



**Emptiness & Voidness**  
**by**  
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I was requested to teach on emptiness and voidness. Actually the words emptiness and voidness are the same, I think. I say that because it is at the discretion of the earlier translators who decided to use the word emptiness instead of voidness for *shunyata* in Sanskrit and *tongpa nyi* in Tibetan. Therefore emptiness became the proper translation of *shunyata* and voidness became something else, but it could have been the other way round.

I personally cannot really judge because I am not a linguist, but voidness has a sense of 'something there' and emptiness has a sense of 'nothing there'; that is what I felt when I was requested to teach on this subject. The direct word to word translation of *tongpa* in English means 'empty'. So if somebody said, "How much money do you have?" I would say, "My wallet is *tongpa*" – my wallet is empty. So *tongpa* and empty are the same.

Then *nyi* is a very important part of the word, but I don't know whether that is translated as 'ness' or not, as in empti-ness. *Nyi* actually means 'that itself'. In some Tibetan dialects they will use it as an honorific term to describe somebody. So instead of mentioning 'you' they will use the word 'nyi'. For example, if a king says something then they would say, *nyi kyi sung* (your word), or *nyi kyi ka* (your command).

So *tongpa nyi* means 'empty itself', and this is maybe where we have a little weakness in the word emptiness. I think a good linguist could fix this problem in the future because emptiness is also saying something like "I feel so lost, I feel so empty." It gives that kind of feeling right away; it is negative rather than positive.

Many of our Tibetan texts were translated from the eastern, central and northern parts of India, and also many of them are from Kashmir, so the mahapanditas from those places translated them together with the Tibetan translators. But those Tibetan translators were not like me, they were enlightened translators – they learned, they received teachings and transmissions, they practiced and they were enlightened – like Bairotsana, Marpa Lotsawa and Lochen Rinchen Zangpo. All of these great translators were enlightened, not only learned in language, therefore the kind of translations that they have done are more meaning translations rather than word translations.

From one language to another, from one culture to another, from one perception to another, the same word will not mean the same thing. For example, I grew up in India so I know what it means when Indians shake their head in a certain way. But people who come to India for the first time, they wouldn't know what it means. It could mean anything. It could mean 'yes' or it could mean 'no'. It is like that for language also – the same word can have different meanings. That being said I will use 'emptiness' as a working title.

So emptiness (Skt. *shunyata*, Tib. *tongpa nyi*), what it really means, intellectually, is very easy to understand. A lot of people think it is a very difficult thing to understand, but it is not.

There are two verses, each with two sentences, from a very sacred text translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan, that describe exactly what emptiness is. The first two sentences say, "There is nothing which is not interdependent." Then the second two sentences say, "Therefore there is nothing which is not emptiness." So everything is interdependent; our mind and our body, our body and our senses, our mind and our thoughts, the outside world and this physical body – everything is interdependent. Other than the interdependent manifestation of everything you cannot find anything.

For example, this can be understood very easily by looking at one of everything, that is time for instance. Time really is the present, the present time. But how can you experience the present? How can you identify the present? How can you isolate the present from the past and the future? It is impossible. Because the present, intellectually speaking, means the smallest distance, which should be the distance the size of a particle – a very, very small distance – and which has travelled by the fastest speed, which should be the speed of light, according to our present comprehension. We cannot comprehend everything so right now we comprehend a particle as the smallest thing and light as the fastest; the speed of light they say. Therefore, how long it will take for light to travel through the distance of one particle should be the present.

Also, how can we feel anything? How can we experience anything? But we feel everything. Whatever I'm saying to you makes you think, it makes you relate to the information and things that you have heard already. You are somehow cooking the ingredients that I'm giving you here; you are cooking it in your head, and some of you get pakora (Indian fritter) out of it, some of you get jelabi (Indian sweet) out of it, and some of you get kedgeree out of it. Each one of you is getting something out of it because you already have all of the ingredients, and all the ingredients that you are getting right now will be cooking together in your head, but the result will not be the same for each of you. For example, if after this teaching I ask you individually to write one page on the subject of what I have said, and you don't discuss it with each other, then you will write very differently. Each one of you will write a unique piece; they

will not be the same. This way emptiness by definition is: everything is interdependent, and everything is an interdependent manifestation of everything else.

Now we'll look at it from a very small – compared to what is there – reality. If somebody on the other side of the Earth is cutting too many trees then we get no rain over here. That is a very dualistic, inferior and relative way of seeing and proving interdependence. But an example that is deeper and more advanced than that is: you are born on a certain day at a certain time, and your father is born on a certain day and at a certain time, and your mother is born on a certain day at a certain time. Also they are born in certain places and you are born in a certain place. So with those three pieces of information (time, day and place of birth), precisely, then a good mathematician – which we also call an astrologer, because an astrologer with no mathematics is like a doctor with no medicine – can predict ninety or maybe one hundred percent accurately the events in your life.

So that is the interdependence of this two meter body and the stars that are billions and billions of miles away. Actually we call the body two arm's length – everybody's body is two arms' length, unless the proportions are not correct (person has unusually short or long arms). So by learning and calculating the position, the rhetoric, patterns, placement and movement of those stars, an astrologer or mathematician can predict your physical and mental situations in this life. They can even predict your past and future life.

How can that be possible? It is because everything is interdependent, interrelated, interconnected. Then if you go further than that, deeper than that, everyone has a unique personal liking and disliking. For example, you like the colour red, blue or green, you like hot food, sweet food, plain food or stale food. Actually a lot of people like very old food like old cheese and all of that. In some parts of China they have a sauce called 'grandmother's sauce' or something, which is three, four or five hundred years old. They store it in something, cook it in that and then refill it so that it will continue from generation to generation. So that family's food is very, very unique, because that is there.

Anyway, each one of us is different but there are two things that are common from heaven to hell, that is: nobody likes to suffer and everybody likes to be happy. No-one can disagree with that. Don't you think that says something, that everyone from heaven to hell is connected? Because, although we have so many differences, in this we are absolutely in agreement. And why? It has something to do with the truth, the absolute truth and ultimate emptiness. In Tibetan ultimate emptiness is *dondam tong pa nyi*. In English I think you have to translate it as ultimate emptiness, which sounds a little strange. 'Dondam tong pa nyi' sounds perfect but 'ultimate emptiness' sounds a little bit awkward. But let us wait until we understand what it means.

The ultimate is beyond all of the relative perceptions. Right now, due to the hard work of scientists of the past, we know that a particle, an atom, is the smallest thing and light is the fastest thing. We can calculate how fast light is but that cannot be the ultimate answer. The ultimate is beyond that, and yet to be comprehended, yet to be discovered scientifically. Science of course is a very great thing but it does not have all the answers, I wouldn't even say it has all the questions either. You have to have questions first then you get an answer – answers come according to the question, you have to know what to look for, then you look, and then you find something.

So we don't even know everything to look at. Whatever we know, we have some idea of what it is. Of course that definitely means that we don't even know everything about the things that we think we know, because you cannot know everything about anything without knowing everything about everything. Until you know everything about everything you don't know everything about anything – you know something about something, but not everything.

Now coming back to each one of us, and knowing the most common interest of everyone, wanting to be happy and not wanting to suffer, looking at this very obvious common interest, which is there in a bad way, in a good way, in a not so good way and in a not so bad way, everybody has this. So by looking at this then we can see the definition of ultimate emptiness. Ultimate emptiness means happiness with no limitation – limitless happiness, limitless joy. What is limitless joy? Actually limited joy is suffering; limitation is suffering. And if I may say so, ironically, the limitation of suffering is happiness! For example, if today you have a problem you should be happy, because a problem came so now what is left is for it to go.

So the limitlessness and the absolutely interdependent come to the same conclusion. For example, space is limitless, it has no end. If you explore to the end of space, after many, many billions of light years you will end up right here. If you are a light that expands in all directions at the fastest speed, then where you will reach is right here. There is nowhere to go, no centre of space will ever be found. You can never find the centre of space except where you are, and at the same time you can never find the end of space except where you are. This is the end of space, so stop looking for the end of space. This is the centre of space, so stop looking for the centre of space.

It is sometimes a little bit strange that Buddhists think that Bodhgaya is the centre of the world and Jews and Christians think that Jerusalem is the centre of the world. Each religion thinks its original holy place is the centre of the world. It is, and for each one of us, wherever we go, is the centre of the world, the centre of space. Our earth is the centre of the universe, for us, and if we go east for billions of light years and stay there, then that's the centre of the universe, the centre of space for us. So we end up here. I don't mean we end up here in New

Delhi, but we end up here. So if you are looking for the end of space, the centre of space, and looking, looking, looking, you end up here! So that is the definition of limitlessness.

Now seeing this through this kind of very simple exploration, these simple examples, then what do we do about this common interest, this wish to be happy and not wanting to suffer? We don't have to go very far in Lord Buddha's teaching; the first teaching that Lord Buddha has given was the four noble truths and the first noble truth is the truth of suffering. So if you look only at that teaching, the first truth, then you have all the answers for this in four steps.

The first step that Lord Buddha taught – actually he manifested it – was that everything is a composition of everything, it is interdependent, it is impermanent; we cannot find anything that is permanent, as long as it is there it is impermanent.

The second step is: anything that is impermanent is suffering. We are happy today because all of us came together and are listening to each other. But that means that all of us will have to part. After gathering together what is left is to part. And as soon as you finish building something, what is left is for it to fall down. So impermanence is suffering.

A lot of people magnify the four noble truths by the first noble truth, by the second part of the first noble truth, they say, "Buddha said, everything is suffering." That's not true, there is much more.

The third step or thing Buddha said was: everything that is suffering is emptiness. From every aspect and in all respects it is emptiness, because suffering is also an interdependent manifestation of everything else. For example, if somebody loses their job it is suffering, because if the person had a job then they can lose their job. But the loss of the job is suffering because of everything else e.g. you pay your rent from your salary, you buy your food from your salary, you pay for your children's school from your salary, you pay to go from place to place in your own car from your salary. So when that salary is no more, when you no longer have a job, then you are suffering because of all of those things. Otherwise it doesn't mean anything. When you have a job, actually you've lost unemployment! And when you lose a job then you've lost employment. So the loss is the same because when you gain something you've lost something. This is the third thing, emptiness, it is not there.

The fourth thing is: everything that is emptiness is selfless. The self, all aspects of self, the 'I', as well as itself, whatever it is, is free from it. Everything is free from self.

There is no fifth thing, but what one has to understand is that everything that is selfless is joy. So the ultimate of our common interest of wanting to be free from suffering and wanting to be happy lies in selflessness, and selflessness is because of emptiness, and emptiness is

because of the interdependent manifestation of everything. Nothing is more or less than the interdependent manifestation of everything.

Now spreading this all over we bring it to a conclusion, which is: how can we overcome suffering? We can overcome suffering by just realizing the emptiness of everything and the selflessness of everything. But still that sounds a bit too much of an intellectual thing. So go beyond the intellectual aspect and go towards feeling, then compassion and devotion, because when you have compassion, at least twenty-five percent of your self, your selfishness, has to be renounced.

Compassion is a little bit ego-friendly, so that comes first, because you think "Oh, poor thing, I'm doing well but he or she is not doing well. I'm doing well, so I should do something." This is good but it is a little bit more dualistic and more self-oriented. When compassion is there it should become limitless compassion, not limited compassion. We have compassion for the poor and underprivileged easily, but we don't easily have that kind of compassion for the rich and privileged. We should have compassion that is not limited to the underprivileged and poor. We should have compassion for all sentient beings, equally; we should have compassion from hell to heaven and from heaven to hell. We should have compassion for everyone.

Of course at the present, being a human being, having compassion for the gods is a bit too much. They should have compassion for us – we are down here and they are up there! But of course they also want happiness and don't like suffering. They also help those who please them and punish those who insult them. We say, "god fearing." We fear god because if we don't behave god will punish us. Therefore at that level compassion for them is needed as well.

But at the same time, when compassion is becoming limitless then it transforms into devotion because devotion is one hundred percent not ego-friendly. I wouldn't say anti-ego, but ego has to be transformed in order to have true unconditional devotion. When you have unconditional compassion, naturally you have unconditional devotion. You cannot have unconditional compassion without having unconditional devotion. That is impossible. Compassion means, you are here, and for anybody below you, you have compassion. Devotion means, you are here, and for anybody above you, you have devotion.

Normally, in a negative way... actually I shouldn't say normally, it is not normal. Abnormally, when we are here, we look down on anybody below and we become proud and arrogant. Then to anybody above we become jealous, envious and greedy. That is abnormally, but it is kind of normal for us. When we are looking with the ultimate eye we are abnormal, but looking with the relative eye we are normal. This way unconditional compassion is to all sentient beings below us and unconditional devotion is to everyone who is above us. Above us in the sense that for those who have more compassion and more devotion than us, for them we have

devotion. Below us means for those who have less compassion and less devotion than us, for them we have compassion. That is our pure feeling, which is labelled as compassion and devotion; it is a label we use but it is that pure feeling. And that pure feeling you can have when you are selfless. When you are full of self you will not have that. Self means ego and ego means ignorance, and when we have lots of ego we cannot be selfless. So you have to overcome ego in order to be selfless.

The fourth part of the first noble truth, the truth of suffering, is selflessness. And how can we achieve this common goal of wanting to be happy and not wanting to suffer? Starting from there, when we have this happiness we work very hard for this happiness, and after some time we find so many problems in this, so then we look for another happiness. Then after some time we will have lots of problems and suffering, then we look for another happiness, but again, after some time we find lots of problems. In this way we find that we are looking for something which is not there. You cannot find limitless happiness or limitless freedom out there. It is not anywhere. It is in us. The centre of the universe is here. The centre of the entire space is here. Limitless freedom and limitless joy, freedom from all suffering is right here, in you, that is you – you are free from that limitation in which you call yourself 'I'. This way one can understand the definition of emptiness.

Now void, I don't think I have to talk about void otherwise we will confuse ourselves – emptiness and voidness are two choices for words to describe *shunyata* and *tongpa nyi*. The translators chose emptiness because directly it is the same word as the Sanskrit. In Sanskrit I think *shun* means 'zero'. I think *yata* is the key, not *shun*. It is the same in Tibetan – *tongpa* does not say everything, *nyi* says everything. *Tongpa nyi* is definitely not a word to word translation of *shunyata* from Sanskrit to Tibetan, it is a meaning translation. *Tongpa* in Hindi is *kali*, which in Sanskrit is *shunya*. It is very interesting that when there was only Sanskrit spoken the great translators actually understood the present day Hindi. So what I presume is there were two choices, emptiness and voidness, and they chose emptiness. And it is the correct one, we have to believe.

Now since all of this has been said, what should we do? Well, we should be able to, not by so much thinking and effort, but spontaneously, be able to cope with suffering, happiness and everything with the true understanding that they are nothing but an interdependent manifestation of everything. Then we will enjoy happiness, we will try our best to avoid suffering, we do all of that, but not more than that. We don't look at suffering and happiness as real solid things, or push away the suffering and hold onto happiness.

Some people say, "I don't want to hear that or I don't want to look at that." But we should not be like that; we look right in the eye of suffering, look right in the eye of happiness, and face it with grace. If you are happy, if something wonderful has happened to you; face it with grace.

And if you are facing some problem and suffering, face it and deal with it with grace. Don't lose your grace, don't lose your calm. Don't lose your mountain – you should be like a mountain. Storms come and it's beautiful, trees are moving and there is lots of noise, so a mountain should enjoy it. Then rain will fall, heavy monsoons will come and everything will be washed very clean, so you should enjoy it. Also there will be winters, big snows come and everything will be covered with ice and snow; so again, you should enjoy it. That is how we should deal with our happiness and our suffering. We should cope with it with a true and deep understanding and footing that everything is nothing but an interdependent manifestation; illusion of everything.

Everything is an illusion, a dream. When you have a bad dream, if you don't know that it is a dream you will be devastated. Even the next day you will be devastated, and even the day after you will be devastated. But if you know it is a dream, even a very frightening thing, a terrifying thing, if you have full confidence that it is a dream, you can enjoy it. It is sort of like entertainment. For example, if ten thousand tigers are attacking you from all directions, it is okay, it is a dream, then you just sit there and see what happens. Also you do not wish to wake up, because normally when we have very serious dreams, no matter whether they are good or bad, we wake up. So we really have to be able to look at our life and the situations in life as being like a dream. We have to handle them, but we have to handle them as no more than what they are.

So I think practically that is what we can do. We have this short life, this arms' length life, which is not going to last more than a hundred years, of which a good twenty, thirty, forty, or in my case fifty-five years, is gone. So what is left there, why do we spoil it? Why do we look for something that is never there? But it doesn't mean that we shouldn't have ambition, we shouldn't plan, and we shouldn't have some kind of target. We should plan, we should have a target, but knowing very well that this is nothing but a dream. That way if you succeed you will be happy but you will not be outrageously happy, because if you become happy and then proud and careless then you will start to fall.

We have a saying, 'the higher you fly the harder you fall'. So even if you are doing very, very well, you shouldn't get carried away. You should know that this is a wonderful dream of all the karmas of countless lives, so you should appreciate everyone. For all of your good karma you should give credit to all sentient beings. You have been compassionate, you have been generous, you have been tolerant to all sentient beings in the past and as a result of that right now you are having a good life. So you should appreciate all sentient beings, instead of thinking "I'm smart, I'm clever. See, I made it." So I think that is how we can implement the understanding of emptiness.



Then when we have suffering, when we have problems, instead of going, "My goodness, why is this happening to me, not again," say, "Why not me. I must have done things to other sentient beings, I have caused similar things in my past lives to others, therefore the same things are happening to me in this life – as result of what I have done previously this is happening to me now. So may I be able to be a furnace to burn all this bad karma of mine so that no more bad karma will be left, and if it is possible, may I also become the furnace to burn the bad karma of everybody else." In that way your suffering becomes so small and insignificant. If you really look at the big picture you'll have this perspective.

I always tell people, "don't hold your thumb right next to your eye, because then it is so big so you can't see the sun and you can't see the moon; you can't see anything. Instead just keep your thumb at arm's length, you don't have to cut it off and throw it away, just keep it at arm's length and it does no harm." Our happiness and suffering becomes bad because of our ego, therefore we should keep our ego at arm's length. For the time being you don't have to cut it out and throw it away, unless you decide to be a *rishi muni* (sage), or a real yogi. Unless you decide to be that then you need ego a little bit, so don't cut it out and throw it away. Because as long as you are in the world of ego, the world full of ego, if you are in this world doing worldly things with no ego at all then many things can happen. After some time, as a result of that, then you will have a very big ego, because you are faking it. For example, when a possum animal pretends to be dead then the predator, a tiger or something, would have to be stupid. If it is clever then you will really be dead! So it is better to run than pretend to be dead when you are not dead.

So when you are in the world, being a worldly person and not renouncing samsaric activities, you should keep your ego at arm's length. Don't cut it out and throw it away, you need it from time to time. You don't have to do anything, but you have to show your teeth and claws from time to time. You don't have to scratch, just show them. You should be a compassionate and powerful lion in samsara.

But if you decide to really renounce samsara then you don't need any of that. If everybody steps on you like a doormat, then that is a blessing. You are getting a blessing from all the living Buddhas. You are down there and all the crowds walk on you, it is a blessing. If you are a yogi then for you everyone is Buddha. So if all of them beat you it is blessing because they are all Buddhas. But until you have that kind of maturity and that kind of renunciation then a little bit of ego is needed. I wouldn't encourage you to have ego, what I'm saying here is, don't pretend you have no ego when you are full of it. Tame your ego – you have ego but tame it right now. That's all. Do you have any questions?

## Questions

**Question:** You talked about compassion. I pray that I can love myself so that I can love others and I can be compassionate to myself so that I can be compassionate to others. But I do not know how I can develop compassion and love for myself?

**Rinpoche:** My friends tease me for being cynical and pragmatic and not very diplomatic. But I have no regrets. I feel quite happy about this, therefore I'm not going to entertain you. I don't think you have to worry about loving yourself and liking yourself. That is there very, very deeply in you. I think that you think you don't love and like yourself enough. That is the proof of that – because your idea of how you should be and how others should address you or whatever, because of so many things, you are not satisfied. Therefore, the way you are, I think you are perfect; you are healthy, you are strong, you look good. But in your mind somewhere you think you are not good enough, and your expectation of you is this much. You are what you are, but your expectation of yourself is unreasonable for you. Therefore the idea that you don't like yourself enough comes. So from my point of view don't worry about it. You like yourself more than you should!

**Question:** Is interdependence relative or ultimate truth?

**Rinpoche:** Relative. Everything that has been said is relative. Interdependence is truth, but it is relative truth. Ultimate truth is beyond. For example, if interdependence was ultimate truth then Prince Siddhartha is pretending to be Buddha because all of us are not yet Buddha. So how could he be Buddha when we are not? If interdependence is ultimate then he cannot be Buddha. So interdependence is relative truth.

**Student:** So when you say ultimate truth...

**Rinpoche:** Ultimate emptiness.

**Student:** Ultimate emptiness is the only truth?

**Rinpoche:** Well, we are speaking about the unspeakable, the ineffable. We are imagining the unimaginable, therefore you are asking this question. We are talking about fruition, the final destination when we are just beginning the path. This way one should understand that Buddhahood is not something that is time bound. When you reach Buddhahood, there is no time. It is beyond time.

People say things like "the thought of the Buddha," "the words of the Buddha." We have to say that, otherwise what are we supposed to say? But it is not like that, it is the manifestation of the Buddha. Buddha manifests. For example, if Buddha was here now, then everyone would hear what he says perfectly in your own language without a translator. Also it wouldn't matter how far away you were sitting. You could be sitting twenty kilometres away but you will hear him perfectly. You might then think that if you were right next to Buddha and that if his voice is so loud that it can be heard twenty kilometres away that it would burst your eardrums. But that wouldn't happen; you would hear perfect sound. You could even be deaf, but you could

hear, you could be blind, but you could see, and you could be very far away but you could hear. Also you hear exactly according to your capacity. It is not that Buddha thinks about what to say today to some people and what to say tomorrow to other people.

So it is manifestation. But it is manifestation of what we are doing today. We wish to be free; we wish to reach limitless freedom in order to help all sentient beings reach limitless freedom. That is our purpose, and when that purpose is fulfilled, that is called Buddhahood. Buddha will manifest to liberate all sentient beings for limitless freedom and liberation. And it will happen in limitless ways, not just in the form of Prince Siddhartha. We have wrathful, peaceful, male, female, animals, all aspects of manifestation. Buddha manifests in hell, Buddha manifests in heaven, Buddha manifests in the human realm, everywhere, but always he will benefit others. For example, Buddha might manifest as a piece of bone on a path which you step on. Then you see the broken bone and realize, "My goodness, that is in me here. I have to do my best to use this body, this life. Not too long from now I will be like that bone."

So Buddha can manifest in countless and limitless ways. Buddha can also manifest as your problem – you might be carried away and one problem hits you and you wake up; then you start to mature from there. So there is no limitation to which way Buddha manifests.

**Question:** The four steps of the first noble truth that you mentioned, I can see a kind of glimpse of what is generally being said that emptiness is so simple yet so close that we sometimes miss that.

**Rinpoche:** We always miss that.

**Same Student:** Could you please elaborate a little bit on that – it is so simple, so close, but we are still far away from that.

**Rinpoche:** Yes, and what about you? Your question might have something related – I can answer two or three questions at the same time.

**Another Student:** This is my first time here. It is very nice to hear what you are saying, very beautiful things. Sometimes it is very difficult to understand what the way to go is. I am from Italy and here in India I see lots of energy, but what can I do to receive benefit, to change my life in a good way?

**Rinpoche:** Okay, the question is almost the same but coming from a different person. Okay one more?

**Same Student:** When you say the interdependence of everything, does that also mean interdependence applies to the manifestation of Buddha?

**Rinpoche:** Perfect, good, this is related to your question.

**Same Student:** Also about the twelve links?

**Rinpoche:** That is also a way to describe interdependence. Actually these questions, the first from a very well learned and practicing Buddhist, and the later from a little bit newer student, fall into the same category. What we should do about this very clearly is: we should know that

although we are in samsara we have to do what has to be done. For that we are pretty good, I don't have to teach you, all of you are much better than me in samsaric things. I don't even know how to drive a car. But truly implementing this, doing our best should be, in our life there are so many things going on, therefore, physically, mentally, because of our environmental surroundings, we have to do housecleaning, book-keeping etc. There are so many things that we don't need, so many things that we don't have to do, so many things that are not important, but we are unconsciously giving so much attention and importance to those things. It is those things that we have to be able to identify and let go of. Then we will have more energy and more time to do the things that are meaningful and important for the time being. Why I say for the time being is because after some time they also aren't necessary. For example, when we meditate, we are not meditating to become a meditation champion. We are not trying to win a gold or silver medal in meditation. We are meditating so that that we don't have to meditate. We become meditation. That is why we work very hard to meditate, so that we don't have to meditate. It is like going to school, you learn the alphabet. Why? Because you don't want to have to learn those things, you already know. In the same way, we meditate in order that we don't have to meditate – everything becomes a meditation. That is an answer for the first gentleman here.

For the second gentleman who asked how to go about it. We need blessing, we need a path, and we need a guide on the path. Otherwise we like to do something wonderful but we don't know how, or we want to do something wonderful, and we try, but it doesn't happen, because there's no blessing. What is blessing? Blessing is the living lineage of enlightenment.

Because Buddha, Prince Siddhartha, attained enlightenment, his physical presence manifested – sound, the teachings, the form – everything manifested to his disciples. The first teaching manifested to five disciples and then later to many, many more. And this blessing has continued from person to person. This blessing was felt, received, empowered, transmitted, and then transmitted to others, and this has continued until today. That is why, I don't know whether this word is good or not but we all use it – 'Buddhism' – Buddhism is alive today. Otherwise it would be just look-a-like Buddhism – with no lineage and no blessing it just looks like Buddhism. So this lineage of unbroken blessing, unbroken transmission and unbroken teaching is the path that we follow. Then it says do this first, do this second, and do this third etc. For each thing you will be empowered, you will be given transmission and you will be taught. This way it is not somebody's idea or somebody's interpretation of the Buddha's teaching. It is the genuine blessing and genuine teaching of the Buddha that we are practicing.

I will give you an example of my tradition, my lineage, or whatever you call it. If somebody asks me for a particular text to teach or read, first I have to check whether I have received it or not. If I haven't received it then I am not allowed to read it, pray it or teach it. I can read

it like one reads a novel, for information or something like that, but not for blessing, because I did not receive that blessing, I don't have that transmission.

In case you don't get it I will give you a very bad example. I can pretend to have a cold but none of you will catch cold from me because I don't have a cold. I don't have the lineage, I don't have the blessing, I have no transmission. So I can pretend and cough like mad but nothing will happen.

The other question about interdependence is very close to this. Buddha's manifestation is not interdependent from the Buddha's side, but from the recipient's side it is interdependent. Why? Because the Buddha's original motivation was to liberate all sentient beings; for that he wanted to be liberated. But liberated is not by somebody, it is from inside. Buddhism is actually a nickname; some people gave us the nickname Buddhism. We are a follower of Buddha, so people say Buddhism. But the real name of Buddhism, what we call ourselves is *nangpa*. *Nang* means 'inside' and *pa* means, for example, people from London are called Londoners. It's the same thing. That means that what was realized by the Buddha and what is in us, what is the essence of us, is exactly inseparable. Therefore this interdependence manifests Buddha in whatever way is the most appropriate for us.

Also we have to have devotion to the Buddha, and if you get the lineage then it works even more. Without lineage our millions of lifetimes of habits will be very powerful. Also, for example, if you are going very far away, maybe a million miles away, and you make one little mistake here, then after going a million miles you are way off course. So in our motivation, in our practice, in everything, if you don't get it accurately then the end result can be very wrong. Therefore to assure that we need blessing – the blessing will assure it because it is in us. It is from Buddha but it is in us.

So when the seed is sown it will grow but when the seed is fried it will not grow. It is not exactly like that because our Buddha nature can never be destroyed, but it can be temporarily spoiled. Maybe a hundred or a thousand lives are wasted, but it can never be destroyed. It is indestructible. Time is relative anyway, but still, we'd like to be enlightened as soon as possible.

One wonderful thing is that we don't remember our past lives. If we are happy in this life, then that is good enough. Then each life is a little bit happier, a little bit better, with a little bit more wisdom, a little bit more compassion and that's better, right? At the end of the day, when you go to bed, you should be able to go to bed very happy. Then every morning when you wake up, you should be able to wake up very happy. Then you have your breakfast, and you should be able to enjoy it very happily. Also you talk with people, you go wherever you go, you do whatever you do, so you should be able to cope with everything very happily. That joy should

be there and how can we have that without the blessing? The blessing is joy. We are blessed, then we are joyful.

One of my friends – people say disciple but I say friend – who was from the Sikh community had many, many problems in his family, death, theft, there were so many things that happened. But instead of that making him angry and sad saying, “Please help me, pray for me so that my problem goes away,” he said, “May these problems of mine solve the problems of the lineage, may the lineage live long and flourish, and whatever problems are there, whatever obstacles are there, may this be the remedy to solve them.” That’s a very happy and blessed way to think. He was not in denial. Of course he was not saying that nothing was happening; he told me everything. But at the end that was his wish.

**Question:** I wanted to ask about the twelve interdependences and about emptiness, and the step by step practice of it. I have heard it is taught in many steps and only then you can realize it. What is this meditation on emptiness?

**Rinpoche:** I think this is maybe either following the first, second, or third great text (not a small one line practice) the great text of Kamalashila of meditation on the Middle Way, or it is Lord Maitreya’s Prajnaparamita meditation, it’s almost like a philosophical text but it is a practice. So it could be either one of those, or it can be something else. If you practice emptiness in that kind of detail then you have to receive the teachings of that. For example, Lord Maitreya’s Prajnaparamita has one hundred and seventy-plus steps of meditation on Prajnaparamita, and this is upgraded in three stages, and then after that it is upgraded in four stages. Then altogether all of the one hundred and seventy-plus steps are summarized into seventy. So it is a very complex philosophical text. In monastic colleges monks spend five to seven years studying and debating this. It’s an enormous philosophical text, as well as a practice. In Tibetan it is *sherab kyi parol tu chinpa mengak tengyur nganpar tokpe chen*. *Mengak tengyur* means ‘sacred instruction’. It is a practice actually. It is a *tengyur*, which is like a philosophical text, but it is a practice, a sacred instruction. So this must be following something like that.

Then about the twelve links, which is a way to describe interdependence, the first is ignorance and the last is old age and death. That is just to summarize, but it is taught as one life, three lives, or just by itself, there are many ways it is taught. But twelve is just a metaphor, it can be two hundred or two million interdependences, it is limitless interdependences. But you have to have some kind of summarized version so Buddha manifested the twelve interdependences, which starts with ignorance and ends with old age and death, with everything in between. It is one whole subject and very good to study and receive teachings on. It is a very comprehensive subject and you learn a lot in this order.

**Question:** Rinpoche, are what we call the four seals of Buddhism this first aspect of the first noble truth?

**Rinpoche:** The four parts or steps of the first noble truth.

**Same Student:** Yes, are these also what we call the four seals?

**Rinpoche:** When you say four seals I think you are talking about *choje domshi* in Tibetan. *Cho* means dharma, *je* means of, *dom* means summarized and *shi* means four. I think you are talking about that.

**Student:** In the Gelugpa system impermanence, suffering, emptiness and nirvana are called the four seals.

**Rinpoche:** That is the *choje domshi*. Everything that is composite is impermanent, everything that is stained is suffering, nirvana is peace, and all phenomena are empty and selfless. That by itself is not the four levels of the first noble truth, no, it is all by itself. But here the second noble truth also has four, etc., so in all sixteen – four noble truths with four stages for each.

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