacle to success in working for others. Self-cherishing brings constant problems. Broadly speaking, if you have self-cherishing, you cannot develop bodhicitta. As long as you do not renounce self-cherishing, you cannot develop the holy mind of cherishing others. That means you cannot attain enlightenment, cannot work perfectly for the sake of all the numberless sentient beings.

Thus you can see how the self-centered mind is the main obstacle that prevents you from benefiting others. It is from the self-centered mind that desire, anger and all other negative, emotional thoughts arise, obscuring your mind, blocking your wisdom. Even though there may exist many methods for solving a particular problem and you have the potential to apply them, your self-cherishing attitude totally obstructs your wisdom and prevents you from either seeing or applying them. These emotional thoughts obscure your mind and cause it to hallucinate. Therefore, you cannot perceive the methods that would bring happiness, peace and harmony. Even though, simply by changing your attitude—something that your mind is quite capable of doing—you could apply those methods and solve your problems very easily, somehow you never see it or are unable to do it.

Also, when you are not clear about the purpose of life, you are never clear when it comes to making decisions that affect your life. You always hesitate and are always in danger of making the wrong decision. When your single purpose for living is nothing other than the benefit of others, it is very easy to make the right decision. It is easy because you are very clear about why you are alive.

If there is compassion in your heart, you do not harm others. All other sentient beings receive no harm from you, the one, individual person. Instead of receiving harm from you, they receive peace and happiness. Not only do you not harm them, but out of compassion and according to your ability, you benefit them as much as you can. On the basis of not harming, you benefit. Therefore, numberless sentient beings receive so much peace and happiness from your compassion.

So whether or not numberless sentient beings receive that great peace and happiness from you is entirely up to you. Giving great peace and

happiness to others is completely up to you, because it depends upon what you do with your mind, whether or not you practice compassion towards others. Your own mind makes the decision—either you keep going from life to life harming sentient beings directly or indirectly, or you change your attitude from ego to compassion and offer sentient beings all peace and happiness up to enlightenment. All this depends completely on what you do with your own mind.

Therefore, each of us here is responsible for the peace and happiness of all sentient beings, of each sentient being—all happiness up to that of enlightenment.

The purpose of our lives is, on the basis of abstaining from harm, to bring happiness to others, to be useful for others, to free them from all suffering and bring them all happiness. One kind of happiness is that of this life, but long term happiness—happiness in all coming future lives—is much more important than that. And while causing others to experience happiness in all future lives is highly meaningful, it is even more important to lead them to the everlasting happiness of total liberation—cessation of the entire round of suffering and its causes, delusion and karma. This is more important than simply the long term happiness of future lives, because the happiness of future lives is still contaminated happiness, while the happiness of liberation never diminishes or degenerates. It is the complete cessation of suffering and its causes. Once the seed, or imprint, of delusion has been eradicated, there is no cause for delusion, and therefore suffering, to ever arise again.

But even more important than that is to bring all sentient beings into the peerless happiness of full enlightenment—the cessation of even the subtle faults of mind, the subtle defilements, and the completion of all realizations. However, saying that bringing others to enlightenment is the most important thing does not mean that you should not try to give others the happiness of this life. It means that starting from the intention of enlightening all sentient beings, according to your own ability, you should offer whatever service you possibly can to all other sentient beings. In other words, on the basis of bringing the happiness of this life to others, you lead them to the ultimate happiness of full enlightenment. Or, on the basis of offering others the greatest benefit possible, that of bringing them to enlightenment, you also offer whatever you can of those previous services.

ACHIEVING ENLIGHTENMENT

In order to be able to do perfect work for the numberless other sentient beings, eliminate all their sufferings and lead them from happiness to happiness to full enlightenment, first you have to achieve the omniscient mind of enlightenment yourself. How do you achieve enlightenment? It doesn't happen without cause or by practicing the wrong cause, by following the wrong path. Nor does it happen if you practice an unmistaken method incompletely, for example, spending your entire life—twenty, thirty, forty, fifty...eighty, ninety years of life—just doing breathing meditation. Even though breathing meditation is recommended as a tool to calm your mind down and might be useful for developing single-pointed concentration and making your mind peaceful, that alone does not get you anywhere, does not transform your mind into virtue or diminish or eradicate delusions.

To terminate delusions, you need to realize emptiness. To eradicate ignorance, the root, or cause, of all the delusions, you have to realize emptiness. So how can you do that just by practicing breathing meditation? How can you escape from samsara by spending your whole life watching your breath? There's no way. Spending your entire life practicing mindfulness of the body, watching your abdomen rise and fall—after you've eaten a big meal or when your belly is empty! Anyway, I'm joking. Spending your whole life developing awareness of your bodily sensations might help you prevent strong anger or strong desire from arising at the time, but even if you spend your whole life with your mind watching your mind, your mind meditating on your mind, if you meditate on only the conventional nature of mind and not its ultimate nature, if you simply practice single-pointed concentration on the conventional nature of mind, how can that stop ignorance? How can that cut the root of samsara? There's no way.

Spending your time doing that is like trying to stop a poisonous plant from growing by planting another one next to it. It's like trying to destroy a poisonous plant by putting cotton wool alongside it. Even if you spend your whole life practicing mind concentrating on mind, how can that eradicate the root of samsara, the concept of the inherently-existent I, the inherently-existent aggregates? It's impossible. It would not affect that one bit; it would not do anything.

The root of samsara is the perverted mind (Tib. *log-she*). While there is no I on the aggregates—not even a merely labeled I on the base, the aggregates—after the I is merely labeled by the mind, it appears to our hallucinating mind as if it's *on* the aggregates—like a brocade tablecloth covering a table, like a book lying on a table. You see that it is *there* on the aggregates—which is the same as saying that the I appears from its own side—the merely labeled I, the I that is merely labeled by your mind, appears back to your mind, your hallucinating mind, as if it exists from its own side. Then you allow your mind to believe that it is true. You allow your mind to hold on to that inherently-existent I. That concept is *log-she*, the totally perverted mind, the totally wrong concept, the totally hallucinating mind. The *only way* to eliminate this is to recognize what it is that the concept is holding on to, to recognize the way this concept apprehends the I.

When you don't investigate, it looks like it's there, but when you examine it more closely, you see that it is not there. While your mind is unaware, not analyzing, it looks as if it's there, but when your mind investigates, it cannot be found either on the aggregates or anywhere else. It is totally non-existent.

Even though you cannot find the merely labeled I on the base, on the aggregates, you can find it where the aggregates are. Where there is the base, there you will find the merely labeled I. You just can't find it *on* the base.

The object that this ignorance, the root of samsara, the concept of inherent existence, apprehends, what it holds onto, cannot be found either on the aggregates or anywhere else. It is totally non-existent, it has *never* existed since beginningless time. From beginningless rebirths, the inherently existent I has never existed; it doesn't exist now, and it has never existed.

All buddhas realize that there is no inherently existent I, even though the merely labeled I, merely labeled actions, merely labeled objects, merely labeled hell, merely labeled enlightenment, merely labeled path, merely labeled samsara, merely labeled nirvana, merely labeled happiness, merely labeled suffering, merely labeled virtue, merely labeled non-virtue—which in reality exist merely in name and are completely empty of inherent existence—are covered by our hallucinating view with the appearance of inherent existence. Our hallucinating view covers everything—the

merely labeled I, merely labeled actions, merely labeled objects, merely labeled enemies, merely labeled friends, merely labeled money, merely labeled jobs, the whole thing—all phenomena, which exist in mere name and are empty of inherent existence, with the appearance of inherent existence. This is how it is; this is our world. But what the numberless buddhas and bodhisattvas who have realized emptiness see is that all these appearances are completely non-existent; that there is not the slightest atom of inherent existence anywhere.

So, to go back to what I was saying before, even if you spend your entire life watching your mind, single-pointedly concentrating on your mind, that alone will not have the slightest effect on the root of samsara. It will give no harm to your ignorance; your ignorance will remain very comfortable, with its entourage of the delusions very well established. That kind of meditation alone can never help liberate you from samsara; it does nothing.

To make it impossible for delusions to arise, you have to eradicate their seed. To prevent the cause of samsara, delusion and karma, from ever arising, to make sure that ignorance, attachment and anger never arise at all, ever again, you have to eradicate the seed of delusion, which is in the nature of imprints on the continuity of your consciousness, according to the Prasangika school of Buddhist philosophy, the merely labeled I. Only by realizing emptiness, by developing the wisdom that directly perceives emptiness, can you eradicate the seed of delusion. Nothing else can directly do this.

Therefore, if you spend your entire life just doing breathing meditation—or even “mind concentrating on mind” meditation, which has nothing to do with the ultimate nature of mind—you cannot remove the seed of delusion or put a final end to the delusions, and you certainly can’t reach enlightenment. That’s totally out of the question.

In order to attain enlightenment, you have to practice all the methods without exception. Not only that, you have to practice these methods in the right order, without mixing them up. If you practice them out of order you cannot attain enlightenment. To reach full enlightenment, to actualize the lam-rim, the steps of the path to enlightenment, you have to actualize the graduated path of the practitioner of highest capability. Doing that depends upon your having actualized as a foundation the graduated path of the practitioner of intermediate capability. That in

turn depends upon your having prepared by actualizing the graduated path of the practitioner of least capability.

GURU DEVOTION

I was thinking to read a little from Lama Tsong Khapa's *Great Exposition of the Steps of the Path (Lam-rim chen-mo)*. I was actually thinking of reading the entire text—perhaps in fifteen minutes!

Anyway, you need to actualize the graduated path of the practitioner of least capability in order to actualize the graduated path of the practitioner of intermediate capability, and for that, as Lama Tsong Khapa mentions in his short lam-rim text, *The Foundation of All Good Qualities*, you need to see that correct devotion to the kind guru, who is the foundation of all good qualities, is the root of the path. That is the foundation of all realizations, from the graduated path of the practitioner of least capability, from the realization of the perfect human rebirth, all the way up to enlightenment. That is not only the foundation of all realizations; it is also the foundation of every good thing that ever happens in your life, of any happiness you have ever experienced, in past lives, in this life, and in all future lives up to enlightenment. Every good thing, every single happiness, comes from that field that is the guru. Therefore, correct devotion to your guru is the root of the path.

The text continues: “By clearly seeing this and applying great effort, please bless me to rely upon him with great respect.”

The words “great effort” here have deep significance. What Lama Tsong Khapa is saying here is that seeing your virtuous friend as pure, as buddha, has to come with much effort from your own side. Seeing your guru as buddha doesn't come from his side, independently. It has to come from your own side, and with much effort. Seeing him as pure takes much, continual effort. Seeing him as pure, as having eradicated all the errors of mind and possessing all the good qualities, takes not just a few days, not just an hour's meditation session, not just two or three months of meditation, but year after year, life after life, of effort. This is how much effort it takes to be able to practice guru devotion with thought and action correctly. That's what this teaching means. Not just a few minutes' practice then stop; an hour's practice, then stop; a year's practice, then stop. Not like that.

However, this is not the main thing I wanted to talk about right now. I can deal with that another time. I also wanted to go into the nine attitudes of guru devotion that Lama Tsong Khapa explained in the *Lam-rim chen-mo*. How to correctly devote yourself to your guru with those nine attitudes. So I can do that another time.

THE PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH

What I want to talk about now is what Lama Tsong Khapa mentions in the second verse of *The Foundation of All Good Qualities*, that on the basis of correct guru devotion, we should understand that this time not only have we found a precious human body, which in itself is extremely rare, but one that is qualified by eight freedoms and ten richnesses, which is much more rare. And specifically, at this time we have met the precious Buddhadharma and a virtuous friend revealing not only the unmistakable path but also the complete path, with nothing missing. Therefore, we have every opportunity to practice all the steps of the entire path to enlightenment. This is what we have received, just this once.

When you are born in the hell realms, at that time you encounter all the obstacles. This time you have all the opportunities to practice Dharma. Whatever happiness you want—any great meaning of this life, the happiness of future lives, liberation from samsara, the full enlightenment of buddhahood—whichever of these you want, you can achieve with this present perfect human body. What you want is happiness; what you don't want is suffering. So with this highly meaningful perfect human body you can abandon all the causes of suffering and create all the causes of happiness, because all happiness comes only from virtue, only from Dharma, and all suffering comes only from non-virtue. As Nagarjuna explained, actions born from attachment, anger and ignorance are non-virtuous—from those, all suffering transmigrators arise—whereas actions born from non-attachment, non-anger and non-ignorance are virtuous—from those, all happy transmigrators arise.

Therefore, what you should do is practice only Dharma, nothing else, because happiness is what you want. Since that is your wish, you should create only virtue, you should practice only Dharma. Not only that, but you must practice Dharma in this life. You cannot leave it for future lives

because it will be extremely difficult to find such an opportunity again. After this, it will be hard to receive such a perfect human body as you have now, with which you can achieve all the different levels of happiness beyond this life—the happiness of future lives, liberation from samsara and full enlightenment. With this body you can achieve whatever you want, but you have found it only this once and such a body will be extremely difficult to find again in the future.

IMPERMANENCE AND DEATH

Not only should you practice Dharma in this life, but you must practice it right now. Not only is death certain, but it can come at any time, even today, even at this very moment. Therefore, you should practice Dharma right now, and you should practice only Dharma, because at the time of death nothing else will help. Your entire family and even your own body, which of all sentient beings' bodies you cherish the most, have to be left behind. No matter how many friends you have, how much wealth, none of it can be carried into your future lives. Naked, your consciousness goes alone into your next life. As many lamas have mentioned in their lam-rim teachings, when you pull a hair from butter, it slips out with no butter attached. Like that, your bare consciousness will go into your next life, therefore, at the time of death nothing other than Buddhadharma can be of benefit. Furthermore, only Dharma can benefit your next life and those beyond. Therefore, practice Dharma and only Dharma.

[Rinpoche reads from a text by Lama Tsong Khapa.] Lama Tsong Khapa says that at the time of death, nothing other than the holy Dharma can be of benefit. There are three things to think. When you see you have to go to the next life, away from this life, away from this world, even if at the time of death you are surrounded by your relatives and friends, no matter how much they love you, how much affection they have for you, none of them can go with you. And no matter how much wealth you possess, how many piles of beautiful objects, you can't take even an atom of it with you. Finally, you have to leave behind even the flesh and bones that you were born with. If you have to leave even your flesh and bones, there's no question that you also have to leave behind the other perfections of this life. Therefore, you should think, "It is certain that I will pass to another world and that when I do I will leave all

this behind.” Moreover, you should think that this will happen today, and think how at that time, *only* the Dharma will be your savior, refuge and guide.

Then Lama Tsong Khapa refers to two quotations. One is from the writings of Karnikarnika, who says, “When the view of the ripening aspect result of previous karma arises and the Lord of Death invites them to follow their new karma, all migratory beings have to leave behind everything but their negative karma and virtue; nobody comes along with them. Understand this and practice well.”

The other quotation says basically what Lama Tsong Khapa explained just before, so I won’t repeat it. However, he says that leisure has great significance, is extremely difficult to find and decays very easily, so remember death. If you don’t try to achieve happiness beyond this life, even though you have received a human rebirth, it’s as if you have not, and your life will have no more meaning than that of an animal. As far as achieving happiness and avoiding suffering up until the time of death are concerned—in other words, attaining the happiness of this life, solving the problems of this life—Lama Tsong Khapa says that animals are even better at it than humans. But we should conduct ourselves better than animals. Since being born human is special, our conduct should surpass that of animals. Otherwise, Lama Tsong Khapa says, even though you have achieved the body of a happy transmigrator, it is as if you haven’t.

If you lead your life no better than an animal, if your attitude is simply that of seeking the happiness of this life, your own happiness, no matter how successful you are in achieving this life’s happiness, your life is no more special than that of an animal. No matter how powerful or famous you become—or whatever other happiness of this life you seek—your attitude and conduct is no better than that of an animal. If this is how you live your life, your having achieved this human body has no meaning.

In the *Bodhicharyavatara*, Shantideva says, “It is not rare for animals to engage in meaningless activities, but freedom and richness, which are extremely difficult to find, are destroyed through being tormented by karma.” [Chapter 8, verse 81.]

I’m not one hundred percent sure, but my guess is that he means that insignificant or meaningless activities are not hard to create; even animals can do those well. But if we use our perfect human rebirth, which is so

difficult to find again, for that, and create negative karma instead of trying to achieve the happiness beyond this life all the way up to enlightenment, we are destroying this precious opportunity we have. If, instead of creating good karma, the cause of all happiness, we use our perfect human body to create negative karma, all these good results—good rebirths, liberation from samsara, enlightenment—are destroyed, and we will have to experience rebirth in the lower realms.

I think this is what Shantideva means by “destroy.” For example, when you get angry, the anger destroys your liberation. How? By destroying your merits. Because anger destroys your merits, anger destroys your liberation. Shantideva’s meaning might be similar to that. If, with this perfect human rebirth and that kind of attitude you create negative karma, you will experience only suffering rebirths and will not achieve all those good rebirths, from better future lives all the way up to enlightenment. It’s like the negative karma destroyed all those good results. I think that’s what it could mean.

Then Lama Tsong Khapa says that even though it is difficult to generate, it is the foundation of the path, so you must try.

From the holy mouth of the Kadampa Geshe Potowa: “Meditating on impermanence in order to eliminate the appearance of this life should be your main practice. Eliminate the appearance of this life, your family, relatives, possessions and so forth, knowing that you yourself must go from this life unaccompanied, alone, and nothing other than Dharma can help you at that time. Thinking in this way, live without attachment to this life. Until this thought arises in your mind, your entire Dharma path is blocked.”

Geshe Potowa is saying that until the thought of impermanence and death arises in your mind—the thought that death can come at any moment and that at the time of death none of the perfections or activities of this life can be of benefit and you have to go alone into the next life—and you have developed detachment from this life, the entire path of Dharma is blocked.

In other words, the concept of permanence, the attachment clinging to this life, the thought, “I am going to live for a long time,” which is opposite to the thought of impermanence and death, blocks the path of the entire Dharma. First of all, it prevents your mind from becoming Dharma, it does not allow your daily attitude to become Dharma. This

prevents all your actions from becoming Dharma; therefore, they all become non-virtuous. That is the immediate obstacle—your attitude of mind in daily life not becoming Dharma and as a result, all your actions not becoming Dharma actions.

Therefore, you cannot gain the realizations of the graduated path of the practitioner of least capability, those of the graduated path of the practitioner of intermediate capability or those of the graduated path of the practitioner of highest capability. Since you have no renunciation of this life, no renunciation of future lives in samsara, you cannot achieve the graduated path of the practitioner of intermediate capability, which is the foundation. Similarly, you cannot achieve the graduated path of the practitioner of highest capability, bodhicitta or the rest of the Mahayana path. Therefore, you cannot receive enlightenment. That's the meaning of the entire Dharma path being blocked.

Kadampa Geshe Torwa said, "If by the way you practice precisely, try to collect merits and purify your defilements with effort and zeal, and make requests to the guru and the deity, even though you think you won't attain any realizations for a hundred years, because causative phenomena cannot remain as they are, realizations will come."

What he is saying is that if you practice whole-heartedly, correctly, with effort and precision; if, while you are meditating on the path, you also constantly, from the bottom of your heart, pray, make single-pointed requests to the guru-deity; if you continue to practice like this, even if you think that you will never gain any realizations, such as those of emptiness, bodhicitta, renunciation or tantra, even if you think, "Oh, how could it possibly happen? Poor me! I'm this and that...how could someone like me attain realizations? It will take ages, a hundred years," even if that's what you believe about your gaining realizations, because of all the practices you do and because your mind is a causative phenomenon—it exists through dependence upon causes and conditions—without choice, your mind has to change. It cannot stay as it is. Your mind cannot remain in its old, hard state, it has to change. That's what the Kadampa Geshe Torwa is saying—realizations can happen very easily, without taking a hundred years.

In the quotation above, "by the way" could mean while you are meditating on the path, training your mind in the lam-rim. Or it could mean trying to use even your daily activities—eating, sleeping, washing and so

forth—as a means of collecting extensive merits and purifying defilements. “By the way” could mean either of those things.

So today I’ll stop here, but somehow I’ve skipped ahead and I haven’t covered the subject that I wanted to talk about!

LAM-RIM AND RETREAT

Basically, I don’t plan to go over the entire lam-rim from the beginning to end. Anyway, it’s never happened yet! That would be like seeing stars in the daytime. What I hope to do is to cover some of the lam-rim subjects that relate to the Vajrasattva retreat, such as guru devotion, to help the Vajrasattva retreat become a stronger, more powerful purification, to become a support for that; to increase our determination to practice Dharma so that we can defeat the delusions, overcome the obstacles that prevent us from achieving enlightenment—the self-cherishing thought and so forth; and to strengthen our minds so that we can overcome our inner obstacles, which prevent us from freeing ourselves from samsara.

Our getting free from samsara or remaining trapped within it depends entirely on which is stronger, the delusions or the mind. It’s a question of this. If our mind becomes stronger than our delusions, we’ll get free from samsara. If we allow our mind to be weak and our delusions to be strong, if we give freedom to our delusions instead of ourselves, we will not find liberation, only more samsaric suffering.

The conclusion is this. Not all of us can live ascetic lives in isolated places, but we all have to practice Dharma as much as possible. There’s no choice. Therefore, we have to remember impermanence and death as much as we possibly can, since this is the mind that serves as a remedy to the attachment clinging to this life. This attachment is what brings us all our problems, confusion and obstacles to Dharma practice. It prevents our attitude and actions from becoming Dharma and prevents the Dharma that we do practice from becoming pure. Meditation on impermanence and death must become our fundamental weapon, our main remedy, or antidote, to the delusions.

On the basis of this, we should generate the good heart, bodhicitta, the thought of benefiting others. This is our best refuge, especially for those of us whose lives are very busy, who don’t have much time for sitting or other traditional forms of practice. On the basis of reflecting on

impermanence and death, we should make the good heart the main object of refuge in our lives. This allows all our actions to become Dharma, the cause of enlightenment and the cause of happiness for all sentient beings. Therefore, we should lead our lives with this attitude, the thought of benefiting all sentient beings.

If you recite the Vajrasattva mantra once with bodhicitta, you get the same benefit as you do from reciting 100,000 without it. If you make one light offering with bodhicitta, you get the same amount of merit as you do from making 100,000 light offerings without it. If you make charity of one dollar to a sentient being—a beggar or a homeless person—with bodhicitta, you get the same amount of merit as you do from making charity of \$100,000 without it.

It is said in the scriptures that if the sentient beings of three galaxies—the Tibetan term is *tong-sum*, but I'm not exactly sure how best to translate it, you should check for yourselves—all build stupas of the seven precious substances, such as gold, diamonds and so forth, and fill the whole world with these stupas, the merit of that is far less than that created by just one person offering a tiny flower to the Buddha with bodhicitta motivation. The person making this small offering with bodhicitta motivation creates far more merit than three galaxies of sentient beings covering the world with stupas made of the seven precious substances without it.

Try to imagine this. If you build just one stupa you create unbelievable merit. It directs your life to enlightenment and is an amazing purification. So here we have three galaxies' worth of sentient beings, each one building a stupa of the seven precious substances—not with bricks and mortar but with precious jewels—and covering the world with these. Nevertheless, the merit of one person offering a tiny flower to the Buddha with bodhicitta motivation creates far more merit than that.

Thinking about this should inspire you to make bodhicitta your heart practice. It transforms your life like iron into gold or kaka into diamonds. Bodhicitta motivation gives your life its greatest possible meaning and makes every single action of your daily life as beneficial as it can possibly be. You should remember bodhicitta from morning to night, twenty-four hours a day. Hold it as your most precious possession, as your wish-fulfilling jewel. You should cherish your bodhicitta motivation above all else; remember it constantly and practice it at every moment.

If you do one prostration with bodhicitta it's as if you did 100,000 prostrations. In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo explains that if you recite the *Praises to the Twenty-one Taras* with bodhicitta, you get the benefit of having recited it 100,000 times. Hence, if you are doing pujas or reciting prayers for others, if you do them with bodhicitta, they become much more powerful and create far more merit.

Therefore, how much purification you get from the Vajrasattva retreat doesn't depend upon how many mantras you recite but on their quality. Of course, the number has power, but the quality of your recitation is much more important. So even if you recite just one Vajrasattva mantra, how much negative karma gets purified depends on how you recite it. Therefore, when you do your motivation you should meditate very precisely on the lam-rim, especially bodhicitta, and generate regret.

Ordinary people might think regretting your mistaken actions is negative thinking, but people who are practitioners, who have faith in the Buddha's teachings and the lam-rim and have been practicing deeply, see it as positive. Beginners, too, might think that generating the thought of regret is negative. But if you understand the Dharma—especially Mahayana practices such as the Thirty-five Buddhas practice, where you recite the names of those extremely powerful buddhas, and in particular, the skillful methods of Highest Yoga Tantra, such as the practice of the Highest Yoga Tantra aspect of Vajrasattva—your regret serves as medicine; it heals you.

The lam-rim teachings cite six methods of purification. Practicing Vajrasattva, for example, with your knowledge of Buddhadharma, especially the powerful purification methods of the skillful means of tantra, your regret becomes a technique of healing. It purifies your negative karma so that you avoid obstacles and don't have to experience its suffering result, and even if you do, the experience is either very light or delayed for a long time; many lifetimes, even eons. Thus, the generation of regret heals, purifies negative karma, brings happiness and peace, not only in this life but in all lives, from now to enlightenment.

Even if you don't do these methods of purification—Vajrasattva, prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas while reciting their names, making tsa-tsas and statues of buddhas and so forth—just feeling regret for the negative karmas you have created or for the harm you have given

others lightens that negative karma. The stronger the regret, the lighter the negative karma becomes. Therefore, feeling regret is positive, is healing, is purification. Generating regret is the path to happiness, even though at the time it might feel unpleasant. Never mind; it has a good future! When you tally your negative karmas, count them one by one, make an account of them, you might not feel so good, but that feeling of regret has a good future because it purifies them, at least makes them lighter and shorter. Therefore it is positive.

Therefore, it is wrong to think that just because at the moment something feels unpleasant, it must be negative. That kind of thinking becomes an obstacle to purifying your negative karma, to avoiding your future suffering, to freeing yourself from samsara, to attaining enlightenment, to achieving realizations. Instead of focusing on the incredible benefits you will gain, all that future peace and happiness, interpreting the whole thing as negative becomes a huge block to all those good results.

A similar thing can happen when you don't know how to think about impermanence and death properly. If you don't know Dharma or don't practice, thinking about impermanence and death can be like torturing yourself because you don't have a solution to the problem. But if you know Dharma, and especially if you practice, then instead of becoming unpleasant, thinking about impermanence and death can become incredibly beneficial. You can overcome all your delusions, you can begin to practice Dharma without obstacles, you can continue to practice without obstacles, and you can complete your practice without obstacles and attain enlightenment. These are some of the benefits, as mentioned in the lam-rim teachings. If you practice Dharma, you receive these benefits, but if you don't, then thinking of death just makes you unhappy.

If you practice Dharma, thinking about impermanence and death allows you to overcome death itself. When you start to meditate on impermanence and death, you are afraid of death, but this fear makes you practice Dharma. Then, through practicing Dharma, you gain the realizations of renunciation of samsara, bodhicitta and emptiness, and in that way gradually overcome your fear of death. Eventually, you become free of even death itself. As Milarepa said, "Afraid of death, I fled to the mountains, where I realized the ultimate nature of the primordial mind. Now even should I die, I'll be unafraid."

In that way, Dharma practitioners think about impermanence and death, which spurs them on to develop their practice until they have overcome not only the fear of death, but death itself.

So again, I have gone on for a long time, but now it's really time to stop, this is really the end!

Saturday, February 13 (B)

EVENING: FINAL VAJRASATTVA SESSION

DEDICATION

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may bodhicitta, the source of all happiness and success for me and for all sentient beings, be generated within my mind and in the minds of all the sentient beings without even a second’s delay. And may the bodhicitta that has been generated be increased.”

DEDICATING WITH BODHICITTA

Even though you pray to generate bodhicitta when you do the lam-rim prayers, it is still good to do this dedication at the very end. There are two reasons for this. The first is that generating bodhicitta is the door of the Mahayana path to enlightenment. Without bodhicitta, you cannot enter the Mahayana path, which means that you cannot achieve enlightenment and cannot enlighten all sentient beings. Without bodhicitta, you cannot do perfect work for sentient beings. Without bodhicitta you cannot purify all your subtle defilements. Of course, the direct purification of subtle defilements has to do with wisdom, but it requires the support of bodhicitta. Even if you have the wisdom that directly perceives emptiness, unless you also have bodhicitta, you cannot cease the subtle defilements. You cannot cease the subtle defilements with that wisdom alone; you need the support of bodhicitta. With bodhicitta you can then complete all the qualities of the realizations. It is only with bodhicitta that you can do perfect work for other sentient beings. Without bodhicitta, even if you have wisdom, you cannot do perfect work for other sentient beings.

The second reason for dedicating to generate bodhicitta is that it

becomes practicing the power of prayer, one of the five powers that you practice in thought transformation. Your whole life's practice can be integrated into the five powers, one of which is the power of prayer. [The others are the powers of the white seed, familiarity, determination and repudiation. See p. 612 ff. in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*.] You dedicate your merits by praying to actualize bodhicitta and to never be separated from bodhicitta in this life and in all future lives. The power of prayer is also part of the five powers to be practiced at the time of death, a Mahayana (though not tantric) technique for transferring the consciousness. [The other powers at death have the same names and page references as above.] As the time of your death approaches, you also pray to never be separated from bodhicitta at the death time, in the intermediate state or in future lives. If you are practicing thought transformation by following these outlines, you accomplish the practice of the power of prayer by dedicating to develop bodhicitta. This is one reason that we dedicate especially to develop bodhicitta, even though there are so many other realizations.

THREE OTHER DEDICATIONS

Dedication is generally also done for the long lives of the holy beings who preserve the Dharma. You dedicate for your own virtuous friend to have stable life. The happiness of sentient beings depends on the teachings of Buddha, and the existence of the teachings depends on the existence of the holy beings who preserve and spread the Dharma. This is why we dedicate for the holy beings to have stable life and for their holy wishes to be fulfilled. We dedicate principally for the long life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who is the holder of the entire Buddhadharm (not only Hinayana, but Mahayana Paramitayana and Mahayana Secret Mantra) in this world, and then for other holy beings.

We then dedicate the merits for the flourishing of the teachings and next for the happiness of sentient beings. Dedications are made for these three purposes. However, dedicating the merits for the teachings to exist and to spread includes the other dedications.

DEDICATING OTHERS' MERITS

There is a reason why I always mention dedicating your own merits and also the merits of others. For example, if one million people each give one dollar to a charity, it makes a total of one million dollars. Even though the amount that each person gives is very small, just one dollar, it combines with all the other donations to become one million dollars. And with one millions dollars, you can accomplish big projects that help many thousands of people. The one dollar that you give combines with the others to become something that is very powerful and that can be used for a long time. In a similar way, even though your merit is very small, by combining it with the merit of others, your merit becomes very powerful and inexhaustible.

Dedicating to achieve enlightenment for the sake of sentient beings again makes the merit inexhaustible. It is like putting one drop of water into the ocean. That one drop gets mixed with the rest of the ocean, and until the ocean is exhausted, that one drop is never exhausted. By dedicating the merits to achieve enlightenment, you can enjoy the benefits of the merit until you achieve enlightenment; and even after you achieve enlightenment, you still enjoy the result of the merits because you can then enlighten other sentient beings. You continuously enjoy your merit. Otherwise, you enjoy the result of your merit just once, and then it is exhausted. Dedicating the merits to achieve enlightenment makes the merits powerful and inexhaustible.

DEDICATING IN EMPTINESS

The reason that we dedicate the merits by sealing them with emptiness is that if we do not do this, our dedication is not pure because it is stained by the concept of inherent existence. This is the “poisonous food” referred to in *The Seven-Point Thought Training* when it advises, “Abandon poisonous food.” When we dedicate the merits by sealing with emptiness, the merits are protected from being destroyed by anger and heresy. Otherwise, anger and heresy can destroy our merits. Since our mind is so uncontrolled and we do not apply meditation all the time, anger and heresy can arise at any moment. Therefore, it is very important to protect the merits that we have put so much effort into creating.

Like putting our money in the safest bank, sealing our merits with emptiness is the best way to protect them. When we dedicate our merits in daily life, we should dedicate for bodhicitta, to achieve enlightenment for the sake of sentient beings, and we should seal our dedications with emptiness. At the very least our dedications should include these two factors.

THE ACTUAL DEDICATIONS

“Due to the three times merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I be able to offer benefit as extensive as the sky to all sentient beings, just as Lama Tsong Khapa did, through having the same qualities within me as Lama Tsong Khapa had, from now on in all my future lives.”

We give all our past, present and future merits—including all the merits we collected today by doing *Guru Puja*, Vajrasattva practice, prostrations and so forth—and all the resultant happiness, up to enlightenment, to every hell being, every hungry ghost, every animal, every human being, every asura being, every sura being and every intermediate state being. (To do this more elaborately, we can also give our body, which we visualize as a wish-fulfilling jewel, and all our possessions.) Because of this, sentient beings receive everything that they need, and all these enjoyments then cause them to cease all their defilements and to actualize the path of method and wisdom. They all become enlightened in the aspect of whichever buddha we practice.

By doing this practice of giving, we collect skies of merit, which we now dedicate. “Due to all these merits, may whatever suffering sentient beings have ripen upon me and may whatever happiness I have ripen upon all sentient beings.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me and others, wherever I am—whichever universe, world, country, area or place—simply by my being there, may the sentient beings who are in that universe, world, country, area or place, never ever be reborn in the lower realms. May they immediately be liberated from all diseases, spirit harms, negative karmas and defilements and achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible by actualizing the whole path, especially bodhicitta.”

Then dedicate more specifically: “Simply by my being in that universe, world, country, area or place, may those who are blind be able to

see; may the deaf be able to hear; may the lame be able to walk; may those with cancer immediately be healed; may those with AIDS immediately be healed; may those in a coma immediately regain consciousness; may those with arthritis immediately be healed; may those who are crazy because they are possessed by spirits immediately be released from spirit possession; may those living in disharmony become harmonious and find peace and happiness; may those who have obstacles to practicing Dharma, to doing retreat, be free from all those obstacles; may those who are looking for a guru be able to find a perfectly qualified guru; may those who are looking for teachings be able to receive all the teachings that they need. May everyone receive perfect happiness simply through my being there in that universe, world, country, area or place. May I become wish-fulfilling for all sentient beings, like Kshitigarbha, who brings infinite benefit to all sentient beings.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may the father of Fred (a member of Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Singapore) who died recently, as well as all those who have died and whose names have been given to me and for whom I have promised to pray, those who rely upon me, as well as all the numberless sentient beings who are suffering unimaginably in the lower realms immediately be liberated from all those sufferings and reincarnate in a pure land where they can become enlightened. Or may they receive a perfect human rebirth in all their lifetimes and achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible through meeting a perfectly qualified Mahayana guru and the Mahayana teachings.

“Whenever I hear that somebody is sick, may my hearing about it cause that sentient being to immediately be healed. Whenever I hear that somebody has died, may my hearing about it cause that sentient being to immediately be liberated from the lower realms and reincarnate in a pure land where they can become enlightened; and if the sentient being has been born as a human being but with no opportunity to practice Dharma, may they receive a perfect human body and achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible by meeting a Mahayana guru and the Mahayana teachings.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas, and all other sentient beings, may I, the members of my family, all the students and benefactors of this organization, especially

those who sacrifice their lives and bear hardships to serve others and the teachings of Buddha through this organization, and those who rely upon me, whose names have been given to me and for whom I promised to pray, have long lives and be healthy. May all our wishes be fulfilled immediately in accordance with the holy Dharma. And most important, may we actualize the path to enlightenment, especially bodhicitta, in this very lifetime without the delay of even a second.” (While we are doing this dedication, since it is also a request, we can think of Medicine Buddha and think that we are making the request to Medicine Buddha. This makes our request very powerful.)

“May the whole organization—all the meditation centers, Dharma publications, hospices, schools, leprosy project, and other public service projects—become wish-fulfilling for all sentient beings, pacifying immediately all their suffering of body and mind.

“By receiving all their needs, may all the meditation centers be able to spread the teachings of Lama Tsong Khapa in the minds of all sentient beings. May all the projects of this organization succeed immediately by receiving all their needs. May the 500-foot Maitreya Buddha statue be completed immediately by receiving all the needs. And may all these projects and statues generate loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta in the minds of all sentient beings. Due to that, may no sentient being experience war, famine, disease, earthquake, fire, flood or any other undesirable thing. May all these projects and statues cause all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

“May the teachings of Buddha and Lama Tsong Khapa always flourish and spread in all directions.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, which are merely labeled by the mind, may the I, which is merely labeled by the mind, achieve Guru Vajrasattva’s enlightenment, which is also merely labeled by the mind, and lead all sentient beings, who are also merely labeled by the mind, to that enlightenment, which is also merely labeled by the mind, by myself alone, who is also merely labeled by the mind.”

MULTIPLYING MANTRAS

Now recite the mantras, the names of the buddhas, that multiply each

merit we have collected today 100,000 times.

Reciting the last buddha's name (...NGO WA DANG MÖN LAM...) also increases the merits 100,000 times, but its particular quality is that it actualizes whatever prayers we have done.

“Due to the eminent blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, due to unbetraying dependent arising, and due to my special attitude, may all my prayers be fulfilled immediately.”

16

Sunday, February 14

AFTERNOON: VAJRASATTVA SESSION

THIRTY-FIVE BUDDHAS PRACTICE

The seven Medicine Buddhas are extremely powerful not only for healing but for success generally. By reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra and the names of the Medicine Buddhas, we can actualize the prayers that we normally do. This happens because the Medicine Buddhas made many prayers in the past to be able to actualize the wishes of sentient beings. This is why it is very important to recite the names of the seven Medicine Buddhas after those of the Thirty-five Buddhas, and this is how Kachen Yeshe Gyaltzen and other recent lineage lamas practiced. It makes the practice very powerful.

At the end of the recitation, visualize that nectar beams emitted by all the figures in the merit field enter within you. Everything is purified; all defilements, negative karma and downfalls are purified. Nothing in the slightest is left in your mental continuum.

In emptiness there is no creator, there is no action of creating negative karma, there is no negative karma created.

“Due to all the merits collected by having done prostrations, made offerings, confessed, rejoiced, requested the gurus to have stable life and to turn the Dharma wheel, may I achieve enlightenment in order to enlighten all sentient beings.”

THE PURPOSE OF RECITING THE LAM-RIM PRAYERS

One purpose of the lam-rim prayer is as a motivation. Another reason is that each time we recite a lam-rim prayer, since it contains the essence of the entire path, our mind becomes closer to the realizations of the path to enlightenment, which means closer to enlightenment and closer to our being able to enlighten all sentient beings. This is the main reason

that we are doing this Vajrasattva retreat. We are not doing this practice of purification just to be healthy or to live a long time. Our main reason for doing this practice is to have realizations of the path to enlightenment so that we can benefit others, so that we can liberate others from all suffering and lead them to enlightenment. This is why we should recite one of the lam-rim prayers as the motivation at the beginning of each session. It brings our mind closer to the realizations of the path to enlightenment.

Each lam-rim prayer has a different presentation, so reciting a different one each time, like eating different styles of food, has a different effect on your mind. Also, in this way you won't become bored by reciting the same prayer all the time.

GENERATING AS HERUKA

Since we are not doing Heruka practice in the short sadhana, we can leave out the part about becoming Heruka. Recite the refuge verse then leave a short silence in which to generate a strong motivation of bodhicitta.

BODHICITTA MOTIVATION

I mentioned yesterday the importance of the motivation of bodhicitta. Even here when we listen to the teaching, we need to generate the purest motivation of bodhicitta—one that is unstained by the self-centered mind.

Think, “The purpose of my life is to free the numberless other sentient beings from all their suffering and its causes and bring them to full enlightenment. To do this, I must achieve full enlightenment; therefore, I'm going to listen to the profound holy Dharma, to the lam-rim teachings.”

Please listen to the teachings well by clarifying the motivation of bodhicitta and observing the proper conduct for listening to teachings.

In the past, in the early courses, I repeated the motivation all the time, but now it doesn't happen much. I think it's a sign that my mind has degenerated!

Even though you generate the motivation at the beginning of the Vajrasattva sadhana, after the verse of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, it's also good to make sure of your motivation when you actually begin the mantra recitation. Again think, “I'm going to recite

this mantra for the benefit of every single one of the numberless hell beings, of the numberless hungry ghosts, of the numberless animals, of the numberless human beings, of the numberless asura beings, of the numberless sura beings, of the numberless intermediate state beings.”

Also, while you are reciting the mantra, check your motivation from time to time to see whether it has become a self-centered one. Try to keep in mind continuously that your purpose for doing Vajrasattva practice is to benefit others. Check your motivation from time to time, and if you have lost the continuity of that thought of bodhicitta, clarify it again by thinking, “I’m doing this Vajrasattva meditation-recitation for the benefit of other sentient beings.”

In this way, your practice becomes very powerful. Also, the nature of that thought of benefiting others, of doing the Vajrasattva practice for others, is very pleasant and very satisfying. As much as possible, try to do the mantra recitation with the thought of benefiting all sentient beings. You should not simply generate a bodhicitta motivation at the beginning. If you don’t keep checking our mind, since you don’t have the stable realization of effortless bodhicitta, there is a risk that after some time, your motivation will become self-centered. The benefit of reciting the Vajrasattva mantra then becomes limited, and you will not collect skies of merit or purify many lifetimes or many eons of negative karma. As I mentioned yesterday, by reciting the Vajrasattva mantra once with the thought of bodhicitta, you gain the merit of having recited the Vajrasattva mantra 100,000 times. Without bodhicitta motivation, you will not receive all this inconceivable benefit.

It is similar with tantric practice. Even though tantra is the quick path to enlightenment, without bodhicitta, without the lam-rim, you cannot achieve enlightenment by practicing tantra. Without the lam-rim, you cannot achieve enlightenment by practicing tantra alone. There is even the risk that you will be reborn in the hell realms if you practice tantra without the lam-rim. By meditating on deities without the lam-rim, you can be born as a hungry ghost. Many of you will remember such stories from reading *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* or from hearing teachings. Practicing tantra without knowing how to practice Dharma, without even knowing what Dharma is, is dangerous. If, instead of entering the Mahayana path, you fall into the Lesser Vehicle path and achieve the lower nirvana, it is a great loss because you have

missed the real meaning of life, but at least it is still some kind of positive result. It is much worse to reborn in a hell realm or as a hungry ghost. It is bodhicitta that makes tantra the quick path to enlightenment.

Arhats have the wisdom that directly perceives emptiness. If you realize the wisdom that directly perceives emptiness, the highest you can achieve is arhatship, with cessation of just the gross delusions. From the two types of obscurations, you cease only the gross one, which interferes mainly with your achievement of liberation from samsara. Even with the wisdom that directly perceives emptiness, you cannot achieve anything higher than arhatship.

Not only here during this Vajrasattva retreat but during any retreat, we should pay most attention to generating bodhicitta. We should make sure that we generate a strong motivation of bodhicitta at the beginning, and even during the recitation-meditation we should remind ourselves from time to time to keep our mind on bodhicitta. Just as we concentrate on keeping the car in the correct lane when we are driving, we should concentrate on keeping our mind continuously in the motivation of bodhicitta when we are meditating.

Reciting OM MANI PADME HUM one time with a bodhicitta motivation has the power to purify the very heavy karma of the five uninterrupted negative karmas (having killed one's father, mother or an arhat; caused blood to flow from a buddha; and caused disunity among the sangha) and the ten non-virtuous actions. By reciting OM MANI PADME HUM one time, a fully ordained monk can purify the very heavy negative karma of having broken all four root vows, of having received all four defeats (having killed a human being, taken what has not been given, had sexual intercourse and told the big lie, which means saying that he has realizations when he knows that he does not). Again, this refers to reciting OM MANI PADME HUM with a bodhicitta motivation.

It is similar with Vajrasattva. The amount of negative karma you purify with one Vajrasattva mantra depends on how you recite that one mantra. It depends especially on whether or not you have recited the mantra with a bodhicitta motivation. This is what determines how much negative karma you purify and how much merit you collect. Not just during retreat but generally in your daily life, even if your only practice is reciting one mala of OM MANI PADME HUM, you must make sure that you pay the most attention to bodhicitta. Even if you are only going to recite

a total of one mala, half a mala or just twenty-one mantras, first make sure that you generate a motivation of bodhicitta. The benefit you gain from doing this is unimaginable; you purify inconceivable negative karmas and collect skies of merit.

If the only time you spend on practice in your daily life is the time it takes you to recite one mala of OM MANI PADME HUM or one short sadhana and you don't even do that properly, it is a very sad life. If even the small amount of practice that you do does not get done properly and does not become Dharma—not only does it not become the cause of enlightenment, but it does not even become Dharma—your whole life becomes empty. Not only do you waste your perfect human body, but you use it to create suffering, to be born in the lower realms. Instead of using your perfect human body to experience happiness, you use it to experience suffering. Not only do you make your life empty and meaningless, you actually use your perfect human body as a tool to create more suffering.

Even if you do only five minutes of practice out of the twenty-four hours in each day, even if you recite only a few mantras, you must put all your effort into doing it in the best way.

GEN JAMPA WANGDU

Some of the old students here were in Dharamsala during the First Dharma Celebration, and many of them have met the great meditator, Gen Jampa Wangdu, who was Lama Yeshe's and my best friend in Dharamsala. Each time Gen Jampa Wangdu came to see us was the best time. Gen Jampa Wangdu was an old meditator—not "old" in terms of age, but "old" in terms of meditation experience. He meditated and lived an ascetic life in Tibet, then continued in Buxa and Dalhousie when he came to India.

Even when he was at Buxa he was totally different from the other monks that I saw. I would see him from time to time walking around outside or going to the toilet. At the back of where I lived, there was a long line of toilets. It was very difficult to take care of the toilets well, and a strong "incense" smell would come from the toilets during lunch. We would have to hold our noses to eat our food. Even at that time, Gen Jampa Wangdu's conduct and appearance was very different from that of

other monks. The way Gen Jampa Wangdu wore his robes was very proper, in accordance with the vinaya, and he walked in the way an arhat walks, as described in the lam-rim teachings. You could see that his mind was totally concentrated. He did not have a monkey mind or a bird mind. A bird looks here for one second, there for one second, here for one second; it is impossible for it to concentrate. Just from Gen Jampa Wangdu's proper manner when going to the toilet, you could see that he practiced Dharma continuously, with full awareness of his body, speech and mind.

It was the same when he was in Dalhousie. I was in Dalhousie for six months at the school set up by the British nun, Freda Bedi, who was the second Western nun and who became a very close disciple of the Karmapa. I think she might have originally been a Christian. She then lived in Sri Lanka and became a Theravadin. She was wearing some kind of yellow dress when she first started helping the monks who had escaped from Lhasa in Musamari in Assam. At that time I think her son was attending the same university as the son of prime minister Nehru. They were friends, and the Indian government gave her the job of looking after the Tibetan monks who had recently escaped from Tibet, mainly monks from Sera, Ganden and Drepung. Musamari is an unbelievably hot and very unhealthy place. I haven't been there, as I went directly to Buxa; but other monks who came to Buxa were first sent to Musamari.

So, Freda Bedi was asked to be in charge of taking care of the monks. She even had a Tibetan monk as a cook, I think. When she first came to Buxa, she was not a nun but dressed in yellow saris in the Theravadin style. However, she must have had strong karma with Tibetan Buddhism and lamas. She went to see many incarnate lamas, and because I bear the dry name "incarnate lama," she also came to see me. She came to Buxa one or two times. She organized a school for young lamas from all four traditions, first in Delhi for six months and then she moved the school to Dalhousie, where she continued for five years. Every year after six months at the school the lamas would go back to their own monasteries to study. Because she insisted very much that I come, I went one time to Dalhousie.

Gen Jampa Wangdu was in Dalhousie, doing retreat in the ruins of an old house. The place was tiny, with just a roof and some pieces of flat stone. It seems that many people had been killed in that house during

the time of the British. Geshe-la said that there were many spirits there; while he was doing his practice, the spirits would walk through and make a lot of noise. He had no fear, and sometimes he would give the spirits Dharma teachings, teachings on bodhicitta.

On Sunday we had a holiday. I think we played football two or three times. When the school was in Delhi for six months, they gave us a football and on Sundays, all of us young lamas, played football in the school compound. Then one day the Delhi representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama came while we were playing. His name was Shakabpa. When Tibet was independent, he was one of the Tibetan officials from aristocratic families who had been educated abroad, in India and in other countries. He told Freda Bedi that we should not play football, so from that time we were no longer allowed to play.

On Sundays in Dalhousie we would go around the mountain. One day I met Gen Jampa Wangdu in the road. When I asked him where he was going, he said that we was going to collect firewood. He didn't look like someone who was collecting firewood. Everything about him was perfect, and his manner was very subdued.

In Buxa, Gen Jampa Wangdu was in a small group with a few other monks. I heard that if he was there in the morning when the other monks were discussing what to make for lunch and they decided to make momos—momos are not only Tibetan food but also Chinese, though the name in Chinese is different—he would never come for that meal. I think this is similar to the way the Kadampa geshe applied the remedies to delusions.

It is similar to the behavior of Kadampa Geshe Ben Kungyal, who was very famous in his early life as a robber in the daytime and a thief at night. In his belt and on his body he carried many weapons, such as knives, arrows and slingshots. Once, after he had begun to practice Dharma, he was in a temple where a benefactor had offered curd to all the monks. Geshe Ben Kungyal was sitting near the end of the row of monks, watching the person serving the curd to the monks at the top of the line. When he saw that a lot of curd was being dished into the bowls of these monks, he was worried that it would all be gone by the time it came to him. Then he suddenly realized what was happening in his mind. He suddenly recognized that his attitude was one of worldly concern. To renounce the thought of the eight worldly dharmas, he then

turned his bowl upside down. When the person came to serve him the delicious curd, his bowl was upside down. In this way he practiced the remedy to the attachment that clings to this life. Gen Jampa Wangdu was acting in a similar way at Buxa.

At Dalhousie Gen Jampa Wangdu accomplished *shamatha*, or calm abiding, which has nine levels. It is only with this realization that you achieve perfect concentration, free from attachment-scattering thought, *gö-pa*, and sinking thought, *ching-wa*. The term “scattering thought,” or *tro-wa*, can refer to the mind scattering from the object of meditation to an object of attachment, which is non-virtuous, or to a virtuous object, such as a buddha, which is virtuous. However, if you are trying to concentrate single-pointedly on a particular deity as your object of meditation and your mind scatters to another deity, that scattering thought is considered to be an obstacle to your meditation. The point I am making is that we add the word “attachment” to differentiate attachment-scattering (*gö-pa*) from scattering in general (*tro-wa*).

After reaching the ninth level of calm abiding, you are free from these two obstacles to perfect meditation. You then experience extremely refined rapturous ecstasy of body and mind. According to *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, after you achieve the extremely refined rapturous ecstasy of mind, it seems that you experience some small decrease in the ecstasy. However, after experiencing these two, you achieve the fully characterized, or actual, shamatha.

Gen Jampa Wangdu completed the realization of shamatha there in Dalhousie. Geshe Rabten Rinpoche was sent by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to check the meditators in Dalhousie. As well as Gen Jampa Wangdu, there were a few incarnate lamas and geshe who had completed their studies and were trying to meditate on the path. They had been selected by Trehor Kyorpen Rinpoche, a very high lama from Drepung Monastery. After he became a *lharampa* geshe, he went to a very high mountain near Lhasa to meditate in a cave. Trehor Kyorpen Rinpoche became a geshe at the same time as His Holiness Serkong Dorje Chang. I think this must be the Serkong Dorje Chang who lived at Swayambhunath in Nepal and passed away there. I sometimes get this great yogi mixed up with his previous incarnation. In that previous life, Serkong Dorje Chang was one of the Gelugpa lamas recognized by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama as fully qualified to have a consort, a wisdommother.

After Trehor Kyorpen Rinpoche became a geshe, he went looking for a cave on Lhumbo Tse, a very high mountain near Lhasa. Accompanied by one monk-attendant, he carried on his back just one text, *Lam-rim chen-mo*, and the robes that a monk is required to have.

While he was looking for a cave on this high mountain, stones kept on coming down near him as if thrown from up above him. He followed the stones, and after some time he came to a cave; the stones were dropping on that cave. When he went into the cave, he found a skeleton sitting in meditation posture. Trehor Kyorpen Rinpoche then sat down and offered a mandala. After he finished offering the mandala, the skeleton collapsed. He then decided to practice in that cave.

It seems that he lived there in that cave, and his disciples meditated in places scattered around the mountain. This lama spent his life in practice and continued to experience the path when he came to Dalhousie. Some geshees and meditators that he had selected also meditated on the path there in Dalhousie.

Gen Jampa Wangdu never talked much about his realizations to other people. He would never normally say, "I have this realization," but to those of us who were very close to him, he would express things in such a way that we knew he had realizations. In terms of the achievement of shamatha, Gen Jampa Wangdu would fold his arms across his chest and say things such as, "Until you achieve shamatha, what you think is meditation is not meditation." This was really an expression of his own success. I think what he said is true. Compared to the meditation of someone who has realized shamatha, what we call meditation is not meditation because it is full of obstacles, full of gross and subtle attachment-scattering thoughts and sinking thoughts. He also talked about the bliss from shamatha.

One time in Dharamsala we were receiving teachings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, either on Lama Tsong Khapa's commentary on the Heruka root text, *Clarifying All the Hidden Meanings*, or on the four lam-rim commentaries. It was raining very heavily, and in one of the break times, Gen Jampa Wangdu showed the aspect of falling down on some steps outside His Holiness's office. He knocked his head on the concrete and started to bleed. His Holiness saw what happened and blew on the wound. Gen Jampa Wangdu said that when he fell down and knocked his head on the ground, he experienced bliss. Normal people

would feel pain, but all he felt was bliss. This is because of his realizations—not just of shamatha but of the completion path of Highest Yoga Tantra.

After he had accomplished shamatha in Dalhousie, Gen Jampa Wangdu moved to Dharamsala. He lived in a cave under a big rock down below the home of His Holiness Ling Rinpoche, Senior Tutor to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I think he lived there for seven years, and it seems that he realized emptiness there. Around that time I was receiving teachings on mahamudra from Geshe Rabten Rinpoche, and Geshe Rabten Rinpoche often praised Gen Jampa Wangdu, saying that he was a very lucky person. Geshe Rabten Rinpoche said that if we had any questions on emptiness, we should ask Gen Jampa Wangdu because he had fresh experience of emptiness. So it seems that Gen Jampa Wangdu realized emptiness in that cave.

It also seems that he achieved the realization of bodhicitta in Dharamsala. A sign of this is that one night he told Lama Yeshe and me that it had been seven years since he had been to anyone's house for his own sake. (Gen Jampa Wangdu didn't normally eat in the evening, because the main practice of these meditators is that of the Kadampa geshe. Externally they are like arhats, with a very subdued manner; internally they are bound by love, compassion and bodhicitta; and secretly they have realization of the two stages of tantra.) Anyway, not going to anyone's house for himself is just an example, the implication being that he had realized bodhicitta seven years previously and since then had done no action for himself. With the way Gen Jampa Wangdu thought about sentient beings, there is no doubt at all that he had the realization of bodhicitta. Even if he hadn't said this, there would still be no doubt.

Gen Jampa Wangdu also had great success in realizing the Six Yogas of Naropa and the rest of the Highest Yoga Tantra path. Sometimes we would come back together to Tushita after His Holiness the Dalai Lama's commentary, have some tea and then discuss the teachings. Gen Jampa Wangdu had a lot of answers from his own experiences, so these proved that he had the realizations.

After Lama Yeshe passed away, I went back to Dharamsala. His Holiness was giving oral transmission, with commentary, of the nine lam-rim teachings, and I arrived for the graduated path of the being of

middle capability. Early in the morning of the last day, there was to be a long life puja for His Holiness and there were one or two pages from each text left to be finished that morning. The day before, Geshe-la had mentioned that things didn't look good and that he might pass away, though generally he was very healthy. Early that morning, around five o'clock, I received a message from a German woman, Geshe-la's student, that Geshe-la might be passing away or might need to go to the hospital.

Geshe-la never usually accepted students, but somehow he accepted this woman. She spoke Tibetan very well and had studied for some years at the Tibetan Medical Center. She moved into the house next to Geshe Rabten's house, where Gen Jampa Wangdu was living, and began studying *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. She asked Gen Jampa Wangdu many questions. Every day she would go to the house with the text, and Gen Jampa Wangdu would explain to her. She hadn't asked him to be her guru, but when she reached the guru devotion section in the text, she did prostrations and requested him to be her guru. Geshe-la normally never accepted disciples, but after having given her so many explanations and after she insisted, somehow there was some strong karma, and he had to accept her as his disciple. He then continued to give her teachings, and I think they completed the text. Gen Jampa Wangdu was not a lharampa geshe and had not done any extensive study of philosophy, but he had spent his life actually meditating on the path and had successful realization of the lam-rim, so she received teachings from his own experiences. She was fully satisfied and didn't seem to need any other teacher. Gen Jampa Wangdu alone was sufficient, and it seems that she didn't even need His Holiness the Dalai Lama. She was fully satisfied having just Gen Jampa Wangdu as her guru.

Anyway, I received a message from her that Gen Jampa Wangdu might be passing away or might need to be taken to the hospital. I then went to Geshe-la's house to do prayers. Geshe-la was in the meditation state for three days, I think. Even after the meditation was over, his holy body looked magnificent and completely healthy, so it wasn't easy to check whether or not his meditation was finished. So, with Lama Gyüpa, I checked whether any bodhicitta, any sperm, had come out. I also checked with Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche, who was one of Geshe-la's friends. Rinpoche came inside and just by looking at Geshe-la's face, Rinpoche said the meditation was over. I don't remember whether it was

before or after that that we checked whether any sperm had come out.

Geshe-la was somebody who actually had experienced the very essence of Highest Yoga Tantra, which enables the achievement of enlightenment not only in one lifetime but in one brief lifetime of the degenerate time. He had achieved realization of clear light and the illusory body, of the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness. Realization of the illusory body enables you to complete in such a short time, in one brief lifetime, the collection of merit that takes three countless great eons to collect in the Mahayana Paramitayana path. Gen Jampa Wangdu achieved great success in even Highest Yoga Tantra realizations.

When I came to Hong Kong in 1989, we went for a picnic with all the students who came to take refuge and for the teachings. One family had a little boy who liked me very much, and a question arose in my mind. At that time the center was in Peter's apartment, so that night I did a lot of divinations with rolled papers. I thought the boy could be the reincarnation of one of my teachers, either Geshe Rabten Rinpoche or Gen Jampa Wangdu. Just before Gen Jampa Wangdu passed away, I received from him the lineage of *chu-len*, "Taking the Essence." I hadn't received it during the First Dharma Celebration, when Geshe-la gave many of the sangha the lineage of the teaching on "Taking the Essence," or the pill retreat. The purpose of the *chu-len* practice is to save time for those living on high mountains or in isolated places. They eat the pills and don't have to waste time looking for food. They live on the pills and do their meditation; it is especially good for shamatha meditation. Many of the sangha did the pill retreat. One or two of them didn't succeed, but most of them did the pill retreat for twenty-one days, and some had great success.

I didn't receive the lineage at that time, but I later received the *chu-len* lineage in case it becomes rare in the future. I also received some instructions in response to my question, "What is the quickest way to have realizations of lam-rim?" Answering from his own experience, Gen Jampa Wangdu said to always practice the remedy to the self-cherishing thought. It's a unique answer, but it is very true because all the obstacles come from the ego. So when you renounce the ego, when you always practice the remedy to the self-centered mind, there are no obstacles to your Dharma practice. What you believe to be an obstacle is no longer an obstacle. This one answer covers everything. It takes care of everything. If

you follow this advice, anger doesn't arise, and the emotional mind of desire doesn't arise. Everything is taken care of when you do this practice, and obstacles don't arise.

In my divinations that night, it came out that the boy might be the reincarnation of Gen Jampa Wangdu. That same year I went to South India to receive the commentary of *Lam-rim chen-mo* from the His Holiness the Dalai Lama, which was given at Drepung Loseling Monastery and was attended by the monks from Sera, Ganden and Drepung. At that time I mentioned this boy to His Holiness, saying that I thought he might be the incarnation of Gen Jampa Wangdu. When I mentioned this, I had the feeling that His Holiness accepted the suggestion. His Holiness then checked very quickly and the next day said that it came out that the boy was Gen Jampa Wangdu's incarnation and that the divination was extremely good. I said that I would put him in a monastery for his education. Anyway, this is how it happened.

Now, this whole story is just a preliminary to what I was going to mention. This boy [Lungtog Rinpoche], even when he was very young, had incredible answers to give people when they consulted him. His character is very like that of Gen Jampa Wangdu; he has a very compassionate nature. Almost every month the Hong Kong center liberates animals. It has been saving the lives of animals for many years ago, as has Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Singapore and the centers in Taiwan. The merits are dedicated for the long lives of His Holiness and all other holy beings; for the members of the sangha to complete their studies and achieve realizations of the path; for the benefactors who serve the sangha and the teachings to have long lives and for their wishes to offer service to be successful; for all the people who do good things for others to have long lives; for those for whom it is more beneficial to live, to have long lives; and also for people who have AIDS, cancer and so forth to have long lives and to be free from life obstacles. This is how I would dedicate at the beginning or at the end of liberating the animals. The group I left out is that of the evil beings; so one day I asked him whether we should dedicate for the evil beings, and he replied that we should dedicate for the evil beings, that we should dedicate for them to meet Dharma and then have long lives.

So, now I've reached the main point of what I was going to say! His mother spends one or two hours each day reciting different mantras and

meditating. One day he told his mother, “Rather than spending two hours with a scattered mind, with your mind wandering all over the place, you should meditate for five minutes without your mind wandering at all.” This is what he advised his mother. And this is also what most of us do.

WATCHING THE MIND

While you are doing the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation, from time to time watch what your mind is doing to see whether it is meditating or not. Check whether your mind is meditating on Vajrasattva or on the delusions. Check to see if your mind is trying to achieve samsara.

Watch your mind from time to time. If your mind is very disturbed by anger or attachment, you can do breathing meditation, but a very important remedy is to think very strongly of death. Remember that your death could happen today, even in this moment. Perhaps it is better to decide that you are actually going to die today, and that you could even die within an hour. Your breath could stop at any moment; the vivid appearance of this life—the people around you, this center—could stop at any moment. And throughout beginningless past lives, you have created so many negative karmas because of non-virtuous actions of your body, speech and mind—the ten non-virtuous actions; breaking pratimoksha, bodhisattva and tantric vows; and the heaviest negative karma, that created in relation to your gurus through anger, heresy, negative thoughts and so forth. Right after your breath stops, right after the appearance of this life stops, you will definitely be in the heaviest sufferings of the hell realms and will have to suffer there for an inconceivable length of time. What you will see then will be terrifying, the complete opposite of what you see now, and you will have to suffer there for an inconceivable period.

Think, “This is the only opportunity that I will have in my life to do Vajrasattva meditation-recitation and purify all these negative karmas. The only opportunity I have is right now. Therefore, I must put every single effort into this practice and not allow my mind to wander.”

Make this very strong determination when you begin the meditation and plan from the very beginning to keep a close watch on your mind. Concentrate with most of your mind on the meditation—Vajrasattva,

yourself as the deity, the main visualization of purification or whatever—but with a small part of your mind watch what is happening. While you are doing the meditation, one corner of your mind should be watching, spying. Instead of concentrating your whole mind on Vajrasattva’s holy body or the visualization of purifying, use one portion of your mind to check whether or not you are meditating. If your mind is very disturbed and uncontrolled, this can be a skillful way to help maintain your concentration. By keeping your mind away from distractions, it becomes the means to maintain your concentration.

It is mentioned in the *Bodhicharyavatara* that if you tie the elephant of the mind well with the rope of constant remembrance, no fear or danger will arise, and you will receive all virtue in your hand. Like its use in “liberation in the palm of your hand,” the expression “in your hand” means easily. Receiving all virtue in your hand means that you will easily achieve all success, which refers, broadly speaking, to liberation from samsara and enlightenment.

By meditating single-pointedly on the Vajrasattva purification practice, you don’t waste your life. Your life becomes meaningful, and from the meditation you receive all the virtues, all the benefits, up to enlightenment. You purify all your negative karmas, so you don’t have to experience the four suffering results of each negative karma. And you achieve a good rebirth in all your future lives. “All virtue” means all these benefits.

Also, the thirty-eighth or forty-eighth chapter of the sutra called *Könchog Tsegpa* says, “If the arrogant mind possesses conscientiousness, all your wishes will be fulfilled.” This has the same meaning.

VISUALIZATIONS DURING MANTRA RECITATION

Vajrasattva father-mother are complete in all qualities and powers, but to increase your faith, there is the invocation of the wisdom beings and the initiating deities. In addition to visualizing Vajrasattva, you then invoke the wisdom and initiating deities to help you to generate strong faith that a real Vajrasattva is there rather than your mere visualization. It is not that Vajrasattva needs more power or help from other buddhas or anything like that. It is done just to make your faith stronger. From your side, think that Vajrasattva is very powerful and magnificent, with the power of all the buddhas to purify.

It is also very good to think that all sentient beings are on a moon disc at your heart. Visualize that beams emitted by all the buddhas in the ten directions enter Guru Vajrasattva, who becomes very radiant. Beams then emit from Guru Vajrasattva's heart and enter within you and within all the sentient beings in your heart. As soon as the beams touch you and all the sentient beings, all defilements are completely purified. Simply being touched by the beams immediately purifies you. Think that nectar-beams are emitted, with the nectar flowing along the beams as dew drops flow along wire. At the end, you and all sentient beings become Vajrasattva.

Another meditation is to visualize that there is a Vajrasattva father-mother on the tip of each beam emitted from the Vajrasattva at your crown. A Vajrasattva descends on the crown of each sentient being and purifies them. Vajrasattva father-mother then melt into light and absorb into each sentient being. This is part of a more elaborate Highest Yoga Tantra meditation, but there is no need to mention it in more detail.

You can do these meditations in addition to the general meditations of purifying down, purifying up and instant purification. When purifying down, you visualize that the nectar beams clean downward through your body. When purifying up, you visualize that the nectar beams push all the negativities upward and out of your body through your crown, just as all the dirt in a glass is pushed up and out when you fill it with milk. All the defilements, negative karmas and downfalls are washed upward and come out from the crown. One explanation is that you feel as if a wind has suddenly blown off your hat.

In the third visualization, the purification is like a bright camera flash. You visualize all your defilements, negative karmas and downfalls—not just from this life but from beginningless lives—in the form of darkness at your heart. Extremely bright light, like a camera flash, comes from Guru Vajrasattva's heart and the darkness at your heart suddenly becomes completely non-existent; it is instantly purified. Sometimes lamas say to visualize a big pile of garbage at your heart, with strong nectar beams coming like a flash flood, immediately flushing the garbage away, so that you are not even sure where it went. It becomes completely non-existent.

These are the usual meditations that accompany recitation of the Vajrasattva mantra.

Sometimes you can meditate on guru yoga while you are reciting the Vajrasattva mantra. Just single-pointedly focus on Vajrasattva father-mother, seeing Vajrasattva and the guru as inseparable. Remembering some quotations from the texts might help you to see the oneness of the guru and Vajrasattva.

The tantric text *Dorje Kur (Vajra Tent)*, which might be a Hevajra text, says, “I, who am called Vajrasattva, will take the form of the vajra master in order to benefit other sentient beings. I will abide in an ordinary form in order to benefit others.” The phrase “in order to benefit others” refers to the fact that we sentient beings do not have the karma to see the aspect of Buddha Vajrasattva; we can only see ordinary aspects. The definition of an ordinary aspect is one with faults, with delusions and samsaric suffering. This is the only aspect we can see. Why? Because at the moment our mind has faults. Because our mind is impure and obscured, this is the only aspect we can see. Therefore, the only way the buddhas can benefit us is by manifesting in an ordinary aspect, one that shows the aspect of having delusions and samsaric suffering. It is only in such an aspect that the buddhas can benefit us and directly guide us. In such an aspect, they can communicate with us and help us purify all our negative karma by giving us teachings, vows and initiations. In such an aspect, they can give us the opportunity to practice Dharma, thus saving us from the unimaginable sufferings of the lower realms and leading us to higher rebirths, liberation from samsara and, with cessation of even the subtle defilements, enlightenment. This is the commentary to “I will abide in an ordinary form in order to benefit others.”

Another quotation to consider is, “At the end of the 500-age, I will manifest as the vajra master in the form of various means. At that time think of this form as me, Vajrasattva, and generate devotion,” but I would have to check the original to make this translation more precise.

Also, at the time when Guru Shakyamuni Buddha was passing away, the bodhisattva Meaningful to Behold asked Buddha, “At the moment we receive teachings from Buddha, but when Buddha passes away, from whom are we going to receive teachings?” Buddha replied, “Don’t worry, Meaningful to Behold. In future times I will manifest in the bodies of abbots, I will manifest in the bodies of vajra masters. In order to benefit other sentient beings I will show birth, sickness, old age and death.” This means that in order to guide us sentient beings Buddha will manifest as

an ordinary being, as a being with delusions and suffering, and with that aspect Buddha will liberate us sentient beings from suffering and guide us to enlightenment.

Remembering these quotations helps you to realize the inseparability of the guru and Vajrasattva, the oneness of the guru and Vajrasattva. With the help of these quotations, you look at the guru and Vajrasattva as one, and you then see them as one. Concentrate single-pointedly on the fact that the guru is Vajrasattva, and with this single-pointed guru devotion, recite the mantra. This is reciting the Vajrasattva mantra with the guru yoga mind.

Also, you can sometimes meditate on emptiness. The I, the action of purifying, the negative karma that is purified and Vajrasattva—none of these contains the slightest atom of inherent existence. Meditating on this emptiness, you then recite the Vajrasattva mantra.

You can also meditate on bodhicitta while you recite the Vajrasattva mantra. You can also do lam-rim meditation while reciting the mantra.

You can meditate in different ways as you recite the mantra. If your mind becomes bored with always doing the purification visualizations, you can do these other meditations.

DEDICATION

Due to all these merits may I reach Vajrasattva's enlightenment and lead all sentient beings to Vajrasattva's enlightenment by myself, alone.