



**The Four Immeasurables in the Context of  
Ethics, Meditation, and Wisdom  
by  
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I am very happy to come to Vancouver and to see you all here – the members of Kagyu Kunchab Chöling, the members of Dharmadhatu, and all those who came to attend this seminar.

It is of primary importance while receiving the instructions on the Buddhadharma to generate the pure motivation of the enlightened mind. Therefore, please cultivate the altruistic motivation and listen to the instructions attentively. What is the pure motivation of the enlightened mind? It is to not only receive the teachings to understand Buddhism for our personal well-being but to be able to help a limitless number of sentient beings by integrating the dharma in our lives. The altruistic motivation is the wish to receive the teachings in order to truly be able to help others.

Lord Buddha presented innumerable teachings. The quintessence of all dharma instructions is: moral discipline, correct meditative absorption, and superior knowledge or prajna in Sanskrit. Nothing is excluded from these three topics. We need to integrate all three aspects into our lives when we embark on the spiritual journey Buddha Shakyamuni showed us.

The three stages tread in Buddhism correspond with, the valid view, correct meditation, and proper conduct.

**Wisdom**

Knowledge, discriminating wisdom or prajna concerns the correct view. Why? We all know that samsara or “cyclic existence” entails suffering and wish to become free of the inadequacies of conditioned existence by achieving nirvana or “freedom from suffering.” Merely understanding that samsara is suffering and nirvana is peace is not sufficient to attain liberation. We must have thorough knowledge of what samsara and nirvana actually are in order to attain the

correct view concerning the ultimate reality of dharmata, "suchness, meaningfulness, being as such," which enables us to properly focus our attention on the healthy and pure outlook.

Without the basis of the correct view, we would not be able to follow the path of the Buddhadharma, which eventually leads to fruition. For example, if someone intends to reach a specific destination without knowing where it is located or how to get there, they could not possibly arrive. They must study all details of their journey before setting out. Similarly, the proper view is essential before embarking on the spiritual path to enlightenment. The healthy view is the irremissible condition for meditative practices. Lacking the view, we persist with our materialistic ideas and remain beset by spiritual materialism.

How does an individual fall into beliefs such as spiritual materialism? An example is, a practitioner learns about the result and falsely aspires to achieve personal strength or fame by engaging in tantra. They know nothing about reality and the truth of emptiness (Skt. *shunyata*), and falsely assume nothing exists. They only win a sophistic understanding of emptiness and fabricate their own conclusions.

In order to apply the correct practices of the path, which eventually lead to the fruition of liberation, the valid view is indispensable. Why? Buddha's teachings are quite vast, especially those of the Mahayana and Madhyamaka traditions.<sup>1</sup> The Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, summarized Lord Buddha's teachings in *The Mahamudra Prayer* and wrote, "May all beings achieve the meaning of the ground, the two truths free of the extremes of existence and nonexistence."

The ground is free of discursive extreme assumptions concerning existence and nonexistence, eternalism and nihilism, a few of the most formidable views.

What do the two truths refer to? We experience the world of appearances in and around us as relative reality. Relatively, we experience the world as it appears to us. Absolutely, we can experience the world as it is by nature. Ordinary experiences are therefore called "relative truths." The ultimate experience is ascertaining the true nature of each experience and appearance, recognizing the reality of being.

There is no opposition between the relative and ultimate truths. The essence of being is emptiness. Not knowing that every experience and appearance only arise in dependence upon causes and conditions, a bewildered mind insists that phenomena inherently exist as solid and unique entities. This extreme view concerning existence, we could also say concerning

existents, is called "the eternalistic view." Since it is possible to fall into the extreme view which believes all things independently, inherently, permanently, and concretely exist of their own accord, there is the opposite possibility of falling into the extreme view which believes nothing exists at all, called "the nihilistic view."

Buddhist scholars first explain the wrong views in order to clarify matters so that students do not become stuck in their studies of the wrong views and fall into them. Furthermore, others may conclude that those who don't believe in Buddha sustain a false psychological outlook. This isn't the definition of the term "wrong view," rather, it refers to a deluded mind that believes in and insists upon such concepts as eternalism or nihilism, which inevitably hinder them from realizing the true nature of being since beliefs have a deadening effect.

What then is the healthy view? Understanding that all perceivable and conceivable realities manifest due to the law of interdependent origination; all things are empty of independent existence, the reason they manifest dependently. Should phenomena independently exist, appearances could not arise. In other words, since phenomena depend upon causes and conditions for their existence, creation is possible. The *Prajnaparamita Sutra* summarizes this topic: "Form is empty, emptiness is form."

Emptiness isn't a state that sweeps away or covers up form, nor does form cover up emptiness, rather form and emptiness inseparably coexist. Emptiness is the fact that all outer and inner things lack inherent existence; emptiness is the basis, the stratum for interdependent development to occur at all, the only meaning of shunyata or "emptiness."

Maybe it will be clearer if I give an example. The term "human being" embraces such attributes as the body, head, etc. Relatively, that is a human being. Ultimately, human being is a mere label given to a specific compound that the mind clings to as "human being." For example, if we examine a person, we will never find they inherently exist of his or her own accord. We first discover that the body and the consciousness are not identical. Then we discover the body consists of many parts and understand that a head is a head and not a human being. A hand isn't a human being and neither are the legs or the stomach. Each composite as well as the aggregation of all composites is but a label, a definition. We see that a human being isn't really the human being we usually believe in.

The head isn't a head because it is comprised of eyes, ears, a nose, and so forth. There is no head existing independently or of its own accord. The eye, too, is an aggregation of composites. You can search for man, his head, or eyes until you reach an atom, also divided into many parts. Back to our example: No human being exists the way we think or believe, that is the truth about the real nature of the term "human being," in short, the truth of reality.

The problem is we cling to existents as a whole, as solid, unique, and permanent entities, which is “the eternalistic view.” Since we cling to existents as though they permanently exist of their own accord, we also assume nothing exists at all. In truth though, nothing exists nor doesn’t not exist. The middle view that sees the truth of reality is the inseparability of the two truths.

An accomplished practitioner of the Buddhadharmā sees that a person exists as a human being and simultaneously knows they don’t exist ultimately – they realize the non-contradictory truth of existence and nonexistence. Contradictions or oppositions are mind-made, they are mental fabrications. An existent can’t ever not exist, nor can a nonexistent ever exist until appropriated. Mind creates contradictions because it clings to the one or other false suppositions.

When we talk about relative truth, people think it is something we must negate and the ultimate is something special we must affirm. They think shunyata or “emptiness” is created through meditation practice and enables them to perceive that nothing at all exists, which is an improper understanding. Shunyata can’t be created; it is the essence of all phenomena and penetrates all things. You need to understand this theme.

If you don’t understand the correct or valid view, many misunderstandings will arise and confuse you. Unfortunately, a lot of people are confused. This is one of the reasons I said that outer phenomena arise out of emptiness – appearances can only arise because of emptiness. Relatively, things exist. You do not create their nonexistence – their essence is nonexistence. The existence and nonexistence of all things are inseparable. You don’t manufacture emptiness it is the true nature of reality.

We try not to become trapped in the two extreme attitudes of eternalism and nihilism but abide in the middle, the middle path beyond assumptions about existents and nonexistents. We know objects by nature neither exist nor do not non-exist. We realize only our mind clings and holds on to objects as permanent existents or as nonexistents. We see it is but our mind that discriminates and not the objects in themselves.

What causes the mind to fabricate permanent existence to appearances while objects in themselves are non-discriminate? Mind’s nature consists of two aspects, emptiness and clarity.<sup>ii</sup> By failing to realize mind’s empty nature, one fabricates the idea of a self, an “I,” a “mine.” By failing to realize mind’s clear aspect, one fabricates the existence of other, of objects. By clinging to the inherent existence of an experienced subject and experienced objects, duality is born, the basis for delusion, called “ignorance.”

It is due to ignorance that we fail to recognize our mind's empty essence and thus cling to a subject, a self, and why we fail to recognize mind's clear nature and thus cling to objects, other. Failing to recognize both aspects of the mind, we are beset by the extreme beliefs of eternalism and nihilism.

The enlightened one, the Buddha, said, "Unless you break through dualistic fixations that lead you to cling to a subject and object, liberation from suffering in conditioned existence is impossible." Further, "All phenomena are projections of the mind, they are mental fabrications." When a practitioner of the Buddhadharma has overcome grasping at duality, he or she has attained nirvana or "peace." When a practitioner is not restrained from duality, he or she continues wandering in the futile hopes of samsara and must necessarily suffer. Nirvana isn't another location, realm, or planet one aspires to reach but is the cessation of clinging to the conviction of one's own importance – to duality.

We now see why a healthy attitude is essential when we apply the practices Lord Buddha transmitted to us. The correct view prevents us from falling into extreme beliefs and enables us to cut through all discriminating thoughts. We win the valid view by studying prajna, "superior knowledge" or "discriminating wisdom," knowledge discerning the true nature of reality. Having attained prajna, we have established the correct view that sustains the development of all that is healthy and indispensable for the actual practice of all that leads to the reward of liberation.

### **Correct Meditative Absorption**

I have elaborated the importance of gaining knowledge of the view by studying prajna, a knowledge that enables a practitioner to properly understand the true nature of things as they are. Prajna is the expansive knowledge of reality. Also I mentioned why it is impossible to accomplish enlightenment with a mere intellectual understanding and, why meditation practice is indispensably based on knowledge or discriminating wisdom.

Now, what is meditation? Ordinary and specific mental evenness, a state of tranquility in which continuous awareness throughout all concerns of life is maintained. Meditation without awareness is not meditation. A mere intellectual understanding of the Buddhist view is not sufficient unless integrated with proper meditation practice.

As it is, our mind is swept into distractions through the power and force of disturbing emotions. Being continuously distracted by our emotions, we have no control over our mind. For this reason, it is impossible to perfectly realize the true nature of our mind. The true nature of our mind is the tathagatagarbha, the "Buddha nature or matrix for Buddhahood."

Since our mind is completely determined by our disturbing emotions, we cannot realize our potential within and remain overwhelmed by unwholesome distractions.

Again, our mind is constantly distracted and therefore totally controlled by our mental defilements. In order to win control over our mind, we need to develop the habit of disciplined awareness. We need to know it is possible to overcome uncontrolled emotional distractions by engaging in meditation practice. Samadhi or “mental calmness” experienced during meditation practice enables an individual to become wakefully aware and to gradually develop profound insight. While sustaining an improper view and holding on to extreme beliefs concerning existence, meditation practice is in vain. Correct meditation practice presupposes correct knowledge, knowledge that is free of mental beliefs of any kind.

Clinging to the peace one experiences during practice is an obstacle to meditation and not correct. Furthermore, clinging to the experience of emptiness one fathoms during practice is another obstacle to proper meditation – one thinks one has entered deep tranquility whereas one has only met with the biggest obstacle one has ever encountered during one’s life.

On the one side, it sounds funny, but this really happens. When a lot of people meditate, they think they should not think, which is true because thoughts distract us from achieving calmness. On the other hand, thoughts in themselves are not wrong – they arise from mind’s empty essence. The problem is we are attached and attracted to our thoughts. In *The Lineage Prayer*<sup>iii</sup> we read that the essence of thoughts is the dharmakaya, which should not be rejected. Everything arises out of emptiness, out of the dharmakaya. Many practitioners fall into a dull torpor and think those moments are deep meditative absorption, they do not even notice time passing but think they have achieved a state of profound insight, which isn’t true because they lack awareness. If you don’t have awareness, you don’t have meditation and have encountered a hidden obstacle. So, be very careful. Meditation without awareness is not meditation.

We need to become familiar with meditation. The great masters of the past taught us that meditation denotes developing familiarization, developing habituation.<sup>iv</sup> Which familiarization do we need to develop? Mindfulness and awareness are the conditions for self-improvement. Habituating ourselves to both mindfulness and awareness is meditation. Also, proper meditation doesn’t mean discursively accepting or rejecting obstacles to meditation.

**The Four Immeasurables:  
Love, compassion, joy, and equanimity**

May all beings enjoy happiness and have whatever causes happiness,  
May they be free from suffering and whatever causes suffering,  
May they never be separated from the pure happiness which is without suffering,

May they remain in great equanimity beyond attachment or aversion to things near and far.

A practitioner of the Buddhadharma needs to generate and cultivate bodhichitta, the “enlightened attitude,” by contemplating the four immeasurables in order to meditate properly. The four immeasurable contemplations embrace all living beings.

A practitioner first develops true love, a true love wishing all sentient beings have happiness and the causes for happiness. We contemplate that all sentient beings were once our dear parents. We know that we ourselves want to be happy and free of suffering and understand others also wish this. Since beings, our parents, do not know how to attain happiness and how to eliminate suffering due to the force of ignorance, they incessantly wander in the vicious rounds of conditioned existence. We generate true love wishing all have ultimate happiness and pray, “May all beings enjoy happiness and have whatever causes happiness,” the first immeasurable contemplation on true love which manifests itself in a way that all ill-will is removed. True love is the basis for compassion. When there is love for others, consideration for their well-being becomes alive. We don’t only wish they have happiness and its causes but feel we wish them to be free of suffering and its causes.

What causes suffering? Ignorance that engenders clinging to duality. We understand that sentient beings experience mental and physical anguish in the six realms of cyclic or conditioned existence.<sup>v</sup> There are three types of suffering: all-pervasive suffering, the suffering of change, and the suffering of suffering. The suffering of suffering and the suffering of change are easily comprehensible; since there is birth, life is inevitably subject to sickness, old age, and death.<sup>vi</sup>

We must know the significance of all-pervasive suffering, which arises from ideating self-importance. Clinging to a self brings forth birth in dependence upon the five skandhas or aggregates of being. All beings wish to be free from conditioned inadequacies but lead their lives overpowered by clinging to the five skandhas as a self and consequently experience suffering. Even while seeking happiness beings often accumulate further causes and conditions to experience misery due to deludedness.

We understand that no single being wants to experience suffering but does so on account of karma, the infallible law of cause and effect.<sup>vii</sup> We learn to feel for their situation and pray, “May they be free from suffering and whatever causes suffering,” the second immeasurable contemplation on true compassion, which advances participation in others and decreases the sense of self-importance.

Having developed immeasurable love and compassion, we pray, "May they never be separated from the pure happiness which is without suffering." We feel joy in the happy circumstances beings have encountered, the third immeasurable contemplation on true joy, which overcomes unwillingness.

We realize that the frustrations beings experience are based upon their aspiration to attain happiness and their fear of experiencing pain, their fear of losing happiness and aspiration not to encounter pain.

They therefore accept whoever and whatever they feel will fulfill their hopes and reject whoever and whatever obstructs their hopes so consequently foster a biased attitude of attachment and aversion, which brings forth the source and cause for all anguish, discursiveness and discrimination. We pray, "May they remain in great equanimity beyond attachment or aversion to things near and far," the fourth immeasurable contemplation on true impartiality, which cannot be disturbed by sympathies for nor antipathies against someone.

Our heart-felt love, compassion, joy, and equanimity are the four immeasurables.

What does the word "immeasurable" mean? It does not refer to a quantitative size or number. We have heard that the impartial view is a prerequisite to correctly engage in meditation practice. Non-discursive wisdom engenders ascertaining the indivisibility of the relative and ultimate truths. Correct application engenders realizing the indivisibility of skillful means and wisdom. Skillful means are those practices Lord Buddha taught us to generate true love and compassion, bodhichitta or "the altruistic mind of enlightenment." Realization is never immeasurable without true love, compassion, joy, and impartiality. Skillful means unified with superior knowledge gained by studying the view leads to an immeasurable frame of mind, the reason the four contemplations are called "the four immeasurables."

Skillful means also refer to the six perfections or paramitas: generosity, moral discipline, patience, enthusiastic perseverance, concentration, and wisdom.<sup>viii</sup> The term "generosity" alone does not describe perfection. Perfection of any paramita is based upon freedom from the three mental discriminations concerning the existence of a self, an object, and an action.

An accomplished individual knows there is nobody being generous to anybody receiving anything. Perfection means not clinging to those three aspects. Realizing emptiness means realizing non-duality, a non-discursive and non-discriminating mental state free of clinging to any mental contrivances whatsoever. Likewise, when we meditate on true love and compassion, we do not think, "I am meditating on love and compassion toward others."

We now see why many teachings, especially those handed down to us by Gampopa in *The*

*Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, stress the importance of applying skillful means and wisdom. A true follower of the Buddhadharma must unify skillful means and wisdom in order to actualize the true reward.

Many followers know that the main theme in Buddhism is emptiness and mistakenly wonder why they should accumulate merit and engage in virtuous activities. Traditionally, such an attitude is described as “decorating oneself with emptiness” – an individual hasn’t recognized that skillful means and wisdom must be practiced together. Other followers know that Buddhism emphasizes the importance of practicing skillful means and mistakenly wonder why they should accumulate wisdom; they then foster false hopes which eventually bring about fearful experiences and frustration – an individual hasn’t recognized that wisdom and skillful means must be practiced together.

By the virtue of employing both wisdom and skillful means on the path, two accomplishments arise. First, an accomplished individual realizes how things really are by having overcome the emotional obscurations. One has achieved realization of emptiness, the first purpose of practice. Secondly, an accomplished individual realizes how things manifest and achieves the ability to effortlessly help all beings in the world in accordance with their mental propensities. One has achieved the serenity of their innate qualities, the second purpose of practice.

By the virtue of attaining wisdom and actualizing the skillful means, two perfections manifest: complete elimination of the subtlest obscurations<sup>ix</sup> through realization of the true nature of all things, which benefits oneself, and, complete realization of mind’s unimpeded nature, which enables the practitioner to properly benefit others in accordance with their mental propensities.<sup>x</sup>

So, the correct view does lead a practitioner to accomplishments on the path. We now understand why it is necessary to integrate the knowledge of the view with the practices of the path.

## **Ethics**

I want to remind everyone to generate the pure frame of mind when we receive Lord Buddha’s instructions. We aspire to benefit all beings and therefore listen to the teachings attentively. You may have heard about the importance of maintaining a pure motivation while receiving the teachings many times. It is said that one needs to be free of three faults, compared with a vessel, when one learns the Buddhadharma.

The first fault is likened with a vessel turned upside down. Nothing can flow into the container

– the fault of being inattentive. We need to be interested in the teachings and feel joy by appreciating the fact that we are receiving them.

The second fault is compared with a bowl with holes in the bottom. Whatever is poured into the bowl inevitably leaks out again – the fault of not remembering the teachings. The error of forgetting the instructions is caused by insufficient interest and devotion in Lord Buddha's words. We should remember that all teachings originated with Shakyamuni Buddha and need to hear them with three types of confidence: trusting, longing, and lucid. If we listen to the Buddha's teachings with devotion and respect, we are free of the second fault.

The third fault is compared with a perfect container that has no holes and is turned up correctly but is filled with poison. Anything poured into the bowl automatically becomes contaminated. Similarly, we need to be free of an impure attitude while we receive the holy dharma.

I have discussed knowledge and meditation and will now elaborate the study of moral discipline or ethics.

The great teachers of the past explained that the foundation for pure knowledge is discipline or ethics, the foundation for all knowledge and qualities we aspire to develop. Discipline is likened with the foundation for any building and is just as decisive. It is a function, a force in our mental life, our awareness, and understanding, and relates to body, speech, and mind.

Why is ethics of body, speech, and mind the ground for omniscience? A practitioner lacking ethics by not knowing how things really are clings to duality, to a subject and object, and consequently fosters sympathy and antipathy, which bring forth attachment and aversion; negative karma is therefore accumulated. An individual is completely overpowered by the impact and outburst of their emotional defilements without discipline or ethics. This does not mean such a person doesn't possess the Buddha potential. Being overwhelmed and thus controlled by disturbing emotions and by acting wrongly on account, their pure potential is obscured, called the "obscuration of disturbing emotions," the reason they are not able to experience enlightenment within.

For example, at the first turning of the wheel of dharma,<sup>xi</sup> Lord Buddha taught the four noble truths. The first is the truth of suffering. Lord Buddha said we must know the truth of suffering. The second is the truth of the origin of suffering. He said we must give up the causes for all suffering. The causes for suffering can be either negative karma or kleshas, "disturbing emotions," which must be given up and eliminated.

Buddhism investigates the mind poisons (kleshas), the first being the inability to know mind's

true nature, and teaches that we grasp at mental fabrications concerning a truly existing subject and object on account. The first poison of ignorance means not knowing the empty and clear aspect of our mind. Because there is clinging to a subject and object, the mind poisons of attachment and aggression evolve. We are attached to those we feel we want near us and hostile against those we don't want near us. These three mind poisons – ignorance, attachment, and aversion – cause us to unceasingly engage in negative activities. We consequently accumulate mental, physical, and verbal active processes, karma.

In short: We live our lives completely overpowered by the three mind poisons. Many other poisons arise from the first three. Since we are completely controlled by them, we are not free but accumulate further negative karma of body, speech, and mind – the origin of all misery. Karma is accumulated by the mind, by the body, and through our speech.

Our mind is driven and controlled by our disturbing emotions and therefore obscured. When negative thoughts arise we act and speak accordingly. Habits are accumulated and subside into the ground consciousness, where they are stored to arise again when conditions are appropriate.<sup>xii</sup> Our habitual patterns cause us to incessantly repeat if not intensify negativity and then to encounter the ripening of our karma, the reason we are confused and wander in the inadequacies of conditioned existence, samsara. Again: What is confusion? Having built up habitual patterns during past lives, which are stored in our ground consciousness, we are driven by and intensify our mental patterns.

It is possible to become free of all habitual patterns that drive us into inadequate tendencies. How? We first need to know and understand that we can become free of misery by giving up and eliminating our habitual patterns. Knowing we can become free we stop accumulating further negativity and attempt to build up positive habits.

Ethics is a function and drives us to develop awareness and mindfulness of the infallible law of cause and effect, to act correctly. Through mindfulness and awareness, we are restrained from blindly insisting upon negative conduct and are encouraged to act beneficially.

We may think ethics, or moral discipline, only applies to those persons who have entered ordination, or is only of relevance to those who have taken vows. This is not so. Ethics means developing awareness and mindfulness to stop negativity and engage in positive actions of body, speech, and mind. The purpose of moral discipline is to win control over the kleshas, the "mind poisons," which determine our lives while in a mental state of deludedness.

What I'm trying to say is that discipline is an essential practice. You shouldn't think practitioners take vows to satisfy personal aims. If somebody maintains mindfulness, they aren't overpowered by emotions and needn't take vows. But it is very difficult. You know you

should not misbehave, but when the situation occurs, you aren't able to uphold mindfulness. This is the reason Lord Buddha said that it is very important to take vows. Fully ordained monks and nuns have emotions, desire, and so forth. They can't immediately apply awareness but they remember, "I took the vows and am wearing the robes." It helps. Monks and nuns don't want to be seen as different because they wear robes. I'm not happy when people stare at me while I walk around. People don't know why I wear the robes, why I took the vows. But, I have a feeling of more value from having taken the vows. The real meaning of the vows and of upholding them is to develop mindfulness of what is healthy and beneficial. I hope I have made this clear and not confused you.

The reason I want to stress this is because it is so important to understand. I was asked about the transformation of emotions into wisdom. When people hear such things they think it isn't important to take and hold the vows because negativity can easily be transformed. This isn't true. In order to transform negativity, you first need to be able to control yourself.

There are teachings that describe how emotions are the path to enlightenment. These can mislead us. This doesn't mean we may misbehave in order to achieve omniscience. This doesn't mean we may arouse negativity. Rather, we must have control over ourselves. The virtue of a refined mind having control means not being subject to mental defilements. A practitioner hasn't eliminated all defilements but has pacified them to the extent that they gradually win control. By realizing the essence of all defilements – emptiness – it is possible to transform emotional defilements.

Moral discipline or ethics denotes giving up negative activities and continuously maintaining mindfulness and alertness of body, speech, and mind, whether one has taken vows or not. It means maintaining alertness not only while one meditates in a shrine room but during all daily concerns, during our life in the world where we encounter intolerable and deplorable situations. We then and there need to generate perseverance and love.

Love and compassion in the midst of difficulties are proper actions following the valid view and correct meditation practice. "Shila" in Sanskrit or "perfect ethics," is the essence of bodhichitta and the conduct of a bodhisattva. Perfect conduct of a bodhisattva is a state not shattered or discouraged by any hardships or hindrances in benefiting others. A bodhisattva's capacity to help others isn't shaken by the time it takes. They will never give up their pure intention in helping others, even it takes them eons.

## **Questions**

**Question:** Rinpoche, could you please explain a little further the difference between emptiness and interdependence? Are the two the same at any point?"

**Rinpoche:** The great teacher Nagarjuna explained the connection between interdependence and emptiness. He said there could be no interdependent origination without emptiness. Everything that exists is an aggregation of innumerable particles. Aggregation itself is the interdependent relation. A smallest particle doesn't exist. Take a bundle of sticks leaning against each other to form a stalk. They are only a stalk because they lean against each other. Should you remove some sticks, the bundle would collapse. A bundle exemplifies interdependent existence. A further example for the fact that nothing exists as the label we give it. We define the right depending on the left. The left isn't on the left of its own accord. Further, there is only an up where there is a down. Where there is tall, there is short; there is no reality to the shortness of something shorter than something that is longer. It is but a mental concept and only exists interdependently as short. All things arise out of emptiness, so the arising of interdependence takes place out of emptiness.

**Question:** Is it possible to achieve beneficial results through such an intellectual analysis?"

**Rinpoche:** You cannot achieve realization through intellectual analysis. As I said in the beginning, in order to practice correctly, you need all three conditions: the right view, correct meditation, and proper conduct, which are applicable in everyday life. That is why it is said: "In order to practice dharma, you must develop the three knowledges that arise from hearing,<sup>xiii</sup> contemplating, and meditating on the instructions." You must practice all three together. If you don't have an intellectual understanding and only meditate, it will not be possible to attain realization because you need to know how and what to meditate on. In fact, the great master Saraha said: "Without knowledge, meditation can cause us to become more foolish." The path is based on the view. The view, path, and fruition are connected with each other. The view describes the ultimate nature; it clarifies our misunderstandings. The path must be based on the view. It is important to apply all three, which can't come about from books. It is impossible to achieve realization from books.

**Question:** Rinpoche, I wonder if you would describe what the clarity aspect would be like from the point of view of experience, clarity as opposed to the emptiness aspect? Are the two not separable?

**Rinpoche:** Actually, realization of shunyata or "emptiness" is the actual experience of the inseparability of clarity and emptiness. Experiencing one aspect isn't experiencing perfect emptiness because emptiness possesses the aspect of clarity, which in itself is appearance, i.e., since the mind is empty, you can arouse loving kindness and compassion, shunyata's qualities. Shunyata isn't a blank mental state. Clarity is an aspect of emptiness.

**Question:** What would clarity actually be like? It seems in some ways when one practices it is easier to experience emptiness, dropping conceptualizations, and so forth.

**Rinpoche:** The real experience of clarity is self-knowing, self-seeing. When you look for the mind and cannot find it, you discover its nonexistence. At the same time, though, the mind has the potential to know everything, to see, called "self-knowing," "rang-rig" in Tibetan – mind's clarity. Compassion is also clarity since it arises.

**Question:** It sounds as if emptiness can be more aroused by Shamatha and clarity more by Vipashyana practice?

**Rinpoche:** You couldn't say that. You focus more on emptiness by looking into the mind. Vipashyana can be more the emptiness aspect too. It depends. You can't really separate.

**Question:** Rinpoche, could you talk about how this view relates to good and bad? It seems as human beings we search for pleasures and try to push away negative experiences. From this point of view it seems both have equal quality somehow. What is the correct view of good and bad?

**Rinpoche:** Relatively, there is good and bad; from the relative view, yes, "This is good and that is bad." But genuine goodness is freedom from such ideas concerning good or bad. It is always good, ultimately nothing is not good. People seek the good from dualistic notions concerning good, which can change in any moment or at any time. That is transitory joy and is not lasting, so no matter how much pleasure people achieve they are never satisfied. Genuine happiness is changeless.

**Question:** How do we transform emotions into wisdom?

**Rinpoche:** Your question is very advanced. In order to transform negative emotions into wisdom you first need to have experienced shunyata otherwise transformation is impossible. Transformation of the emotions into wisdom isn't something you simply think. You don't think the moment you are angry that it is wisdom. Transformation is freedom from clinging, which alone enables you to transform negativity. In order to do that, you first have to be able to control anger and the other emotions when they arise. This means you first need to recognize in order to control them. It is then possible to transform emotions otherwise it's impossible.

**Question:** What is the quality of mirror-like wisdom?<sup>xiv</sup>

**Rinpoche:** A mirror has the capacity to reflect any form. Even when an image is reflected in a mirror there is no truly existing form in the mirror. The mirror simply has the capacity to reflect images clearly. Although it is apparent and clearly reflected in a mirror, it is evident that there is no true, solid existent in the mirror. Mirror-like wisdom concerns the inseparability of emptiness and clarity.

**Question:** Would Rinpoche speak about the transmission of the mind?

**Rinpoche:** Actually, in order to receive the real instructions on mind transmission, you must have finished certain practices. It isn't possible to simply explain them since they are the quintessence of all teachings. What I can tell you is that ego is the basis for ignorance; ignorance is not knowing mind's empty essence. We therefore cling to the "I," to the self. Not understanding mind's clarity, we cling to the identity of others, of objects, both the cause for samsara. Due to clinging you have desire, then you develop animosity toward others. Sympathy and antipathy give birth to the emotions, which determine your activities. You then accumulate habits that subside into the ground consciousness. When causes and conditions come together, karma ripens and clinging intensifies.

**Question:** Your Eminence, I want to follow the question about controlling the kleshas by first recognizing to control and then to transform them. I was wondering about the controlling step. Is it pushing them away or not acting by just watching them go away?

**Rinpoche:** Yes, but sometimes you can push them away, which isn't the best way of doing it. If you push emotions away, they come up again. It's better not to act.

**Question:** From the *Kungtsen-la-mai-sha-lo* we were told there are three levels of practitioners. The first level of practitioner is one who practices virtue over non-virtue, the second level of practitioner is one who sees life as a dream, and the third level of practitioner is one who does nothing. This seems to be a bit of a contradiction. If the highest form of practitioner does nothing, I see great lamas building stupas and doing all kinds of things. It seems a contradiction. Do you agree with that statement that there are three levels in those categories?

**Rinpoche:** Yes, I agree. But I want to tell you that the third type of practitioner does not sleep. Doing nothing has a meaning. Doing nothing shouldn't be taken literally. Buddha said – I'm sure you have heard this many times – that he never taught any teachings from his point of view. Since he achieved omniscience, he is beyond teaching by the one teaching to the one who needs to be taught. He said he never taught any teachings. From the point of view of the students, there are so many teachings taught by Lord Buddha, who taught without any effort.

**Question:** What is the best way to achieve the best view, the proper view, if meditation alone isn't sufficient?

**Rinpoche:** Because we are subject to the relative view, we go back and review our view.

**Student:** It's a practice on its own?

**Rinpoche:** You have to apply the view, meditation, and action. It's the best way to achieve the right view.

**Question:** This is kind of the same question. As you contemplate shunyata, you come to a point where everything disappears. Your teacher disappears. The devotion you have is still there. Then that disappears too and you say, No, I have to have that to practice. So you are rather attached to that devotion. What I'm trying to ask is where do you put him? Is he shunyata too? Sorry.

**Rinpoche:** No, it's very interesting. How do you concentrate on shunyata?

**Student:** That's a good question. I guess it's just kind of dark at this point. There's a sense of questioning.

**Rinpoche:** You said the teacher disappears, right? Do you mean his physical body?

**Student:** No, not his physical body, beside when he dies. The question arises, are they dead?

**Rinpoche:** So, what do you mean by the teacher disappears?

**Student:** His part of the mind is also apart of a projection and takes on the same quality.

**Rinpoche:** The ultimate teacher is not a physical form. The physical form is a tool you communicate with. The essence of the *lama* is the dharmakaya, which is beyond form; the dharmakaya has no form. It is beyond life and death, the real teacher is said to be inseparable from your own mind. Since it is difficult for a beginner to comprehend that level, you need the physical teacher you can communicate with. I think your question refers to the level of teacher you are communicating with. Even though you contemplate shunyata, the dharmakaya doesn't disappear.

**Student:** To separate the *three kayas* is rather difficult. I have to relate to the physical presence of the teacher here, therefore the point is more devotion and respect and the view of

the teacher in this form. If this is a projection, then how am I to judge or view my own projection?

**Rinpoche:** I think you should know this: It says that in order to understand ultimate reality you need to work with relative reality. You cannot just reject relative reality – it is a truth. If something disappears, it is not a good understanding of shunyata, in that case you should be careful. Maybe you are falling into the nihilistic view. You should contemplate more.

**Question:** If I'm meditating and the I-consciousness arises, it seems to become interpreted as a thought. As I hear a bird and "bird" comes to my mind, if I let go of this thought still maintaining awareness and not being blank, what am I aware of? Does this mean when I hear or see things, I don't label them or is there some other level of awareness all together?

**Rinpoche:** Is the awareness you are referring to the knowledge that the sound is that of a bird?

**Student:** Does this mean I don't say to myself, "Ah, a bird," but am only aware without making it a concept or is there some other awareness sort of beyond what I should be aware of when I'm not blank?

**Rinpoche:** First, when you meditate and thoughts arise, you need to be aware of the thoughts. You need not do any more. When you recognize a thought, you just ignore it and bring your mind back to the practice you are doing, whether it is Shamatha or any other practice.

**Student:** If I'm not being aware of something, how do I know I'm not being blank?

**Rinpoche:** Even though you don't have specific thoughts during meditation, the mind has the potential to know. This is what is called "awareness," to know or to see what is happening. You should maintain that awareness.

**Student:** So, it's the potential to be aware as opposed to shutting it out and not being able to be aware?

**Rinpoche:** Yes.

**Question:** You said after that familiarization was necessary.

**Rinpoche:** First you need effort. As you develop, it comes naturally. You needn't develop mindfulness because mindfulness is always present. You are aware of everything. Even if you are doing something, your mind is always aware.

**Question:** Blanking out as opposed to mindfulness doesn't happen then. If you then familiarize yourself with awareness, you will not blank out. I guess my question is similar to the previous one. I made a note when you described that, so how do you develop awareness that you are being mindful rather than being blank. If one develops the familiarization you speak of, then you have awareness during the time you are familiar and not blank. Am I correct in that?

**Rinpoche:** In the ordinary state, whatever we engage in, our mind is distracted by our engagement and we aren't aware. Familiarization means developing an awareness that is mindful, even when you are engaging in activities. That ability to maintain mindfulness is familiarization.

**Question:** This question probably shows my own ignorance. I'm a bit bothered by one step in immeasurable compassion development and that is when you think of sentient beings suffering and having created suffering out of their own ignorance. I've always been bothered by this a little bit. It seems that the meditator sets himself apart and sort of looks down on others as ignorant by separating. Compassion kind of degenerates into pity, like, "Poor sentient beings!" Could you comment on that?

**Rinpoche:** It's quite the opposite. Immeasurable compassion means knowing that the enlightened nature equally abides within every living being without exception. Although it abides in all, the confused mind fails to recognize its true nature and experiences unnecessary pain. Knowing all have the Buddha nature, true compassion is possible. We should not look down but understand everyone's situation.

**Question:** Is there a principle following the path where one would decide what to focus on within the limited time we have for meditation. Do we focus on developing the four immeasurables, contemplating shunyata, giving and taking? Is it one's own inclination at a particular time to meditate on compassion or on emptiness?

**Rinpoche:** The best thing is to follow your teacher's instructions, if you have a teacher you can consult. The teacher should know your level of progress and can then tell you which aspect of practice is more important for you. Your teacher is the one who should tell you and you should follow him. If you don't have anybody to ask, then I guess you meditate on emptiness one day and the rest the others. In the beginning, I think you should develop compassion, bodhichitta. That's more important.

**Question:** I'm not exactly sure how to ask this question. I'm curious as to what mind is. We've been talking a lot about what we do when we sit and the thoughts that come into our mind. It doesn't seem to me that we're all that different. We are very much so when we manifest in different styles. It doesn't seem to me that my mind is just my mind. We sometimes talk about the meeting of the minds and being able to connect with each other. It seems to me that because we can know how someone else is feeling. You know, we talk about doing the right view. You talked about doing for others basically rather than for ourselves, or accumulating anything for ourselves. So, in some kind of way it seems we are containers and we have the form our mind is contained in. I don't know if you get the gist of what I'm after. What is mind actually?

**Rinpoche:** Mind is mind. What is mind? Mind is emptiness. Its clear aspect is mind.

**Student:** So, the clarity aspect is the mind and the other stuff is mind, or mind sees clarity?

**Rinpoche:** No, when we say its nature is emptiness, it means when you look at the mind, there is no form, color, or mind you can find. When the mind watches the mind and you look at who is watching what, there aren't two separate things. At the same time, there is the potential to know everything, which is clarity or self-knowing. The combination is mind.

You asked, "What is mind?" There is no mind, which doesn't mean it is nonexistent. We are taught the mind is beyond description. It is said the Mahamudra is free of mental contrivances.<sup>xv</sup> Meditation created by the mind isn't meditation. Real meditation is resting in the natural state free of mental fabrications. You have to experience the mind and can't describe it as such. Nobody can show it to you. Even Lord Buddha never found the mind.

**Question:** Rinpoche, what is the Tibetan word for mind?

**Rinpoche:** "Sems." Actually, "sems" means to think.

**Student:** I'll remember that now. Thank you.

**Question:** Rinpoche, you discussed wisdom and skillful means. In having wisdom without skillful means, you develop nihilism or eternalism, I can't remember, and vice versa for the other. How can you have skillful means without wisdom or vice versa? Can you give an example or explain that a little more?

**Rinpoche:** Relating to the practice of the *creation stage* of meditation of skillful means, if you take the deity as a solid and concrete existent, which happens in the absence of

understanding wisdom. Although you receive the skillful method of the creation stage of meditation, you take the visualization as concrete and real without wisdom. The purpose of the creation stage of deity practice is to transform impure perceptions into the pure, to break through a firm belief in solidified existence. If you hold on to a solid entity you visualize, you lack wisdom. Clinging to a deity as real is also clinging and therefore impure.

**Student:** And vice versa?

**Rinpoche:** Lacking skillful means, people think nothing exists once they have studied emptiness and then falsely assume the accumulation of virtuous merit is senseless and that the law of cause and effect is invalid. The true meaning of emptiness is beyond existence and nonexistence.

**Question:** I'm left with an impression from these lectures. Let me make an analogy. It seems in the talks I'm hearing, if you are going to the end of a path, it sounds like you have to be at the end to begin with. I'm hearing that if you want to travel from Vancouver to Delhi, you already have to be in Delhi. I wonder where are we going to the ticket agent to get on the plane?

**Rinpoche:** If you already know what enlightenment is, you are beyond the necessity of engaging in the path. I'm not talking about that. You said "from Vancouver to Delhi." Without knowing there is a Delhi, you wouldn't have the wish to go, right? You have to know something about Delhi. If you don't know that you are going to Delhi and haven't even heard of it, then you are not going to go there. You have to know about Delhi, that it is the capital of India. You also need a reason to go there, which doesn't mean you must go. Of course, you can't compare Delhi with enlightenment. Nobody can issue a ticket to enlightenment.

What I'm trying to say is, when we talk about enlightenment or the ultimate state, there are many ways of explaining this. Different religions have different views of fruition. Buddhism speaks about Buddhadharma, liberation. Every religion believes in liberation. It is important for you to know what the Buddhist view of liberation is, explained with the view, otherwise you will have a different view of liberation which doesn't comply with Buddhism. So you must understand, otherwise you won't have the wish to practice. I hope I didn't lead you to not wanting to practice.

**Question:** I'm curious about equanimity of compassion. It's easy to evoke compassion to some people. I was just wondering how one does develop equanimity of compassion?

**Rinpoche:** Are you referring to objects of compassion?

**Student:** With some people there is something that makes you feel for their situation, you

care about them very easily. There are other people you need to work at to have compassion for.

**Rinpoche:** That's the difference between measurable and immeasurable. I suggest you practice giving and taking.

**Question:** Recently I read a book on *Dzogchen* and they talked about the state of contemplation achieved through awareness. I was wondering if that state of contemplation could be compared with a state of union with one's lama based on devotion?

**Rinpoche:** You said you read a Dzogchen book?

**Student:** Yes. They talked about a state of contemplation achieved through maintaining awareness. I'm wondering whether that can be compared to a state of union with one's lama based on devotion?

**Rinpoche:** What do you mean by union with the lama?

**Student:** Through maintaining devotion of joining one's mind with one's lama, it is one of the bases.

**Rinpoche:** Yes, non-artificial devotion can bring you to realize the inseparability of your lama's and your own mind. Awareness leading to the development of contemplation is new to me. Based on awareness, one experiences wisdom of awareness. Contemplation is different.

**Question:** Rinpoche, I work with people all day long as a therapist and it feels I'm not being shaken and that I can be of some benefit. But, it seems like it is catching up with me physically. I realize I'm real stressed-out, breaking down. I don't know what to think of that.

**Rinpoche:** That's very true. I think you have to take a rest.

**Student:** Thank you.

**Rinpoche:** When you are physically tired it is good to take a break. You are a practitioner and can go into retreat. It strengthens your mind and gives you physical well-being. Mind and body are connected during life. Mind is strong, but if your body is weak, you cannot function. It's good to do meditation practice.

**Question:** The English word "control" is a very dualistic word; it means one person is controlling something separate. In terms of kleshas controlling me, it seems to fit. The other way around, where there is awareness and you are in control of the mind, I wonder what the Tibetan word is and what it's meaning is. Control is very English and very dualistic.

**Rinpoche:** Yes, I admire your depth of understanding duality. We haven't found another word, but it does convey the meaning, which is "dbang-du-rgyur-wa" in Tibetan, i.e., "being under the control." I can't go further than that.

**Question:** If I understand you correctly, you said habitual patterns stored in the ground consciousness continue from one life to the next. I had thought that the only thing that goes through the *bardo* was pure awareness. Does this mean the alaya (ground consciousness) carries on from one life to another or is this more in the sense of one's karma that carries on? Is there actually some consciousness that carries through with all these patterns in it?

**Translator:** Would you repeat your question please?

**Student:** You said the habitual patterns stored in the alaya consciousness carry from one lifetime to another, so that in this life we still have the patterns from past lives. Does that mean the alaya consciousness moves through the bardos from one life to another or not? I thought it was naked awareness that went from one life to another through the bardo.

**Rinpoche:** As long as you cling to duality, the *eight consciousnesses* carry on. During the intermediate state of the bardo between death and birth, it is possible to experience awareness, a matter depending upon whether you can recognize it or not. As long as you cling, there is karma. Unless you are free of clinging, karma is always there. You can divide karma into many categories. Some karma ripens in this life, other karma after a few lives. Also there is karma that needn't necessarily ripen. As long as you cling to duality, there is karma. Everyone experiences the clear light or true nature of the mind. But if you don't recognize it, the next moment is consciousness, illusion.<sup>xvi</sup>

**Student:** So we do carry all this stuff with us?

**Rinpoche:** Oh yes, that's why it's so difficult to overcome. Did you think karma is eliminated at death?

**Student:** I thought the alaya is a group of habits.

**Rinpoche:** Right.

**Student:** It seems to be a grouping of confusion.

**Rinpoche:** There are the mental habitual patterns, which are not a solid thing that you take from one life to the next. The habit fixed on a self goes from one life to the next. One builds the habits stored in the alaya, which is the reason it is called "alaya." When it is free of all habitual patterns, it is no longer the alaya consciousness but the alaya wisdom, the *jnana-alaya*.

**Question:** I understand what you are saying about the patterns, making negative patterns come up. I'm a therapist and engage in remembering negative experiences. My partner and I work with sexually abused women who talk about their negative feelings, their negative thoughts, and the negative words that hurt them in their childhood. I am nervous if I continue perpetuating further negativity or whether I'm wrongly in the illusion of believing the methods I'm using can also cause benefit by working a method that is different than the method you suggested, that we continue perpetuating negative patterns for the future. I need advice because I spend a lot of time listening how they feel. It's like an awareness they try to go through. Are you suggesting that the therapy causes more negativity?

**Rinpoche:** During the Conference on Buddhism and Psychotherapy in New York<sup>xvii</sup> I saw that the approaches are very different. I have a question: After you bring up all those feelings, what do you do then?

**Student:** We use things like paper, art, and play to let their emotions out of themselves into objects.

**Rinpoche:** If that technique really helps to eliminate an individual's pain, it is good. It depends on final help. The whole aim of practice in Buddhism is to pacify the emotions. If you haven't pacified emotions and encounter disturbing situations with emotions – it relates to practice. If feelings and pain can be put into inanimate objects, I think nothing is wrong with that.

We also deal with such situations because people don't think we are lamas but psychotherapists. It depends on the situation of an individual. Some people need to talk and we let them. It's necessary. I'm not sure whether I made that clear. What I understood from the conference was that psychologists listen and then blame the parents who did such horrible things. We never do that, but we listen and bring people through their experiences. It depends. I don't know if you have that tradition. When you blame others, you encourage hate. We don't see that it helps their hurt, even though they have found a cause. We deal with such situations differently. We listen and deal with the situations in another fashion.

**Student:** Are we making a mistake by helping people work their way through?

**Rinpoche:** I wouldn't say you are making a mistake by helping people who ask for help.

**Question:** Rinpoche, we cultivate beneficial actions and then also build habit patterns. Is there a fixation that could be harmful in that or is it simply better to engage in beneficial actions and not worry about fixations?

**Translator:** Would you please repeat your question?

**Student:** Our karma comes with us, which is attachment.

**Rinpoche:** Do you think that is harmful?

**Student:** Yes. If fixation or attachment becomes the problem, could that not also be a problem if we are fixated on creating good karma. It's very helpful, but, on the other hand, there's the fixation. Is it a problem for our state of mind?

**Rinpoche:** I think that's why we discussed the combination of skillful means, of helping others with body, speech, and mind. It needs to be combined with wisdom so that whatever you do isn't the cause for fixations.

**Student:** I see. If the background of our actions comes from prajna, it doesn't have a fixation on self?

**Rinpoche:** Right. That's why it's very important to check your attitude before any practice.

**Student:** Thank you.

**Question:** Rinpoche, for those of us who are therapists and work with people who are in a great deal of pain, I'd appreciate the suggestion around retreat. I'm also wondering if on a day-to-day practice that you could recommend something so that we could continue to be helpful.

**Rinpoche:** Tonglen (sending and taking) is the best practice.

**Student:** Giving and taking. That scares me.

**Rinpoche:** That's why you have to do it.

**Student:** The fear is you are taking on the pain of others.

**Rinpoche:** Do you fear you will get sick?

**Student:** No, it's more like past a certain point – you sort of get it in your body. Working with the pain and tension of others, it seems to wear you down after a while. That seems to be part of the struggle.

**Rinpoche:** There are two means to practice. In order to take somebody's suffering you have to have some experience of shunyata. With a dualistic fixation, you cannot share. That's why it's necessary to practice giving and taking. Your worry isn't justified. You can't get someone's sickness. Frankly speaking, it is not easy to take somebody's suffering and give your happiness away; it isn't possible by just thinking it. You also don't accomplish enlightenment by just imagining it. But, there is practice. If you have fear, it can happen that you become sick from fear.

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- <sup>i</sup> Madhyamaka is the philosophical school within the great vehicle of Mahayana that does not blend extreme views but refutes both inherent existence and total non-existence. Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche teaches that the great middle way avoids all philosophically extreme positions.
- <sup>ii</sup> This is the translation of the Tibetan word *selwa* which is also translated variously as “lucidity,” “luminous clarity,” and “luminosity.” In the third turning of the wheel of dharma, the Buddha taught that everything is empty, but this emptiness is not completely void because it has luminosity. We must not make the mistake of thinking of this as some kind of light such as we get from a light bulb even though the words suggest this. Rather it is simply that continuous awareness, that knowing, that the mind always has. Luminosity or clarity allows all phenomena to appear and is a characteristic of and inseparable from emptiness (Skt. *shunyata*).
- <sup>iii</sup> The Kagyu lineage supplication, called the Dorje Chang Tungma in Tibetan is recited in almost all Kagyu centres throughout the world on a daily basis. Thrangu Rinpoche has written an extensive commentary on this Prayer in *Showing the Path to Liberation*. Namu Buddha & Zhyisil Chokyi Ghatsal Publications.
- <sup>iv</sup> The Tibetan word for meditation is “gom” (spelled *sgom*) and the word for habituation is “khom” (spelled *sgoms*). So meditation has the root of the word for habituation.
- <sup>v</sup> The six realms of cyclic existence refer to six classes of beings: Through the power of aggression and anger, living beings experience heat and cold as hell beings. Through the power of miserliness, living beings experience hunger and thirst as hungry ghosts. Through the power of stupidity, living beings experience the mental dullness of animals. Through the power of desire and attachment, living beings experience birth, old age, sickness, and death as humans. Through the power of jealousy, living beings experience strife as demi-gods. Through the power of pride, living beings experience the fall of the gods at death to the lower realms. Cf. Gampopa: *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. Translated & annotated by Herbert V. Guenther, Shambhala, Boston & London, 1959, pp. 55-73.
- <sup>vi</sup> Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche teaches that immediate suffering is all experienced physical and mental pain (the suffering of suffering). The suffering of change is that all joyful experiences inevitably expire and

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turn into the suffering of change or loss.

All-pervasive suffering is clinging to duality due to conditioned mental habits. This is a universal type of suffering inherent in the very process of samsara. There is the constant threat of change running through conditioned life. This is what is described as the innate suffering of the process of existence.

- vii Karma is Sanskrit and literally means action, though in other contexts it can also mean “duty” and “rite.” The Tibetan translation is “las”, meaning action. Karma is the principle that every action has a result. This highlights the Buddhist concept of action, in which not only the initial action itself, but also its longer-term consequences, are considered together to be one action, one karma. One may think that a cause and its result are two separate things but actually it is an ongoing process. For example, the actions in one life and the consequences in another seem quite distinct, yet there is one continuum.
- viii The literal meaning of paramita is “gone to the other side” or “reached the other shore,” the other side or shore being enlightenment. This covers both that which *will* carry one to the other side (the development of the six paramitas), and that which *has* reached the other side, (the perfection of those qualities).  
For a detailed discussion of the paramitas see Gampopa’s *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, chapters 12 - 17. Commentary by Thrangu Rinpoche available from Zhyisil Chokyi Ghatsal Publications.
- ix There are two categories of obscurations or defilements that cover one’s Buddha nature: the emotional obscurations or obscuration of the disturbing emotions, and the more subtle obscurations, the defilement of latent tendencies or sometimes called the obscuration of dualistic perception, or the cognitive obscurations. The first category prevents sentient beings from freeing themselves from samsara, while the second prevents them from gaining accurate knowledge and realising truth.
- x Gampopa describes the mental propensities living beings have in chapter two on “The Working Basis” in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche summarizes this topic in *Bsdusdom*, pp. 12-13: “Somebody endowed with the opportunities and the acquirements is called ‘a capable being’ since he has the power and ability to accomplish higher states of existence and ‘the definite good,’ which is liberation. A capable being is known as being of the three kinds: a lesser capable being has the ability of not falling into lower existences but of obtaining a god or a human state of existence, an average capable being has the ability of liberating himself from samsara and obtaining a state of peace and bliss, and, a greater capable being has the ability of obtaining Buddhahood for the sake of sentient beings.”
- xi Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche discussed the three dharmachakras on various occasions and taught that “they embrace the vast body of teachings the Buddha presented in accordance with the varied capabilities of individual people: The first cycle of teachings, the initial formulation of the Buddha’s experience, was directed towards people very much in the midst of their ordinary lives and deal with the four noble truths. At the second cycle, known as ‘the teachings of no characteristics,’ were provisional teachings intended to lead a person into a deeper appreciation. The third cycle of teachings, known alternatively as ‘complete delineation,’ ‘perfect delineation,’ or, probably more familiarly, ‘the teachings of the Buddha nature,’ concern how things actually are, what we call ‘the definitive’ or ‘certain section of teachings.”
- xii The ground consciousness is called “alaya” in Sanskrit. Alaya means “home” or “abode” in Sanskrit. The ground consciousness refers to the fundamental basis of the other consciousnesses constituting mind.
- xiii “To hear” the teachings is the literal translation of the Tibetan “talwa.” Thrangu Rinpoche has said that in this modern age this actually means, “to study” the teachings.
- xiv The question is referring to one of the five wisdoms: mirror-like wisdom, discriminating wisdom, the wisdom of equality, the all-accomplishing wisdom, and the dharmadhatu wisdom. These wisdoms are the transformations of the eight consciousnesses. The five wisdoms can also be related to the pure aspect of the five emotions.
- xv Mahamudra literally means “the great seal,” the most direct practice in the Kagyu tradition to realize one’s innate nature. It was handed down from Buddha Vajradhara to Tilopa (988-1069) to the present lineage holders. In *The Mahamudra Prayer*, Rangjung Dorje, the Third Karmapa, wrote: “Freedom from mental constructs is the great seal, Mahamudra.”
- xvi It may be helpful here to understand the term for “consciousness,” which in Sanskrit is “vijñana,” which is a specific type of cognition. It is the term for “cognition,” “jnana,” with the prefix “vi,” which means complete or fully developed. This is a more specific term than cognition and although it may sound like a positive thing to say “fully-developed cognition,” in this context it is actually somewhat pejorative because it refers to cognition that has become developed in the sense of becoming coarsened. This is the type of cognition, or consciousness, what we as ordinary individuals have and is what is divided into the eight or six types of consciousnesses. All of these consciousnesses are considered manifestations of the

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mind's impurity. They are things that arise when a mind does not recognize its own nature. The basic idea of the development of consciousness is that when a mind does not recognize its own nature, its inherent lucidity, which is just a mere cognition, it runs wild. And running wild it becomes coarse or develops into deluded cognition or consciousness, which is characteristic of samsara. Nevertheless, in the midst of all of this confusion, the nature of these consciousnesses, the nature of this deluded mind is unchanged.

<sup>xvii</sup> The first conference on "Buddhism and Psychotherapy" was held under the guidance of Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche and took place in New York City in 1987. It was organized by the Karma Kagyu Institute of America and the New Age Journal.