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Lama Yeshe

UNIVERSAL LOVE

The Yoga Method of Buddha Maitreya

Edited by Nicholas Ribush



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We are also deeply grateful to all those who have become members of the ARCHIVE over the past few years. Details of our membership program may be found at the back of this book, and if you are not a member, please do consider joining up. Due to the kindness of those who have, we now have three editors working on our vast collection of teachings for the benefit of all. We have posted our list of individual and corporate members on our Web site, www.LamaYeshe.com. We also thank Henry & Catherine Lau and S. S. Lim for their help with our membership program in Singapore and Serina Yap for her help with our membership program in Malaysia. Thank you all so much for your foresight and kindness.

In particular, we thank Peter Kedge and the Maitreya Project for kindly commissioning and funding the preparation and publication of this book, and Doss McDavid for a generous donation that has allowed us to expand the originally planned volume with additional introductory material.

Furthermore, we would like to express our appreciation for the kindness and compassion of all those other generous benefactors who have

contributed funds to our work since we began publishing free books. Thankfully, you are too numerous to mention individually in this book, but we value highly each and every donation made to spreading the Dharma for the sake of the kind mother sentient beings and now pay tribute to you all on our Web site. Thank you so much.

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If you, dear reader, would like to join this noble group of open-hearted altruists by contributing to the production of more books by Lama Yeshe or Lama Zopa Rinpoche or to any other aspect of the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive's work, please contact us to find out how.

—*Dr. Nicholas Ribush*

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.

Editor's Introduction

WE ARE DELIGHTED to add to our collection of Lama Yeshe books and Wisdom Publications' series of Lama Yeshe's tantric commentaries¹ by publishing Lama Yeshe's teachings on the yoga method of Maitreya, which he taught at Maitreya Institute, Holland,² in 1981.

Buddha Maitreya was very dear to Lama Yeshe's heart. As well as giving this commentary on the yoga method Lama also taught two of Maitreya's five famous texts: *Dharmadharmatavibhanga* (*Discrimination of Phenomena and the Nature of Phenomena*) and *Madhyantavibhanga* (*Discrimination of the Middle Way and the Extremes*).³ And of course, Lama initiated the Maitreya Project, the building in India of a five-hundred-foot statue of Maitreya, more information about which can be found at the back of this book.

Thus we were delighted when the Maitreya Project commissioned us to publish this book. When we had finished the first draft we realized that publishing Lama's commentary alone would make the book relatively inaccessible to people unfamiliar with tantra, so we decided to add some introductory lectures from Lama's 1975 teachings in the USA. Now the book has something for everybody and better introduces the general reader to Lama's unique teachings on tantra.

However, as Lama has taken pains to point out before: "...a word of caution to the intellectual. Reading tantric teachings on your own, without the power of the appropriate initiation, is just an intellectual pastime—only by practicing correctly, under the guidance of a fully

¹ *Introduction to Tantra, Becoming Vajrasattva, Bliss of Inner Fire and Becoming the Compassion Buddha.*

² An FPMT center in Holland, see www.maitreya.nl

³ See footnote 12, page 46, for the names of all five texts.

qualified and experienced teacher, can you evolve beyond the intellect, beyond conceptual thought into the true wisdom of a pure, spontaneous being. I am not trying to be mysterious or exclusive here but simply saying that if you think that you can understand, let alone experience, the methods of tantric yoga merely by reading books, you are deceiving yourself—like a terminally ill person doctoring himself with the same methods that made him ill in the first place.”⁴

In other words, simply reading books about tantra does not qualify us to practice it. For that, we need initiation and qualified guidance. So the question then arises, why publish books on tantra? It’s true that in times past such teachings were secret and not made available to non-initiates. Things today are different. So many books on tantra are being published by so many unqualified authors that no less an authority than His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that teachings that once would have been kept secret should now be published in order to correct mistakes made by inauthentic writers.

That said, Lama does tell the Maitreya students, “In the future, in my absence or that of another teacher, I think it would be good for Maitreya Institute to organize retreats on this yoga method. Personally, I also think it would be all right for people who have not had the initiation to join such retreats. Because this is Maitreya Institute we can make the exception that people can practice Maitreya without initiation. There would be many benefits from that. In Tibet we also had a system where people without initiation could join a group deity yoga retreat but could not do the practice individually.”⁵

So, thanking Wendy Cook and Jennifer Barlow for their kind and helpful editorial suggestions, I hope you enjoy Lama’s teachings in this book and are inspired to go deeply into the practice, find a fully qualified teacher like Lama himself, and quickly reach your ultimate mental and spiritual potential, enlightenment, for the benefit of all beings.

⁴ From Prologue: Intellectuals, Beware! *Becoming Vajrasattva*, page 5.

⁵ See page 102.

PART 1

Introduction to Buddhism





1. *What is Buddhism?*

IT'S DIFFICULT TO SAY “Buddhism is *this*, therefore it should be like *that*” or to summarize it in a simplistic way because people have a wide variety of views of what Buddhism is. However, I can say that Buddhism is not what most people consider to be a religion.

First of all, when we study Buddhism we're studying ourselves—the nature of our body, speech and mind—the main emphasis being on the nature of our mind and how it works in everyday life. The main topic is not something else, like what is Buddha, what is the nature of God or things like that.

Why is it so important to know the nature of our own mind? It's because we all want happiness, enjoyment, peace and satisfaction and these experiences do not come from ice cream but from wisdom and the mind. Therefore we have to understand what the mind is and how it works.

One thing about Buddhism is that it's very simple and practical in that it explains logically how satisfaction comes from the mind and not from some kind of supernatural being in whom we have to believe.

I understand that this idea can be difficult to accept because in the West, from the moment you're born, there's extreme emphasis on the belief that the source of happiness resides outside of yourself in external objects. Therefore your sense perception and consciousness have an almost fanatical orientation toward the sense world and you come to value external objects above all else, even your life. This extreme view that over-values material things is a misconception, the result of unreasonable, illogical thought.

Therefore, if you want true peace, happiness and joy, you need to realize that happiness and satisfaction come from within you and stop

searching so obsessively outside. You can never find real happiness out there. Whoever has?

From the moment they evolved, humans have never found true happiness in the external world, even though modern scientific technology seems to think that that's where the solution to human happiness lies. That's a totally wrong conception. Of course, technology is necessary and good, but it has to be used skillfully. Religion is not against technology nor is external development contrary to the practice of religion, even though we do find religious extremists who oppose material development and scientific advancement and non-believers pitted against those who believe. All such fanatics are wrong.

First, however, let me ask a question. Where in the world can we find somebody who doesn't believe? Who among us is a true non-believer? In asking this I'm not necessarily referring to conceptual belief. The person who says "I don't believe" thinks he's intellectually superior but all you have to do to puncture his pride is ask a couple of simple questions: "What do you like? What don't you like?" He'll come up with a hundred likes and dislikes. "Why do you like those things? Why don't you like the others?" Questions like those immediately expose all of us to be believers.

Anyway, to live in harmony we have to balance external and internal development; failure to do so simply leads to mental conflict and restless states of mind.

So Buddhism finds no contradiction in advocating external scientific and inner mental development; both are correct but, depending on mental attitude, each can be positive or negative as well. There's no such thing as absolute, eternally existent, total positivity or absolute, eternally existent, total negativity. Positive and negative actions are defined mainly by the motivation that gives rise to them not by the actions themselves.

Therefore it's very important to avoid extreme views; extreme emotional attachment to sense objects—"This is good; this makes me happy"—only leads to mental illness. What we need to learn instead is how to remain in the middle, between the extremes of exaggeration and underestimation.

That doesn't mean giving everything up. You don't have to get rid of

all your possessions. It's extreme emotional attachment to *any* object—external *or* internal—that makes you mentally ill; that's what you have to abandon. Western medicine has few answers to that kind of sickness. There's nothing you can take; it's very hard to cure. Psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists... I doubt that they can solve the problems of attachment. Most of you have probably experienced that. Attachment and the lack of knowledge-wisdom that underlies it are the actual problem.

The reason that Western health professionals can't treat attachment effectively is that they don't know how to investigate the reality of the mind. The function of attachment is to bring frustration and misery. We all know this; it's not that difficult to grasp—in fact, it's rather simple. But Buddhism has a method of revealing the psychology of attachment and how it works in everyday life. That method is meditation.

Excessive concern for your own comfort and pleasure driven by the exaggerations of attachment automatically leads to feelings of hatred for others. These two incompatible feelings—attachment and hatred—naturally clash in your mind. From the Buddhist point of view, a mind in this kind of conflict is sick and unbalanced.

Going to church or temple once a week is not enough to deal with this—you have to examine your mind all day long every day and maintain constant awareness of the way you speak and act. We usually hurt others unconsciously. In order to observe the actions of our unconscious mind we need to develop powerful wisdom energy, but that's easier said than done; it takes work to be constantly aware of what's going on in the mind.

Most religious and non-religious people agree that loving kindness for others is important. How do we develop loving kindness? First we have to understand how and why others suffer, what the best kind of happiness for them to have is, and how they can get it. That's what we have to investigate. But our emotions get the better of us. We project our attachments onto others. We think that others like the same things we do, that people's main problems are hunger and thirst and that food and water are the solution. The human problem is not hunger and thirst; it's misconception and mental pollution.

Therefore it's very important that you make your mind clear. If you

can, the ups and downs of the external world won't bother you; no matter what happens out there, your mind will remain peaceful and joyous. If you get too caught up in watching the up and down world you finish up going up and down yourself: "Oh, that's so good! Oh, that's so bad!" If the outer world is your only source of happiness, its natural fluctuations constantly disturb your peace of mind and you can never be happy, no matter how long you live. It's impossible.

But if you understand that the world is up and down by nature and expect things to fluctuate, you won't get upset when they do and as a result your mind will be balanced and peaceful. Whenever your mind is balanced and peaceful you have wisdom and control.

Perhaps you think, "Oh, control! Buddhism is all about control. Who wants control? That's a Himalayan trip, not a Western one." But in our experience, control is natural. When you have the wisdom that knows how the uncontrolled mind functions and where it comes from, control comes naturally.

All people have equal potential to control and develop their mind. There's no distinction according to race, color or nationality. Equally, all can experience mental peace and joy. Human ability is great—if you use it with wisdom, it's worthwhile; if you use it with ignorance and emotional attachment, you waste your life. Therefore, be careful. Lord Buddha's teaching strongly emphasizes understanding over the hallucinated fantasies of the ordinary mind. The emotional projections and hallucinations that arise from unrealistic perceptions are wrong conceptions and as long as your mind is polluted by wrong conceptions you will always be frustrated.

The clean clear mind is simultaneously joyful. That's simple to see. When your mind is under the control of extreme attachment on one side and extreme hatred on the other, you have to examine it to see why you grasp at happiness and why you hate. When you check your objects of attachment and hatred logically, you'll see that the fundamental reason for these contrary emotions is basically the same thing: emotional attachment projects a hallucinatory object; emotional hatred projects a hallucinatory object. And either way, you believe in the hallucination.

As I said before, it's not an intellectual, "Oh, yes, I believe." And by

the way, just saying you believe in something doesn't actually mean you do. However, belief has deep roots in your subconscious and as long as you're under the influence of attachment, you're a believer. Belief doesn't necessarily have to be in something supernatural or beyond logic. There are many ways to believe.

From the standpoint of Buddhist psychology, in order to have love and compassion for all living beings you first have to develop equilibrium—a feeling that all beings are equal. This is not a radical sort of “I have a piece of candy; I need to cut it up and share it with everybody else” but rather something you have to work with in your mind. A mind out of balance is an unhealthy mind.

So equalizing sentient beings is not something we do externally; that's impossible. The equality advocated by Buddhists is completely different from that which the communists talk about; ours is the inner balance derived from training the mind.

When your mind is even and balanced you can generate loving kindness for all beings in the universe without discrimination. At the same time, emotional attachment automatically decreases. If you have the right method, it's not difficult; when right method and right wisdom come together, solving problems is easy.

But we humans suffer from a shortage of intensive knowledge-wisdom. We search for happiness where it doesn't exist; it's here, but we're looking over there. It's actually very simple. True peace, happiness and joy lie within you and if you meditate correctly and investigate the nature of your mind you can discover the everlasting happiness and joy within. They're always with you; they're mental energy, not external material energy, which always fizzles out. Mental energy coupled with right method and right wisdom is unlimited and always with you. That's incredible! And it explains why human beings are so powerful.

Materialists think that people are powerful because of the amazing buildings and so forth that they construct but all that actually comes from the human mind. Without the skill of the human mind there's no external supermarket. Therefore, instead of placing extreme value on regular supermarkets we should try to discover our own internal supermarket. That's much more useful and leads to a balanced, even mind.

As I mentioned before, it can sound as if Buddhism is telling you to renounce all your possessions because attachment is bad, but renunciation isn't a physical giving up. You go to the toilet every day but that doesn't mean you're attached to it—you're not attached to your toilet, are you? We should have the same attitude to all the material things we use—give them a reasonable value according to their usefulness for human existence, not an extreme one.

If a kid runs crazily over dangerous ground to get an apple, trips, falls and breaks his leg, we think he's foolish, exaggerating the value of the apple and putting his wellbeing at risk for the sake of achieving a tiny goal. But actually, we're the same. We exaggerate the beauty of objects of desire and generate extreme attachment toward them, which blinds us to our true potential. This is dangerous; we're just like the boy who risks his safety for an apple. By looking at objects with emotional attachment and chasing that hallucinated vision we definitely destroy our pure potential.

Human potential is great but we have to use our energy skillfully; we have to know how to put our lives in the right direction. This is extremely important.

Now, instead of just talking, let me try to answer any questions you might have.

Q. How can I make my mind aware so that I have equilibrium of mind and skillfulness of action?

Lama. The first thing you need to do is to recognize how your unbalanced mind works—how it arises, what causes it to do so, what it reacts to and so forth—and how your false conceptions create the view you perceive. This recognition allows you to put your mind into a clearer atmosphere. Once you understand your unbalanced mind, it becomes clear.

The Buddhist approach to negativity is not to avoid it but to confront it head-on and check why it's there, what its reality is and so forth. We think that this is the best foundation for destroying the negative mind and is much more logical and scientific than just avoiding it—like running away to some other place or trying to think only positive things.

That's not enough. So, when problems arise, instead of turning away stare them right in the face. That's very useful; that's the Buddhist way.

If you run from problems you can never really ascertain their root. Putting your head in the sand doesn't help. You have to determine where the problem comes from and how it arises. The way to discover the clean clear mind is to understand the nature of the unclear mind, especially its cause. If there's a thorn bush growing at your door, scratching you every time you go in or out, pruning it won't be enough to solve the problem once and for all—you have to pull it out by the root. Then it will never bother you again.

Q. You mentioned going beyond thought. Could you please talk about that experience?

Lama. It's possible. When you suddenly realize that the hallucinated self-imagination projected by your ego does not exist as it appears, you can be left with an automatic experience of emptiness, a vision of shunyata. But as long as your self-imagination—"I'm Thubten Yeshe, I'm this, I'm that, therefore I should have this, I should do that"—continues to run amok, it's impossible to go beyond thought. You need to investigate such thoughts with skillful, analytic knowledge-wisdom. Scrutinize your mind's self-imagination as interpreted by your ego: what am I? What is it? Is it form? Does it have color? No. Then what is it? The only conclusion you can eventually arrive at is that it does not exist anywhere, either externally or internally, and the vision that automatically accompanies that experience is one of emptiness; at that time you reach beyond thought. Before that, your mind was full of "I'm this, therefore I need a house; I'm that, therefore I need a car; I'm the other, therefore I need to go to the supermarket." All your "I'm that-this" comes from conflicted emotional thought that completely destroys your inner peace....

Q. So then you're beyond thought and there's the void, emptiness?

Lama. Yes, that's emptiness or, in Sanskrit terminology, shunyata. But emptiness does not mean nothingness. It refers to an absence of ego conceptualization—"I am Thubten Yeshe"—which is bigger than Los Angeles but a complete hallucination. When we realize that it's totally

non-existent, that it's only projected by the mind, by the ego, the experience of shunyata suddenly arises; at that time there's an absence of thought.

Now, "no thought" does not mean that you become somehow unconscious. Many people think that that's what it means but that's dangerous. Reaching beyond thought means eliminating the usual conflict-producing, dualistic, "that-this" type of thought, not lapsing into unconsciousness.

Q. Does Buddhism have physical exercises similar to tai chi or yoga, to tone the body as well as the mind? Are there physical exercises that are a part of Buddhism?

Lama. Physical exercise is good but mental exercise is better; it's more powerful. Nevertheless, we do have certain exercises but they're mainly to facilitate sitting meditation. Sometimes we do retreat in a small room for months at a time; on such occasions we also do some physical yoga. However, we normally emphasize that, no matter what actions we engage in with our body, speech and mind, mental attitude is the most important thing. Buddhism always stresses the importance of understanding the nature of the mind.

Q. How do we get rid of mental pollution?

Lama. By realizing *how* the mind is polluted, where the pollution comes from and that it has a deep root. If you know that, you can get rid of it; if you don't, you can't. Thus Lord Buddha always emphasized understanding as the only path to liberation, that the only way to attain liberation is through understanding.

Q. If everything is so simple and God is so perfect, why did he create all the negativity and suffering we see in the world today?

Lama. Perhaps it's *you* who created all the bad things you say God did. Our own mind creates our own uncontrolled situation. All the suffering we see in the world today was not created by God but by the negative mind.

Q. How can I escape the cycle of death and rebirth?

Lama. By recognizing and destroying that which causes you to cycle. Basically, if you're free of emotional attachment there's no cycle of death and rebirth. Once you cut emotional attachment, the cause, there's no reason to ever again have to experience an uncontrolled situation, the result. The short answer: cut attachment.

Q. When I read Zen and other Eastern philosophies, they all seem to be saying the same thing.

Lama. Yes, if you examine the different religions more deeply with right understanding, you'll find the same qualities, but if you just check them superficially you're more likely to be judgmental: "This religion's good; that one's bad." That's a poor assessment. What you need to look at is the purpose of each religion—every religion has a purpose—and how that purpose can be realized in experience.

The question is, however, do followers of a given religion know how to put its ideas into action? This is often the problem. People might think a religion's ideas are good but they don't have the key of method; they don't know how to put those ideas into experience.

Q. Then are you saying that your way of putting ideas into action is better than the others?

Lama. No, I'm not saying that my way is the best and that the others are wrong. I'm saying that most of us lack that knowledge. For example, you might say, "I'm a Buddhist," but if you check how much you understand your religion, how much you act in accordance with its principles, perhaps even though you say, "I'm a Buddhist," you're not.

I'm not talking about any specific person; I'm talking about all of us. So the most important thing to know is the method: how to bring lofty ideas down to the practical level, into our life.

Q. Lama, do you have anything to say regarding the interpersonal problems married people face?

Lama. Yes, I certainly have something to say! The main thing is that the

two married people don't understand each other and this lack of understanding leads to poor communication and problems. Also, many times young people get married for very superficial and temporal reasons: "I like the way he looks, I like the way she looks, let's get married." There's no examination of the other person's inner personality or how life together will be. Because we can't see another's inner beauty we judge them by the way they appear; because we lack knowledge-wisdom we don't understand our spouse's essential inner qualities. Then, when the relative world moves on and things don't work out as we planned, it is very easy to disrespect our partner. Of course, most relationships and marriages are ego-based and so it's no surprise that they often don't work out.

It's important, therefore, that a married couple bases their marriage on mental rather than physical communication and that the two people really try sincerely to understand and help each other. A marriage based on superficialities will nearly always break down. Small things: the husband says, "Put this here," his wife says, "No, I want it there," and a huge fight ensues...over nothing! It's so foolish. Put it here; put it there—what difference does it make? It's so narrow-minded, yet we break up over these foolish things.

Q. Some people in our culture say that Jesus is God. How do you see Jesus Christ?

Lama. I see Jesus as a holy man. If you understand beyond words what he taught, fantastic. But we don't even understand what he said literally. Even though holy Jesus told us that we should love everybody, we still choose one atom to love and hate the rest. That's contrary to what he said. If you truly understand what Jesus taught, it's very useful, and especially helpful for mental sickness.

Q. Jesus also said, "I am the only way. Only through me can you reach God."

Lama. He did say that and that's right but you can't interpret it to mean that only his teachings are correct and that all other religions are wrong. That's not what he meant. "Only way" means that the only way to reach inner freedom is through the reality he taught. That's my interpretation,

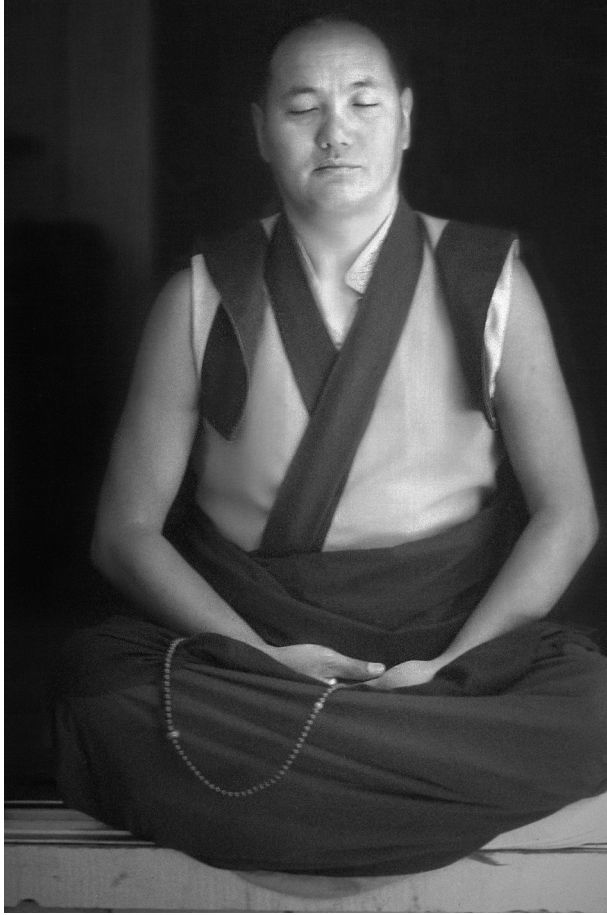
anyway. Jesus saying “only my way” doesn’t mean he was propounding some dogmatic view. He was talking about absolute reality as being the only way to God. If you realize that, you can reach inner freedom; if you follow your hallucinated, polluted, wrong-conception mind, you can’t. That’s how I interpret Jesus’s words. I think that’s perfect. Many people interpret what he said very dogmatically but that’s just their polluted mind. So we have to be careful when we think we understand the views of other religions. Many times a religion’s view might be perfect but our limited mind will think, “This means this, that means that,” and all we’re doing is bringing something profound down to our own mundane level.

Q. Is trying to plan and organize my life versus just letting things happen an expression of attachment?

Lama. Not necessarily. You can organize your life with wisdom. How? One way is by trying to make it beneficial to others rather than by living it simply for your own enjoyment. When your life is integrated and you’re a wise, knowledgeable person giving a beautiful, peaceful vibration to others, it’s so worthwhile. That’s not attachment. Buddhism says that we can use our life and sense objects without attachment by giving them a reasonable value and using them to benefit humankind. We need both method and wisdom. You can eat ice cream without confusion or attachment; there’s a way to transform worldly pleasures into the path to inner peace and joy.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about reincarnation?

Lama. Reincarnation is very simple; it’s mental energy. Your physical energy is exhausted at the time of death and the energy of your consciousness separates from your body and goes into another form, that’s all. That’s the simple explanation. Mental energy and physical energy are different. Modern science has some difficulty with this. It does accept that there’s a difference between mental and physical energy but Buddhism explains it more clearly.



2. The purpose of meditation

WE MEDITATE to experience how our mind works, not to change our ideas and philosophy or to try out some Eastern trip. We meditate to investigate the basic energy we already have, the energy of our body, speech and mind: what is it, where does it come from, why does it do what it does? This is not an external search; it's a search of our own mind and is so worthwhile.

Investigating our own inner nature, the reality of our own mind and life, is not just a religious undertaking. We can't deny that we possess body, speech and mind—we experience them all the time; we live within their energy field. So investigating our own energy to understand its true nature is really most worthwhile.

Furthermore, seeking the nature of the mind is not something that's necessary for young people but not the old; old people can't deny the existence of their own body, speech and mind either. Since the undisciplined, uncontrolled mind is common to both young and old, both need to investigate it. In fact, anybody whose mind is uncontrolled and produces agitation, conflict and frustration needs to look very carefully at what's going on. Such research is incredibly useful for young and old alike.

Investigating the mind doesn't demand an extreme change in habits, in the way we work, eat or sleep. However, the uncontrolled mind is intimately associated with the activities of our everyday life and causes the conflicts we experience all the time. Therefore it's essential that we understand the reality of our mind and the nature of our mental attitudes; this is most necessary.

The mind is like the central generator that provides electricity to the entirety of a big city; it's mental energy that determines whether the

actions of our body, speech and mind are positive or negative, the cause of happiness or suffering. All the energy of our body, speech and mind comes from the mind. That's why Buddhism always stresses the importance of knowing its essential nature and how it produces both controlled and uncontrolled behavior.

How does Buddhism recommend we investigate the mind? The method is meditation. We receive teachings on the nature of the mind in general and on that basis experiment on our own mind; we investigate its nature through our own experience.

To our surprise, perhaps, we discover that meditation allows us to control small things that we could not control before. This encourages us to go further. We realize that far from being weak, we have fantastic abilities and potential. We stop thinking, "I'm hopeless, I can't do anything," and no longer rely on others to do everything for us. From the Buddhist point of view, the mind that relies on others is weak.

So what Buddhism is really trying to get us to do through philosophy, psychology and meditation is to become our own psychologist so that when problems arise we can diagnose and solve them for ourselves. This really is the essence of what the Buddha taught. Everything he taught was aimed at getting us to gain the knowledge-wisdom we need to understand our everyday life through knowing how our own mind functions.

Western psychologists also try to solve their patients' problems but not by making them their own psychologist. Patients who have mental problems need to realize the nature of their illness; then they can apply the right solution. If the actual cause of their problems remains hidden there's no way they can solve them. We have to realize the nature of our own problems.

Also, meditation doesn't mean sitting alone in some corner doing nothing; you can meditate while physically active. Your body can be moving but simultaneously you can be totally conscious and aware, observing how your mind communicates with the sense world, how it interprets the objects it perceives and so forth. That, too, is meditation.

Usually when we walk in the street, communicate with others, or do anything else we unconsciously leave imprints on our mind, imprints

that will later ripen into problems. We call that karma. Most of the time we're unaware of what we're doing; that's the main problem. Meditation can wake us up and prevent us from sleeping our way through life. We think that when we're working, interacting with others and so forth we're awake, but at a certain level, we're still asleep. If you look below the surface, you'll see.

Thus you can see how worthwhile it is to understand the way your uncontrolled mind functions and discipline yourself with right wisdom, and to see that this is exactly what you need, no matter how old you are. With understanding, control comes easily and naturally.

The uncontrolled, undisciplined mind is, by nature, the opposite of knowledge-wisdom and happiness. Its nature is dissatisfaction. When you control your mind with wisdom you create the space you need to discover peace and joy. Your life then becomes peaceful and joyful and somewhat protected from the ups and downs of the external world. You enjoy life and stop blaming external factors when things go wrong: "I'm unhappy because society is up and down; I'm unhappy because of my circumstances."

Actually you have many reasons to be happy but your weak mind doesn't see that it's possible for you to be happy. Knowledge-wisdom is an antidote to the weak mind; it alleviates your depression and gives you the answer to all your problems. Knowledge-wisdom is the path to inner freedom, liberation and enlightenment.

Thus, through meditation you can discover how the selfish mind of attachment is the cause of all mental disease and frustration and how changing your attitude can make your mind healthy and give purpose and meaning to your life. The attitude you need to change is that of excessive worry and self-concern—"Maybe I'm going to get sick, maybe this, maybe that"—to one where through mind training you totally dedicate your life to the benefit of others. Attachment and self-concern are obsessed minds. The obsessed mind is automatically narrow. The narrow mind always leads to problems.

In the Mahayana teachings there's a mind we call *bodhicitta*, which means changing our attitude from obsessed concern for self-pleasure—"I'm hot, I'm cold, I'm this, I'm that"—to compassionate concern for

other living beings' pleasure, and dedicating everything we do to the highest benefit of other sentient beings. That kind of attitude automatically brings relaxation and joy into our mind; everything we do becomes joyful and we see a much greater purpose to it.

Otherwise all we see are our imagined self's objects of obsession. When that's our view we very easily get unhappy and depressed. Depression and happiness don't come from outside but from how we direct our mind; not from changing our life but from changing our motivation. The motivation behind an action is much more important than the action itself.

With respect to actions, we can't say, "Doing this is totally bad; doing that is totally good." What determines whether an action is bad or good is our motivation for doing it.

Therefore we shouldn't ask others "How am I doing?" but look within to see what kind of mind impels our daily actions. Acting with attachment to our own happiness on the basis of an imaginary self always brings frustration and conflict into our mind whereas totally dedicating everything we do to the benefit of others automatically brings relaxation, joy and much energy into our mind.

Westerners over-emphasize physical action. For example, many people think that they're being religious when they give money to the poor or to worthy causes but often what they're doing is just an ego trip. Instead of their giving becoming an antidote to dissatisfaction and attachment it simply causes increased dissatisfaction and egocentricity and therefore has nothing to do with religion. Such people are just taking the religious idea that it's good to give and believe that they're giving, but from the Buddhist point of view charity is not what you give but why and how. True charity depends on motivation—giving without attachment or the expectation of anything in return. Such giving automatically frees the mind. Giving with the hope of getting something back is in the nature of conflict.

Therefore we have to carefully check our supposedly religious actions to make sure that they do in fact bring benefit and don't cause more confusion for others or ourselves. In order to make sure that our actions become positive, while doing them we meditate on the ultimate nature of reality or what's sometimes called the "circle of the three": subject,

object and action. This is how to make whatever we do a true cause of freedom from suffering.

Investigating the nature of our mental attitude is most worthwhile, especially if we do it with the intention of changing attachment to the welfare of our imagined self into thoughts of benefiting others. In order to benefit others we don't necessarily have to do anything physical, we just have to turn our mind in that direction. This brings great joy into our mind, a warm feeling to our heart and clarifies the purpose of our life. We always think that the source of warm feelings is outside of ourselves but it can never be found out there. Warm feelings and satisfaction come from our own mind; that's where we should seek them.

Now I think I've said enough. Do you have any questions?

Q. You spoke of turning the mind around, changing the way we look at things. If I'm experiencing sadness or some other negative mind state that I don't like, how do I do that?

Lama. When there's a problem in your mind it's because of something you did in the past. For example, yesterday your friend might have said something that hurts your reputation and when you think about it today you get upset. That kind of problem is easily stopped. One thing is that your attachment clings very strongly to your reputation and worse, you *believe* that your being good or bad depends upon what others say. But the responsibility for being good or bad is actually yours. Somebody else's saying that you're good or bad doesn't make you good or bad. You're responsible. Also, whatever was said yesterday has already gone, so why worry about it? Anyway, this is just an example. You should know that whenever anything bothers you it's because of attachment, aversion or ignorance, a lack of intensive knowledge-wisdom, and that therefore there's a solution. There are antidotes to each of these three poisonous minds.

Q. Was tantra Shakyamuni Buddha's highest teaching?

Lama. Yes, definitely, but the main practitioners for whom he gave his tantric teachings were those who had the skill, intelligence and knowledge-wisdom to transform poison into medicine. If you don't have such

wisdom, tantra can be dangerous, so please be careful. However, there's a way to develop your mind gradually so that eventually you'll be qualified to practice tantra; it's just not something you can jump into right away.

Q. I've seen Tibetan monks chanting. How does that affect the mind?

Lama. Chanting is a form of training in awareness of sense objects. Often our senses are totally unaware of what sense objects actually are. An object is there, our mind sees it, but then we project something extra onto it, something that's not actually there. Then we say, "That's good" or "That's bad." With chanting, our ordinary sense perception is transformed into blissful wisdom energy with total consciousness of the sense object, sound. So it's a form of mind training.

Q. It opens your consciousness more and more?

Lama. Yes, that's right. It allows you to see the reality of the sense objects you observe rather than the hallucinations projected by your ego. Actually, when you see monks doing puja and chanting, it might look like empty ritual but their external actions are just symbolic; internally, they're meditating. We all need to learn how to do that. Also, these practices usually come from the Buddhist tantric tradition. What's that? Normally, ordinary people might consider certain things to be negative, bad for their mind, but as I just mentioned, those with powerful, skillful, intelligent knowledge-wisdom and access to the methods of tantra can transform potentially negative things into positive. It's a kind of alchemy that turns poison into medicine.

Q. Would you say something about the role of women seeking enlightenment, please?

Lama. Men and women seeking enlightenment are the same. Women have the same potential for enlightenment as do men and equal ability to train their mind. The ability to develop powerful control over the mind and to reach enlightenment is equal. There's no way we can say that women are lower than men and can't do anything. Also, in Tibet there were many female lamas.

Q. What do you mean by control over the mind and how do we get it?
Lama. It comes through understanding the nature of the mind and practicing meditation. But control comes gradually, not all at once. You start off with a day's experience of control. When you find that as a result you're happier and more easy-going, you think, why not two days? Then a week, two weeks and so on. Developing control slowly-slowly is the way to go. You can't expect to gain lofty goals just by thinking about and grasping at them while you still have a low level of mind. It doesn't work that way. Progressing slowly and steadily is the way to reach spiritual goals.

The thing is, whether you're religious or not, it's important not simply to grasp at idealistic goals but to consider if what you want is achievable and by what means; ask yourself what you can do to achieve your aims. That is much more practical.

Sometimes we find that when things don't work out for them in the material world, people turn to philosophy or meditation but bring worldly grasping to their spiritual pursuits. Of course, that doesn't work either.

So I always get people to meditate in a step-by-step fashion. That's the comfortable way to proceed. You're sure of what you're doing, you gain experience and everything comes together for you in an integrated way.

Of course, we have many specific methods. Sometimes we use concentration on mantra and listening to our inner sound. However, in general, rather than getting involved in too much physical action, it's better to sit, relax and check your motivation. That's very powerful—much more powerful than watching TV.

Q. We're told to control our senses. Does that mean if I have a rose in my hand I mustn't smell it? What do you mean by changing or controlling our senses?

Lama. You don't have to throw the rose away to gain control; you can simply enjoy the scent of the rose in a reasonable way and not over-value it. For example, if you pick up a flower and think, "As long as I have this flower, my life has meaning. If I lose it, I'm dead," that's unreasonable; that's an exaggeration of the value of the flower based on a hallucinated view of it. The reasonable view would be to recognize that it's

impermanent; its nature is to come and go. When the time comes for it to disappear, you're OK with that. You're not fretting, "My flower is dead; my life is over." This shows how we create problems in our own mind. It's very interesting. Of course, we don't think consciously, "I like this. As long as I have it, life's worth living." But beyond words, deeply rooted within, we actually do have such a philosophy of life. There's a lot going on in our mind beneath the conscious level. That's what we need to check and observe through meditation. But getting back to the rose, you can smell and enjoy it; what you need to avoid is exaggerating its importance and getting attached to it.

Q. Lama, what's the best defense against worldly pain inflicted by other people when you're searching for wisdom and it makes you vulnerable to that pain? For example, if somebody tries to take financial advantage of you in business, should you fight back or be passive?

Lama. It depends on the situation. If you're well off and somebody cheats you out of a few dollars, instead of making a big fuss about it perhaps you can just let it go or even feel glad that he got some extra money. If it's a bigger amount, again it depends on how much it hurts you. One way you can assess the damage is to think how much longer you have to live. Of course, this is something we can never know, but say you give yourself five years—do you have enough for that? If so, then a few thousand dollars isn't going to make much difference. And you might not even live that long, so is a couple of thousand dollars worth hassling over? If you check, you'll see that you can never be sure how much longer you have to live.

Sometimes people forget what's of real value. They make millions of dollars—far more money than they could spend even if they lived a hundred years—and then finish up dying young, worried about the money they're leaving behind. If you're going to worry make sure you worry about something worthwhile. There are more important things than money.

Q. What I understand is that there are positive and negative worlds within us and we have to realize the positive rather than the negative.

Lama. What I'm saying is that we can make our mind positive, enjoy life and avoid putting ourselves into bad situations and conflict. That's the realistic way to live. We need to use the energy of our body, speech and mind to maintain what meets our human need, be content and avoid chasing excess. The "I need this, I need that" mind has no limit.

Q. Is bodhicitta the most beautiful or important aspect of Buddhism?

Lama. Yes, you could say that. Those who have realized the meditation on bodhicitta see all living beings as equal in the sense that none appear as close objects of attachment or distant objects of hatred. They have an equal feeling toward all beings—human, animal, insect, whatever. It's very important to train our mind in this.

Normally we always choose one person—which is like choosing one out of all the atoms in the universe—and cling to him or her, "Oh, you're my best friend, I can't live without you," with great attachment, overestimation and grasping. When you grasp at one atom in this extreme manner you automatically discriminate other atoms as objects of hatred or indifference. This kind of unbalanced mind inevitably brings conflict and frustration.

So, in order to develop universal love and compassion, you need to feel equanimity with all living beings. This makes your mind very healthy. Lord Buddha himself said that you should not be attached to anything, not even the realization of enlightenment. If you are, then when somebody says there's no such thing as enlightenment, you freak out. That's *your* problem.

Often when you're attracted to a certain religion or spiritual philosophy you immediately exaggerate its good qualities and grasp at it, thinking, "Oh, this is fantastic; this is so good..." This can be very dangerous, because when somebody says that your religion's no good, you freak out. That's the unhealthy mind at work. Irrespective of the religion, philosophy, psychology or whatever else you follow, if somebody says it's no good and you get upset, that's *your* problem.

Therefore Lord Buddha said that we should not be attached to even the concept of higher realizations and enlightenment, let alone sense objects. He also said that we should not believe what he taught just because he

taught it but scrutinize his words carefully with our own knowledge-wisdom to see if his teachings suit us or not. That responsibility is ours; we should not be Buddhists through blind belief.

Q. Could you please say more about the circle of the three, which you mentioned before?

Lama. I was saying that when we practice charity, for example, it's mostly in the mind; charity is wisdom. In Buddhism, charity doesn't mean just handing something over to somebody else. What often happens is that we hear that it's important to give but don't know how to do it correctly, so we make charity in the wrong way. Then, instead of becoming a solution to our attachment and dissatisfaction, our giving becomes just another source of conflict. We give and regret: "Oh, I shouldn't have given that away; now I need it." That's not charity. Perfect charity is made with the right motivation and awareness of the ultimate nature, or emptiness, of three things: you, the donor; the recipient of the gift; and the action of giving.

Q. Do you also have to check to see whether what you're giving is appropriate?

Lama. Yes, that's a good point too. For example, if you give money to somebody who then goes and gets drunk, instead of helping that person, you've given harm. That's just a simple example; there are many more.

Q. Would it then be charity *not* to give that person money?

Lama. Yes, that's right. Lord Buddha's charity is a psychological method of eradicating attachment and bringing the realization of inner peace. You can see how it works. If you give with an understanding of the ultimate reality of the object you're giving and the circle of the three—donor, recipient and action—there's no danger of a negative reaction. Our problem is that we always give with the expectation of getting something in return. Psychologically, that's a great problem. Therefore give with care.

Q. What do you think of the teachings of Christ?

Lama. His teachings were excellent. He taught what true love means, the shortcomings of selfishness and many other positive things. He meditated, too. Don't think that meditation is just an Eastern trip. By meditating on Christ's love we can transcend attachment and selfishness. He also emphasized forgetting oneself and focusing more on others' benefit. He was a great example to all of us.

Q. Did Jesus and the Buddha teach the same thing?

Lama. No, their teachings were different because they were teaching different people. Each person needs to be taught according to his or her own level of mind; the same teaching will not fit everybody. Therefore you can't state dogmatically that Jesus's teachings are all we need and that Lord Buddha's are unnecessary or that only Lord Buddha's teachings are correct and Jesus's are wrong. It all depends on the students' level of development—some who are not ready for one type of philosophy might be ready for another and only a skilled teacher can tell which is suitable for whom. Even within Buddhism, Lord Buddha taught thousands of different methods. You can't say that this one is right and the others are wrong, unnecessary. They're all necessary for certain people. That's why there are hundreds of different flavors of ice cream; people's minds are different. You can't say that vanilla is right and all the others are wrong.

Q. Does Buddhism not relate to an outside God, an outside savior?

Lama. Buddhism emphasizes that your main savior is yourself. Neither God nor Buddha is responsible for your positive and negative actions—you are. So you have to check your mind and motivation for doing an action *before* you engage in it; once it's finished it's too late.

Q. Is it possible to experience an inner teacher or guide?

Lama. Yes. If you're able to be intensively aware, you can get guidance or answers to your questions, but at the moment, how much of the day are you fully conscious and aware? An hour? Even less? So although you can make a little progress at times like that, most of the time you're unconscious. However, that leaves a lot of room for improvement. As you know, it's possible to be fully conscious day and night, so instead of

worrying, do what needs to be done to develop such awareness. If you can be fully aware and act correctly on the basis of wisdom, everything you do will be perfect.

Q. Then what is the role of an external teacher?

Lama. It depends on the individual. An external teacher may not be necessary. If you're already advanced through many previous lives' practice, perhaps you don't need an external teacher in this life. That's a question you have to ask yourself. If you have the inner wisdom to direct all your energy into the right channel, fine. But if you don't and always find yourself doubtful and hesitant, those are negative minds and should not be followed. In that case you need an experienced external guide. But of course, you have to check your potential guide's credentials very carefully before deciding to rely on his or her advice, and even analyze carefully check whatever you are told. If you think your own advice is better, then follow that. This is a path of personal responsibility.

3. *Compassion and emptiness*

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING those of us seeking enlightenment can do is to thoroughly analyze the actions of our body, speech and mind. What determines whether our actions are positive or negative, moral or immoral, is the motivation behind them, the mental attitude that impels us to act. It's mainly mental attitude that determines whether actions are positive or negative.

Sometimes we're confused as to what's positive and what's negative; we don't know what morality is or why we should follow it. Actually, it's very simple; we can check up scientifically. Moral actions are those that derive from a positive mental attitude; immoral actions are the opposite.

For example, when we talk about Hinayana and Mahayana it seems that the difference is philosophical or doctrinal, but when we examine it from the practical level we find that although literally *yana* means vehicle—something that takes you from where you are to where you want to go—here, this internal vehicle refers to mental attitude.

The practitioner who, having clearly understood the confused and suffering nature of samsara, seeks liberation from cyclic existence for himself rather than enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings has the mental attitude of self-concern and doesn't have time to look at other mother sentient beings' problems: "My problems are the greatest problem; I must free myself from them once and for all." That kind of mental attitude, seeking realization of nirvana for oneself alone, is called Hinayana.

In Mahayana, *maha* means great and, as above, *yana* means internal vehicle, so what makes this vehicle great? Once more, *yana* implies mental attitude and here we call it bodhicitta—the determination to escape

from the control of self-attachment and obsession with the welfare of “I, I, I” and reach enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.⁶

We often say “I want enlightenment” but if we’re not careful our spiritual view and practice can become almost materialistic. However, those who truly have the innermost enlightenment attitude of bodhicitta seek enlightenment *only* for the sake of others and thus become true Mahayanists. Those who seek self-realization out of concern for only their own samsaric problems are Hinayanists.

Why do we call these attitudes vehicles? A vehicle is something that transports you—in the case of the Hinayana, to liberation; in the case of the Mahayana, to enlightenment.

We talk a lot about Hinayana this, Mahayana that. We can explain verbally what these vehicles are, but actually, we have to understand them at a much deeper level. It can be that we’re a person who talks about being a Mahayanist but is, in fact, a Hinayanist. What you are isn’t determined by what you talk about but by your level of mind. That’s the way to distinguish Mahayanists from those who aren’t.

However, the way the lam-rim is set up is that it explains the whole path; it begins with the Hinayana and continues on through the Mahayana in order to gradually lead students all the way to enlightenment. It also demonstrates the step-by-step way practitioners have to proceed. The realistic way to practice is to follow the path as laid out in the lam-rim. You can’t skip steps and jump ahead, thinking you’re too intelligent for the early stages. Also, in order to experience heartfelt concern for the happiness of others instead of always putting yourself first, you have to start by understanding your own problems. This experience is gained in the beginning stages of the path.

There’s a prayer⁷ that says,

⁶ In the *Tibetan Tradition of Mental Development*, Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey says (p. 202), “The Mahayana is called ‘great’ for the following reasons: 1. The aim is great, because it is for the benefit of all sentient beings. 2. The purpose is great, for it leads to the omniscient state. 3. The effort is great. 4. The ultimate goal is great, because it is buddhahood rather than mere freedom from samsara. 5. The concern is great, as it is for all sentient beings. 6. The enthusiasm is great, as the practice is not regarded as a hardship.”

⁷ In Lama Tsongkhapa’s *Foundation of All Good Qualities*. See www.LamaYeshe.com.

Just as I have fallen into the sea of samsara,
So have all mother migratory beings.
Please bless me to see this, train in supreme bodhicitta
And bear the responsibility of freeing migratory beings.

It means that first we have to see that we ourselves are drowning in the ocean of samsaric suffering; only then can we truly appreciate the situation others are in. Then, by seeing that, we should not only wish to relieve them of their suffering but also take personal responsibility for their liberation and enlightenment; we must generate the determination to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment by ourselves alone. This is the attitude that we call bodhicitta.

Actually, what is bodhicitta? It's what this verse explains. It's not a situation of becoming aware of your own suffering, seeing that others are also immersed in it and then generating some kind of emotional sorrow, "Oh, that's terrible; how can I possibly help them?" That's not bodhicitta.

It's true that we suffer from the problems of ego and attachment and that all sentient beings are in the same situation of confusion leading to samsaric problems. However, seeing that and getting emotionally upset—"Oh, poor sentient beings, but what can I do? I have no method"—is not bodhicitta.

If you get too emotionally worked up over sentient beings' suffering you can even go crazy. Instead of your insights bringing you wisdom they bring you more hallucination; you pump yourself up, "I'm completely confused and negative, the world is full of suffering, I have no reason for living. I might as well slash my wrists and end it all."

It's possible to have this kind of reaction to seeing universal suffering. If you're not careful you might feel that this distorted compassion is bodhicitta. That's a total misconception. Bodhicitta requires tremendous wisdom; it's not based on emotional sorrow. Bodhicitta is the enlightened attitude that begins with seeing that all sentient beings, including you, have the potential to attain enlightenment. Before, you might have felt, "Oh, what can I do to help all sentient beings? I have no method," but when you see the possibility of leading them to enlightenment, a door somehow opens in your mind and instead of feeling suffocated and

emotionally bothered, you feel inspired. Therefore, in the verse I quoted, bodhicitta is described as supreme, perfect or magnificent.

So there are two things we need in order to develop bodhicitta. One is, as it says, “Just as I have fallen into the sea of samsara.” First we have to investigate and understand our own samsaric nature. When we realize that all our wrong conceptions and suffering come from the ego, we can extend that experience to others: “So have all mother migratory beings.” Then, when we see our own potential for enlightenment, we see that all sentient beings have the same potential and take personal responsibility for leading them to enlightenment by attaining it ourselves. This intention is bodhicitta; when the two thoughts—attaining enlightenment and others’ welfare—come together simultaneously in the one mind, that’s bodhicitta.

Seeing the possibility of leading all mother sentient beings to enlightenment and taking personal responsibility for doing so is very important. It automatically releases attachment and at the same time your actions naturally benefit others without your having to think about it.

Many people think that bodhicitta is a dualistic mind and therefore somehow contradictory because the Buddha said that enlightened beings have completely released all dualistic minds; they can’t understand why we would purposely cultivate a dualistic mind. Some people engage in this kind of philosophical debate.

However, a mind perceiving a dualistic view is not necessarily totally negative. For example, when we begin to understand the nature of samsara, impermanence, emptiness and so forth, without first cultivating a dualistic view of these topics it’s impossible eventually to realize them beyond the dualistic view.

It’s very hard to transcend duality. Sometimes you can be experiencing a kind of unity but still find it has a dualistic component. The dualistic view is very subtle. Even a tenth level bodhisattva who has gained complete understanding of emptiness still has a slight level of subtle dualistic view.

Also, conception and perception of dualistic view are two different things. You can demonstrate this for yourself by compressing one eyeball slightly and looking at a single light bulb: conceptually, you know

for certain that there's only one light bulb there, but what you see is two. The difference between conception and perception of dualistic view is like that. Therefore, when you first experience the wisdom realizing emptiness, you have the right conception but you still perceive things dualistically.

The reason we have not reached enlightenment since beginningless time is because our relative mind has relentlessly perceived things in a mistaken, dualistic way. The only unenlightened mind that does not see things dualistically is that of the *arya* bodhisattva in meditative equipoise on emptiness. Everything else is dualistic.

We often feel that analytical meditation is too hard because we have to expend a lot of intellectual energy checking this, checking that, and conclude it would be better just to stop thinking altogether, to completely empty our mind. That's just ego. How can you stop thinking? Thought runs continuously, like an automatic watch. Whether you're asleep or under the influence of drugs, thought is always there. Your stomach can be empty but not your mind.

From the perspective of Tibetan lamas, everything that sentient beings' relative minds perceive is not in accordance with reality. So where does this idea of the mind being empty of intellectual thought come from?

The experience of emptiness is not an intellectual one. If it were, all you'd have to do to experience it would be to fabricate it intellectually, "Oh, this is emptiness, I'm here," and then you'd feel, "Wow, now I'm experiencing emptiness." But of course, that's simply a polluted, deluded, wrong conception mind. It really takes time to experience emptiness. Nevertheless, there are degrees of experience. But for beginners, it's impossible to experience emptiness intellectually; it's beyond the intellect.

As spiritual seekers we face two dangerous extremes. One is over-emotionality: "I'm suffering, others are suffering, oh, it's too much, God help us!" Seeing everything as terrible is too emotional. The other extreme is over-rejectionism: "Nothing exists." You can't reject the reality of your own suffering...but through skillful wisdom and practice you can free yourself from it.

What we need to do is follow a middle path between the extremes of

seeing everything with too much ignorant emotion as suffering and too much intellectualization as non-existent. But that middle path is very difficult to take.

Therefore Lama Tsongkhapa always advocated the simultaneous development of method and wisdom in order to realize enlightenment and negotiate the two extremes: that of no wisdom and emotional spiritual misery and that of over-emphasis on emptiness and rejection of morality and so forth. Method and wisdom have to be developed simultaneously.

Method means bodhicitta. And not just the words, “Bodhicitta is wonderful!” We have to practice it the way the lam-rim explains. If you don’t have a perfect method for developing bodhicitta it will simply remain in your mind as a good idea. Therefore, if you do have a way of developing bodhicitta, you are extremely fortunate. Shantideva and Chandrakirti both explained how to practice bodhicitta, and based on their teachings Lama Tsongkhapa elaborated on how to actualize it in his.

One of the methods especially emphasized by Shantideva was that of equalizing and exchanging self and others [Tib: *dag-shen nyam-je*]: changing attachment to one’s own happiness to attachment to the happiness of others. For countless lives we have always been obsessed with our own pleasure and have completely neglected that of others. This beginningless focus on our own happiness to the exclusion of that of others is called “self-cherishing.” So we have to totally change this attitude to one of greater concern for others’ welfare than our own.

Actually, this thought is extremely powerful; just generating it automatically destroys the ego. For example, if somebody asks us to serve tea to a visitor, resentment immediately arises within us. We serve the tea, but unhappily. As soon as we’re asked, the buzz of irritation starts in our heart. It’s amazing: we can’t even be happy to give somebody a cup of tea.

The person who changes attachment to self to attachment to others doesn’t have that buzz of irritation in his heart. Without even having to think about it, he’s automatically happy to serve others. Psychologically, that’s very helpful—it stops the pain of self-attachment from arising in our heart.

At the start of our practice, we beginners need tremendous under-

standing and strong intellectual determination because for countless lives we've instinctively thought, "My pleasure is the most important pleasure there is." Every minute, every second, that thought is there, even if it's not at the intellectual level. Attachment goes way beyond the intellect and is very well developed in our mind.

In order to destroy the instinctive experiences of attachment and self-cherishing we need to be strongly dedicated to the happiness of others; we do it not through the use of artificial force but by realizing that even the pain of losing our best friend comes from attachment. Nevertheless, even if this best friend asks us for a cup of tea, the buzz of self-attachment can still stir in our heart. It's incredible.

So we have to think, "Attachment has been a problem in all my beginningless lifetimes and it's still my real enemy. If I had to name my worst enemy, attachment would be it, because it hurts me all the time and destroys all my pleasure. For countless lives I have been concerned with just my own pleasure, which only results in misery. I must change my attitude from concern for my own pleasure to that of other mother sentient beings. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment through concern for other mother sentient beings and helping them but because I've been on the attachment trip since beginningless time, I'm still totally confused."

Those who really want to realize enlightenment have to forget their own pleasure and completely devote themselves to that of others. That's the most important thing. It's actually a matter of psychology. At first glance you might think that this is just intellectual thought but if you really sincerely concern yourself with others' pleasure and forget your own, automatically your selfish motivation is released and you have less anger. That's because anger and hatred come from the selfish motivation that is concerned with only one's own pleasure. Don't think about this from simply the philosophical standpoint; check up through your own everyday experience.

For that reason, Nagarjuna said, "All positive, moral actions come from concern for others' pleasure. Everything immoral and negative comes from selfish attachment."

So that's clear, isn't it? We don't just make this stuff up philosophically.

It's scientific experience. Check your everyday life: ever since you were born you've been dealing with other human beings. You can't live without involvement with other people; it's impossible—unless you become Milarepa. But even if you do, you won't be Milarepa forever.

So bodhicitta is very practical. You don't have to intellectualize too much. Just check up every day how the self-cherishing thought agitates your mind. Even if somebody asks you for a cup of tea you get irritated. That's unbelievable, but it's your ego. So you bring the person a cup of tea and begrudgingly dump it down, "Here's your tea," but even though you brought the person some tea, because you did it with selfishness buzzing in your heart, it's negative. On the other hand, if you give somebody a cup of tea with the dedicated thought of bodhicitta, it's the most positive thing you can do: all the wonderful qualities of the omniscient enlightened mind come from concern for other beings' pleasure.

Just having this understanding is very powerful. For a start—forget about enlightenment—it makes your everyday life happy; you have no problems with those around you. It's extremely practical. Therefore, as much as you can, train your mind in bodhicitta and try to realize that attachment is the greatest obstacle to the happiness of your daily life. And even if you can't completely change attachment to your own pleasure to concern for that of others, at least you can try to practice the equilibrium meditation,⁸ which is also a very powerful and practical way of bringing enjoyment into your life.

Perhaps, instead of arrogantly going for the realization of enlightenment, you can first try to make your daily life joyful by putting a stop to the things that come from the selfish thought and complicate everything. For beginners, this is probably more realistic and sensible. Just look at your everyday life and see how selfish attachment causes all the problems that arise.

All the problems of desire come from attachment; all those due to hatred and anger also come from attachment. Even a bad reputation or the upset that arises when you're insulted come from attachment. If you

⁸ See the Appendix in Lama Yeshe's *Ego, Attachment and Liberation* (a free book from the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive).

really understand this evolution you'll have fewer problems and be psychologically healthy because understanding allows you to release emotional attachment so that it no longer has a hold on you.

What I'm saying is that sometimes we intellectualize too much about the highest goal—enlightenment—and neglect to investigate how our everyday problems arise. This only throws our life into disorder and is not a practical approach.

What's practical is to check how everyday problems arise. That's the most important thing and that's what practicing Dharma means. By constantly checking what kind of mind causes our problems, we're always learning. By understanding the nature of attachment we can easily recognize it when it arises. If you don't know how to look, you'll never see.

I don't need to say much more now but if you have any questions I'll try to answer them.

Q. Say we have the Mahayana thought and want to bring pleasure to others. There are so many of them—how do we decide who to help and how?

Lama. When I say that we should be more concerned for others' pleasure than our own, I don't mean that you literally have to help *all* beings right *now*. Of course, that's impossible—that's the point we have to understand. When you generate the wish to help infinite other beings and then look more deeply into what's involved in doing so, you'll see that at the moment, your mind, wisdom and actions are too limited to help all living beings and that in order to do so you'll need to develop the infinite, transcendental knowledge-wisdom of a buddha. When you become a buddha you can manifest in billions of different aspects in order to reach and communicate with all the different sentient beings in their own language according to their level of mind. So, understanding that you can't do this now but that you do have the potential to reach enlightenment and then *really* help them, you start to practice your yana until it eventually carries you all the way to buddhahood, when you can be of true benefit to others. However, this doesn't mean you can't be of some help to others now, even though it's limited.

The path to enlightenment has three main levels. The first leads us to

upper rebirths but not out of cyclic existence; from here, the help we can give others is minimal. The second level is for those who seek complete liberation from cyclic existence mainly out of concern for their own problems. Even though such practitioners transcend their ego, the help they can give others is still quite limited; they can't help all mother sentient beings. Only fully enlightened beings can help all sentient beings—if that's what you want to do, that's the goal you have to reach, and that's where the third, or highest, level of the path leads.

Helping others has to be understood as rather more than, "I want to share my furniture with others" and then sawing it up into little pieces and distributing them evenly among your friends. That's not the way to help others. The emphasis has to be on training the mind. Otherwise it sounds a bit like communist propaganda: I have to share everything I own with everybody else. That's wrong; it's emotional. The communist idea of equality is false because it's not based on mind training. It's just another ego trip. It's impossible to achieve true equality just by saying, "Everybody should be equal," with ego, attachment and no mind training. You can't control people's minds with guns—from the outside it might look like control, but it's not.

The goal is to change self-attachment to concern for others. This is based on equilibrium, which is achieved through meditation, not physically. It's psychological, mind training, and very different from the communist idea of equality. Look at the Soviet Union, for example. Their original goal was equality but now they're becoming more and more like America. Why? Because they have attachment; everybody wants to be happy. It's the same with China. The cyclic nature of samsara is reality. The same things come around again and again. I'm not making some kind of telepathic prediction; you can see through logical analysis how it works.

Q. In thinking about the two vehicles, it seems that the Hinayana is quite strict in prohibiting certain actions—not killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct and so forth—whereas the Mahayana says motivation is more important than action. Also, Nagarjuna quoted the Buddha as saying, out of his great compassion, that we should have few possessions

and be content because it's very difficult for us to know our motivation. So it would seem to me that at our level we should follow the Hinayana, not the Mahayana.

Lama. I agree that it's better to have fewer possessions rather than to be surrounded by hundreds of objects of desire, pulling us this way and that and agitating our mind. However, Tibetan Buddhism puts Hinayana and Mahayana together; it unifies the two vehicles. Since our mind tends to run wild like a mad elephant, we definitely need to adhere to certain mental rules—following the disciplines suggested by experienced practitioners makes it unbelievably easier to practice sincerely and meditate properly.

For example, say you're at a busy airport with people rushing everywhere and I tell you, "Meditate! Meditate!" It's impossible, isn't it? Why? Because all your sense doors are wide open and you just can't focus your mind on one point. Similarly, if you sit down to meditate and I poke you with a needle, saying, "Concentrate! Concentrate!" you can't do it. Objects of sense gravitation attachment⁹ are just like a needle—they automatically agitate your mind and by not avoiding them you make meditation difficult for yourself.

One lama said, "The more you possess the greater your superstition." It's true; the more possessions we have the more paranoid we are about protecting them and their constant presence in our mind causes it to be restless all the time.

In America, it's almost a right to possess a big house, a couple of cars, a refrigerator and all kinds of other stuff. Nobody looks at you twice and it doesn't necessarily take much effort to acquire such things. What takes effort is deciding, for example, what to have for breakfast; you have so many choices—"What should I eat? This? This? This? This? What about this?" It's such a waste of time; that kind of thing makes life difficult.

Take the middle path and choose your environment carefully; create your own mandala, just like Chenrezig creates his—surround yourself

⁹ Editor: For several years I thought Lama was trying to say "sense gratification attachment" and would try to correct him (to no avail) but eventually it became clear that he knew what he was saying and meant the irresistible gravitational pull that objects of attachment have upon our mind.

with people and things conducive to your practice. Sometimes we're very weak; we think everything's so difficult. However, you have to know that human problems can be solved by human wisdom. So create your own mandala according to the way in which you want to develop—select carefully the kind of people with whom you want to associate, the kind of house in which you want to live, the activities in which you engage and so forth. That's very important. Otherwise you're just left with "Whatever happens happens. Who knows?" That's not the right approach. Karma is strong. Just because you want something to work out in a certain way doesn't mean it will go the way you want but if you put yourself into the right environment, you give yourself every opportunity to develop the way you'd like.

Q. Thinking about all this creates a bit of a dilemma for me. In a land of excess like America, it would seem that the fewer possessions I have the less my attachment and the greater my ability to think clearly and therefore benefit others. On the other hand, if I had a nice big house with lots of bedrooms perhaps I could help people more by giving them a good place to live, food to eat and the opportunity to meditate while being supported in this way.

Lama. If you have skillful wisdom it's definitely possible that you could help others like that, but if your mind is unclear and you make your offer emotionally, ten days later you're going to be saying, "The kitchen's a mess, there's a broken window, last night he did this, today she did that..." You get upset; others get upset—unfortunately, things can turn out like that. If you can execute your plan with wisdom and keep it all together skillfully, then of course helping others in the way you suggest would be a great thing to do, but first think it through and weigh your options carefully.

Getting back to the issue of mental rules, however, it's important to follow them at the outset of your practice but after some time, if you have skillful wisdom, perhaps you don't need them any more.

Q. I'm wondering how others and I should relate to you as a lama. Should we think of you as a person too?

Lama. Of course! I'm just another man.

Q. I mean, it's very hot outside today and although it's OK for me, I understand that it might be bad for you.¹⁰ Since you're a lama, am I allowed to think in that way? Somebody told me that we should never think of a lama as an ordinary person.

Lama. Of course I'm a person. At the moment I'm manifesting as an American man from Wisconsin!

Q. Lama, where do you draw the line between putting yourself into situations—for instance, a job—where you have many opportunities to see your self-cherishing but where unconsciously you're also creating a lot of negative karma, and not putting yourself into situations where the negative mind can easily arise like this?

Lama. That depends. For example, if you don't put yourself into that kind of situation perhaps you won't have any money to sustain your life. Say you can't get a job other than one that will disturb your mind. You can take it and try to use that opportunity to understand your mental disturbances and in that way develop wisdom. It's a mixed situation, part negative and part positive. If you have little choice other than to take that job, then you've got to try to make the positives outweigh the negatives, but if you think that that is beyond your capabilities and will just lead to a nervous breakdown, then obviously it's better to try to find some other kind of work. You have to assess all this for yourself. However, if you're skillful, you'll try to find a Dharma job that offers peace and happiness and the opportunity to benefit others.

Q. My present job is driving a cab, so there are all sorts of people getting into the car all day long and I have many opportunities to practice the equilibrium meditation, but what I was asking was, is that type of situation good, where there's all this material to reflect on during my

¹⁰ It was common knowledge among Lama's students that he had a heart condition that was aggravated by hot weather even though he never complained himself.

meditation at night but at the same time I'm creating a lot of negative karma during the day, getting angry, for example?

Lama. Again, it depends. If you assess the situation as basically more positive, then a little anger might be OK. Developing yourself for the benefit of others is better than a little anger. You can think, "My anger makes me go a bit crazy but as long as I'm helping others, I don't care." Giving yourself up for the sake of others automatically makes your craziness disappear.

Thank you. I think that's all the questions we have time for. We should now dedicate our merit. Dedication is very important. We often do positive things without dedicating the merit and as a result, as soon as we get angry that merit is destroyed. It's all about mental energy. So whenever you do something worthwhile, instead of puffing up with pride—"I did great"—or at some point getting angry, all of which dissipates your positive energy, sincerely dedicate your merit to others. This is an essential part of mind training. So beginning with bodhicitta, the determination to lead all mother sentient beings to enlightenment, do whatever action it is you're doing and then dedicate your merit: this helps make the action complete.

If we're not aware of these three—motivation, action and dedication—all our actions are incomplete and therefore not particularly powerful. On the other hand, when we do negative actions, even without thinking, we do them perfectly from beginning to end: we're motivated by strong desire, we do the action with great enthusiasm, and when we finish we think, "That was so good," sort of dedicating it to attachment. So from beginning to end it becomes a perfect negative action.

Mahayana practice is the complete antidote to perfect negative actions. At the beginning we generate bodhicitta, which completely neutralizes self-cherishing. Then we engage in a positive action. Finally, instead of feeling proud, we sincerely dedicate the merits of that to others. In that way it becomes totally positive.

Other religions may not be complete in the same way. They might start with good motivation but be bad in the middle, or the middle might be OK, but there's no dedication. Such incomplete practices can't be proper

antidotes to attachment. If you look at the psychology of the Mahayana you'll see that the entire practice—motivation, action, dedication—is geared toward the destruction of attachment. You have to understand the psychology of your practice in order to know the purpose of what you're doing.