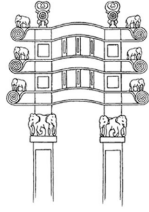




Teachings on Ngöndro

Notes of teachings on ngöndro given by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche during the Pema Lingpa Tersar Wangs and Lungs at Bartsham, Bhutan, over the period December 22, 2013 to January 9, 2014.

These notes were compiled and translated into English by Khenpo Sonam Phuntsho.



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Introduction

I believe that all you who have gathered here, risking the cold weather of Bartsham, have come genuinely intending to receive the transmission of the treasure teachings of Pema Lingpa, and not as a way to fill in the space between the other worldly things you might be doing. In this degenerate age people don't consider the dharma or spiritual practice important. Worldly affairs are considered more important. And so dharma practice or spiritual practice is undertaken as something to fill in the gaps while people try to accomplish their worldly pursuits.

Some people might come to a transmission like this one thinking, 'Khyentse Rinpoche is giving these transmissions. If I don't attend people might criticise me.' But I believe that the people gathered here are not motivated by the eight worldly dharmas. Therefore, the people who have gathered here to genuinely receive the transmission for Pema Lingpa's treasure teachings, risking this cold weather and many hardships and difficulties, should truly rejoice.

The sponsors have been requesting me to give this transmission for a long time and now it is happening. The lineage of this transmission comes from Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoche. I received this transmission in present day Pema Gatshel when I was very young, about seven years old. Whatever empowerments, oral transmissions, and teachings I missed I received from Dudjom Rinpoche when he gave the transmission to the royal great grandmother of Bhutan, Queen Phuntsho Choden, at Dechencholing in Thimphu.

Ensuring the continuity of Pema Lingpa's treasure teachings

I lack the qualities of a Mahayana spiritual friend or of a vinaya preceptor – let alone those qualities of a vajra master required for giving the transmission of these treasure teachings. But simply because I have the transmission lineage, I am giving this transmission as clouds of offerings to the lineage masters, buddhas, and bodhisattvas – to all the objects of refuge. I am giving the transmission mainly to ensure the continuity of the transmission lineage of the treasure teachings of Pema Lingpa. I am also giving the transmission to enable people to practice these treasure teachings. Empowerments and oral transmissions are necessary for our practice of the development and completion stages.

It seems that in the past the treasure teachings of Pema Lingpa, a Bhutanese, spread far and wide in Bhutan. But lately the Bhutanese are quite influenced by teachers and teachings from Tibet. You are receiving this transmission from Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, a Tibetan lama, whose seat is in Tibet. I should mention that the two previous Khyentse reincarnations were exceptionally great masters of vast activity. I am Dzongsar Khyentse only in name. These days the Dudjom Tersar teachings are very popular and widespread in Bhutan, and the master who brought those teachings to Bhutan, Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoche, was also a Tibetan. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the great Drukpa Kagyupa master who established the spiritual and temporal system in Bhutan, was a Tibetan too.

Pema Lingpa, on the other hand, was a native of Bhutan. He came from Bumthang and must have been a person who chewed pan and carried a long sword. So it is the special responsibility of the Bhutanese people to take care of his teachings – in other words to inherit the wealth of their father. The historical records tell us that the people of Bhutan have had great respect and reverence for Tibetan lamas. But the Tibetans themselves haven't had much respect for Bhutanese lamas. However Pema Lingpa was one of those great masters who were also deeply respected by the Tibetans. He is counted among the five king-like tertöns. When I say we should take care of the teachings of Pema Lingpa, it doesn't mean that we should ignore all the other teachings. In fact, we must try to receive and safeguard each and every teaching as much as possible.

Some people say that the old treasure teachings, such as the teachings of Ratna Lingpa, Karma Lingpa and so on, are outdated or expired and thus no longer effective. They say the new treasure teachings are more powerful and effective. Then there are those who believe that the old representations and relics are more sacred than the new ones. But actually, each and every treasure teaching, whether Pema Lingpa's *Lama Norbu Gyatso* or the *Tsokye Tuktik* from the *Dudjom Tersar*, has the complete path to buddhahood. Each sadhana or teaching has the complete path to enlightenment. Each aspect of the teachings can lead us to enlightenment if we practice sincerely and wholeheartedly. I earnestly pray that this present transmission will be accomplished without any obstacles.

One of the texts for which I am giving the reading transmission contains the root verses of the sacred ritual dances from Dramitse. The text also contains the root verses of the Ging dance. I am telling you this because people who don't understand the significance of these ritual dances sometimes perform them at parties and celebrations. We can accomplish a lot of merit just by practicing these dances if we know their purpose and background. We can accumulate merit and purify our defilements through just seeing these dances.

There is another point here. We practice wrathful pujas and other rituals to dispel obstacles and to drive away the so-called spirits that cause sickness. But if we witness these dances with devotion, understanding their background and purpose, then there won't be any need for all these exorcism rituals. We can dispel sickness and obstructive spirits just by viewing these dances with devotion.

The treasure teachings of Pema Lingpa have incredible qualities but have degenerated

Pema Lingpa's teachings are very profound. Each of his teachings contains the complete path to enlightenment. In particular the treasure teachings of Pema Lingpa have incredible qualities. Unfortunately, the teachings of Pema Lingpa seem to have degenerated over the years and have even disappeared from the land of their origin. Whatever teachings and traditional practices remain today are largely ritualistic, such as simple village rituals that are performed for temporary worldly purposes.

Even the dharmapāla prayers have become a kind of ordinary cultural tradition. People in the rural areas of Bhutan seem to believe that if they don't do these dharmapāla practices every

year, the dharmapālas might cause them harm. Most people don't even seem to know which dharmapālas they are propitiating. Those few people who know it's the Black Maning dharmapāla look upon Black Maning as a demon of some kind who will bring misfortune if they fail to please him. So people now regard the dharmapālas as dreadful and frightening entities.

Since Buddhist ritual practices have become only cultural traditions, people now use symbols such as the phallus which clowns carry during religious festivals. In far-flung areas like Dewathang, people make tormas that represent their father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, and so on. Actually, according to the Pema Lingpa teachings, tormas represent the deity and its consort. Then people engage in all kinds of dances, like the cat dance, the monkey dance, and so on. They make these kinds of tormas and do these kinds of dances strictly as cultural affairs.

However, in some villages there are still people who believe they should practice the *shitrö* of Pema Lingpa – the practice of the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities. This must be a sign that they retain a connection to the teachings of Pema Lingpa. The *shitrö* practice includes all aspects of the path that will lead practitioners to perfect buddhahood in this very life. While giving the reading transmission, I have discovered that only in the teachings of Pema Lingpa can there be found a very clear commentary on all seventeen Dzogchen tantras. Pema Lingpa's terma contain so many incredible teachings.

The example of the prince who forgot who he was

In the context of *wang* or abhisheka, there are some people who seem to be satisfied with just receiving the empowerment substances. This approach is fine, but if we want to understand the essential meaning of empowerment, there is an illustrative story in the empowerment manual for one of Pema Lingpa's treasure teachings. One day a prince ventured out onto a crowded street. The street was so full of people that the prince became separated from his attendants and got lost. He had no idea where he was, and didn't know how to get back to his palace. So he became just an ordinary person there. He worked for a living, got married, and had children. Meantime at the palace the king was growing old. He was nearing death and wanted a successor. So his ministers combed the streets in order to find the prince and finally they did find him. They told the prince that he was not an ordinary man. He was a prince and must go back to the palace and become king.

In the same manner, empowerment is introducing us to our own actual nature. In other words, it is introducing us to our naturally present dharmakaya or tathāgatagarbha. Without knowing that the innate buddha is present within us we wander in the six realms of samsara. As we wander in the six realms, our guru introduces us to our own basic, innate nature saying, 'You are the deity; you are the dakini.' In the *shitrö* mandala, the hundred sublime deities refer to the buddha within us. That is what is being introduced in the empowerment.

It is not just the innate nature of our minds that is introduced. All of our aggregates are similarly introduced. For example, the eyes with which we see objects are introduced as the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha, and the form that the eyes see is introduced as the dancing goddess. Because we fail to recognize this, we mistakenly see the five elements as ordinary earth, wind, water, fire,

and space. So the earth element is introduced to us as the consort Buddha Locanā. Water is introduced as the Ḍakini Māmakī. In other words, not only is the nature of one's mind introduced in the empowerment but also all of one's aggregates, āyatanas, dhātus, and elements are introduced as deities.

Thus empowerment is basically introducing us to our true nature. In particular, the symbolic word empowerment is an introduction to the nature of mind. Having received this introduction, through keeping samaya and practicing the sadhana, practitioners of the highest calibre will be enlightened in this very life. Medium calibre practitioners who are unable to attain enlightenment in this lifetime will, at the time of death, recognize the appearances in the bardo of dharmatā and attain liberation just like a child climbing into its mother's lap. If, having received the empowerments, we can practice the path without breaking samaya our attachment to samsara will disappear and we will recognize all appearances as our projections.

In summary, the best practitioners will attain liberation in this very life. Intermediate ones will attain liberation in the bardo of dharmatā. A practitioner who doesn't attain liberation in the bardo of dharmatā but receives the empowerments and practises the sadhana will not be terrified by the appearances of the bardo. Such a practitioner will take a human rebirth endowed with the freedoms and riches and will gradually attain enlightenment. On the other hand, a person who lacks spiritual experience will be horrified by the appearances of the deities and the sounds, forms, and lights in the bardo state and will want to run away, thereby jumping into samsaric rebirths.

Cultivating genuine interest in the dharma

Notwithstanding this degenerate age of ours, when I see people sitting in the cold weather, convinced of the preciousness of the buddhadharma and of the importance of receiving empowerments and reading transmissions, then I feel that the Buddha's teachings will continue for some time. This is a cause for rejoicing. I am not saying that you should be proud of attending these teachings, but you should really rejoice in the fact that your motivation in being here is a genuine intention to receive the teachings, understanding their preciousness.

The buddhas and bodhisattvas of the past underwent infinite hardships to receive the Buddhist teachings. They carved a thousand holes in their bodies, filled these with oil and made of them butter lamp offerings simply to receive a single word of teaching. The 8,000 verse *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* tells how the bodhisattva Ārya Sadaparudita, the 'always weeping' bodhisattva, underwent great hardships in order to receive the prajñāpāramitā teachings. There are also stories of Tibetan vidyādharas, monks, and lay practitioners who had to endure immense hardships in order to receive the teachings.

With such examples in mind, we should really rejoice when we see people in this degenerate age taking an interest in the dharma. So all those here to receive the transmission should rejoice

in having a genuine interest in and enthusiasm for the dharma. In about thirty years, there will probably only be one hundred people or so interested in practicing the dharma. Due to the impermanent nature of compounded phenomena previously great and flourishing Indian dharma centres such as the universities of Nālandā, Vikramaśīlā and Taxila now lie in ruins. Similar situations will happen in the future.

The dharma has nothing to offer this life

The dharma is not intended for this life, to make things work out better in this life. It is aimed at enlightenment or at the very least at the next life and the lives thereafter. The dharma has nothing to offer this life. Of course if we practice the dharma then things like long life, freedom from sickness, and prosperity may come along in the process. But dharma practice is for the next life and the lives thereafter. It is better to spend your time doing business, or even telling lies, than to try and use the dharma to make this life work out better. Doing business and telling lies are more profitable than practicing the dharma in order to create better circumstances in this life.

So study, contemplation and meditation should be done to attain enlightenment, not for this life. However these days, our practice of dharma seems mostly directed at improving our circumstances in this life. We perform pujas so our businesses will be successful. If someone is starting up a corporation he will ask the monks to perform a puja or chant the praises to Ārya Tārā and so on in order that the corporation will be successful. We can't blame people for this. People's perceptions are very limited – they see only this life and cannot see beyond. Since this life is all they see, this life is all they care about.

Culture and dharma are different but closely related

There is something else about practising the dharma that I need to repeat again and again. Dharma and culture are two different things. Culture is created by human beings. To take the example of Bhutanese culture, Buddhist ceremonies in Bhutan feature an involved process of serving a variety of things such as tea and saffron rice and then bowing down and so on. But this is cultural. The reality of phenomena is not like that and cannot be shaped by human beings. Buddha himself said that whether the buddhas appear or not, the actual nature of things can never change.

But even though the dharma and culture are different, they are also closely related. A strong connection exists between them – like a cup and the water or tea that is in it. When we are thirsty it's the tea we need to drink. We can drink it from any kind of cup – gold, silver, wooden or other. But we have a tendency to make a big deal about the cup. So we end up looking down on a wooden or simple metal cup. But the important thing is actually the tea. The cup is just a container for the tea, no matter whether it is made of gold or wood. So we should never look down on other cups, even if we ourselves have cups of gold.

Culture poses both advantages and disadvantages for the dharma. Actually, there are more disadvantages because over time culture tends to take over the dharma. Culture keeps on changing and it can become a kind of bastardised culture. So in most cases culture will end up

causing great harm to the dharma.

As part of the present transmission of the treasure teachings of Pema Lingpa, I will give teachings based on the *ngöndro* of *Kunzang Gongdü – The Embodied Realization of Samantabhadra*. Based on this text I'll be talking about how to contemplate and practice the dharma. 'Ngöndro' and 'preliminary practice' are just terms given to this particular practice, which actually contains all the methods of the nine yanas or the three yanas. *Ngöndro* practice is very important. In *The Words of my Perfect Teacher* Paltrul Rinpoche emphasises that *ngöndro* practice is more important than the main practice.

But even *ngöndro* practice has become a kind of tradition or culture. These days the first thing dharma practitioners ask each other is: 'Have you finished your *ngöndro* practice?' or 'Have you done the 100,000 prostrations?' But *ngöndro* practice doesn't have an end. The practice of *ngöndro* will only be concluded when you have 32 major marks and 80 minor marks on your body, when you have the *uṣṇīṣa* on your head that ordinary eyes can't see. The great masters of the past created this requirement of one hundred thousand accumulations in order to make us practice. This is the skilful means that the early great masters devised to help us engage in practice. If you can, there's no harm in doing one hundred thousand prostrations a hundred thousand times. But if you do the prostrations properly, with the right motivation and the right visualization, even a single prostration can suffice.

Before adopting a religion, first study, contemplate and examine it

Now, what is the dharma? The dharma is the nature or the reality of phenomena, or the method to understand that reality. Such dharma is not the creation of monks or of rowdy-looking Bhutanese gomchens or meditators. The buddhadharma has existed in this world for over 2,500 years. These days other religions such as Islam and Christianity seem to be taking root in Bhutan. I can't say that those religions are bad. I can't strongly say that you shouldn't adopt them. The omniscient Longchenpa said that we should not denigrate or disparage other faiths. But before adopting any religion, you should first study, contemplate and examine it. If you find that its teachings are helpful to you and to others for this life and the lives hereafter, or even lead to the attainment of enlightenment, then adopt those teachings and practice them.

In the 2,500-year history of the buddhadharma, there has never been any suggestion that war should be waged in order to convert people to the Buddhist religion. Rather it is other religions that have resorted to waging wars in order to convert people to their faiths. Buddhism doesn't believe in using force to convert people to its teachings.

Subsequent to the Buddha Shakyamuni, there have been so many incredible practitioners who adopted and practiced Buddhism, such as the dharma King Aśoka, King Harshvardhana and so on. Having met the teachings of the Buddha, they laid down their arms and became great patrons of the buddhadharma. From India the buddhist teachings slowly spread to other parts of the world and there have been so many great buddhist practitioners in China, Japan and so on. However the Indians were not able to sustain the buddhadharma, so it disappeared from that country.

Here I want to repeat something that I always say to my Indian friends. Usually, we tend to think that goods labelled 'made in India' are poor quality. Even something like the Indian-made Prado automobile looks like a Bolero jeep. But India does have one great and very precious export – the teachings of the Buddha. India has exported the buddhadharma to many parts of the world: China, Cambodia, Mongolia, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka and many other countries. So Indians should take pride in this particular export.

Buddhism has been practiced not only by kings, but by great scholars. And there have also been great patrons of Buddhism, not only in India but in places such as China. Due to their patronage Buddhism spread widely in China, as well as in Mongolia and Japan. The Buddha's teaching is not something that can be adopted and practiced by anybody and everybody just like that. It should first be studied and undergo serious analysis and examination. Many people have spent many years testing the teachings of the Buddha in this way. Through analysis and examination they have found that wisdom and benefit are the result of practicing the buddhadharma. Finding that the buddhadharma is profound and majestic, they naturally took a deep interest in it.

But since cultural practices have become so strong in Buddhism we now have a situation where even lamas and khenpos don't know the dharma properly. So we should be really concerned and careful. In the past there were lineage masters such as Tilopa, Nāropā, Samantabhadra, and Guru Rinpoche. In Bhutan there were Tibetan and Bhutanese lineage masters such as Jigme Lingpa, Pema Lingpa and so on. But if we are not careful in the future we will have Western lineage masters such as 'David,' 'Linda' and so on. So we must be really careful not to let culture take over the dharma.

Renunciation

I am going to briefly teach on the *Kunzang Gongdü* ngöndro. As I explained earlier, the dharma is directed towards the next life and particularly the achievement of liberation and enlightenment. Since even lay people should try their best to develop revulsion towards samsara, I need not mention how important it is for dharma practitioners to have such renunciation. How should we understand renunciation? When you are carsick you lose any desire to eat food. Similarly, you should be disgusted by samsaric wealth and activities, knowing that they don't have any essence or lasting value.

Kunkhyen Jigme Lingpa said that renunciation, devotion and compassion are sublime wealth. People work very hard in pursuit of precious worldly things like gold. If people are willing to undergo endless difficulties to acquire mere worldly gems then we should not be lazy in our efforts to attain the sublime wealth. To acquire this sublime wealth requires a great deal of merit and exertion.

In the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, the Buddha praises a bodhisattva who is subject to constant sadness, saying that such sadness is evidence of his merit. In fact, it is difficult for most dharma

practitioners to have genuine renunciation towards samsaric activities even once a year. Ideally, you should feel the disgust towards samsara that a tiger would feel towards grass that you offer him as food. But even if you lack such disgust you should at least try to have less craving and attachment towards material things. And even those loppens and lamas who cannot abandon the world as Milarepa did should understand that samsaric wealth has no essence.

Material wealth is the greatest obstacle to dharma practice

Usually we are caught up in the eight worldly dharmas. Even lamas and tulkus get entangled in the worldly dharmas. I tell the Tibetan lamas that it's not alcohol or women that are the greatest obstacles to dharma practice. It is material wealth. Material wealth is the greatest cause of disharmony among lamas. I myself am always getting lost in the eight worldly dharmas. As long as we get lost in materialism, it is difficult for us to become genuine dharma practitioners. Gomchens camouflage themselves as worldly people in order to conduct business and make money. And when monks are horny they dress up as lay people.

The craving for material wealth destroys not only Buddhism but other faiths too. Material wealth is like saltwater; the more you drink, the thirstier you get. We always want something more. For example, in the past there were no mobile phones. Now that we have mobile phones we have the new complaint of not getting through on calls. So material wealth brings no satisfaction. It only ends up causing harm and destruction to dharma practitioners as well as to countries and the world at large.

In the past people used to build stupas. Now people destroy and vandalize such stupas in order to obtain material wealth. Not being contented with the amount of material wealth that they have really destroys dharma practitioners. Milarepa left his village and went to solitary caves in the mountains where he lived on nettles. He said he would be satisfied if nobody knew or cared whether he was sick or dead. Even if monks and gomchens are not able to have this kind of renunciation, at least they shouldn't always get lost in counting money. Jigme Lingpa said that whatever material wealth we have now is the result of the merit we've accumulated in our past lives. So when you have some money make offerings to the Three Jewels and give to the needy. By doing that you can at least purify the defilements of *kor*, the misuse of offerings.

Briefly, in order to abandon our attachment to material wealth we should contemplate the essenceless nature of samsara, based on the teachings in the instruction texts. When we say that samsara has no essence, it's not as if the Buddha transformed something that *had* an essence into something essenceless. For example we can see that even among families and relatives – where we may think there should be natural affection – there is enmity, back-biting and criticism. Friends and spouses can become enemies as well. There are long explanations in the *Kunzang Lamai Shelung*, as well as three different instructions in the *Dudjom Tersar ngöndro*, on how to arouse renunciation. Since you have received the transmission for the *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro* you should read and contemplate these instructions.

Among contemplations, the contemplation of impermanence is the best

In order to develop renunciation mind we need to contemplate the four ways of turning the

mind away from samsara. First, we should contemplate the impermanent nature of compounded things. The Buddha has said that among footprints that of the elephant is the best and that similarly, among contemplations, the contemplation of impermanence is the best. We should sincerely reflect on the fearful nature of the experience of death – and the even more dreadful uncertainty of *when* death will come. This is something that we should take to our hearts. The Buddha’s teachings explain the profound meaning of impermanence. If an understanding of impermanence takes root in our minds then we will have more enthusiasm for practicing the dharma. As Gampopa said, “May my mind turn towards the dharma.” Reflecting on impermanence will help our minds turn towards the dharma. Not only monks and gomchens but ordinary lay people as well should reflect on impermanence.

We don’t need to talk about the implications for enlightenment or the conditions of the next life – failing to understand impermanence causes a lot of problems in *this* life. People think that they are going to live very long lives and this gives birth to lots of hope, fear, attachment, aversion and so on. If ordinary lay people were to sincerely contemplate impermanence then there would be more love and affection between spouses. When partners have lived together for twenty or thirty years very commonly they grow tired of each other. If, before they went to bed, the husband and wife were to think that that this might be their last sight of their spouse then they would feel more love and affection towards each other.

The great Sakya master, Jetsün Drakpa Gyaltzen, said that we spend our whole lives making plans and preparations yet nothing materialises. Nothing fruitful comes from these plans. If we reflect on impermanence, not simply from a dharmic point of view but even from a worldly perspective, then greater peace and happiness will be the result. By reflecting on impermanence we can truly taste our lives. In the beginning we will have difficulty contemplating impermanence. However, as we get used to it, we will really enjoy whatever we eat or drink. And everyone will speak gently to one another. For example, no one will speak harshly to someone who is going to die tomorrow. Also things like destroying stupas for material gain won’t happen. It’s very unlikely that a person who knows he’s dying tomorrow will vandalize a stupa for money.

I am giving these counsels for the benefit of worldly lay people. For dharma practitioners it’s a must to contemplate impermanence. Don’t postpone this practice till tomorrow or some other time. Dharma practitioners shouldn’t think that, having received the teachings today, they can go sometime later to some solitary place and practice then. We should begin practising right now, at this very moment. Pray to Guru Rinpoche that we can generate renunciation and that impermanence will take root in our minds. In addition, we should also do meditation practice. Later, I will teach you how to do contemplative meditation.

The second of the four ways of turning our minds away from samsara is to contemplate the rarity of our having a precious human birth endowed with freedom and riches. ‘Freedom’ means having the opportunity to practice the dharma. We should continually bear in mind that in our next lives we may no longer have the devotion we now have for the Buddha, dharma and sangha. We should reflect in this way on the rarity of our precious human body. I’m not going to say much on this subject.

Generating proper motivation

Both teacher and students must generate proper motivation with respect to the teachings. The students should not listen to the teachings as if they were listening to a story but should listen with renunciation, devotion and bodhicitta. They should understand that they are receiving these Vajrayana teachings so that they can enlighten all other beings. Similarly, the teacher's motivation should be the enlightenment of his students. He should aspire also that his teachings will be the cause of his students becoming enlightened.

Students should listen to the teachings with the motivation of all three yantras – so they should also generate Vajrayana motivation, looking at the teacher not as an ordinary human being but as the Buddha or Guru Padmasambhava in human form. They should regard the place where the teachings are taking place not as an ordinary place but as the buddhafield of the Copper Coloured Mountain. And they should see the recipients of the teachings as male and female vidyādharas. Pure vision or sacred outlook makes our motivation grand and vast. But these days, monks study in the shedra with the sole aim of getting the degree of khenpo or geshe or teacher. Considering the times we are living in such a motivation is not bad but it is very limited. Because they have such a limited aim these monks' achievements stop at the point where they obtain a khenpo's or a geshe's degree.

'Renounce this life!'

In monasteries but also in the outside world – especially in foreign countries – there are people who study or come to hear the Buddhist teachings mainly out of curiosity. Some study the teachings just so they can become scholars or translators. But there are others, not concerned with material wealth, who really find the essence of the teachings. They study and practice the teachings in order to escape the world of suffering. Motivation makes a big difference in the goal or result that you achieve. So dharma practitioners should renounce this life.

There is a story of a Kadampa geshe who was instructed by his teacher to 'practise the dharma.' This geshe thought that he would be practising the dharma if he fashioned small miniature stupas and made offerings. While he was engaged in this his teacher came by and asked what he was doing. The geshe said that he was practising the dharma. The teacher then said, 'What you are doing is good, but you should practice the dharma.' The student then thought that 'practising the dharma' meant that he should do prostrations and circumambulations, so he started on that. Again his teacher came to him and said, 'it's good that you are doing this, but really, you should practise the dharma.'

Then the geshe thought that practising the dharma meant that he should go into retreat and do meditation practice. But while he was meditating his teacher again came to him and said, 'It's good that you are doing meditation, but still, you should practice the dharma.' By then this student had done every possible kind of dharma practice and had nothing left to do. The student then asked the teacher what he meant by 'practising the dharma.' His teacher said,

‘Renounce this life!’

As long as you are attached to this life it is impossible for you to practice the dharma. Mañjuśrī spoke four lines to Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, the first founding master of the Sakya tradition. The first line is: “If you have attachment to this life, you are not a dharma practitioner.” So the greatest obstacle to dharma practice is not being able to renounce this life – in other words being attached to wealth and belongings.

How much wealth do we really need?

We should think deeply about material wealth. On the surface, material wealth seems indispensable. We need wealth for survival – it’s a necessity. In particular, when it comes to monastics, wealth is needed to build temples and monasteries and for the representations, offering articles and so on. We really need to think about this deeply. We need these necessary conditions to live in this world. Alcohol and women are dispensable – you can either have or do without them. By contrast, we need material wealth to survive. But how much do we really need? Even dharma practitioners think that we need to accumulate wealth for the sake of the dharma, in order to build monasteries and so on. In great dharma centres, many offering articles and representations are made and embellished with gold, silver and the like. Such dharma centres continually accumulate these costly articles. As a result, even the representations of body, speech and mind become objects of attachment – as if they were material wealth rather than offering substances.

These days, when a lama passes away, there tend to be five or six reincarnations who are recognized. Some of them are ‘recognized’ by their parents and friends, and some are ‘self-recognized.’ Then there are those tulku who are already adults when they are ‘recognized.’ All of this happens because of attachment to wealth. We get lost in this wealth. Dharma practitioners in particular should be very careful about wealth. We need a certain amount of wealth to survive, and to live, but excessive wealth is harmful. When we are sick, we need a certain amount of medicine. However, if we take more than the required dose, it will cause us harm. Likewise, if we indulge excessively in wealth, it will degrade and destroy our wellbeing.

I have a friend named Jigme Khyentse Rinpoche, who is also a tulku of Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö. I came upon him one day painting over an antique statue with inexpensive gold paint. I asked what he was doing, and he said that he was making an offering to the statue. This had a great impact on my mind. Usually, we try to make our statues look antique and old so that we can sell them for a high price. We try to make the representations of body, speech and mind look old and dirty so that they seem antique, in order to make some money out of them. That is not the motivation of a dharma practitioner. Actually, we should be cleaning these antique statues with metal sand paper and painting them gold and so on. That would constitute an offering to the statues.

It is essential that we reflect on this precious human life endowed with freedom and riches. Freedom and riches means the opportunity to practise the dharma. Human beings have this freedom. Animals don’t have it. For them even having a meal tomorrow is something uncertain. There is no certainty at all that they will have anything to eat the next day. We

human beings at least have the strength and freedom to get what we need. Moreover, human beings know far better than animals what is good and what is bad. At the very least, human beings know how to feel shame. Unlike dogs, humans don't sleep with their parents or siblings. Human beings have freedom and strength; they can speak and they can understand what others say. We need to think time and time again that we may not have these same opportunities in the future.

The third way of turning our minds away from samsara is to contemplate the defects and disadvantages of samsara. The teachings tell us that living in samsara is like trying to rest on the tip of a needle. There is no peace or happiness at all. We don't need to talk about the sufferings of hell and the lower realms. Even in this human realm, our lives lack any certainty at all. The way we thought in the morning will not be the same in the evening. We will think in a different way. Our human lives are like a feather carried away by the wind. Nothing is certain and nothing is firm and stable. It is changing all the time. We need to reflect on the changing nature and uncertainty of samsara.

Karma has power and authority over what happens, we don't

The fourth way of turning our minds away from samsara and towards the dharma is to contemplate cause and effect or karma. Karma is very profound. We cannot understand karma unless we understand the meaning of sunyata or great emptiness. The meaning of karma is that nothing exists without causes and conditions. Things are just not created by supernatural beings. Everything is the result of corresponding causes and conditions. Different things appear as the results of different causes and conditions. In the same way, all suffering and happiness result from virtuous and non-virtuous actions.

The main point here is that we don't have any power or authority; it is karma that does. Everything is manipulated or controlled by karma. If everything were to happen as we wish, there would be no need to consider karma or cause and effect. But things don't happen that way. For example, we may send our children to school hoping that they will receive a good education, get a decent job and have a good life. Our children study, graduate from university, but then, when they are about to get a job, they either pass away or encounter an accident or some other misfortune. Actually, the biggest problem children face today is that there are no jobs. They can't find employment. So we can't achieve our objectives as we wish.

On the other hand, the possibility of our not fulfilling our wishes is at least ninety percent. You may make plans to go to Trashigang, but there is no guarantee that you will actually get there. Therefore karma is our greatest ruler or king. Dharma practitioners really need to think that they should not squander the opportunity and freedom that they have now. Those gomchens who are doing meditation practice should remember that in future lives they may not have the opportunity to meet and practice the dharma. Since samsara is uncertain, we can't make our wishes come true.

All of us in this degenerate age are planning to live for 100 or 1,000 years. This makes having renunciation mind very difficult. We should pray to the Three Jewels, the buddhas and bodhisattvas that we will be able to generate revulsion towards samsara. We should not pray to

the Three Jewels for ordinary things like long life, freedom from sickness or prosperity. We should pray to be blessed so that our minds will turn towards the dharma.

Gampopa said that if we practise these four contemplations, these four thoughts that turn our mind away from samsara, then our minds will turn towards the dharma. It doesn't matter whether or not we formally recite the verses. The important thing is to contemplate and reflect on these four points. So, to this point what I have been teaching on relates to turning our minds towards the dharma. Gampopa teaches that next we need to make the dharma become the path to enlightenment. For that to happen, we take refuge, generate bodhicitta, do mandala offerings and so on. I will now give teachings on these inner ngöndro practices.

We need reason-oriented devotion

The most important thing for dharma practitioners is to generate renunciation mind. It is essential that they have renunciation. In addition, dharma practitioners need devotion and confidence. In Bhutan, faith or devotion has become just a kind of tradition or culture – the Bhutanese have less and less devotion based on logic or reason. Devotion that is based on tradition or culture and not on reason has no root or footing. We really need to try, through hearing and studying the teachings, to give birth to reason-oriented devotion. Worldly and ordinary lay people should try to generate this devotion, not just monks and nuns. Accordingly, they should study and they should ask the lamas and khenpos questions. In dharma practice we need logical devotion, devotion that is born from knowing the reason for our commitment. Just trying to have devotion by imitating what others do will not work.

I feel that it would be good if the lay people interacted with the learned khenpos, lamas and lopons. Actually, this brings up another instance where cultural habit or tradition has had a really bad influence on the dharma. Lamas like me sit on very high thrones, as if sitting in the sky. This makes us inaccessible to students and devotees. So they don't get the opportunity to ask questions and clarify their doubts. The Bhutanese and also the Tibetans should try to ask questions of their teachers without hesitation – as Western students do – so that their doubts get clarified and they don't get entangled in blind faith.

The lama or guru is like a doctor or physician and the student is like a patient. The dharma is like medicine. If the patient and the doctor are far apart, then the doctor cannot examine or diagnose the patient's illness and prescribe the right medicine. Then the patient won't be cured of his illness. Likewise, when there is too large a separation between teacher and student, the lama won't be able to give teachings and clarify the student's doubts. The student doesn't get the instruction that he needs and doesn't attain liberation. This kind of cultural habit is harmful to dharma practice.

It is important to hold the dharma, the teachings, in the highest esteem. In the sutras, there are stories of the Buddha prostrating to the seat from which he gave teachings. At the same time, it would be beneficial if there is at least occasional interaction between teacher and student to discuss the greatness of the teachings, the biographies of the lineage masters, the teachings on the four contemplations for turning our mind away from samsara and so on.

For Buddhist practitioners, devotion and sacred outlook are very important. Harboring doubts about the teachings obstructs dharma practitioners from attaining their goal. This kind of doubt is represented by the *nyulé* spirit. During the practice of drupchen, there is a particular ritual for the suppression of this spirit, which symbolizes removing the obstacle that obstructs attainment. The *nyulé* spirit is the manifestation or expression of doubt.

Taking refuge

We should begin our practice by praying to the precious guru. The *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro* begins: 'I pray to the unsurpassable precious Guru.' We should visualize the guru in the sky in front of us and pray to him with fervent devotion. In the end, the guru dissolves into us. After dissolution, we should generate revulsion towards samsara by reflecting on the preciousness of human birth, impermanence, cause and effect and the defects of samsara. We should be convinced that we have neither the power nor the authority to manipulate anything. Then we should cut our attachment to samsara by remembering that wherever we are born there is suffering. We should generate the longing to free ourselves from samsara and to attain nirvana and buddhahood. Then we should generate compassion for our parent sentient beings who are going through all kinds of suffering.

Generally speaking, it is important to pray to the guru. In the Vajrayana, it is especially important to pray to the guru and have devotion. Praying to the guru simply means to remember the sublime qualities of the guru, particularly the guru's realization. We usually pray to the guru to grant us something. The prayer *Calling to the Guru from Afar* begins by supplicating the precious guru in this way: 'Guru pay heed to me. Please know me, so that I will remember the guru's qualities.'

As I earlier explained, it is very difficult to have the sublime wealth of devotion, renunciation and compassion. We may have superficial devotion, but it is very difficult to have firm and everlasting devotion. So we must make every effort to give birth to authentic, genuine and firm devotion. The Shravakayana and Mahayana possess so many different methods for generating devotion, renunciation and compassion. In the Vajrayana, the most important method for attaining this sublime wealth is to pray to the guru. In the *Longchen Nyingthik ngöndro*, there is a section on praying to guru while generating revulsion towards samsara.

Taking refuge means accepting the truth of things

Refuge is the foundation of all the ngöndro practices. It is the basis of Buddhist practice. Refuge also distinguishes Buddhists from non-Buddhists. I don't know if wearing different robes and shaving one's head distinguishes a Buddhist from a non-Buddhist. Taking refuge has several different meanings. Taking refuge means accepting or confirming. For example, if you believe and accept that this place is Bartsham and then come here based on that belief, then your belief is a correct belief. Taking refuge is like believing and accepting that this is Bartsham and not, for example, Bidung. Your belief that this is Bartsham is supported by reason and logic. If you

believe in reality, or things as they are, then you are not on the wrong path.

When we say, “I take refuge in the dharma,” it is fine for those who are not well versed in the Buddhist teachings to take refuge in some large volumes of Buddhist scriptures. However, if we are really talking about the teachings of the Buddha, then we should recall that the Buddha said that ‘all compounded things are impermanent.’ If you believe and accept the truth that all compounded things are impermanent, that is actually taking refuge in the dharma. Those who believe that all compounded things are impermanent and all emotions are pain are Buddhists, and those who don’t believe that are not Buddhists. Other faiths like Islam and Christianity don’t have these same beliefs.

The different reasons that we take refuge

In any case, there are various reasons and causes for taking refuge. To begin with, we take refuge out of fear, out of compassion or out of devotion. For instance, because of our fear of getting wet in the rain, we take refuge in an umbrella. Our refuge object should be something that doesn’t deceive us. If we take refuge in an umbrella as protection from the rain it will work, whereas a flimsy cloth will not. Likewise, the object of refuge should not deceive those who take refuge. We may take refuge out of our fear of some temporary suffering, such as being punished, or to obtain relief from sickness and so on. This kind of fear is a very small, petty fear, and accordingly this is a very limited way of taking refuge. It’s okay, but we really need to take refuge out of fear of the different kinds of sufferings in samsara. Samsara is a deluded state, so we should take refuge in order to get out of this deluded state.

The best kind of fear is fear, not only of samsara, but also of nirvana. If we take refuge in order to transcend both samsara and nirvana then this is the best refuge – it is the Mahayana refuge. It is taking refuge with the utmost confidence. Another reason or cause that we take refuge is out of compassion for sentient beings. We should know that all sentient beings have been our parents. Even if we aren’t able to experience compassion for all sentient beings, we should at least have compassion for those who have benefitted us in this life, such as our parents and friends. We should at least love and have affection towards these beings. Since you want to help these beings, you take refuge in the Buddha, dharma, and sangha so that you can enlighten them.

We can also take refuge out of devotion. We do this by taking refuge in the Buddha, dharma and sangha, being aware of their sublime qualities. Just as we willingly go through hardships to get precious things such as gold, we should dedicate ourselves to taking refuge in the Triple Gem through studying, contemplating, and meditating so that we can generate the sublime qualities of the Triple Gem in our mind stream.

There are two different kinds of refuge, relative and absolute. When we say, “I take refuge in the guru, Buddha, dharma and sangha,” in the absolute sense we are taking refuge in the nature of our minds, which is the three kayas. The actual buddha is the nature of our mind. An historical Buddha such as Shakyamuni is an expression of this inner buddha. If we can recognize the nature of our mind through hearing, contemplation and meditation, that is the real refuge. And it is this refuge that really differentiates Buddhists from non-Buddhists because in other

faiths, such as Christianity and Islam, the object of refuge exists outside your own mind.

Since the objects of refuge are present in the nature of our minds, when we finish taking refuge we dissolve the refuge tree into ourselves and then try to recognize the nature of our mind. It is not easy to recognize the nature of one's mind as the ultimate refuge. It's even difficult to believe intellectually that that ultimate refuge is present within us. Because of our strong dualistic grasping, we are convinced that we are deluded good-for-nothing beings. So we need to begin by taking refuge in the outer objects of refuge and then receive blessings and empowerments. But at a certain point we need to understand that the Triple Gem is actually present within us.

In the *Longchen Nyinthik* sadhana, there is the verse: "the deity is me and I am the deity." In summary, if we recognize that the Buddha, dharma and sangha are present within ourselves, then that is the ultimate or absolute refuge. Other religions don't have this kind of refuge – their followers regard their object of refuge as something outside that is truly existing.

Our beliefs and views are influenced by cultural habits and also by our educational upbringing. In Bhutan, there are people from my generation who were educated at Christian schools and colleges in Kalimpong, Darjeeling etc. They think that the Buddha is something like the Christian God. In the relative sense, it's fine to think that the Buddha was an Indian or a Nepalese. However, we must understand that the real buddha is not someone who exists outside of ourselves. Gomchens and monks might understand this, but ordinary lay people generally don't.

One important method used in the practise of refuge is to visualize the refuge tree. You can consult the instruction texts or you can ask the lamas and khenpos for detailed explanations on how to visualize the refuge tree. If we are visualizing the details, then we would visualize a wish-fulfilling tree with five branches and so on. The most important thing here is to visualize our root guru surrounded by the lineage gurus, buddhas, bodhisattvas, deities, dakinis and protectors. When we visualize our root guru in the middle, it is also appropriate to visualize him or her in his or her present human form. Lama Shang Rinpoche, who is one of the most realized and experienced Kagyupa masters, says that the human guru we now follow should be visualized in his ordinary form since he is actually an expression of the innate guru.

We must think that the object of refuge is really present in front of us

However, other masters such as Paltrul Rinpoche encourage us to visualize the guru as Samantabhadra, Vajradhāra, Guru Rinpoche and so on, rather than in his ordinary form. The reason not to visualize the guru in human form is because the main purpose of practice is to purify our impure perceptions. If we visualize the guru in his ordinary form, it may not help us to purify our impure vision. Whereas if we visualize our guru in the form of Guru Rinpoche or Samantabhadra, it will help us transform our impure perception into pure perception. At any rate, practitioners should visualize the guru in the form that suits them.

It is very difficult to visualize each and every detail of the guru's form – like a sculptor modelling a sculpture. For example, when we think of our mother, we only remember her gross form, not her individual parts. Likewise, we cannot easily visualize the guru's form clearly and completely.

Beginners can use a picture of the guru to begin with, but experienced practitioners should avoid relying on this. A painted image of the guru is lifeless; the eyes don't blink, and the image is flat and two-dimensional. The most important thing is for us to have conviction that the object of refuge is there in front of us. We must think that the object of refuge is really present in front of us.

The mind of the guru is the Buddha, the speech of the guru is the dharma, and the form of the guru is the sangha. Again, our own guru is the guru, deity, dakini and dharmapāla all in one. So the guru is the embodiment of all objects of refuge. There are three reasons for taking refuge. The first reason is to be free from sickness and obstacles and to have a long life, in order to accomplish those activities that will help turn our minds towards the dharma. Secondly, we take refuge as a method to destroy our ego-clinging. Thirdly, we take refuge in order to dispel impure perception.

Another important point regarding taking refuge is that one is not taking refuge alone. All sentient beings, including your friends, relatives and enemies, are taking refuge alongside you. Thinking in this way generates bodhicitta and has other positive effects. In our daily lives, we may engage in many rituals and activities designed to magnetize others. For example, we may hoist red prayer flags for that purpose. Such activities can lead to negative side effects. Actually, the most effective method of magnetizing others is taking refuge for the sake of all beings. If we take refuge in that way, then we will be able to magnetize others temporarily without suffering bad effects in the future.

We have been discussing what are essentially relative refuge practices. After having taken refuge and recited the refuge prayer, we now move on to the absolute or ultimate refuge practice. From the object of refuge light rays emanate and liberate all sentient beings. In the end, the object of refuge, the guru, dissolves into ourselves. Resting in the state of that dissolution is the ultimate refuge. According to the refuge prayer of the *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro*, we are basically taking refuge in primordial awareness or dharmakaya, which is all-perfect and spontaneously present at all times within ourselves. We take refuge in the dharmakaya free from the defilements of dualistic thinking.

It would not be right to go into detail about the absolute refuge, as most of the listeners here might not understand. I am just mentioning it to create an auspicious circumstance, because if we hear this teaching again and again we will become habituated. We can see that the Bhutanese are so habituated to Bollywood movies and songs that they even sing Bhutanese music Bollywood-style. This concludes the teachings on the refuge section.

Bodhicitta

The next section has to do with bodhicitta. Since bodhicitta is the root of the dharma, it is very precious. We are all followers of the Mahayana, and moreover of the Vajrayana. Regardless of

which Tibetan Buddhist tradition we follow, bodhicitta is crucial. In one of the sutras, the Buddha said, 'Supposing that there are 500 arhats sitting in a chariot and there is nobody to pull it. If the Buddha were to come by, those 500 arhats would not have enough merit to cause him to pull that chariot with even one of his toes. On the other hand, if there were a person sitting in the chariot who didn't possess bodhicitta but had merely heard of it, then the Buddha would have to pull the chariot with his neck.' This illustrates the importance of bodhicitta.

Dharma practitioners cannot live without bodhicitta

Even though a practitioner or follower of the dharma has little learning, he or she should take refuge and generate bodhicitta. Bodhicitta can be generated or aroused. Firstly, we can generate bodhicitta through taking the Mahayana bodhisattva vow. Even if we don't formally take the vow, we can at least generate the altruistic intention to enlighten all beings. In other words, we should have the intention to benefit others and to bring them to enlightenment.

We must not become tied down to an intention that benefits beings only in a small and temporary way – wishing to build them a house for example. However, due to our habitual patterns it is very difficult to have genuine bodhicitta. Even though we recite the words 'may I enlighten all beings,' this is something very difficult to accomplish. Since bodhicitta is as vast as the sky, we tend to get discouraged or frightened when it comes to enlightening or benefitting other beings in a substantial way. Because we have not recognized the view of emptiness – the view that is free from all kinds of elaborations and judgements – we become discouraged by the infinite nature of bodhicitta. Our habits make it difficult to have this view free from elaborations.

Thus, we tend to make aspirations only for our own benefit or at most for our relatives, friends and acquaintances. Such aspirations are limited. We should try by all possible means to generate the vast intention to benefit all beings. The Bhutanese people traditionally are narrow-minded, but they should try to broaden their minds. Our aspirations should not be limited to the present moment or the present place. Like the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, we should aim to generate the vast intention to enlighten others. Samantabhadra made the vast aspiration to enlighten all sentient beings by himself – without relying on anybody else. Likewise, we must generate the motivation to practise the dharma in order to enlighten all beings. That is not something impossible. It is possible.

The main thing is that we need to get accustomed to this noble intention. If we get habituated to bodhicitta, we will not have any doubt or hesitation about benefitting other beings or in bringing them to enlightenment. As Shantideva said: 'There is nothing that is impossible if we get used to it.' So there will be no difficulty in benefitting other beings if we get used to this vast intention of bodhicitta. We may take the form of kings, ministers or even prostitutes – it all depends on what benefits other beings.

There are monks and gomchens who perform rituals in a village and care only about the offerings they will receive at the end of the day. The whole day they wait for these offerings, taking long breaks and chanting the prayers as little as possible. Then, the moment they receive the offerings, they wrap up the ritual and call it a day. It is not just these monks and gomchens

who act like this. Some lamas who encounter foreigners sincerely interested in learning and practicing the dharma try to squeeze money out of them rather than helping them. And we need to be very careful with respect to the misuse of the *kor* offerings.

I always tell the monks at my monasteries that it's not good to feed our families and relatives with offerings. Misusing offerings is more serious than slaughtering animals. So when we perform rituals in a village, we should aspire not only to benefit our hosts temporarily but ultimately to bring them to enlightenment. If we fail to make this aspiration and don't dedicate the offerings of our sponsors in accordance with the dharma, then this will defile and obscure both sponsor and practitioner in this life and the next.

We should exercise great care in performing the purification and liberation rituals, as well as the exorcism rituals to drive away obstacles and obstacle-makers. These are very risky and dangerous practices. Maintaining the attitude of bodhicitta is the only way to counteract the danger. When monks and gomchens offer prayers for a household, they should aspire to fulfil the wishes of the host in accordance with the dharma and ultimately to enlighten all sentient beings.

This kind of aspiration makes our practice powerful. As dharma practitioners we cannot live without bodhicitta. It is indispensable! We must try in whatever way we can to give birth to bodhicitta. Even if we can't give rise to grand aspirations, if we are involved in, say, chanting the words of the dharma, we should aspire that such chanting will enlighten all beings. In short, whatever virtuous practice we engage in, we should do for the sake of enlightenment.

There are two different kinds of bodhicitta – relative and absolute. Absolute or ultimate bodhicitta is meditating on the ultimate view of sunyata. The omniscient Longchenpa said that it is almost impossible for beginners to have absolute bodhicitta. So we should rely mainly on relative bodhicitta.

There are, as well, two kinds of relative bodhicitta: the bodhicitta of aspiration, and that of action. Action, or application, bodhicitta is engaging in practices such as the six paramitas and the four factors for inspiring students. However, it is very difficult to actually practice the six paramitas. We may only be able to make a few butter lamp offerings or give a few rupees to beggars, and so on. Since application bodhicitta is so difficult, Longchenpa has said that we need to practice mainly aspiration bodhicitta. In the *Sūtra of Advice to the King*, there is the story of a king who had so many queens and subjects that it was very difficult for him to practice application bodhicitta. The Buddha told this king that he should practice aspiration bodhicitta. We ourselves should try our best to generate aspiration bodhicitta. When we rise in the morning, we should make the aspiration to benefit all beings and ultimately to enlighten them.

Aspiration bodhicitta is very economical; it doesn't require any expenditure on our parts. We simply need to give rise to a good aspiration. And it's not necessary to formally chant a prayer such as Samantabhadra's aspiration prayer. At the same time, if we can, it is good to chant this prayer, which is very powerful. In addition to those aspiration prayers that already exist, we should make our own aspiration prayers in our own languages and dialects.

Actually, we don't know how to make aspirations – it is very difficult. We don't know who wants what. We might make the aspiration that a hungry person gets some food, but we don't know if that food will help or harm that person. It might kill them. We don't know what different individuals want. And if we made an aspiration such as everybody having a Toyota Land Cruiser, then that aspiration being fulfilled would be terrible. There would be gas shortages, environmental pollution and other problems, and it would be disastrous for the planet. So our aspiration really can't be that individual beings should have everything they want, because there is no end to what people want. Therefore, we should follow the example of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. We must make our aspirations follow those made by the buddhas and by bodhisattvas such as Mañjushri and Samantabhadra. The buddhas and bodhisattvas know what beings really need. If we make aspirations just as they have, then such aspirations will bring benefit.

We should practice the four contemplations in order to make our minds turn towards the dharma. We should reflect again and again on the defects of the three realms of samsara, the impermanence of life in particular, and on samsara's uncertainty and impermanence in general. We should reflect on cause and effect. We should know that no one has the power to create his or her own circumstances. It is karma alone that has the authority to manipulate everything – we lack the power to have things as we want them.

At present, we have been born as human being. We know how to speak and how to understand others. We also know how to differentiate between virtuous and non-virtuous actions. Furthermore, we have encountered the dharma and met with sublime teachers. We also have some kind of interest in and enthusiasm for studying and practicing the dharma. We should reflect again and again on the fact that we may not obtain this precious human body in the future. These contemplations are the methods for turning our minds towards the dharma.

Getting habituated to practice is the start of becoming a true dharma practitioner

The next of the Four Dharmas of Gampopa concerns the method for the dharma to become the path. Taking refuge, on which I have already taught, is the first part of the method. I'll continue now on the second part – which is bodhicitta. There is no need to mention that dharma practitioners such as monks and gomchens should have bodhicitta, but even worldly folk must have it. We must not postpone our bodhicitta practice. We shouldn't think: 'At the moment, I don't have the time and the right conditions for practice but in a few years I will practice in a grand manner.' Because the time when we can practice in such a grand and elaborate manner will never come. So, as much as possible, we should begin to practice now. Even if that means reciting just a single " *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ,*" or "*Oṃ āḥ hūṃ vajra guru padma siddhi hūṃ*" or offering just one butter lamp. And we should do this act with the motivation of enlightening all sentient beings. Even though our practice is seemingly small and unimportant, we should accompany it with aspiration.

Due to our habitual patterns, we have a tendency to look down on small practices like offering a single butter lamp or reciting some short prayers. We ignore such small practices, but then we are not able to get around to the grand and elaborate practices. In the *Words of my Perfect Teacher*, Paltrul Rinpoche said that we should practice the way a hungry yak eats grass. A hungry

yak does not make any distinction as to whether the grass is long or short; it eats it all.

I am giving this advice to ordinary worldly folks, not to committed dharma practitioners. People tend to think, 'When I have grown old, then at that point I will practice and recite the mantras like "*Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ,*" or "*Oṃ āḥ hūṃ vajra guru padma siddhi hūṃ.*" What guarantee is there that you will live to an old age? Life is impermanent; it is uncertain. And I want to say this particularly to the worldly lay people. We think that when we do dharma practice, we ought to accumulate hundreds of thousands or millions of mantras. Of course if you could do that, that would be actually good. It's certainly not bad. But what is important is to be consistent with your practice.

People are always engaged in their day-to-day activities, such as cooking, going to the office, washing clothes and so on. The endless nature of such activities is one of the downfalls of samsara. There is no end to samsaric activities. Not only worldly lay people, but even so-called dharma practitioners such as myself get entrapped in samsaric activities. We are always busy doing projects. We build one thing and then move onto another, so that we always have so many things to do. As Longchenpa has said, we are caught up in our own self-created work that no one else asked us to do. We create our own work and we busy ourselves doing it. We also create deadlines for the completion of the work, but we're unable either to complete the work or to keep up with those deadlines. In the process of all this, we run out of money and become destitute, as Longchenpa pointed out in the *Thirty Verses of Heart Advice*. Then we have to go around collecting donations so that we can continue with our projects. In this way, there is no end to what we do. There is no end to samsaric activities. Therefore these days, even among dharma practitioners, it's very difficult to find a practitioner like the yogi Milarepa who leaves everything and goes to a cave to practice.

However caught up we are in worldly activities, for at least three to five minutes each day we should visualize the buddhas and bodhisattvas in front of us and generate bodhicitta, the altruistic intention to enlighten all sentient beings. If we consistently practice in this way, over time we will get used to it. As Shantideva said, 'there's nothing that does not become easy if you get used to it'. Gradually we will become habituated to the practice, so that we will feel uncomfortable if we *don't* do it. And that is the beginning of becoming a true dharma practitioner. At some point, even when we engage in worldly activities, we will end up doing dharma practices such as generating bodhicitta or making aspirations to enlighten all sentient beings.

It is very difficult to make a habit of dharma practice. My friend Jigme jokes that if you can't sleep, you should chant the *vajra guru* mantra and then you will just drift off. The point is that right now we are not habituated to dharma practice, so it doesn't come spontaneously and effortlessly. Since the Bhutanese are so accustomed to the sport of archery, their interest in practicing archery comes almost effortlessly. In the same way, we need to build up the habit of practicing the dharma.

I needn't address this advice to dharma practitioners – the appellation "practitioner" means that they should be practicing the dharma most of the time. Worldly lay people should spend three to five minutes a day meditating on bodhicitta and making good aspirations. In this way, they'll

become used to it. For example, heavy drinkers start by drinking a small amount of alcohol and over the years they become total drunkards. If a person drinks a huge amount of alcohol all at one go, then he will get sick and won't want to drink after that. So we need to establish the habit of spending a small amount of time every day practicing the dharma, and in this case generating bodhicitta.

In order to generate bodhicitta, we need to have a witness or support. Here that support or witness is the refuge tree. The particular support we employ for our bodhicitta aspiration is very important because the merit we accumulate will very much depend on the kind of support. For example, if we offer a glass of water to a person who is thirsty we will accumulate merit, but if the water is offered to a bodhisattva then the merit will be manifold. This is because the support or object of offering is more precious. So we need to generate our bodhicitta aspiration in front of an appropriate support or witness. This is all I have to say at this point concerning relative bodhicitta.

We now come to absolute or ultimate bodhicitta. The notion of 'buddhas' as opposed to 'sentient beings' is a concept that is created by dualistic mind. Neither buddhas nor sentient beings constitute entities that truly exist outside our minds. Because of our ignorance, we label phenomena as 'good,' 'bad,' 'small,' 'big,' 'Dorji,' 'Tashi' etc. Because we do this, subject and object are separated and become far apart. Because of the dualistic separation of subject and object, we wander endlessly in this cyclic existence known as samsara. When sentient beings perfectly actualize the primordially awakened view through meditation they attain the state of buddhahood. This is difficult for beginners to understand, but it is not meaningless chatter.

Toys are something precious to small children, but as the children grow up they lose interest in their toys. We child-like, ordinary beings have toys such as wives, children, homes, power, rank etc. When they regard us ordinary beings playing with our toys, compassion arises in the minds of the realized bodhisattvas.

Here, I am reciting the bodhicitta verse from the *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro*. This verse may seem difficult to comprehend, but I am reciting it to plant a seed in your minds. Because if you hear it again and again, you will gain familiarity with this teaching.

Vajrasattva practice

The refuge and bodhicitta aspirations that we have been discussing are called the "common practices." That is because the practice of refuge can be found in the Shrivakayana, and the practice of bodhicitta in the Mahayana. The visualization and recitation practice of Vajrasattva marks the beginning of the Vajrayana path. Vajrasattva practice is a method for purifying the defilements of our negative actions. Vajrayana practice is like drinking tea. We should clean the teacup before we drink the tea. Similarly, in order to practice the Vajrayana path we need to purify our mind. There are very many different methods for purifying our mind. Among these the practice of Vajrasattva is the most effective.

In the practice of Vajrasattva described in the *Longchen Nyingthik*, we visualize Vajrasattva sitting on the top of our heads. The amrita that flows down from the union of deity and consort purifies our body, speech and mind. In the *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro*, the text directs us to visualize ourselves as Vajrasattva. Now, who is Vajrasattva? Vajrasattva is the embodiment of the vajra mind of all the buddhas. Just as Mañjushri is the embodiment of the wisdom of all the buddhas, Avalokiteśvara is the embodiment of the compassion of all the buddhas, and Vajrapāni is the embodiment of the power of all the buddhas, so Vajrasattva is the embodiment of the mind of all the buddhas.

Vajrasattva is nothing other than *tathāgatagarbha*, the nature of our minds. Since we have not recognized the actual Vajrasattva, we visualize our guru in the form of Vajrasattva as a means to help us recognize the innate Vajrasattva. The main thing in the practice of Vajrasattva is to confess our negative actions of past, present and future. We take Vajrasattva as the support, or object, to whom we confess our negative actions. And here, we should talk about the four strengths of confession.

- First, there is the object or support for confession, which is Vajrasattva.
- Second, we should realize that the unwholesome actions we have committed are destructive. We should feel regret, knowing that such unwholesome actions are bad and destructive. If we lack remorse and regret, we won't even have the wish to confess our negative actions. Without regret, even if we pretended to confess our negative actions, we couldn't purify them.
- Third, we must wholeheartedly confess all our negative actions of past, present and future, whether we remember them or not. We should confess each and every negative action we have committed.
- Finally, it is important is to make the commitment not to repeat these negative actions. That is the fourth of the four strengths of confession.

Employing these four limbs of confession, we visualize Vajrasattva, and we accomplish purification through the descent of amrita from Vajrasattva. We can either visualize Vajrasattva sitting on the crowns of our heads or visualize ourselves as Vajrasattva as in the *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro*.

When we speak about visualizing Vajrasattva, we are talking about the development stage of meditation. *Kyérim* means development or creation stage, and this word is so profound. When we see a rainbow in the sky, it appears as something very vivid and beautiful. However, we can't bring that rainbow home. Although the rainbow appears vividly, it does not have any substantial existence. The rainbow lacks true, substantial existence. But even though it's empty, it appears clearly. Likewise, all the phenomena of the three realms of existence appear, but lack any true existence. They are empty. Even while they are empty, they are not completely blank. They appear. All the phenomena of samsara and nirvana are empty, but appear. This is the inseparability of clarity and emptiness.

Although all phenomena are the union of clarity and emptiness, Longchenpa pointed out that some beings are more confused by the emptiness aspect and some are more confused by the clarity aspect. At the time beings are confused by the clarity aspect, they think that things are truly existent. When they are confused by the emptiness aspect, they become nihilists and think that there is no cause and effect, no past or future life, no good or bad, no samsara or nirvana, and so on. Such confusion as to the clarity and emptiness aspects of phenomena gives birth to ignorance. From that ignorance, all kinds of negative emotions arise. Through these harmful emotions, we create karma, and karma brings rebirth. Enmeshed in the cycle of emotions, karma and rebirth, we wander endlessly in the three realms of cyclic existence.

A foolish person who sees a rainbow and doesn't understand that it lacks true existence may try to reach out and take hold of the rainbow. Similarly, when we fail to understand the non-duality of the clarity and emptiness aspects of phenomena, then clarity and emptiness become separated or get divorced. We practice *Kyérim* and *dzogrim* in order to unite the two aspects of clarity and emptiness. Generally, *Kyérim* has to do with the clarity aspect and *dzogrim* deals with the emptiness aspect. Actually, they are inseparable. *Kyérim* and *dzogrim* are in union.

The purpose of visualizing ourselves as Vajrasattva, or of visualizing Vajrasattva as the deity sitting above our heads, is to purify our habitual pattern of viewing ourselves as 'Dorje,' 'Pema,' 'David,' 'Aria,' 'Tashi,' etc. We visualize Vajrasattva in order to destroy this habit. The *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro* directs us to visualize ourselves as Vajrasattva – luminous-white, transparent and adorned with ornaments. The point here is to visualize Vajrasattva in a form that is beautiful. Whatever deity we visualize, we should visualize its form as beautiful and attractive. Mañjushri and Avalokiteśvara should also be visualized in attractive forms. When we practice the *Longchen Nyingthik ngöndro*, we visualize our own guru in the form of Vajrasattva.

The visualization and recitation practice of Vajrasattva is a method for confessing our negative actions and karmic defilements. In general, even non-Buddhist religions like Christianity and Hinduism are concerned with cleansing the defilements of negative actions. These religions talk about negative actions as sins. But the Buddhist concept of sin is totally different from that of other faiths. Christians believe that everything is the creation of God, and that we must follow the command of this 'Almighty.' Whatever goes against the Almighty's command is a sin. For Christians, whether something is a 'sin' or not is therefore predetermined. Christians believe, for example, that killing pigs or fish for food is not really a sin because their God created these animals as food for human beings.

Vajrasattva practice is the best means for purifying defilements

In Buddhism, karma, or cause and effect, is a limitless concept. Even highly learned scholars such as panditas have difficulty explaining the finer details of cause and effect. A person has to fully realize the view of *sunyata* to be able to explain karma in its smallest details. From the Buddhist understanding, when we have not realized the right view, then we perceive things in a distorted way. Buddhism regards any action, whether physical or mental, which is rooted in a distorted understanding of the view as unwholesome. In other words, any action motivated by the harmful emotions is considered to be an unwholesome action or sin. It's like touching a burning

iron without understanding that it will burn you. Not knowing the true nature of phenomena, we perceive them in a mistaken way. This wrong perception gives birth to misconceptions. We perceive impermanent things to be permanent, dirty things to be clean, and things devoid of self to have a self, or true existence. When we engage in actions based on these wrong attitudes, then we create negative actions or sins. There may be some difference in their degree and magnitude, but any action committed out of a mistaken attitude is considered a negative action. Dharma practice aims to reverse or transform such mistaken views. Having the right view will counteract negative actions.

Our practice of the dharma, and our efforts to engage in wholesome action, shouldn't be motivated by such petty goals as long life, prosperity and so on. Practicing the dharma based on this kind of small motivation can't purify our negative actions and defilements. Understanding the view, we need to practice the dharma with the objective of obtaining enlightenment in order to enlighten all beings. This will purify our negative actions and obscurations. Engaging in dharma practice with the right view serves as the antidote for negative actions, the root of negative actions and the harmful emotions.

It is very difficult to confidently distinguish which actions are positive and which are negative. Seemingly negative actions can be positive, and seemingly positive actions can be negative, depending on the motivation underlying them. Killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh words, idle gossip, covetousness, harmful thoughts and wrong views are negative actions. We should always remember that Buddhists don't regard happiness and suffering as the creation of some supernatural almighty being, but as the result of corresponding positive and negative actions. If you plant an apple seedling and have such necessary causes and conditions as fertile soil, fertilizers, water and sunlight, then – if there are no obstacles – the seedling will grow into an apple tree and bear fruit. Likewise, negative and positive actions will bear their fruits when the necessary conditions are present and no obstacles occur.

We human beings always do contradictory things. What we want, and the things we do to get what we want, contradict each other. For example, we want to live long lives. But if we really want to live for a long time, we need to stop taking the lives of others. If we don't give up harming others, we won't live long, even if we receive long life initiations a thousand times. Similarly, the root cause of being poor is having stolen or taken what was not given. We may do wealth-summoning rituals in order to become prosperous and rich, but the most effective way to attract wealth is to abandon stealing and taking what has not been given, and instead to practice giving. We may claim that we've never stolen anything, or that we don't steal in this life, but this is hard to say. Determining what is stealing can be very tricky. If you don't pay your bus fare or your full taxes, then that is stealing. So we need to be very careful.

Similarly, it is very easy to lie. In this life, some people have no luck, or are looked down on and not respected. This is because they told lies in their previous lives. Another effect of lying is that our speech becomes weightless – it has no credibility. In contrast, the speech of Buddha Shakyamuni was majestic. The story goes that the Buddha's younger brother Nanda had a wife who did not allow him to leave the house. One day, the Buddha went to Nanda's house to beg alms. He stood outside the house and shook his staff. The sound this made was so powerful that Nanda could not resist coming out of the house. Since the Buddha had never told a lie, his

utterances were very powerful and strong. The Buddha's words were words of truth, and that truth dragged Nanda out of his house.

Then, there are some people with mental problems, which comes from their harmful thoughts towards others. Some dharma practitioners also experience bad luck – things don't go the way they want. Right at the start, these dharma practitioners may not have much enthusiasm for receiving the teachings. Or, even though they do want to receive teachings, they may not be able to find a teacher who will give them. Or, even though they actually receive the teachings from such a teacher, they will be unable to understand them, or may understand them wrongly. When such dharma practitioners practice in retreat, a few days of retreat can seem like ages. On the other hand, when they are involved in gambling and other games time flies by. All these situations are the result of the defilements of negative actions. Having wrong views towards the teacher and doubting the teachings also result from our negative actions and obscurations.

Of the many methods for purifying the defilements of negative actions, those of the Vajrayana are best. Here, we will talk about the practice of Vajrasattva. The secret mantra, the Vajrayana, is very profound and vast. The deities we visualize, such as Vajrasattva, Krodhikali etc., actually are the mantra. As I've explained, the actual deity is the nature of our mind or the buddhanature. But when we make use of these deities, we do so through symbols or aspects. For example, Krodhikali or Troma is black, stands, holds a curved knife and is adorned with ornaments. But the subtle deity is the mantra, or the syllables. Syllables such as "*Om maṇi padme hūṃ*" are the deity. The deity is not something which exists externally.

In *Kyérim*, and in *dzogrim* practice with characteristics, all of the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities are understood to be present within our body. Because they are present in our body, reciting the mantra causes our inner channels and winds to move. When the recitation and visualization practices are accompanied by an understanding of the ultimate view of shunyata, then all kinds of impure actions and defilements are melted, just as the sun's heat melts the frost.

One important point is that we should trust and have confidence in this practice. In Buddhism, unlike other religions, trust, confidence and faith develop as a result of thorough study, contemplation and analytical meditation. Once we have engaged in such analysis, we should develop certainty or confidence. Just to go on examining, without ever reaching certainty, would be useless and fruitless. If a patient reads a medical textbook and doesn't develop confidence in its diagnosis of and treatment for his ailment, then his continuing to read the medical textbook won't help. Having analysed and examined, we need to develop certainty and confidence in the secret mantrayana. Having reached such certainty and confidence, we then purify our negative actions and obscurations through the recitation and visualization practice of Vajrasattva.

According to the long version of the *Kunzang Gongdü* ngöndro text, we should recite not only the one hundred syllables mantra, but also the six syllable mantra. As I've explained numerous times, the actual method for purifying our negative actions and obscurations is to meditate on the true nature of our minds – in other words to prolong the natural state. As a method for resting in the true nature of our minds, we try to perceive all appearances as Vajrasattva. Vajrasattva is not lifeless, like a clay or metal statue. We should understand that the

visualization of Vajrasattva is like the reflection of the moon in the water. That reflection appears clearly, but is empty in nature. Similarly, Vajrasattva is empty of true existence, but appears clearly.

Again, we should visualize Vajrasattva as we do a reflection in a mirror. Although the reflection has no truly substantial existence, it appears in the mirror due to causes and conditions. So we must visualize Vajrasattva as the union of clarity and emptiness, not as a truly existing objective phenomenon. We need to seal our visualization with this view and to prolong it in the state of the ultimate view.

Shamatha

The Indian master Acharya Vasubhandu said: 'Apply perfect discipline, study, and contemplation to the practice of meditation.' After studying and contemplating, we should meditate in order to put the teachings into practice. In the *Samādhirāja Sūtra*, the Buddha said that a second of meditation accumulates merit more powerfully than such methods as prostrations, making offerings or performing pujas. This is because meditation is more effective in uprooting the emotions and corresponding actions.

We practice meditation to attain buddhahood, not to calm or tranquilize our minds

In Bhutan, the name 'gomchen' is given to dharma practitioners. Generally however, due to their traditional habits, the Tibetans and Bhutanese seem to spend more time performing rituals like pujas and recitations. Some people, whose minds are slightly broader, go to shedras to study and to do some amount of contemplation. Even those who go into retreat seem to prefer reciting mantras – to the extent that they wear out their malas. So these days, practicing meditation, or even talking about meditation, seems to be dying out in Bhutanese society.

Bhutanese people are surprised when they see other Bhutanese practicing meditation – they seem to think that the Bhutanese meditators are acting like foreigners. This kind of attitude is very lowly. A member of the Bhutanese nobility said to me: 'In Thailand, people practice meditation, which is very commendable, but the Tibetan and Bhutanese lamas don't seem to do this kind of practice. Don't the Tibetan and Bhutanese traditions have the system of meditation?' What this person said is true!

When we do meditation, we can have many obstacles, like feeling drowsy and bored. We tend to get distracted. I don't know if people feel drowsy and bored when they are practicing pujas. Not only gomchens, but also monks and nuns should practice meditation. Even ordinary lay folk should meditate.

When we talk about how the practice of meditation is regarded in the West, there are people there who meditate as a kind of mental therapy to calm their minds. These people are in the habit of taking tranquillizers to calm their minds, but they say that meditation is much more

effective. As Buddhists, we don't practice meditation to tranquilize or calm our minds. We meditate in order to attain buddhahood. So whoever wishes to attain buddhahood should meditate.

I once visited a store in Burma, where the clerk simply sat upright in silence for three minutes without speaking to any of his customers. When he was asked about this, the clerk said he had the habit of doing meditation, which he would forget if he didn't engage in it continually. This person was basically talking about shamatha, or calm abiding meditation. Actually, reflecting on the preciousness of human birth, the impermanence of life, the defects of samsara and the law of cause and effect are also meditation. Nevertheless, the foundation of all the different kinds of meditation is calm abiding meditation, the development of mental stability. In order to lay the foundation for meditation, it is very important to practice shamatha, or calm abiding meditation.

When meditation becomes a habit, we will have the impulse to meditate every day

Shamatha is a very vast subject. The subject becomes vaster when combined with the subjects of penetrating insight or vipassana. There are so many mahāmudrā and mahāsandhi teachings that concern shamatha meditation. In particular, the mahāmudrā writings of Kunkhyen Pema Karpo, a Drukpa Kagyu master, contain many detailed instructions on gradual methods for developing mental stability, or shamatha. The main purpose of calm abiding meditation is to make the mind pliable, workable and malleable – to make our minds become our slaves. At the moment, we can't make our minds work for us. Rather, it is our minds that make *us* work. Since we are without any authority over our minds, our minds command us.

It is a fact that as ordinary beings we are subject to desire, anger and ignorance. However, if someone were to ask us to become angry at this moment, we would be unable to. We don't have any control or power over when we become angry. The reason is that we lack control of our minds. Because of the habits we have accumulated over many lifetimes, our minds are rigid and stubborn. To make our minds flexible and workable like dough, we should practice shamatha meditation. During the course of this teaching, I am going to teach a few methods for practising calm-abiding meditation.

When we talk about calm-abiding meditation, there is one thing to keep in mind. The instructions are that we should not follow past thoughts or anticipate future thoughts. When I give this instruction, some people think, 'Ah! Khyentse Rinpoche is teaching *dzogpachenpo*.' I must make it clear that I am not teaching *dzogpachenpo*. None of the Buddha's teachings tell us to follow past thoughts or to anticipate future thoughts during meditation. There are many angry, fierce, and wrathful female dharma protectors. They are very stubborn and might not let me live if I were to teach *dzogchen* or *mahāmudrā* to such a large audience.

Whether you are practicing *dzogpachenpo*, *chagyachenpo* or any other advanced form of meditation, you need to base those practices on shamatha meditation. So I am going to teach the methods for shamatha. Actually, you can practice calm abiding meditation while you are sleeping. Or you could go to a discotheque or bar and do shamatha meditation there. However, this would be too distracting for beginners, who lack capacity for that. If you try to do

meditation while you are lying down, you will probably fall asleep. So the posture you adopt when you do shamatha meditation is very important. In the Drukpa Kagyu tradition, practitioners spend at least a month just sitting in the vajra posture of Vairochana before they do any kind of other practice.

There is a story about a rishi who was practicing meditation. He wasn't able to meditate well and couldn't achieve mental stability. It happened that he came across a monkey who had seen the proper posture for meditation and was displaying that posture. The rishi understood and adopted the posture for his own practice. After that, his meditation progressed. So it is best if you can sit in the Vairochana posture. Even if you can't do that, you should sit upright and straighten your spine. Further, the omniscient Longchenpa has spoken about the benefits of sitting underneath a tree or beside a flowing river while doing meditation practice. We need to apply such methods according to the time and situation.

The next important thing is to receive practical oral instructions from a master about how to meditate. Masters like Lama Shang Rinpoche and Tselé Natsok Rangdröl have provided many such instructions. There are also numerous Drukpa Kagyu masters who have given pith instructions on shamatha meditation. For example, if you feel drowsy and sleepy when you meditate, you could drink coffee. Or, if you can't sit on a flat mat, then put a thick cushion under your bum.

An important point for beginners is to meditate for as short periods as possible – perhaps three to five minutes. Advanced meditators can meditate for as long as they want, because they can sustain the meditation. If beginners were to meditate for a long time, they would get bored and become discouraged. If you drink a whole bottle of alcohol in one go, you may lose your appetite for any more alcohol. But if you drink little by little, then gradually you will become a perfect alcoholic. Similarly, you should practice meditation in short sessions.

It would be good if we could make a commitment such as, 'Every day between my rising and going back to bed, I will practice meditation for three to five minutes.' If we practice in this way, then meditation will gradually become a habit and we will have the impulse to meditate every day.

[Rinpoche then led sitting practice for about 5 minutes, preceded by these instructions:]

When you are doing shamatha meditation, there is no mantra to recite or deity to visualize. You just need to sit upright with a straight spine and rest your hands on your knees. You may not be able to resist blinking your eyes or swallowing a small amount of saliva. Apart from that, you are absolutely not allowed to do anything. You should not move your body, cough, sneeze, or pick up your mobile phone. If you have forgotten to switch off your mobile phone and it rings during your meditation, don't respond to the call. Just let it ring. Otherwise, if you attend to each and every thing, five minutes might end up becoming the whole day.

[After the meditation session:]

We didn't actually meditate a full five minutes, only four minutes and fifty-five seconds. For

some people, the five minutes must have been a very long time. They must have been dying to finish the session. And some people might have remembered things that they had forgotten. Why would we now remember what we didn't remember before? It's because we have let our minds go. In other words, we have let our minds relax. Usually, we are constantly distracted. Our cup is in our bag but we look for it elsewhere because we've forgotten that we put it in our bag. Sometimes we look around for our coat even while we're wearing it! This happens because our minds are distracted. We are not vigilant! Not moving and not doing anything at all – this is how we should sit while meditating.

'Knowing that you are distracted is worth one thousand ounces of gold'

As I explained earlier, the main purpose of *shiney* or shamatha practice is to make our minds workable, pliable or malleable – to make our minds soft and flexible. However for Buddhist practitioners, the purpose of meditation is not just to make the mind pliable. The purpose of shamatha or calm-abiding meditation is to give birth to penetrative insight. In Tibetan, this is called *lhagthong*, which means seeing further or seeing beyond. What is 'seeing beyond?' What more do we see when we meditate? What is it that is being seen beyond, through our meditation?

Due to our ignorance and the afflictive emotions, we sentient beings don't see the true nature of things. Through meditation, we can see their true nature. That is what is being 'seen beyond' through meditation. The scriptures explain this penetrative insight, or seeing beyond, as the *prajña* of recognizing no-self. At the moment, we cling to our egos. Penetrative insight is seeing the absence of any self, seeing beyond our habitual delusion of a 'self.' The direct method for developing penetrative insight is shamatha, or calm-abiding meditation. The beginning meditator should sit, just as I have explained. There is nothing to visualize or to recite. We just focus our minds on the movement of the breath. We should be aware of the movement of the breath. We should know that we are breathing as we breathe in and out. This breath is something of great importance to us. If it stops, it will be time for us to be wrapped in a shroud.

[Rinpoche then led a second shamatha session, after which he said:]

Generally, when we try to focus on the movement of the breath, our minds don't stay on the focal point of the breath. They wander here and there, thinking of so many things and hearing many different kinds of sounds. Because of all these distractions, we may have been able to focus our minds on the object of the breath for a second or two only. On this matter, I want to say one very important thing: That is very good! If I could, I would award you a medal for this, because this is a meditator's first experience of meditation.

On the other hand, there are some gomchens who come to me and say that they experience clarity, luminosity and bliss or that they see Guru Rinpoche. That is really not good! If you feel bad when your mind gets distracted, it's a good sign, because knowing that you are distracted *is* non-distraction. You are not distracted! The omniscient Jigme Lingpa has said: 'Knowing that you are distracted is worth one thousand ounces of gold.' If you don't believe this, you can find it in Jigme Lingpa's instructions on meditation *Gomchok Drilen*. When gomchens tell me that they've experienced clarity and bliss or have seen Guru Rinpoche, this is sheer fabrication. It's

just their imaginations. To be sure, there is a non-distracted state in the midst of turbulent thoughts. However, when people try to make something out of that they develop pride and arrogance.

Some people practice meditation for one year, two years or twelve years, without a single sign of improvement. They have no visions or good dreams, so they feel very bad. They become discouraged with their meditation because they haven't seen any 'progress.' Such disappointment is very good. On the other hand, sitting in a blissful state without any thoughts for twelve years and being satisfied with that is not good, because the meditators with those experiences don't know that they are distracted. If you know that you are distracted, then you are not distracted. Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche said that it's very important to have awareness or mindfulness – if you don't, then you are like a mound of shit. In other words, a person who is unmindful is no better than a pile of shit.

To sum up: meditation is very important because it strengthens the mind. It makes the mind more muscular. When we are distracted, our minds become engrossed in all kinds of activities, such as trying to compete with others, and this makes our minds feeble and weak. Then we get disappointed and become sad.

Maṇḍala offering – the accumulation of merit

The next part of the ngöndro is Mandala practice, which is done to accumulate merit. The meanings of the phrases “accumulation of merit” and “gathering of merit” are similar. Merit plays an important part not only in dharma practice – it's important in worldly life as well. However, merit is not the same thing as luck. Luck is viewed as something fortunate that comes about accidentally, without any causes or conditions. But merit has to be accumulated; it has to be created. And just as merit can be created, it can also be exhausted. The so called *wangtang* and *lungta* are essentially types of merit.

Dharma practitioners have so many different ways to think about merit. Some things that appear to result from merit actually do not, while some people who appear to have merit don't have it. For example, the richest man in the world today is Bill Gates. Those who want to succeed in business and become wealthy regard his success as evidence of merit. However, those who are dharma practitioners don't regard Bill Gates as having any merit at all. So when we talk about merit, we need to think about what our aim or goal is. For people whose aim is enlightenment, immense material wealth is not merit.

Acharya Aśvaghōṣa wrote the *Buddhacarita*, which tells the stories of the Buddha's lives. He describes how the Buddha was born as Prince Siddhartha, journeyed from his palace and then saw people who were sick and people who had died. As a result, the Buddha developed renunciation and wanted to set out in search of the dharma. But his father, King Śuddhodana, didn't want Prince Siddhartha to leave. The King created enticing situations to distract

Siddhartha and he instructed his guards to stop the Prince if he tried to leave.

One night, as all the guards were sleeping, the Prince was able to sneak out and become a renunciant. After meditating for six years with hardly any food or water, he finally attained buddhahood under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya. After his enlightenment, the Buddha turned the wheel of dharma. As a result, we now have the teachings that show us the way to liberation. Because of these teachings we know where to go and how to come back when we stray from the path. Ashvaghosha says that the fact the palace guards fell asleep was due to such merit as we sentient beings have.

Those whose aim is to accumulate wealth will have a different idea of merit. Muslims consider Siddhartha to be a good-for-nothing who failed in all his worldly affairs and couldn't even take care of his wife. From the worldly point of view, that is true; the Buddha did not take care of his wife and kingdom!

I have been speaking about the value of accumulating merit. There is little need to say how important it is that dharma practitioners accumulate merit. But merit is important also for those who engage in business, farming and other worldly activities. Worldly activities can't succeed without merit. In the context of the dharma, we are concerned with sublime wealth – devotion, renunciation, and compassion. To gather such sublime wealth is difficult. Having true renunciation or genuine sadness towards samsara doesn't come easily. Having devotion is similarly difficult because of our tendency to lose our devotion when things don't go our way. We need to accumulate merit in order to acquire the sublime wealth of renunciation, devotion, and compassion.

Devotion towards one's guru is the best method of accumulating merit

We need merit in order to find a teacher and to assemble the necessary conditions for our receiving the teachings. All of this depends on the amount of merit that we have. We need merit in order to recognize the reality of interdependent phenomena. There is very little scope for actually understanding reality through study. Our study can only help us understand the reality of phenomena to a very small extent. We need to have accumulated merit in order to fully understand interdependent reality. In particular, there is no way that we can realize dzogpachenpo or mahāmudrā through intellectual study. To realize these, we need merit and the blessings of our guru. We must accumulate merit in order to receive the introduction to dzogchen or mahāmudrā from our teacher and to recognize and actualize this.

We can understand philosophical subjects such as Mādhyamika, prajñāpāramitā, and logic through study and debate. However, as Mipham Rinpoche taught, because mahāsandhi and mahāmudrā are 'too easy,' we have difficulty realizing them. There is nothing to study. In his *Instruction on Mountain Retreat*, Dudjom Rinpoche said that it's difficult to see our own eyelashes because they are too close. Likewise, it is difficult to recognize the nature of our minds, as this is too easy. The only way for us to understand and experience mahāsandhi and mahāmudrā is to accumulate merit. In the Vajrayana, the most effective method of accumulating merit is to have devotion towards the guru and compassion towards all beings. Other ways of accumulating merit include building representations of the body, speech, and

minds of the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Worldly folk can accumulate merit through doing prostrations, making offerings and so on. However, these practices of making offerings and doing prostrations should not be hijacked by cultural habits. Because of our cultural habits, we tend to think that if we don't have a set of seven offering bowls, we can't make an offering to the Three Jewels. Actually, it is okay for us to offer just a single flower to a representation of the Three Jewels. And if we don't have even that one flower, then we can just visualize and make mental offerings.

Prostration and offering are the first two methods in the seven branch offering practice. The third is to confess before the Buddha, dharma, and sangha all the unwholesome actions we have committed. We must confess all our negative actions of body, speech, and mind, such as killing, stealing, lying and so on. The fourth method of the seven branch offering is to rejoice in the virtue and merit of other beings. When we see or hear of others doing virtuous things, we should rejoice. The practice of rejoicing is very economical. It doesn't cost us a thing, but at the same time it brings us so much benefit. In the condensed *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, the Buddha taught that rejoicing in the merit of others is more beneficial than offering the three worlds filled with precious jewels. However, rejoicing in others' virtuous activities is not all that easy to do. We invariably become the victims of our own jealousy. Rather than rejoicing when some rich person makes elaborate butter lamp offerings, beings in this degenerate age tend to say: 'Okay, this person is rich, so his making these kinds of offerings is no big deal.' So rejoicing is not easy; it is difficult.

The next of the seven branch methods is to request the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and teachers to turn the wheel of the dharma. Some people might think: 'What is the use of requesting those buddhas and bodhisattvas who have already passed away to turn the wheel of dharma?' They might think that since the Buddha entered Parinirvana long ago, it is pointless to request him to turn the wheel of dharma. We must not think in this way. If we continually request the buddhas and bodhisattvas to turn the wheel of the dharma, then one day we may come to understand the teachings that we can't understand now. Such understanding will be the fruit of having continuously requested the buddhas and bodhisattvas to turn the wheel of the dharma.

Then we should request and supplicate those buddhas and bodhisattvas now living who wish to enter into nirvana to remain here and not to depart. Supplicating those buddhas and bodhisattvas in this manner will help us overcome wrong views. These days, some people teach what is good and what is bad, or what is virtuous and non-virtuous. Yet at the same time, they engage in non-virtuous activities such as destroying stupas, stealing, lying etc. Such actions sow doubt and confusion in people's minds, so we need to request the buddhas and bodhisattvas not to enter nirvana and to stay here to turn the wheel of the dharma.

Lastly, we should dedicate whatever merit we have gathered for the enlightenment of all beings. We shouldn't dedicate this merit so that our business dealings may prosper. This is the time of the year in Bhutan when people engage in the orange export business, but we should not dedicate our merit with the aim of making our orange business more profitable.

Besides making this seven-branch offering, we should accumulate merit through saving the lives

of other beings. Also, one of the most effective methods for accumulating merit is to go on pilgrimage to holy places. The moment you think about undertaking a pilgrimage from Bartsham to Paro Taktsang you begin to accumulate merit. As soon as you make the wish or begin your preparations, you will accumulate merit.

When you actually visit such temples and monasteries, it is not necessary to offer a thousand butter lamps. Of course if you have the resources and can afford it, you should offer as much as you can. But it is not necessary to make grand offerings. If your means are limited, at the least you could clean the temple. Even if you can't clean the temple, you shouldn't make it a mess by throwing garbage and plastic around. If you don't dirty the temple, then you will accumulate merit. But people who litter the place with plastic waste and other garbage will exhaust whatever merit they have.

Among the many methods for the accumulation of merit, devotion towards one's guru is the best and the most effective. Doing the visualization and recitation practices of the deities are also means for accumulating merit. These are included in the five limbs of accumulating merit. Another way of accumulating merit is to make tsok or ganachakra offerings. When my grandfathers, Lama Sonam Zangpo and Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoche, were alive, people used to bring tsok offerings of cooked rice, vegetables, meat, wild berries and so on. My grandfathers would be very pleased with that. Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoche remarked that the Bhutanese people really know how to make tsok offerings and accumulate merit.

When we make tsok offerings, we spend our time and resources, and we put effort into the preparation of the offerings. If we spend time and effort in preparing the tsok offerings, we will accumulate merit. However, it is not necessary to offer so much meat. Even when we slice a radish as a tsok offering, we accumulate merit.

Unfortunately, the way that people make tsok offerings has degenerated. Nowadays, half-asleep people just grab a packet of Maggi noodles or biscuits from the store and offer this as tsok. I say this particularly to the Bhutanese: This kind of degenerated practice will have serious consequences. I am not trying to talk politics. This is not politics – it is fact. These days, everybody has a mobile phone. In a few years, there will be a situation where a mobile phone is a lot cheaper than an apple. There is the possibility of famine in Bhutan, since everything is imported from outside and we don't use what we have here.

Refraining from offering packaged food might hurt the shopkeepers and vendors who have pitched their tents on the road leading to the Chador Lhakhang temple. But if we make tsok offering in a traditional manner with cooked rice and vegetables, it will actually help to improve the economy. Instead of selling tsok materials packaged in plastic, why not cook rice, put it in containers and sell big containers of food for 100 rupees and small ones for 50 rupees? This is the same as the cost of the packaged food. People can still make money from selling cooked food, and it's much better.

Among the formal practices the *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro* offers for accumulating merit, mandala offering is the most effective. Just as in the refuge, you visualize in front of you the gurus, buddhas, bodhisattvas, deities and protectors to whom you are offering the mandala. You

then perform the three-kaya mandala offering as described in the *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro*. You can consult the lamas, teachers and khenpos for detailed instructions. In the nirmanakaya mandala offering, you offer all the precious things that exist in the universe. The concept of what is precious depends very much on the place, time and situation. Our religion, Buddhism, comes from India where the cow is considered to be very precious. Therefore the wish-fulfilling cow is included in the mandala offering.

Actually, some of the things mentioned in the mandala offering are of no use in the conventional sense. For example, if someone were to offer me an elephant, I would just be frustrated. An elephant is a huge, gigantic animal that eats a lot. Where could I possibly keep it?

In the mandala offering, we offer the continents of the four directions. Since we haven't been to these continents, we don't know what they are like. So we could offer places like Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong. Because we can visit and see pictures of these places, we can more easily imagine them. When we make the mandala offering, we chant, 'We offer all the wealth of gods and humans.' In short, we should offer all the precious things that we can think of and imagine.

It is important that we accumulate merit and purify our obscurations. In the Vajrayana path, we are involved with either the accumulation of merit or the purification of obscurations. Vajrayana offers a wide range of extraordinary methods to purify defilements and to accumulate merit easily and painlessly. Such methods and skilful means are very important. If we are able to utilize skilful means, we can achieve our objectives quickly and without much difficulty or pain. For example, while we might have milk, if we don't have a method for separating butter from the milk we can't produce butter. Using skilful means such as churning, we can produce butter. Similarly, without skilful means or method, we cannot achieve anything. So the Buddha taught very many different methods in accordance with the propensities of sentient beings.

In the ultimate reality, all that appears and exists can be an offering substance

If we give alms to a poor person out of compassion, we will accumulate merit. But if we give those alms, not just out of compassion but also with respect, knowing that the beggar is a human being like ourselves, then the merit will be greater. And if we were to give alms to a beggar with the aim of enlightening all beings then, because our intention is so vast, we will accumulate even greater merit. In the *Madhyamika-avatara*, the great Indian pandita Chandrakirti wrote that a first bhumi bodhisattva who hears a beggar's request for alms experiences a joy that is greater than the combined joy of five hundred arhats attaining nirvana.

Moreover, since we are Vajrayana practitioners, our giving should be accompanied with the outlook that the sound of the beggar's plea for alms is not an ordinary sound but rather the sound of Vajravārāhi's mantra. If we give with the understanding that the beggar on our doorstep is in fact Krodhikali, there to receive our transcendent offering, then the merit accumulated will be immeasurable. So again, the main method for purifying the defilements of our unwholesome actions is the practice of Vajrasattva, and the main method to accumulate merit is offering the mandala offering.

The *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro* contains the mandala offering of the three kayas – the nirmanakaya, samboghakaya and dharmakaya. The nirmanakaya mandala offering is to offer all the precious things in the whole universe. Then there are the samboghakaya and dharmakaya mandala offerings. These are profound offerings that people may or may not understand. Nonetheless, since these are described in the ngöndro text I will provide some explanation, so that people can at least make a connection with them.

In reality, this samsaric world, whether it is Bartsham or Trashigang, is a buddhafiield. At the moment, due to our confused perceptions, we see Bartsham as an ordinary place rather than a buddhafiield. This is just the projection of our confused perception. In reality, there is no objectively existing place such as Bartsham. Since an objective place called ‘Bartsham’ does not truly exist, there is nothing that cannot be a mandala offering. At the moment, we think of offering food, drinks and all kinds of good things. But we could also offer the hell realm of the razor field and so on. When we say we can offer even the hell realm, we are speaking from the ultimate point of view. In the ultimate view, we could offer even our shoes to the shrine. I am explaining this because it is mentioned in the three-kaya mandala of the *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro*. The *Longchen Nyingthik ngöndro* also has a three-kaya mandala. ‘Ngöndro’ is just a name! From the very start, we are talking about the main practice. In the *Longchen Nyingthik ngöndro* refuge, we take refuge in nāḍī, prāṇa and bindu and also in dharmakaya, samboghakaya and nirmanakaya. Therefore, in the absolute sense, there is nothing that cannot be offered.

In sadhana practice, we offer amrita. This literally means to eat shit and drink urine. However, after hearing such information, we shouldn’t just jump into outrageous behaviour. Guru Rinpoche has taught that one’s view should be as high as the sky and one’s own actions as subtle as flour. Until everything appears to us as an infinite pure buddhafiield, we shouldn’t jump into acting outrageously. We can check the nature of our experience by not eating for a day. Then we will realize whether everything has become for us a pure buddhafiield or not.

While we are on the path, we need to unite view and action. View and action should complement each other. In the ultimate reality, all that appears and exists can be an offering substance. How should we understand the three-kaya mandala offering at this stage? As I explained earlier, a rainbow appears clearly but is empty in nature. This is the unity of clarity and emptiness. The emptiness aspect is the dharmakaya, the clarity aspect is the samboghakaya and the unity of clarity and emptiness together is the nirmanakaya. That is how we should understand the three kayas. With that understanding, we should offer our outer, inner and secret wealth, including our spouse, children, and all kinds of precious things. In the end, we should dissolve the gurus, buddhas, bodhisattvas, deities, and protectors to whom we offer into ourselves and remain in that state for as long as we can.

As in the case of taking refuge, there are relative and absolute mandala offerings. How do we practice the absolute mandala offering? How are we to meditate on emptiness? First, we should dissolve the object of offering into ourselves and rest in the state free from reference. How should we sustain this the view? Because beginners cannot remain in this reference-less state, as previously explained they should practice *shiney* or shamatha meditation. They should learn to be mindful and vigilant.

If we know that we are getting distracted during our meditation, this means that we are not distracted. To be really concerned and frustrated about one's distraction is actually good. A meditator's concern and frustration with his experience of distraction is a sign that that meditator knows how to meditate. Whereas seeing lights or experiencing bliss is not a sign of good meditation.

Guru yoga

Guru yoga is the essence of all paths. The Vajrayana in particular regards the guru as very important and precious. Enlightenment is impossible without the guru. At the start, we need devotion in order to rely on the guru. But having actual and genuine devotion is extremely difficult. Our present devotion towards the guru is based more on love or liking. Because human beings are so biased and sectarian, our devotion towards a particular guru may be based on his being the son of this or that person, or because he is from this or that lineage. Tibetans view gurus differently based on what region they come from or the lineage to which they belong. In Bhutan, gurus are categorized as lamas of the Eastern or Western regions, or from Trashigang or Trashiyangtse, etc. Even more disgusting is when we are devoted to a lama because 'he is the reincarnation of my father, grandfather, uncle' and so on. So our devotion to our teachers is quite influenced by our sectarian attitudes.

And if either the mahāsiddha Tilopa or Guru Padmasambhava were suddenly to appear on our doorsteps, we might send him away. Dressed Indian style with long hair, and unwashed, he wouldn't look how we expect a teacher to look. Instead, he might more resemble an Indian sadhu. The teachings describe Guru Rinpoche as being adorned with sublime physical characteristics. Since Guru Rinpoche was also an Indian, he might well have dressed Indian style, in the manner of a sadhu. So having devotion towards the guru is very, very difficult.

At the same time, because it is impossible to attain enlightenment without relying on a teacher, the guru is considered more precious and gracious than all the buddhas. And the guru is also important and precious in that he is someone we can relate to. It would be very difficult to relate to a being with four heads and sixteen arms. Whereas the guru appears as a normal human being who eats, shits and sometimes gets mad at his students. Sometimes the guru may even get drunk. So the guru appears as someone who appears not much different from us, his students. Of course, that is also why it can be difficult to have devotion towards him.

As a first step, we need to examine the guru. Many of the sutras and shastras relate the qualities and characteristics that a guru should have. In general, the guru should be learned, disciplined and kind. Among these three qualities, kindness or good heartedness is the most essential. A guru who possesses learning alone will not be able to tame students and followers. On the contrary, there is a danger of the students of such a teacher becoming arrogant and proud. The quality of being disciplined is better than that of being learned. But generally speaking, the

teacher should also be learned.

In this degenerate age, it is very difficult to find a teacher with all the necessary qualities. Nonetheless, a teacher should at least be kind and good-hearted, be devoted to the Three Jewels and have certainty regarding cause and effect. It is even more important that the teacher be concerned about the enlightenment of his or her students. Jigme Lingpa said that we need to examine our teachers to see if they have these qualities. These days, people don't often undertake that examination. They just follow after any teacher who smiles at them.

The buddhadharma can either be upheld or destroyed by tulkus

Identifying some people as 'tulkus' doesn't tell us their worth as teachers, because there are just so many different kinds of tulkus. There are those tulkus whose 'recognition' comes from their own parents, relatives or friends. In China, there are supposed tulkus with title and 'lineages' that have never existed anywhere before. And there are people who just seem to proclaim themselves as tulkus. Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö said that the buddhadharma could either be upheld or destroyed by tulkus. This is true because, while great masters spread the dharma, bad teachers destroy it.

To be sure, some of these tulkus have certificates attesting to their status. But getting such certificates doesn't seem to be all that difficult. The first step is that a would-be tulku goes to a not-so-high ranking lama and somehow persuades this lama to provide a letter recognizing him as a tulku. Then the would-be tulku goes to a higher lama who is a student of the first lama and shows him that letter. In this way, he is able to get a recognition letter from the higher lama. After gathering many letters from here and there, this person then goes to an even higher ranking master who doesn't have much knowledge of how things work in the conventional world. He shows his letters to this great lama and requests a certification letter. Then he manages to take a picture with a great master such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He uploads the picture on Facebook and circulates it in places like Taiwan and Hong Kong. This is how people become 'tulkus.' This is the way they cheat people.

To be able to receive teachings from an authentic teacher, we should first gain conviction in the teachings through study and hearing. If we study the teachings, then untrustworthy people won't be able to deceive and cheat us. It seems that it is quite easy to cheat the Chinese people. While they have wisdom, they sometimes seem to believe without examining. On the other hand, Westerners are more difficult to cheat. If some tulku were to go to the West and proclaim 'I am a tulku,' no one there would even care. So it is important to study and gain knowledge about the dharma.

We should follow a teacher who is genuinely concerned about the liberation and enlightenment of his students. I once went to Varanasi to find a teacher who could instruct me in one of the Vedas. I sought out a sādhu who was both learned and accomplished, and who many people had recommended. When I first attended upon him, he was sweeping the floor of his temple. After he had finished his cleaning, he asked me what I wanted. I told him that I wanted to study Shaivism with him. The sadhu told me: 'Yes, you may'. Then he took me to the place where he was staying. I was expecting that he would instruct me to read various kinds of instructional

books. However, the sādhu unexpectedly told me that I should first serve the temple by sweeping, cleaning and cooking for three years. After that, he would teach me Shaivism.

Feeling overwhelmed, I experienced both joy and sadness. I wasn't sad because the sādhu didn't immediately teach me Shaivism, but because in Buddhism such traditional ways of teaching have disappeared. At the same time, it was joyful to discover that, even in this degenerate age, there are people who still follow the traditional ways of giving teachings. So we need to follow an authentic teacher who is good-hearted and kind. After finding such a teacher, we need to receive the teachings and the empowerments he gives with an attitude of devotion and respect.

Of all the teachers we follow, we need to have extraordinary devotion towards the teacher who grants us the fourth empowerment – who introduces us to the nature of our minds. When I say we should have devotion towards our root guru, I don't mean just love or liking devotion. Deshung Rinpoche said: 'At first we should look upon the teacher as the buddha. In the middle, we actually see the teacher as the buddha. In the end, our own mind becomes the buddha.' This is the extraordinary characteristic of the Vajrayana path.

In the beginning, since it is very difficult to see the teacher as the buddha, we need to make believe, or pretend, that the teacher is a buddha rather than an ordinary human being. After some time, we begin to actually see the guru as the buddha. Towards the end, through the guru's blessings, we will begin to see the nature of our minds and finally we will become a buddha. Once we see our own minds as the buddha, we will have accomplished our task. Our mission is complete!

Authorization blessings for the practice of nyungney

You will be receiving two *jenangs*, or authorization blessings, for the practice of *nyungney*. One is from the lineage of Apang Tertön and the other originates with Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche. Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche was not just a great master of the Karma Kagyu lineage. He was a great upholder of all the teaching lineages of Tibet. He and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo made the teachings easy to study and digest. Without these great charioteers of the teachings in Tibet, we would not have the teachings in the form we have today.

We should know the background of the teachings we receive. Otherwise, people may go to Taiwan and other places and say that *Riwo Sangchö* is a teaching of Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoche – which it is not. It is the teaching of Lhatsün Namkha Jigme. I received the transmission of Apang Tertön's *nyungey* practice from His Holiness Sakya Trizin in the United States. His Holiness Sakya Trizin received this practice from Jadrel Jangchup Dorje, who was the main lineage holder of Apang Tertön's treasure teachings. So it is a complete and authentic lineage.

We will now discuss '*tendrel*.' The concept of *tendrel* or auspicious coincidence is very important. In Bhutan, alcohol and saffron rice is served in order to create auspicious conditions. *Tendrel* actually means 'interdependence.' If particular causes and conditions assemble and there are no obstacles, then a particular result will occur. For example, once we have eaten, we can't avoid producing excrement. So *tendrel* is the gathering together of causes and conditions, and these then producing a result. The omniscient Jigme Lingpa said that the yogi who

meditates in a cave and the patron who supports him have the *tendrel* or auspicious conditions to attain enlightenment together.

The guru is our own perception or projection

These days we do big drupchens or accomplishment practices in order to create *tendrel*. Though we may have the necessary physical resources for these practices, we can lack the time and diligence needed to accomplish them. Therefore, we invite lamas and yogis who have the time and blessings to do drupchens, in order to create auspicious conditions. Among the many way of creating *tendrel*, the best is guru yoga. Such conditions as praying to the guru, receiving empowerments and merging our minds with the mind of the guru create auspicious conditions for us to recognize the nature of our minds.

The guru is our own perception or projection. In fact, all that exists is the guru, because everything is our own projection. Even our daughter-in-law is the guru, because she too is our perception. However, right now we lack the confidence and devotion to receive blessings from praying to this kind of guru. Since we have not reached the stage where we see all appearances as the buddha, we are unable to receive empowerments and blessings from just anyone and everything. We can only relate to someone as a guru, if we perceive that person to be learned, compassionate and realized.

Such a guru appears because of the merit we have accumulated. The appearance of a guru, our devotion and confidence in him, and our interest in practising the dharma are all signs of our having accumulated great merit. Such signs result from many causes and conditions. In Buddhism, everything arises from causes and conditions, and nothing can exist without them. To be devoted to the guru, even in a love or liking way, is evidence of having gathered merit. Possibly, we have developed a liking for the guru because he has given us money or food, or has said nice things to us. Here also, some kind of merit is involved. If auspicious causes and conditions were lacking, then we might have become devoted to thieves or prostitutes, instead of to the guru.

In the absolute sense, the guru is a reflection or the radiance of tathāgatagarbha – the nature of our mind – just like our reflection in the mirror. He is the appearance of the nature of our mind. As I explained earlier, in the practice of guru yoga we first attempt to see our guru as the buddha. After some time, we can actually see our guru as the buddha. Finally, we see our own minds as the buddha. Therefore, pretending that our guru is the buddha is nothing other than confirming our own buddha nature. In reality, thieves and prostitutes are equally the radiance or manifestation of tathāgatagarbha, but because of a lack of *tendrel* we don't have devotion towards these kinds of manifestations of buddha nature. Because of *tendrel*, we practice guru yoga in order to connect ourselves with the inner guru.

By visualizing our guru as the buddha and the place where we are as a buddhfield, we will gradually purify our obscurations. Due to the ultimate nature of our mind, we are able to transform our guru into the buddha, and this place into the buddhfield of the Copper Coloured Mountain, without moving an inch from this very spot. Enlightenment is something that happens right here; there is no pure realm that exists someplace else. Whereas, the heavens

found in other religions do exist someplace else. Nirvāṇa is nothing other than the recognition of the actual nature of our minds. However, it's not easy to recognize the nature of our minds. The reason we can't recognize is not that the nature of our minds is too complex. It's that it's too simple.

If we were to lose our cow, we would look for it by following its hoof prints. The hoof prints aren't the cow, but without following them we'll never be able to find it. If we do follow those hoof prints, we should finally find our cow. Likewise, when we look for the nature of our minds, then guru yoga is similar to the cow's hoof print. By praying to the guru and receiving blessings and empowerments from him, we will finally find our lost cow – tathāgatagarbha. When we recognize the nature of our minds, we attain enlightenment. This is why guru yoga is the most precious of all methods. Guru yoga is unique to the Vajrayana. While both the Shrivakayana and sutra Mahayana emphasize the importance of the spiritual friend, neither of them teach merging our minds with that of the guru.

Here, I want to make one very important point. Generally, we look on the teacher as someone who commands or disciplines us. That is a traditional part of the relationship, but the guru is actually not our boss. Rather the guru is the path. Our having devotion towards the guru and doing whatever he commands is how we practice the guru as the path. Dharma protectors such as Mahākāli and Ekajaṭī should also be regarded as manifestations of guru. The instruction on how to take the guru as the path is very important.

In the actual practice of guru yoga, such as in the *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro*, we are directed to visualize our root guru in the sky in front of us. As I explained earlier, we can visualize our guru in his human form. If we have difficulty with that, then we should visualize our guru in the form of Guru Rinpoche, Vajrasattva, Samantabhadra and so on. Above our guru, the lineage masters appear sitting on top of each other, and the guru is surrounded by the yidam deities. We should not visualize the guru as if he were a lifeless statue. Even if we are unable to visualize clearly, we should have confidence that our guru is in fact right there in front of us. We should pray to our guru through reciting supplications like those in the *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro*.

I mainly wanted to say the following. The omniscient Jigme Lingpa said that of all practices the practice of meditation is the most powerful. But remembering the guru is many times more powerful than meditation and such practices as prostrating, making offering and so on. I have explained the reason. In order to catch fish from the river, we use the method of a hook. The term 'fish' should be understood here as a metaphor for what we want to catch – which is the nature of our minds. The Buddha taught us 84,000 different methods for catching this particular fish. Each of these 84,000 different teachings is a method to make us recognize the nature of mind. Among all these methods, guru yoga is the most effective.

We do our best to create a multitude of conditions causing distraction

The guru is really one's own mind. Jigme Lingpa's answers to questions on meditation practice provide a detailed explanation on this subject. Jigme Lingpa has said that remembering the guru is the same as what is called 'mindfulness' in the practice of meditation. When you lack awareness and mindfulness you become distracted, and this leads to all kinds of problems. All of

the highest Vajrayana teachings, such as mahāsandhi and mahāmudrā, emphasize mindfulness. Our lack of mindfulness causes us to give birth to emotions such as ignorance, anger, and jealousy, and to wander endlessly in saṃsāra. That such emotions are present within us shows that we are distracted. We become distracted in different ways – through anger, desire and so on.

These days, we are doing our best to create a multitude of conditions that cause distraction. We have so many kinds of appliances and gadgets that help distract us. As a result, it's hard to find genuine meditators these days. We just can't help doing something to keep ourselves distracted. We even want to make a phone call during the middle of our dharma practice. Any kind of busyness we involve ourselves in is just a method for distraction. When our minds are in a turbulent state, we use tranquilizers in order to calm or to distract ourselves. The tranquilizers may help for a while, but then the problems return. People who are unhappy often drink, in an effort to distract themselves. When something difficult happens, they turn to alcohol for relief. Eventually, their drinking can ruin their lives.

There are many causes and conditions for distraction, and we can easily become their victims. That is why we need to meditate and practice mindfulness. The practice of mindfulness in the mahāsandhi includes what is called 'the innate natural mindfulness of dharmatā.' This means not doing anything, not fabricating at all. It is really difficult for beginning meditators to practice this kind of mindfulness. As I have explained, we should first practice shamatha in order to develop the mindfulness to know that we are distracted. When we know that we are distracted, then we begin to be concerned about that distraction. For the time being that is sufficient! We shouldn't ever look forward to experiences of clarity or to visions of deities. Such experiences and visions are not beneficial.

If we meditate and pray to the guru, then one day our ordinary experiences will dissolve

Once we become concerned about our minds being distracted then, even if we can't go practice in the mountains like Milarepa, we can at least act mindfully. That kind of awareness is constructed or forced mindfulness. If we continually practice this kind of mindfulness, we will become used to it. Then, one day when we encounter a qualified teacher and receive his instructions, the forced mindfulness will blossom into unfabricated mindfulness.

If we pray to the guru and receive empowerments with devotion, one day a small, seemingly unimportant condition may trigger our freeing ourselves from saṃsara. At that time, all our ordinary dualistic perceptions will dissolve. Once we become a yogi, we won't see any difference between a heap of gold and a mound of shit. For the yogi, there's no difference between the person who offers him precious things and praises him in one ear and the person who harshly denounces him in the other ear.

An important teacher of mine, Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche, told me this story. One day, while Paltrul Rinpoche's student Nyoshul Lungtok and his attendant were traveling through an isolated place in Tibet, they were set upon by robbers. The robbers started beating Nyoshul Lungtok mercilessly. Unable to stand seeing his precious teacher being beaten, his attendant sprang at the robbers. At that moment, Nyoshul Lungtok grabbed hold of him and the two men wrestled

with each other. The robbers were bewildered to see the two men struggling with each other. Nyoshul Lungtok then said to his student, “What are you doing! This is the time to remember the instructions and to apply your meditation.” At that very moment, the attendant experienced the dissolution of ordinary experiences, and his grasping onto the eight worldly dharmas dissolved. If we meditate as I have explained and pray to the guru, then one day the same thing will happen to us.

At the conclusion of the guru yoga, we receive the four empowerments. Also, there is a section in the guru yoga practice where you receive the self-initiation. We should receive the empowerments in order to maintain the continuity of the empowerment lineage. However, in addition to this, practitioners should receive the self-initiation from time to time. Generally, the four empowerments are received from the three centres of the guru’s body, starting with his forehead, in the manner set out in the ngöndro text.

There is one important thing to say here. We have received so many empowerments, and we should also receive the empowerments in the guru yoga practice, regardless of whether there are empowerment substances or not. And it is okay to receive these empowerments through merely eating and drinking the empowerment substances. However, strictly speaking, as long as we continue to perceive appearances as ordinary, we haven’t received the vase empowerment. We actually receive the vase empowerment only when we see all appearances as the deity. Similarly, we don’t truly receive the secret empowerment until we hear all sounds as mantra. And as long as our minds are confused and affected by external phenomena, we can’t really receive the third empowerment, the wisdom empowerment. Finally, until we experience all appearances as the radiance of *rigpa*, we do not receive the fourth empowerment – that of word.

Most empowerment rituals (though not in the authorization blessings) involve these particular four empowerments. Why should we receive them? Longchenpa said that an eggshell has four layers. In order to hatch, the chick has to break through all four layers. Likewise, sentient beings have four layers – body, speech, mind and the union of those three. The four empowerments help us to break through these four layers and to reveal the inner essence of the egg. After we receive these empowerments, we should dissolve the guru into ourselves and remain in the unfabricated state for as long as we can. Dissolving the guru into ourselves is not like putting objects into a bag, where the bag and the things in it don’t ever merge. Instead, we should merge our mind with the guru’s mind, in the manner of water being poured into water. There should not be any grasping onto external things. Then, following the empowerments, we should do the dedication and aspiration. This concludes the teaching on the *Kunzang Gongdü ngöndro*.

The lineage of Pema Lingpa

Here is some additional advice for those people, especially the Bhutanese, who decide to practice the teachings of Pema Lingpa. Today, Pema Lingpa’s teaching lineage has almost

disappeared. We need to preserve and uphold it, just as we would treasure our own inherited wealth. Practice is the best way of caring for and upholding the teachings. Contrariwise, building big temples and monasteries is not the best way. In some places, you will find huge temples with hardly any monks. We have to actually practice the teachings. In Buddhism, it is easy to practice – there is no need to get up at three or four in the morning for prayers as the Muslims do.

The omniscient Longchenpa was a prior incarnation of Pema Lingpa

We should care for and uphold the teachings of Pema Lingpa, who was a Bhutanese. The biography of his lineage has a story about the passing away of the eighth Pema Lingpa tulku. One night, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo had a dream in which he went to the Copper Coloured Mountain of Guru Rinpoche. There, he heard people saying that Pema Lingpa would be arriving. After some time, he noticed a man eating something among the crowd of people. The man had a large lump in his cheek, and reddish liquid was coming out of his mouth. Although he was escorted by dakas and dakinis, the doorkeepers wouldn't let him enter. The next morning, when his attendant came to serve tea, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo told him that he had had a bad dream that could indicate that the Pema Lingpa tulku had passed away the previous night.

Pema Lingpa has recorded his life story in his own hand. It seems he was quite an unusual kind of person. Sometimes, he appeared like a lama, and sometimes he appeared in quite outrageous aspects. It seems that he swore a lot. We can see in his writing a lot of Bumthangpa! Pema Lingpa must have taken many impure births.

In his past lives, Pema Lingpa seems to have taken a number of inferior rebirths. In one rebirth, he was born as an insect – a mosquito. At that time, three brothers were engaged in building the famous golden stupa in Kathmandu Nepal. A mosquito bit the cheek of the eldest brother, who killed the insect. Feeling great compassion towards the mosquito, this eldest brother made the aspiration that wherever he was reborn there also the mosquito should take rebirth, so that the insect would benefit from him.

The eldest brother was later reborn as King Trisong Deutsen in Tibet. The mosquito took rebirth as his daughter, Princess Pemasel. Princess Pemasel died when she was just eight years old. She died so young because of her past evil actions. In a previous life, she had been one of a man's two wives. She was so jealous of the other wife that she killed that woman's baby. As a result of that action, her later life as Princess Pemasel was very short. In the introduction to the *Longsal* empowerment, it's written that Guru Rinpoche entrusted the *Longsal* teachings to her.

Princess Pemasel's next rebirth was not as Pema Lingpa. There were many intervening incarnations. Princess Pemasel was first reborn as Pema Ledrel Tsal, a great tertön who discovered the Khandro Nyingtik cycle of dzogchen teachings. After Pema Ledrel Tsal took a consort, he discovered two treasure teachings. However, the consort he had taken wasn't the actual consort whom Guru Rinpoche had prophesied. When Pema Ledrel Tsal realized this and was about to join the consort who had been prophesied for him, his first consort became furious. With the help of her relatives, she made arrangements for the assassination of Tertön Pema Ledrel Tsal. Pema Ledrel Tsal told her that it would create unimaginably bad karma if she

and her relatives were to kill a master prophesied by Guru Rinpoche. He told them there was no need for them to kill him, and he then passed away on his own.

One shouldn't regard Tertön Pema Ledrel Tsal as a person who lacked control over his affairs and could be killed by other people. Actually, he had control over his very life and death! Before passing away, he made the aspiration to reincarnate in five years. That reincarnation was as the omniscient Longchenpa. After Guru Rinpoche, Shantarakshita, and King Trisong Deutsen, Longchenpa is, I think, the master most respected by the Nyingmas. Before Pema Ledrel Tsal passed away, he entrusted his treasure teachings to his main three students, one of whom was Gyalse Lekpa Gyaltsen. Later, Longchen Rabjam reclaimed those treasure teachings from the students of his previous incarnation.

Longchen Rabjam's incarnation was born in Bumthang and was a tertön. He was killed when someone hit him in the head with a stone while he was stealing some beans. His immediate incarnation was the tertön Pema Lingpa, who became renowned throughout the three realms.

Conclusion – aspiration & dedication

Regarding Avalokiteśvara empowerment: The Lamp that Dispels the Darkness of Ignorance

Earlier, I bestowed the Avalokiteśvara empowerment called *The Lamp that Dispels the Darkness of Ignorance*. Pema Lingpa unearthed this terma from Tang Rimochen in Bumthang. Avalokiteshvara is a very important deity. Both Arya Tara and Guru Padmasambhava are said to have emanated from Avalokiteśvara. He is the root of both these deities. Many of the most beneficial activities come from Avalokiteśvara, out of his great compassion for sentient beings. And it was Avalokiteśvara who uttered the Heart *Sūtra* in response to Shāripūtra's questions. Nowadays, even Shiva is considered to be an emanation of Avalokiteshvara.

So Avalokiteśvara is a very important deity. He is the principal deity in the *nyungney* or fasting practice. I will give the authorization blessing for this practice based on the tradition of Apang Tertön. *Nyungney* is a very effective practice that doesn't involve any risk. Whereas, other tantric practices can be risky if you don't know how to do the visualizations properly. People should try to support *Nyungney* practice, even if this means doing just a single *nyungney* practice session. In most cases, there are eight or sixteen pairs of *nyungney* practice.

Transmission for all the Pema Lingpa treasure teachings that I received

I have now given transmissions for all of the Pema Lingpa treasure teachings that I received from my own teachers. To conclude the transmission, I have bestowed the empowerment for the *Long Life Practice of Carrying the Jewel on the Path*. I am a tulku of Khyentse Rinpoche and this practice has a special connection with the Khyentse lineage. Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo received this teaching in a vision from Pema Lingpa as a close lineage transmission.

The purpose of receiving the long life initiation is to lengthen our lifespan. The purpose of living long is to accomplish our aims. For dharma practitioners, this means to accomplish our dharma practice. Paltrul Rinpoche said that the dharma and worldly aims do not go together. There is no end to worldly activity. In any case, the purpose of the long life initiation is to make our lives peaceful and happy. We may believe that having a lot of money will make our lives peaceful and happy. But we can look at wealth from many angles. For example, a person could be very wealthy, but if he doesn't use his wealth to make offerings or to help others, then it's a complete waste. Such a person is like a hungry ghost.

Especially for ordinary lay folk, these times have brought profound changes. In the old days, there was no way to make a phone call from here to Trashigang. These days, we can use our mobile phones to call, not only Trashigang, but even the United States. We have to consider this as some kind of material progress. But we should think about such developments very carefully. The improvement of outer conditions can bring along with it many physical and mental problems. In Bhutan's case, thirty years ago there were no drug addicts in this country. Now, we have so many substance abusers. So development is not necessarily good.

We can't stop change, either worldly or spiritual. However, we can make the change go at our pace. The Bhutanese are naturally virtuous. They don't steal or lie, and they have the habit of helping each other. These unique qualities of the Bhutanese may have come about because of their involvement with the teachings of the Buddha. Also, there are a few positive habits that have been passed down from our parents. These days, we don't even know if cooking will be taught in our schools, let alone whether our inherited values will endure. As times change, we should take care of the unique Bhutanese values. Yes, parents should send their kids to school, but a child's main school is his or her home. Parents should set a good example for their children. They should think twice about fighting in front of their kids.

These days, because children have so many worries, parents should think carefully about whether or not they should be beating their kids. Parents should be loving and affectionate towards their children, particularly because modern kids suffer from the sickness of development. If something goes wrong, young people may resort to drugs, suicide and so on. We tend to ostracize drug addicts. But instead of ostracizing them, we should look after them and be loving and affectionate towards them.

Let me speak frankly here. These days, having a university degree may not help us get a job. Even young people who have certificates are finding it very difficult to find jobs. Bhutanese kids go to school ambitious to work in an office, rather than as a servant. That is a very bad attitude. The purpose of education is to get a decent job, so one can support oneself and stand on one's own feet. But at the same time, the Bhutanese should really take care of such values as kind-heartedness and the willingness to help others. When I went to Singye Dzong, I saw some young Bhutanese helping older people without being asked. This is really good. At the moment, the Bhutanese still know how to make a fire and to cook food. But if we don't preserve those values and skills, they will disappear. Future university graduates may not have the skills either to make a fire or to cook food.

Bhutan is situated between India and China, so now we copy everything from these two

countries. It may be good to adopt some Indian and Chinese things. The buddhadharma, for example, came from India. But some of the things the Bhutanese choose to copy from the Indians don't make sense. For instance, Indian toilets have a jet to clean one's bottom after defecating. Now, the Bhutanese people have also put such a jet inside their toilets. But the Bhutanese don't need such equipment, because they don't clean their bottoms like that. Another example is the Bhutanese preferring Bollywood songs to their own songs. Nowadays, even the Bhutanese administrative system has become like India's. Due to my having the title 'Rinpoche,' I have no problem getting what I want done. However, ordinary Bhutanese people seem to face great difficulties in their dealings with the government offices. We should give serious thought to this matter.

Anyway, rather than this often mindless materialistic copying, what the Bhutanese people really need is peace and happiness. But happiness comes from the mind, rather than from material wealth. Wealth is not a reliable source of happiness.

We should end by making the aspiration to sustain the buddhadharma through hearing, contemplation and meditation. If the buddhadharma is not there, then all virtuous things will be lost. When I say we should uphold and sustain the teachings, I mean all the lineages and teachings of Buddhism. For instance, in Burma and Sri Lanka, the Shrivakayāna teachings are currently in a very shaky state. We should be concerned about those teaching lineages too. When the forest is on fire, you can't save just one tree. You have to save all the trees. So I request the lamas, tulkus and khenpos present here to have concern for all of the Buddha's teachings. You have received so many empowerments and transmissions, so you should apply them to your practice, and also make aspirations and dedications.

Let us dedicate whatever merit we have accumulated, for the enlightenment of all beings, and make aspirations for the teachings to live long and for our dharma practice to be successful. Let us pray also for the long life of the holders of the teachings, especially the holders of the teachings of Pema Lingpa, such as Sungtrul Rinpoche and Gangteng Tulku.

There is a monk in Bumthang called Lopen Tseten. Once, Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö visited Lhalung monastery, the main Pema Lingpa seat in Tibet. The lamas there told him that they were looking for the reincarnation of Thuksey Rinpoche, the tulku of Thuksey Dawa Gyaltzen, who was Pema Lingpa's son. Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö told the Lhalung lamas that he had just seen who they were looking for – a boy of about five years who later became Lopen Tseten – and that this boy was, in fact, an incarnation of Lhalung Thuksey Rinpoche. So pray for Lopen Tseten's long life too. Lastly, let us pray for the long life of the King of Bhutan. He keeps the Bhutanese together. Finally, pray for all beings of this world to experience the golden age.