



The Five Strengths
by
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FOR DOING ALL the practices that we do and learning all the dharma that we learn, it is very important for us to always remember what is going on. If I put it simply: living is preparation for dying and dying is preparation for living. So you die to be born and you are born to die, that's how it is. In between you live so that each life, which is maybe a hundred or maybe only fifty years is lived meaningfully so that when the threshold between this life and the next life happens (which is inevitable) then you don't have to say to yourself, "Wait a minute, what did I do?" You have to be able to say to yourself, "Okay, fine, I have done my best. I have nothing to worry about." That is a sign of a meaningful life.

In the Vajrayana teachings there is one very important aspect that involves antidotes. Antidotes for all the fear, antidotes for all the anxiety, and antidotes for all the regrets that might happen when our doctor tells us: "I'm sorry, we have done our best, but this is it." So when that happens we should not be overwhelmed by it. We should be able to say: "Yes alright, it's okay." We should be able to pull ourselves together and finish that half-done will, otherwise we go and everybody is left behind to fight with each other. It's pretty bad. So we should be able to take care of that as well.

In Tibetan it is *nyenpo tob nga*: *nyenpo* means 'antidote', *tob* means 'strength', and *nga* means 'five'. So through these five understandings and five confirmations, five practices will help us to overcome any shortcomings in everything, but especially when the end of this life and the beginning of the next life takes place.

The first of the five strengths is described as *sawon gyi top*. *Sawon* means 'seed' like the seed of a flower. This is also described as fearlessness, no fear. So if we know what our seed is, if we are sure of our essence, our seed, then there is no fear, because this or that life, or the previous or future life, the seed is the same. It is the continuation of the same thing. We are not afraid to go to bed tonight because we know tomorrow we will wake up.

In the same way, when the doctor tells us "okay, I'm sorry (you are going to die)," then we know this is time to go to sleep but we know tomorrow we will wake up, and nicely because we have done our best today. The seed means everybody's basic essence has no limitation. It cannot be contaminated or influenced by anything. You can never lose it. No matter what

happens to you, even if a thousand atom bombs were dropped on you, your ultimate essence would not burst. Also you could be buried under two thousand feet of earth but your ultimate essence could not be trapped. Or you could be shot into the sun at the speed of light but your ultimate essence would not get lost. Your ultimate essence has no limitation of any kind. Therefore, ultimately nobody dies; ultimately nobody is born; ultimately everything is everything as it is all the time. So therefore, knowing this seed, then you overcome the basic fear of everything and in this case, the fear of death.

Now when we say "somebody died," what does that mean to us? We see somebody, their nose, eyes, ears, their shoulders, hair; we hear their voice, we remember their movements and we somehow project their personality, which we cannot see but somehow we have a projection in our mind – "He is like that, she is like that." So when we cannot encounter that identity anymore in this world or we cannot find that person anymore on this Earth, but all we can find is the cocoon or the print of that person lying there, then we say the person is dead. That is what death means to us.

Then what does death mean to the person who is dying? For that person it has nothing to do with what is there, (the body). His or her mind is not in that anymore. His or her mind is wandering somewhere, riding on their thoughts, riding on their emotions, riding on their memory; leave here by karma, pushed there by karma, like a feather flying in a storm taken from here to there by the force of his or her own doing. That is death. By recognising this, then we truly understand what death is and what life is. Death is a life itself, you live after you are dead. In that way death means 'death of the body', the separation of body and mind.

Then who is being separated is your mind. Separated from what? From your body. So who is afraid is mind, not your body, therefore your mind never dies. Because of that we should not have fear when death occurs for us, for death itself. So that is the first thing.

The second strength is the strength of aspiration. Once we technically conquer the fear of death by knowing what death is, then we should see the second side of that, which is what happens after death. There is a very good reason to be afraid to die based on what happens after we die. Now death itself we learn is nothing, it's no big deal. It's not something that we should be scared of. But what happens after that, if we haven't done good thing, the right things, especially if we are doing the wrong things and living the wrong kind of life, then we should be afraid to die and hold onto this dear life as long as we can.

For example, right now I know I have a reference – I know how I look, how I sound, how I feel, where I stay, who are my friends and relatives (in my case who are my disciples and students), who is my teacher, who I should keep away from and who I should be dealing with. I have all these references so I am quite secure here. Also I have been learning about this for

the past fifty years, so I now know quite a bit and I want to hold onto this for as long as I can. But one day the inevitable will come whether we like it or not, and when that happens then it is totally according to our aspiration. Then it will carry on.

Simply speaking it is as you wish. So if you ask somebody how their next life would be, in this part of the teaching it says, 'As you always wish. Sincerely what you always wish, sincerely what you've always done'. So if you wish to have a happy, compassionate, and peaceful life, then you should live a happy, compassionate, and peaceful life. If you want your next life to have lots of chaos, confusion, and neurosis, then you should live a chaotic, confused, and neurotic life. Then your next life will be as you wish. In this way the aspiration is very important.

Now, what is the aspiration? In Vajrayana practice the aspiration is the Mahayana aspiration – I wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings to attain Buddhahood, bodhichitta; that is the aspiration. And if that is our sincere wish and we live according to that, then our next life will be closer to that, and the next life will be even closer to that, and then the next life will be closer still. This way we reach towards our goal as we wish, and aspiration bodhichitta means the sincere confirmation of our wish. That is the second strength.

The third strength is described as a magnitude of power or strength which can overcome anything. For example, a magnitude of perception that can overcome all perceptions, all perceivable shortcomings; that is *sun jinpa*, which means 'strength to overcome'. For example, if there are wolves bothering your herd and you have a mighty lion come and help you, as soon as the lion climbs on a rock and roars in the direction of where the wolves are, then that is the lion king. So it *sun jinpa's* all the viciousness of all the wolves. It doesn't have to do much but just be there. It is 'sun jinpa', it is the strength. So the magnitude of the strength of your understanding, your perception, that can overcome any shortcoming of all the perceptions. And that is simply the understanding of shunyata, the Prajnaparamita, emptiness.

Now how this works is very simple. The relative truth about everything is that everything is interdependent with everything else. Nothing would be there if not for everything else. That is simple and not difficult to understand. For example, a house stands because of everything else – the foundations, the walls, the pillars, the beams, the roof, the window frames, the glass etc. If it was not for all of those there would be no house. It is the same thing with everything – ourselves, everybody else and everything from heaven to hell, from gods to ignorant me – everybody exists because of everything else. If it were not for everything else nothing would be here.

Knowing this is very simple and practical, it is down to earth common sense. But by knowing this truly then you can understand that there is nothing that you cannot understand, because

anything is possible. There will not be anything like "Oh, it is too big," or "It's too complicated," or "It's too frightening," or "It's too good," or "It's too bad," "I can't understand, I can't believe." That won't be there because you know anything is possible. This way your ability to comprehend any aspect of relative truth – how wonderful it may be, how terrible it may be, how complicated it may be, how simple it may be – you will be able to comprehend if you have the understanding of emptiness, shunyata, the interdependence of everything.

So that is the third strength and what it does is, for example, something that was really unbearable happened to you, you think "Oh, this is unbearable." But if you have clear understanding of emptiness, you will still think it is not pleasant, but it will not be unbearable. It will not drive you crazy or destroy you. It can actually make you even stronger, better and more clear, and it might make you become more mature. But if you don't have the understanding of emptiness then it will destroy you, temporarily. Nothing can destroy you permanently of course, only temporarily. One life can be destroyed. This life might become ruined and the scar of that shock and the effect of that trauma can last as long as you live, because you hold onto one thing as the truth, as the reality, as everything, not knowing it is related to everything else.

By holding onto something artificially like this, then what happens is its result will be artificial. Then the artificial result is more harmful than the true result, because the artificial is like a lie. In order to maintain a lie you have to lie again and again, then after sometime you forget what kind of lies you said to cover your first lie, so you get exposed and that becomes even worse. So the misunderstanding of reality happens and the only antidote for that is the true understanding of reality, and the true understanding of reality is the interdependence of everything. That is emptiness, shunyata. And the only antidote, the only effective and true antidote for misunderstanding is true understanding. This way the third strength is the strength that will overwhelm any kind of shortcoming; so emptiness.

The fourth strength is the strength of destination, the determining strength, the strength that will determine. For example, if you are an archer it is the bow and the arrow – the length of the arrow, the length of the bow, and the velocity of the material of the bow; according to that the arrow will go a certain distance. So the destination of an arrow which is shot by, let's say five hundred pounds, will reach maybe half a kilometre. That is what will determine where the arrow will reach; it is determined by all of that.

Now here, no matter what we are doing – positive things, negative things, religious things or just worldly things – what will be the result or outcome of it, what will determine its destination, is our dedication. If we wholeheartedly begin something, continue it and finish it, if it is a good thing the result will be really good and if it is a bad thing the result will be really bad. But if it is not, then according to that the result will be determined.

For us as Mahayana/Vajrayana practitioners it is the dedication. At the beginning we have bodhichitta, but constantly we should dedicate. Dedication is bodhichitta in action. So whatever we do, any kind of things that we involve ourselves in we do our best with, and after doing and being involved in whatever it was, if it was a good thing, then we dedicate it for enlightenment and the benefit of all sentient beings. So that is the fourth strength.

The fifth strength is described as the strength of practice, the strength of continuous effort. It is based on diligence and patience and so forth, but it is the continuation – and the main practice of that is mindfulness and awareness. Mindfulness and awareness are very simple but very important. Mindful means, always be mindful. Mindfulness itself is a very important practice. Mindful means, when you are talking, when you are resting, when you are eating, when you are praying, when you are meditating, when you are reading, when you are working, all the time have mindfulness. It is a very important basic mechanism or path for progress. If you are mindful, then even if you have an ordinary job it becomes very much like meditation because you are mindful.

Then awareness is that you have your motivation and you always remember your motivation. You remember your motivation, your basic inspiration and aspiration all the time so that whatever you do is blessed by it. For example, a good parent will always remember their responsibility as a parent is to make their children grow up.

Another aspect is when dealing with a child, every moment you will have mindfulness, and the motivation of being mindful you'll always remember. So mindfulness and awareness, one is very basic: always be mindful, and the other is to have the motivation, have the principle, and always remember it. And you will not get lost if you have this. Even very good people get lost many times. The lyrics to the song Amazing Grace, written I think by a Christian, "Once I was lost, now I am found" I think are a very powerful thing. Because lost doesn't mean you have lost something, but when you don't have mindfulness and awareness you get lost.

Sometimes we can be very mindful, yet still we get lost because we forget why we are being mindful. It is like doing pujas and rituals and then forgetting why we are doing them. So it happens that we get lost in the pujas and rituals, we get lost in mindfulness. Of course we get lost in bad things but even in good things we get lost.

So mindfulness and awareness are very important. These days humanity is becoming a little bit strange and I think it has a lot to do with this. Originally, at the beginning we know why we want to do something, but then once we get involved in it, then day after day, month after month, we get lost. So we keep on doing what we have started, but then the purpose, the motivation, the real life of it becomes weaker.

Maybe this is a little confusing so I will use the Tibetan words *trenpa* and *she shin*. The translation may be wrong but the Tibetan is not, so you can find a better translator to translate it. *Trenpa* means 'remembering', which is what I call 'awareness'. *She shin* is 'knowingly', which is what I call 'mindful'; so you drink knowingly, you talk knowingly; you do whatever you do knowingly – that is what I call mindfulness. So *she shin* and *trenpa*, mindfulness and awareness, is the fifth strength.

In this way then, whenever we encounter any extreme situations in life, including death, we are able to handle it, because we know we are not going to die, ultimately. Our mind never dies. Secondly we have good sincere motivation and dedication. Thirdly we have the understanding of emptiness. Birth is totally interrelated with death, and death is totally interrelated with birth. You can't die if you are not born. We are glad to be born and terrified to die. But once we know it is interrelated then it's not that much of a tragedy.

Causing death to oneself or causing death to others is a negative thing. It is absolutely neurotic to cause death to anybody or to yourself because sooner or later everyone will die, so just take it easy, it will happen! So your worst enemy, you don't have to go and kill him or her, instead wish them well or whatever, do your best, be kind and compassionate and one day they will be dead, then they will be born again somewhere, and maybe they will become your friend because you have been positive to them. So in the next life your enemy may become your best friend. Maybe if you are old and some little fellow is very nice to you, that is the incarnation of your enemy.

Anyway, this understanding of emptiness and dedication and always being mindful and aware, if we have done all of this, if we have lived life based on this, then it is no problem. Of course sometimes our great master's words are a little bit hard to swallow because a person like me, I can't say I'm terrified of dying, but I'd definitely like to hold on to this dear life as long as I can. But I will not be neurotic about it.

Anyway, it's a good thing that I can live. In one of Milarepa's songs he says: "Death is not a death. It is a little enlightenment for yogis." So for yogis it is enlightenment, because for them, the moment they die – of course naturally – their mind and their body, this dualistic connection, even this will be liberated. So they will recognise the essence of their mind as it is.

It is quite inspiring for me to have witnessed quite a few great masters, and even good lamas of our lineage, dying. I have seen quite a few of them die sitting and meditating – sitting up straight with no support, and they stayed like that for two or three days. It is like mind and body separated and at that moment they recognised the nature of mind, then they are in *thugdam*, samadhi.

I think that can only happen when you have full confidence that everything is okay, then you can go like that. And if you can go like that, also you will come like that. So I think the greatest test of life is at the time of death, because in life we can somehow play all kinds of games, we can put on all kinds of faces, but when the inevitable comes we show our true face, and we can't pretend in that situation.

So I will stop here, but I thought I would share this and maybe it will be a good living principle for us. Now if you have questions, please ask.

Questions

Question: When you say mind, is it also the heart, like in our visualisation?

Rinpoche: We say body, speech and mind, not heart; the heart is not the mind. This is relevant for human beings on the Planet Earth that we live on, how we are conceived.

When you are angry, or you have attachment, or you are shouting or you are going crazy, that is emotion, which is the most dualistic manifestation of mind. Now, the interdependence of mind and matter; mind's own manifestation is matter. There is no such thing as matter separated from mind in Vajrayana. Scientists might say it differently, they will say there is matter even where there is no mind, but then scientists with mind have to go there and see it. Anyway, it is nothing more and nothing less than Harry Potter, it is drama. Whether something is there when I'm not there or whether something is there when I am there, it doesn't make any difference.

Now in this context, then the manifestation of karma, the manifestation of the mind, the emotions, dualism, the base of all reality is the five elements. And out of the five elements the base of them is of course the element of space, but besides that also is the element of wind, but there is no such thing called 'wind'. It is just the pressure up and pressure down that creates wind. Other than that there is no wind. Wind is not stored somewhere and then comes out and then goes somewhere. It just comes, is created, manifests and disappears.

So the most dualistic manifestation of the mind, the emotions, and the most subtle base of reality, wind, these get together; so the mind is riding on the horse of wind, which is *namshe lung ta la sheon* – consciousness, the mind is riding on the wind. So it is together with the wind and then that enters into our mother, into the most subtle physical reality, the manifestation of our mother and father, the liquid form. So the liquid form is the most subtle aspect of the physical, and wind is the most subtle aspect of the universal base, and emotion is the most dualistic manifestation of the mind. These three merge and within twenty-nine days then all of that wind forms a tube in the middle – the liquid form becomes solidified in

twenty-nine days, so it becomes, it builds a tube in the middle. We call that the central channel, which is later developed physically into the backbone, then the subtle aspect of that backbone, which is the central channel, is always there.

Now that wind is concentrated in the middle, so the middle of that is around the heart area, which is why we say mind is here (around the heart area). That is why, if we are injured anywhere in the middle then we die. If we are injured anywhere else we might survive. But in the middle, it doesn't matter where, any place there that is injured, we can die. Also the backbone is a very important thing. If the backbone is injured, life becomes very serious.

So because of that, then body, speech, and mind. The body is the head, because the most important things of the whole body is to hear, to smell, to eat and to see; these are all there, all concentrated in this little thing here, our head. Therefore this is the body. Then the most important aspect for communication happens from our throat, the voice, so that's speech. Then the centre of the nirmanadi is in the heart area, and that is the mind. But it has nothing to do with the heart.

Question: What increases awareness and mindfulness?

Rinpoche: When your ego is less dominating then everything becomes better. The bigger your ego is, the worse everything else becomes. So anything that will make your ego transform is a good thing. But trying to get rid of ego, there is no such thing; you have to transform your ego. For example, compassion makes your ego less and devotion transforms your ego even more. Compassion is more ego-friendly than devotion, therefore compassion first. But once you develop true genuine compassion, then you try to develop true genuine devotion. Once you have compassion and devotion, then mindfulness and awareness and all of the other aspects of practice will be much easier. For example, if the ocean doesn't have a strong current, then to swim in it will be easier.

So the power of your ego becomes transformed – your ego's negative power is transformed into compassion, your ego's negative power is transformed into devotion, then your ego's negative power is transformed into mindfulness and awareness. That way then your ego's basic foundation is transformed into primordial wisdom. That is the base of ego itself. When we don't understand our primordial wisdom then it becomes ego and self.

Question: In response to one of the earlier questions about mind and matter, is that the same as in one of the verses of the third Karmapa's Aspiration for Mahamudra prayer, about subject and object?

*Naturally manifesting appearances, that never truly exist,
are confused into objects.*

Spontaneous intelligence, under the power of ignorance, is confused into a self.

By the power of this dualistic fixation, beings wander in the realms of samsaric existence.

May ignorance, the root of confusion, be discovered and cut.

Rinpoche: The prayer says that outer objects never existed but are our own manifestations, our own projections that we mistake as objects. So the manifestations of our own karma, our own perceptions, we mistake as objects. Then we always recognise our ultimate limitless essence, primordial wisdom, that always manifests, but that manifestation we misunderstand as 'I', self realisation, self recognition. The recognition of primordial wisdom by primordial wisdom itself, that self-realisation, that self-recognition happens all the time but is continuously mistaken as 'I'. Therefore dualism is maintained and we are wandering in samsara, because samsara is a game; the cause, the condition and the result of dualism. As long as there is 'I' and 'other' this subject and object dualism is there – there will be attachment, liking, disliking, aggression, fear, jealousy, hatred and greed; there will be everything. That is samsara.

Samsara means 'circle'; a never-ending circle. If you are running in a circle you will never get anywhere, but you get tired and you can spend many lifetimes running around. In samsara we are serving our attachment, our anger, our jealousy, our fear, our greed and our hatred. We are doing our best to serve these like a slave, but they will never be satisfied. There will be no fulfilment; no ultimate fulfilment of anger or the others.

For example, if you kill one enemy you have to kill that enemy's friends and relatives, then their friends and relatives, and it will go all the way back to you. In the end you will have destroyed everybody in the whole world except yourself, and until that happens, your enemies will never be finished. That's how it is. Anger cannot be fulfilled like that. In the end you will be the only person in the world, but after some time some part of you will hate yourself and you will jump off a cliff. That will happen.

Then attachment for example, we go after one thing, then we find something more interesting and more desirable and go after that until we find something else. If we don't stop somewhere, if we serve our desire, it is the same as serving our anger, it will go on forever. Then if we serve our jealousy, first we will have jealousy about something or of somebody, but then if we go on, then at the end we will be jealous of ourselves! It will go on forever, we will go crazy. First we have jealousy with strangers, then with our friends, then with our family members, and then what happens? There is no end. It will go on forever.

It is the same with pride and with everything; that is samsara. Defilements can never be

fulfilled no matter how hard we work, so we have to do things to transform them.

Question: In our worldly activities and professions we sometimes think that because of our jobs we are having all these problems, we are doing worldly activities. Then we think “oh, if I was a monk or nun, it would be different, because then people would treat me differently because of this situation.” So about being an ordinary lay person, you were mentioning that whatever we do, if we do it with the correct intention that should be good enough. How should we tackle this because I think many people, those that are interested in Buddhism say “oh, it would be much different if I was a monk or a nun.”

Rinpoche: I can tell you one thing, it will be different, yes! But it will be different in many millions of ways. Whether one is a monk, a nun or an ordinary person, all of these things are just different ways of being, but it depends on what kind of ordinary person, what kind of monk and what kind of nun, and where and when and why.

For example, with myself, the whole thing was designated for me when I was eighteen months old. Do you think that is easy? I am supposed to be Lord Maitreya, Guru Rinpoche, Marpa Lotsawa, and all the eleven previous Tai Situs, all of that. And I have to maintain what they have done, and not just theoretically but practically. So I have so many things that I have to do, and to learn what I have to do takes many years. It’s definitely not easier to be a monk or a nun of that kind.

But of course, if you are a monk, a nun or even a yogi simply practicing meditation and you have no other responsibility, just purely practicing and doing retreats month after month, year after year like that, then of course it would be different. But then for that also one has to have the conditions because if you keep on doing retreat year after year, if you don’t have the means to do that, then your life can be very difficult. After some time you might find lots of reasons to make yourself unhappy; “I have done twenty years of retreat but now I have nothing and nobody respects me. Nobody cares for me and nobody serves me” That can happen, which is not very healthy.

So there are so many things. I think as you are, whatever you are doing right now, the first thing is to implement all the dharma that you have learned up to today in the life that you already have. Then learn more and enrich it and deepen it. Then whatever other kind of dharma life that you might follow, or worldly life blessed by dharma you will follow, it should evolve. And it will evolve because good things will always become better, but better doesn’t mean more comfortable or easier, but everything will be more meaningful.

I think everybody is doing wonderfully, but you should not have misgivings that all the monks and nuns have no problems, they have lots of problems. Not all of them, but different monks and different nuns have different problems. Monks and nuns of my kind have too many

responsibilities. Sometimes I have to really think very clearly and trace back for one or two hundred years to find out why something is happening now and why I'm doing something now. It's adventurous, no chance for a boring moment; never a dull moment, but white samsara.

Question: About the issue of creating good karma, maybe we know in our past life that we have done something wrong...

Rinpoche: I would definitely not worry about that. What has happened has happened, and what will happen will happen. I want to do my best with my conscience and with my effort and I will not worry. I agree with you one hundred percent about the worrying part, worrying is extra suffering. Worrying of any kind is extra suffering, so don't worry. Good things happen, bad things happen, and if we want we can worry all the time. The whole world could be given to you today and you could become the emperor of the world. Then if you want to worry, you can worry; you would have the whole world to worry about. Then tomorrow they could take away everything and you have nothing, then you can worry about having nothing to worry about. This way if we want to worry, we can worry at all times. Of course people worry about something, I think they need to otherwise they find it very boring. But no more than a reasonable dosage of worrying, then you will not get lost in worrying because worrying doesn't help. If you have a problem and you worry about it then you become disabled. Your ability to handle your problem will be lessened by your worry and your mind becomes affected by it. So try not to worry.

I don't remember my past lives, but all of those past great incarnations, if I remembered them I would be very delighted, but I don't remember them. But then there are thousands of lifetimes, millions of lifetimes, and each one of us has been everything. If I remembered even ten percent of them I would go crazy. So I actually think ignorance is a pleasure, ignorance is a joy.

Question: Rinpoche, in *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* there is a part that says that many experiences within life resemble the bardo experience, and then sometimes when you die the wrathful deities come. I couldn't understand that very well.

Rinpoche: *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* was written by one of my very good friends, I didn't read it but I think he wrote it based on the very sacred text, *Bardo Thödrol*. So for you to understand this, the relationship between life and death, I think if you understand the basic definition of 'everything is interrelated', then that will take care of that. Because whatever happens to you has everything to do with whatever happened to you. Something that has nothing to do with you will never happen to you, right?

In that way, what is going to happen in your bardo in the future, and what happened in your bardo in the past, and what is happening in your life right now, life is also a bardo – according to the six aspects of bardo only three of them are related to death, but all six you can relate to

it; the bardo is a whole teaching – everything is to do with everything.

Now the wrathful and peaceful deities – actually there are a hundred deities representing the hundred important sacred aspects of our body. This involves forty-two peaceful deities and fifty-eight wrathful deities, and then the main deity, *Chemchok* [Heruka and consort], male and female, the king and queen together [from which the hundred deities manifest]. Then all together that is a hundred deities.

These hundred deities represent all aspects of energy; if I can use a new age term. Energy sometimes sounds a little trendy to me – vibration, energy – but it really means the sacred aspect, the physical aspect as a human being of planet Earth; our body, it relates to us. So as with my answer to the earlier question about the wind and mind and when they enter into the body, in that way, how the body and mind are connected, in that, these hundred aspects are described in the bardo teachings.

In bardo practice we have a practice in the brain, we talk about the mind and the brain, and we call it the fresh, pure white mandala of the brain, like a conch shell palace of the brain. Then the east petal, west petal, south petal, north petal and central petal, and each one has deities, each of which represents different wisdoms – each wisdom is the transformation of each defilement. This is a complete practice, an absolutely full and complete elaborate practice of bardo in ritual, mandala, meditation, visualisation and so on. It is a complete tantra by itself. So that it is there.

Question: You were talking about liquid as the most subtle manifestation of the body....

Rinpoche: ...of the body of our father and mother, the white and red element. It takes twenty-nine days to form the central channel, because the egg becomes hardened and then in the middle, the air element and the mind manifesting the form of emotion, and consciousness, are superficially trapped, relatively trapped there, and that forms a tube, which is the beginning of the central channel.

From there it is like branches, flowers or fruit, everything grows in all directions – the lungs, liver, eyes, ears, nose and all the other things grow from there. For example, it is like if there is one bush here and another over there, then three rabbits living here and two rabbits there, and a vegetable garden where there are lots of carrots, the rabbits will go there, and then there will be less parts here and more parts over there. That way the winds spread and function and we have five fingers here and five toes there, two legs, two hands etc. These things develop out of that. So it is natural, almost primordial genetic engineering. It takes place naturally.

Question: Can you say the union of wind and liquid?

Rinpoche: First the union of the mind (emotion), consciousness and wind. The emotion [of the bardo being consciousness] is attracted to the [liquid in the mother] and it merges into it and then we go unconscious. Our mind becomes unconscious like somebody has hit us on the head with something. So when we die it is the separation of body and mind, we become unconscious. Then we are conceived and there is another unconsciousness, because when mind and body (which are two totally separate things) merge, it is a shock.

Question: Human life is very precious but you...

Rinpoche: No, precious human life is very precious. Precious human life is defined by eighteen things. When we meditate on the first of the four ordinary foundations, precious human life, we contemplate on eighteen aspects, and if we have those eighteen aspects in our life then our life is precious. If those things are already there, we appreciate it, we uphold it and cherish it. Those things that are not quite there, we contemplate on them and we acquire them, we develop them so as to make our human life a precious human life. Of course human life is precious; I'm not saying that it is not. I'm a human being, so human life is precious, but 'precious human life' and 'human life is precious' are different things. A 'precious human life' means a human life which has those eighteen conditions, because in that way then we can progress, and also we can help others to progress.

For example, if you don't have any intention to benefit anybody, then you will not benefit anybody, because you have no intention, you have no wish to benefit anybody. So you have to have that and then your life becomes precious.

Question: Are you saying that only in a human life one can get enlightened?

Rinpoche: I don't know, because on planet Earth Buddha Shakyamuni and the past three Buddhas before him were human, and all the other nine hundred and so on Buddhas are going to be humans. But that doesn't mean that there is no animal Buddha because in the bardo teachings we have Buddha of animals, Buddha of asuras, Buddha of gods and Buddha of hells. The six realms each have Buddhas in the bardo ritual, in bardo practice. So it doesn't mean that only humans will attain Buddhahood, but the thousand prophesized Buddhas are Buddhas of the human realm.

Question: How can we know the difference between when our mind is talking or the consciousness?

Rinpoche: Don't worry about that. If you think too much like that then you get confused for nothing, mind and consciousness are all interdependent. It's like a wave and the ocean, how can you truly tell the difference between the shape of the ocean and a wave? The wave is the ocean and the ocean is the wave. That way don't worry about it, but I think there is something else in it.

When something tells you something, sometimes you should take it seriously and sometimes you shouldn't. First of all, I think we should have a very clear purpose, intention, motivation and aspiration for our life. That is the most important first thing. Our life is not just for whatever. We want to make the best use of this life, to benefit ourselves and to benefit everybody in the best possible way. That motivation should be there.

Once that motivation is there then you have a guideline. When you think of something, when you make a decision, then on what basis, on what guideline should you think and make that decision? That way a good percentage of the job is already done once you have your motivation – your purpose of this life is already clearly decided.

In that process I use a very simple method which is: what I want, what I need and what I have. These three things are a very convenient way to conduct oneself. What I want is maybe this much, but what I need is maybe not that much. Then how much do I have already?. I might not have fifty percent of what I need to achieve what I want, but maybe I have more than enough for achieving what I need already. So in this simple way – what I want, what I need and what I have – then it becomes more clear and simple, and anything extra is a bonus. You know your limitations and you know your potential. Of course our potential is limitless, you have to know that, but you also know the limitations of your manifestation right now, then I think life will be much easier. You don't have to worry too much about listening to your mind or your heart or your thoughts or these things too much, but I think if you are very clear and very sincere already with your motivation then your heart can tell you certain things.

But if we don't have a good heart and a clear mind then I don't think our heart tells us much, because there isn't anybody living there who is awake, it is sleeping, so no matter how much you call it will not answer. So I think in order to have somebody to listen to we have to develop a good heart first. Then we can listen to it.

Question: Rinpoche, earlier you were talking about our basic essence as our seed and I was wondering if this is the same as or similar to Buddha nature and primordial wisdom?

Rinpoche: It is. Primordial wisdom, Buddha nature, ultimate bodhichitta, ultimate emptiness, *yeshe*, and *rigpa*, all of them are the same thing.

Same Student: Also mindfulness and awareness?

Rinpoche: *Trenpa* and *she shin* have nothing to do with Buddha nature. Of course it has everything to do with Buddha nature but it is not about Buddha nature. You have to have somebody to be *trenpa*. *Trenpa* means remembering, so you have to have something to remember – remember your motivation, your bodhichitta, all the time. Remembering, that is *trenpa*, I call that awareness. Then *she shin* means whatever you do, do it knowingly. So if you have done things and you don't know you have done them that is not mindful, that is mindless. So do things mindfully.

Question: The five aggregates, other than form, the other four – feeling, perception, formation and consciousness – are all part of the makeup of mind...

Rinpoche: We would say all of them, including form. Form has everything to do with mind because how forms exists, how we affect form, how forms affect us, all this is our karma; it is the manifestation of our karma. So from that point of view it has everything to do with mind. But why they separate is because as it manifests, that is an inanimate object.

Question: My question is on what basis is this division or classification. Because what you said is absolutely correct because in one sense, excluding form, the other four are more a classification of mind...

Rinpoche: These things happen when you learn so much about dialectic logic. Because when you have to exercise your dialectic principals to debate you get caught very easily, therefore just separate form away and then everything else is easier to deal with.

I will end here, and I hope that this subject is meaningful for you and I enjoyed very much talking about it. Because of my great Masters I am able to say something from my heart and it seems to benefit everybody in their own way. So I'm grateful for that and dedicate the merit of these teachings for the benefit of all sentient beings to attain Buddhahood.

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