Turning Your Mind To the Dharma

DRUPON KHEN RINPOCHE KARMA LHABU

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For more information please visit:
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Introduction

This book is a translated transcript of teachings given by Drupon Khen Rinpoche Karma Lhabu during the 26th Thrangu Namo Buddha Seminar in Boudha, Nepal, 2016.

In the morning sessions of this same seminar, Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche taught Vomiting Gold, a text by Khenpo Gangshar.

Khenpo David Karma Choephel provided English translation for the seminar, while Gloria Jones and a team of volunteers from Thrangu Monastery organised the event itself.

Drupon Khen Rinpoche tailored these teachings and advice for Western students of the Dharma since they made up the main cohort of those in attendance. They arose from his then eight years of experience in guiding and teaching in the West. Eight years may not sound very long, but it was eight intense years over which he gave more than 8000 hours of Dharma teachings to Westerners, often in the close and personal environment of retreat centres. Readers may be interested to learn that Rinpoche has persisted with this level of intensity in his teachings, and has now, at the time of writing in 2025, given more than 16600 hours[1] of teachings to Westerners.

1. To offer a comparison for context, the average number of hours a University lecturer will teach throughout their career is 6750. 16600 hours is approaching two years of continuous teaching, 24 hours a day. This only accounts for the formal teachings Rinpoche has explicitly given for Westerners. His total teaching hours would be significantly more than double 16600.

The insights Drupon Khen Rinpoche shared during the seminar felt particularly valuable and timely. Some of Rinpoche's students requested his permission and blessing to transcribe these teachings into English to share them with a wider audience, to which he graciously consented.

This publication is the first time a teaching by Drupon Khen Rinpoche has been made available in English as a book or ebook. Despite previous requests, Rinpoche had consistently declined to have his teachings transcribed into English. He explained his reluctance as follows:

> *"While so many teachings of the authentic past masters remain untranslated, it makes little sense to take someone's time away from that excellent work to give to my shambolic, so-called teachings. Moreover, as I do not know English, I cannot verify the translations' accuracy or ensure they are suitable for a general audience."*

To honour some of these concerns, the translator, Kunga (Vaughan Aubrey), revisited the original recordings to make the translation, checking with Rinpoche any sections where doubts arose. They were then edited by, in the order of their work on the project, Ani Lodro Yangkyi (Sarah Woolman), Lama Zangpo (Paul Foster), Inge Derijck, Ani Sherab Chodron (Yuchun Huang), Ani Chodron (Teresa Randall), Ani Lochu (Priscilla Aroso) and Senge (David Neviazsky).

The translator and editors were mindful of preserving the spoken quality of Drupon Khen Rinpoche's teachings and, therefore, avoided excessive editing or polishing, where possible.

Hui Liu designed the front cover and formatted the ebook.

We sincerely hope this ebook supports your study and practice of the sacred Dharma.

An introduction to Drupon Khen Rinpoche Karma Lhabu

By Dónal Creedon

"In the practice of unsurpassable, complete enlightenment, what is most difficult is to find a guiding teacher."

- Dogen

If you have ever wondered whether the ancient stories of the siddhas and adepts were a thing of the past or even myth, then perhaps you might consider the life and teaching of Drupon Khen Rinpoche Karma Lhabu. From an early age, Rinpoche underwent long and rigorous training under the direction of supremely accomplished masters of Mahamudra and Dzogchen. Among his teachers were both famous lamas and unknown yogis of all lineages, and especially the Kagyu and Nyingma lineages. These were lamas who had cast worldly concerns aside like so much spittle in the dust and were noted for living in extreme simplicity, far away from the rattle and din of modernity.

Rinpoche has a special love for such anonymous hidden yogis—he, too, offered all he owned to his lamas, abandoning all cares in his pursuit and practice of Dharma. Although he was seriously ill and close to death several times, for Rinpoche it was no big deal. His attitude was one

of carefree indifference as if going for a nap. He lived, slept and absorbed the teaching in an environment that for most people today is unthinkable.

Very early on there arose in Rinpoche's heart a natural and profound understanding and realisation of both view and meditation that is now the very fibre of his being. This, combined with many years of intense study with many of the most eminent masters of the present era, meant he came to possess a brilliant command of the teachings and pith instructions. His lamas considered him their heart son, and in his early twenties they instructed him to be retreat master and to start caring for students.

The ways of the worldly—prioritising fame and profit, numbers of disciples, centres, and buildings per se—are anathema to his way of thinking. Rinpoche's central focus is on serious students and on creating a climate that will nurture the authentic Way-seeking mind and help the students to become firmly established in the way of truth. The main thrust of his approach is to thoroughly ground the students in Dharma through intense and sustained teaching combined with practice.

Most of the year Rinpoche resides at Thrangu Sekhar Retreat Centre in Nepal, where he guides and gives daily teachings to two groups of retreatants: a traditional three-year retreat for the lamas of Thrangu Monastery, and a six-year programme of study, contemplation and meditation for students of all nationalities[1]. The retreat environment, the teachings and practice provide the alchemical container for the work of transmuting the base metal of ego into the gold of bodhicitta. And Rinpoche is like the master alchemist guiding the entire process. He gives tremendous importance to the foundational contemplations and particularly lojong or mind training. These are among the most effective means for disrupting the ego's tenacious tentacles and for planting the seeds of the good and wholesome.

In this respect Rinpoche gives great importance to listening. He points out that we are not actually able to listen to Dharma. Why? For the simple reason that the deep rooted prejudices and assumptions block the ability to listen and understand. Thus the teachings don't penetrate. Listening implies, among other things, the ability to understand the direct relevance of the teaching to the disciple's mind and life.

1. Since this introduction was written, Drupon Khen Rinpoche has formulated and initiated a twenty-one-year and twenty-six-year study and practice programme on the tantric tradition of Marpa.

Rinpoche's broad and vast vision will not satisfy the demands of the mediocre who feed on spiritual candy floss and float around from place to place like tourists looking for entertainment. The ideal students for him (in the opinion of the writer) are those seekers who long to drink from the sacred well of truth and, seeing the sorrows of all beings born of space-time; wish to be balm to them; wish to be rain and blossom to them in the fields of time; wish to bring them to the true place of refuge; unsurpassable complete enlightenment. Nothing less. Taking the teachings into the depth of their heart with indomitable spirit, they set forth on the heroic bodhisattva path.

As a guiding teacher Rinpoche has the unique ability to communicate teachings often seen as abstruse and remote in a very direct and personal way. He impacts the student not only with lucid explanation but also, in an uncanny way, reveals their thought processes and neurotic blind spots. His words are personal to our own thinking and act like a close mirror to our habitual psychological patterns and the mind poisons. This can be a little unsettling, and the immature may even see it as a kind of personal attack. For the more receptive student though, his teachings serve as a source of self-revelation and visceral learning that cuts through the dross and stupidity of ego. His teaching is the sword of prajna striking from a Heart filled with the noble intent of the Sublime Buddhas. In other words, Rinpoche teaches and acts with immense love and infinite care. He is not a lama who remains aloof and remote in a spiritual ivory tower. He is more like a loving parent whose tender care extends to the totality of the student's life.

The way he lives naturally displays the qualities of one whose mind is suffused with Dharma, and is as far from the worldly mentality as the sun is from the earth. He has an easy way with life and death and an innocent generosity. In the person of Rinpoche one finds the embodiment of the bhikshu's discipline and rigour, the vast compassionate mind of the bodhisattva and the incandescent free spirit of the vajrayana siddha.

Those who have been students of Rinpoche will know this is no exaggeration.

Day 1

Reminder

Please listen to the teachings with the motivation of the bodhisattva, the wish to awaken for the benefit of all sentient beings.

The basic mistake

Most of us have been held back in Dharma, not because we haven't been able to receive Dharma teachings, but because we haven't been able to put them into practice; I'm sure most of you have already received teachings and met lamas. Nor is it that we don't wish to practise the Dharma—we do. The problem is that we don't know how to practise.

This comes from not having good objectives or having a good way of studying the Dharma. Through not knowing the correct methods of study, we don't take the right understanding from the teachings we receive. So it is misunderstanding the teachings that skews our practice and stops us from making decent progress. This is what happens, as I see it.

Dharma for happiness?

So, I think there are two mistakes we make in how we study the Dharma. The first mistake is that our motivation isn't right. We do what we do in the Dharma in order to be happy, to have a peaceful mind and to feel good. This is our primary motivation, and it's very strong within us due to having treasured ourselves above all else for lifetimes without beginning. Such self-cherishing leads us to feel, 'I want to be happy, comfortable and mentally at ease', and this distorts our reasons for engaging with the Dharma.

Why is this mistaken? Because the way we make ourselves happy in Buddhism and the world is fundamentally different. The Buddhist way of finding happiness is by eliminating self-cherishing, since this is the primary cause of our suffering. This is what is taught. So when we think, 'I want to be happy,' according to the Buddhist view, we are actually perpetuating the cycle of suffering. The result of such a wish will not be happiness—it will only be more suffering.

With the thought, 'The Dharma will make me happy' as our motivation, whatever practice we do will not go well because the direction of our practice, or our aim, is mistaken. And when our aim is mistaken, it doesn't matter what practice we do, it will not be very beneficial. So right from the outset, the first thing we need to do is correct our motivation.

Ultimate happiness in the Buddhist view is what we call the state of Buddhahood, and the cause for achieving this

awakened state is bodhichitta (the mind of awakening). What is bodhichitta? It is the willingness to accept suffering. It is not the view of rejecting suffering and wanting happiness. It is to say, ‘I am going to work for the benefit of sentient beings. Even if I don’t achieve Buddhahood, as long as others turn out well, that will suffice.’ This view opposes and eliminates self-clinging and will eventually bring us true, ultimate happiness.

With this mindset, we no longer have the view of a sentient being and, therefore, are in fact no longer a sentient being, and thus need not experience the suffering of a sentient being.

What exactly is the view of a sentient being? 'I must be happy.’ This view, from the perspective of the Dharma, is what we call self-clinging or ignorance: ‘I want things to go well for me. I want happiness for myself.’ Although we desperately want to avoid suffering, we end up doing the very thing that brings us suffering. In the Dharma, we would call this view, or approach, ‘idiotic.’ So we need to reduce such thoughts of wanting to be happy and comfortable. If we can do that, then there is a chance we might be able to practise something of the Buddhist way of thinking of the Greater Vehicle Dharma.

I don’t really know all of you individually, but I regularly visit the West and have become quite familiar with the view of Western Buddhists. And what I see is that these thoughts of ‘I want to be happy', 'I need a peaceful mind', 'I want to be mentally untroubled’ are extremely prevalent. But this is the

view of the world. Yes, we practise the Dharma, but for most of us it's just a way of achieving our worldly aims. And as long as that’s the case, the Dharma won’t really help us find the happiness we seek because the basic motivation is mistaken.

Qualities shine when flaws subside

I don't really teach or explain the Dharma. My teachings, or talks, are more like having a go at people; they can seem quite confrontational. My style can be a bit abrasive. The main reason for this is that I don't really have anything to teach. I don't have renunciation, so I can't teach that; I don't have bodhichitta, so I can't teach that; nor do I have the view of no-self, so there is nothing I can say about that either.

What I do have is self-clinging and the afflictions. So when I teach the Dharma, that's what I talk about—desire, anger, self-clinging and so forth. These are what I know and have experience in. It's impossible to teach something we don't have personal experience of. So, whether it is helpful or not, the afflictions, self-clinging and so forth are basically all I can talk about.

But I don't think it's a waste of time for me to talk about them because, when it comes to the practice of Dharma, there are two main areas we need to work on: the things we need to eliminate and the things we need to develop. The first of those relates to self-clinging and the afflictions. If we can recognise and identify them, we have something definite to practise with and work on. Moreover, these aspects are easier for us to understand and identify because we all have them in large doses. If we're told, '*This* is an affliction' or '*This* is self-clinging', we can more readily recognise them because we have direct and personal experience of them. If we cannot recognise these, there is no way we'll be able to identify what renunciation, bodhichitta and the view of no-self are—even if they're pointed out to us. Simply put, we don't have renunciation, bodhichitta, etc. to start with, and it's

difficult to identify that which we don't have. So if we can't recognise what we do have, there's very little chance of us ever identifying what we do not yet have.

As I see it, we first need to identify what we do have. I'm not a good Dharma practitioner or, in fact, very good in general. So, when teaching, what I focus on are the flawed aspects that I see in myself and talk about them since it's quite likely that other people will have similar flaws. Anyway, if we can first recognise our faults and failings, we'll know what needs to be eliminated and, with that, we get something to apply ourselves to and know what the job at hand is. Working like this, our faults diminish and our afflictions and self-clinging decrease. As that happens, the qualities, the positive aspects, naturally grow and strengthen. This is just the way things go. For example, when the sun rises, the darkness recedes. When there is no light, darkness envelops everything. It's just the nature of things. Likewise, when self-clinging and the afflictions decrease, renunciation, bodhichitta, and the view of selflessness will naturally arise. Then, once these good qualities have arisen, we'll recognise them more easily when they're pointed out. So in this way, having found what we need to work at and develop, progress becomes a real possibility.

To recap, to practise the Dharma we first need to see our faults, of which we have no shortage. We need to check whether it is the afflictions or the qualities that are predominant. If we look within ourselves objectively, we'll definitely come to know something. But without doing this, we'll never be able to understand the Dharma because there's simply no way we can see our qualities without first seeing our faults.

You may not agree that, for most of us, our faults are stronger than our good qualities, but to give an example that clearly demonstrates this, I could throw you all into a fit of rage with just a few words. Yet I could talk to you for a whole year about renunciation and bodhichitta, and still you might not give rise to them; at least not to a very strong degree. So, just by criticising your values or your way of seeing things, I could stir you to anger in just one minute. And yet, even by putting great care and effort into giving you teachings on renunciation, bodhichitta and the view of selflessness, I wouldn't be able to rouse them within you, not nearly as strongly as the anger. Look for yourself and see whether this is true.

I think if we look at it in this way, the situation will become very clear. There's a big difference between a minute and a year, and there is a big difference in the power of each feeling (of anger or renunciation, for example). So we can see very clearly which is strongest in us: the faults or the qualities. Our afflictions and self-clinging flare up at the slightest trigger, but we're unable to muster a strong feeling for things such as renunciation, even when they're explained at length.

Who'd dare teach?

I'll give another example, it might be a little close to the bone. Maybe you'll get angry, but I will say it anyway [Rinpoche laughs]. There is a line in the Aspiration for Rebirth in Sukhavati by Karma Chagme that reads: 'May I not be reborn as a woman, but in a high birth.' Generally, lamas who teach Westerners dare not explain this because it doesn't fit with your view; they think you'll get angry. Basically, they dare not teach the Dharma. There is no room to explain the reasoning behind such statements because Westerners' knee-jerk reaction is, 'Sexism! Misogyny! On hearing such a statement, the thought, 'These words are bad!' comes to mind. And, holding very strongly to their own ideas and preconceptions, people are unable to think about what reasoning there might be. The environment that surrounds these people has such a strong view of the equality of men and women that they quickly label such statements as misogynistic and get fired up with anger. Both women and men get angry because this is the shared view: 'That's disparaging of women!'

In this way, even teaching *The Way of the Bodhisattva* becomes problematic, as it contains many similar statements, just as there are in the actual words of the Buddha. When people hold very tightly to ideologies, it becomes difficult to explain the Buddha's words and those of past accomplished beings. People struggle to hear what's actually being said. In truth, the Buddhist view is that not only are men and women equal, but all sentient beings are equal. But that is a difficult point for us to accommodate.

We have to remember that all instructions are tailored to certain individuals. The main considerations will be: What is the best way for them personally to eliminate their afflictions? How should they practise? For this reason, all sorts of statements were made and recorded in the teachings. For example, when you look at the writings of many past masters, they talk a lot about the faults of lamas and monks. They talk about how the lamas are failing, how the monks are failing, and so on. If the monks were then to think, 'This master is discriminating against us and causing us trouble,' that would be very strange. In the writings of Tibetan masters, we find the failings of monks and nuns elucidated at length. In Tibet, it was the monastics who mainly practised Dharma and not lay people. Therefore, it was the faults of those who were training that were directly pointed out. Why? Because we first need to recognise our faults, and only then can we do something to eliminate them.

In brief, when we study the Dharma, we have to give up the worldly view. If we study the Dharma with a worldly view, we will be unable to transcend the world. The Dharma is said to contain the view that transcends the world, and so only when there is this transcendent view is there a possibility for us to practise the Dharma properly.

From our perspective as Buddhists, if the lamas dare not teach the Dharma, how are they supposed to help? This would make things very difficult for the students, wouldn't it? They wouldn't be able to receive proper Dharma teachings. If we become angry on hearing our lama's teachings, who in this world would we not get angry with? From a Buddhist

perspective, as Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche said this morning, the spiritual friend is extremely important for us. This is the case in all schools of Buddhism: the Lesser Vehicle (the Hinayana), the Greater Vehicle (the Mahayana) and the Secret Mantra Vehicle (the Vajrayana). Different names are given to the different levels of teachers, such as khenpo, lopon, spiritual friend, lama, and so on, but each of them is always said to be important to us. So if we find that their teachings and advice make us angry, our fundamental view, our way of seeing things, is mistaken. It will be very difficult for us to generate the correct motivation or for the lamas to communicate the Dharma, with its various teaching methods.

A translator once asked me how they should translate a particular passage about women because they felt that if they translated it literally, people would get angry. Now, I'm a bit of an oddball, so I said, 'Just translate whatever it says. Why does it need to be toned down or edited?'

Fundamentally, the Dharma exposes our faults so that we can see them. If this angers us, it means we are angered by the methods that will help us to develop. And if we are angry with the methods, there is no way for us to put them into practice. This shows us that if our basic motivation or way of seeing things is worldly, or at least strongly influenced by worldly and societal views, the Dharma cannot penetrate our minds.

Among the Buddha's teachings, there are many instances in which he states that animals are ignorant and stupid. Does that mean the Buddha disparaged or disrespected animals by calling them stupid? Considering this example, we can see

how we might get the wrong end of the stick. Such statements are a method to make us think and practise; they are not said out of disrespect. Moreover, the faults of those abiding in the meditative absorptions of the form and formless realms are spoken of critically. Again, not so as to disparage them, but to point out what needs to be eliminated or overcome.

Another example is the hearers (shravakas), the practitioners of the Lesser Vehicle. In the Greater Vehicle Dharma, there are many passages which seem to suggest that, between practising and not practising the Lesser Vehicle, it would be better not to practise it. They seem to say that as a sentient being, there is hope for you to become a buddha, but there's no chance as a hearer. Is that then disrespecting or disparaging the arhats (foe-destroyers)of the Hearer Vehicle? It's a matter of perspective. Seeing this type of statement as disparaging comes down to not understanding the Dharma.

So we need to understand first why a particular fault is being highlighted, and then we need to accept it as a fault and change our minds accordingly. This is what is taught by these statements. It has nothing to do with discrimination or disrespect.

The basic view of Dharma is the view of the equality of all sentient beings, but it doesn't stop there. It also includes the view of the equality of sentient beings and buddhas. The view of the Greater Vehicle is not limited to gender equality—all sentient beings are seen to be equal. In the view of the Secret Mantra, sentient beings and buddhas are equal. That's the

actual view. And the method for coming to realise equality is the pointing out of our every fault.

If we can identify our faults, then we can work towards gradually decreasing and then finally eliminating them. If we think negatively about the methods that bring this about, the Dharma, why would we practise them? How could we practise them? So it is extremely important to first recognise our faults.

The Dharma is not a school topic

Another mistake I think we make relates to how we study the Dharma. We study the Dharma in the same way that we study the mundane topics of the world, even though they are totally different.

When engaged in worldly studies, we are not studying our own minds; we're studying something outside of ourselves, such as flowers, insects and the like. For example, we examine how flowers grow, the conditions they need, and so on. We view it as something external to ourselves, not something that must be related to our minds. The study of secular topics is a matter of researching, explaining and memorising information about something. This is how worldly studies work. From childhood to adulthood, we have become habituated to this way of studying, and so, when we begin to study Buddhism, most of us bring that worldly way of studying with us. This is one reason why our Dharma study does not become true Dharma study.

We see this in how people who study a lot of Dharma often become proud. They become brash and greedy; their learning utilised to gain status and wealth. And so the end result is exactly the same as that of secular studies, which also tend to make us proud and greedy with an eye for position and wealth. So this is how people approach the study of Dharma. It's a risk for everyone, not just those who are considered educated by worldly standards.

Since most of the audience here are westerners, I'm tailoring the teaching for you; the monks here are just sort of listening in. If this were a teaching organised primarily for them, I would bring up the issues I felt would be most relevant to them and their way of thinking. When teaching you, I have to take your way of thinking as the basis for what I say. Whether I can actually do that or not is another matter, but this is what I need to try to do and will be doing over the next couple of days.

In general, my teachings are never very nice to hear. So if you're not finding it very pleasant, you don't have to come back tomorrow. It's up to you. I didn't approach Gloria saying, 'I wish to give a teaching'; she asked me to teach. I don't go around looking for people to teach. That's not my way. If someone asks me to teach and I feel it would be beneficial, then I agree and teach to the best of my ability. For me, it's fine if people attend, but it's also fine if no one wants to listen to what I have to say. And when teaching the Dharma, I have to say what I think—just saying what will please you is not going to be helpful.

As I said earlier, the Dharma teaches two areas: faults and qualities. The faults are greed, hatred, delusion and so on—the afflictions. There are many different types and classifications of the afflictions; the three poisons, the five poisons and many other formulations can be found in the Buddhist treatises. But if we study these as though they are something outside of ourselves, our studies won't bring the right result. It's not like studying computers, which are

external objects. There's no computer or atoms and the like in our minds.

Desire arises from within our mind, not from anything outside, like pillars, vases, or what have you. When, for example, we feel desire for a house, it's not because the house is saying, 'I'm wonderful, and my decor is so beautiful.' It's our mind. We see a house and think, 'This is a lovely house. I want it.' And it's precisely the same when we get angry with somebody; it comes from within ourselves, not from the other person. It's not like there's someone saying, 'Would you please get angry at me?'

The job of the Dharma is to introduce us to our afflictions and show us that they are a part of our mind. So we need to look: 'In what way do I have desire? What is my anger like?' It's not a matter of studying and memorising the words and definitions of desire as found in the scriptures, as though we were studying something outside of ourselves. There's no way to understand our afflictions like that. That is a mistaken way of studying. It's only when you recognise your blood starting to boil that you can really come to understand it. Just memorising the definition of anger is useless. It will only increase your pride—'I know. I understand.' And with that, your afflictions will only grow.

Signs of Dharma study

The Dharma teaches that the sign of having studied is to be calm and self-disciplined. This is because, when you recognise the afflictions within yourself, you recognise that they are no good. The recognition itself naturally weakens them such that one's mind becomes more peaceful. 'Peaceful and self-disciplined' means that the coarse afflictions have been reduced; this is what happens through proper study of the Dharma. Unfortunately, it's not what tends to happen for us. Our studies tend to make our afflictions grow stronger and coarser. Why is that? It's because our way of studying doesn't become a method for identifying the afflictions. For us, the afflictions are something we learn about and memorise from the texts, and once that's done, we feel we've identified them. But we shouldn't just memorise what the lamas teach and then think we have 'got it'. That will not bring the change we need because the afflictions are not in the texts or the lama's words; they're in our own minds. So our studies must bring us to recognise our faults.

Although the qualities and the view are taught, they are very distant from where we are at the moment. They are difficult to recognise because they are so subtle; it's much easier to see big things that are right in front of us. We all have the qualities within ourselves in their subtle form. For example, tigers, leopards, and so on are the most aggressive among animals, but even they have the seed of love within them; they can show affection and the like towards their cubs. In the same way, we also have the various enlightened qualities within ourselves. But the faults are just so much stronger and more noticeable, just as

a severe illness is easy to spot, but a minor ailment less so. Therefore, we should first work to see our faults and only then try to see our qualities.

The texts are the tools by which we come to see our flaws, or the signs that point out what needs to be recognised. For example, when we say goodbye, we wave our hand, right? If someone doesn't recognise the meaning of the hand gesture but instead concentrates on the five wiggling fingers, they'll miss the point. The hand has nothing to do with 'farewell'; it's just a tool or sign that communicates 'farewell' to us. We are familiar with the signal of a waving hand, but tend to miss the signs presented in the texts. What we can do is enumerate the different lists given in the texts, 'point one, point two… three, four, five,' and think, 'Now I understand,' and feel we're learning Dharma. This is how our studies tend to go, and I feel that this is why we are failing to gain true and stable insight into the teachings.

To summarise, I've been talking about two things: our motivation and our way of studying.

Loving ‘emptiness’

The third point is that we love the high views of Mahamudra and Dzogchen. This isn’t bad in and of itself, but there's an order to study and practice called the stages of the path, which is another area where we aren't doing so well.

For example, if we had announced that today’s teachings would be on Mahamudra, Dzogchen, or the Six Yogas of Naropa, more people would likely’ve come. When people hear that there will be teachings on the preliminaries, the four thoughts, they think, ‘Erhh, maybe not,’ and fewer people turn up.

But it was my decision to teach them. When Gloria asked me what I’d like to teach, I said mind training and the four thoughts simply because the higher views are beyond us at the moment. I’m not new to working with Westerners; I've been working with Westerners for many years now, and to be honest, I haven’t seen you gaining an understanding of the higher views.

The teachings on the high views suggest that we don't have to eliminate the afflictions, that everything is good, everything is fine, everything is emptiness. We hear these things and think, ‘This is excellent!’ We love it. But I don’t feel that this reaction is one of faith, stemming from an understanding of those teachings. Rather, it’s connected to our own view; a view that doesn't have much belief in past and future lives, karma cause and effect, the harmfulness of the afflictions and so on. Inasmuch as we think that certain

phenomena do not exist, our view seems to correspond with the higher views that teach that phenomena lack true existence, that there is no karma cause and effect, and that everything is emptiness. These all seem to fit with our view. We love the idea that the afflictions don't need to be eliminated because giving up the afflictions is hard. And if we don't need to do that, then we don't need to work hard to change. Great! We accept these views very willingly. But what good does it do us? If we don't abandon the afflictions, nothing changes—we stay exactly as we are, continue to suffer and so on. Many of us would claim to have been practising the Dharma for ten or fifteen years, but without any substantive change to show for it.

One of the main views that the Dharma refutes is the view of nihilism. But many of the terms and phrases used in the Greater Vehicle of Buddhism—freedom from elaboration, expanse (dhatu), etc., seem to correspond to the nihilistic view. For example, the *Precious Garland of the Supreme Path* gives a list of things which can be mistaken for one another. Similarly, the teachings on a lack of inherent existence, for us, are mistaken for, or become the same as our: 'doesn't exist,' 'no such thing,' and 'what rubbish' views. Even among worldly views, nihilism is considered the worst. When Buddhism uses words like 'doesn't exist' to teach the ultimate view, we are very open and accepting of them. This fondness comes about because everything seems to be so easy with that view; we can do as we wish. But this is a big mistake on our part.

Why is that? Well, the Dharma teaches that suffering and happiness are the same, that the afflictions and bliss are the same, and likewise that samsara and nirvana are the same. Now, for us, pleasure and pain are not the same, are they? When we encounter pain, we don't like it. When we encounter pleasure, we love it. This is our view—but it's not a high view. When we experience suffering, we don't think, 'Oh, never mind, it makes no difference what happens to me.' Instead, we think, 'Oh no, what can I do?!' If we genuinely had a high view, in the midst of suffering or problems, we'd think, 'Whatever, it makes no difference.' But that's not what happens for us, is it?

In fact, we sometimes end up with even more issues through our interaction with the Dharma. For example, non-Buddhists don't think things like, 'This is my school', 'This is my lama', or 'I am a Kagyupa.' They don't get worked up about these sorts of things. They have fewer causes of strife than we do. So if we do not gain the correct understanding and fail to make our Dharma study something that reduces our self-clinging, it's possible that our studies will make us more troublesome and problematic. Study can go both ways. If we go in the right direction, we become better; if we take the wrong path, we become worse.

It's there in the name—
the 'preliminaries' must come first

The high views and our way of thinking are not all that compatible at present. We have to start with the basics, the earlier stages of the path. This goes for any form of study. For example, when you started your education as a child, you didn't go straight to university, did you? Why not? For the simple fact that your level of learning was not advanced enough at that stage. Similarly, there is a sequence to the study and practice of Dharma. If we jump immediately to the level of the high views, it will only cause us problems. We first need to gain the view of the preliminaries (ngondro). That's very important.

Thinking about things logically, from one perspective, the views of Westerners and Easterners are very different. There may even be cultural differences that could make it challenging to live with one another. But from another perspective, the views are exactly the same: we all have the view of 'me' and 'you'. The Dharma view, however, is that there is no me and no you. This is radically different and very difficult for us to take on board. If we can't get on with those who have the same basic view of 'me' and 'you', how will we get on with a view that is totally opposite to our own? It is very hard for us to accept such a view.

The view taught in the preliminaries, however, is similar to our view since it is presented in terms of 'me' and 'you.' Even so, it is not a full-scale worldly view; it contains something of the

Dharma view. So it's through the preliminaries that we have to gradually change our mind and our view.

For example, our view doesn't change as soon as we enter a new cultural environment. Only over time, through the influence of that culture and its people, will our view change. Likewise, if we wish to change to a Dharma view, we need to experience the Dharma culture and learn the Dharma view, thereby bringing about a gradual change. If we jump straight into what is totally different from ourselves, we won't be able to accept it. Our mind can't take on a view that is totally different to our present one; it can only accept it if there are some similarities. And then, as we start to accept it, a gradual change begins to occur within our minds.

The preliminaries, then, are in tune with our minds because both have the view of 'me' and 'you'. The view of the Greater Vehicle and Secret Mantra Vehicle is 'no me' and 'no you', which is so distant from our view that we cannot practise it. Any attempts to do so rarely yield a desirable result.

For these reasons, wherever I teach, I take the preliminaries as the basic topic. I myself don't have a high view, so I can't teach one. I don't know Mahamudra, Dzogchen, or the Secret Mantra, so I don't know how to teach them. I dare not teach these views. I don't feel that they fit with our view. The teachings that are compatible and more helpful for us are the preliminaries and mind training (lojong)—they can transform us more easily.

The mind is something malleable. We can change from an ordinary being into someone on the path of accumulation and then the path of joining, the path of insight and the path of cultivation. Our view constantly changes until we become what we call 'buddha.' I don't know, maybe you regard the Buddha as just another human being, but that's very mistaken: humans are sentient beings trapped in the wheel of samsara (cyclic existence); we need to identify the difference between samsara and nirvana. By changing ourselves as humans, we can gradually become buddhas. Animals, for example, are not humans, but if they gradually improve their way of thinking, they can become humans. From the Buddhist perspective, animals have a lower way of thinking than humans; thus, their karmic experience is that of an animal. Humans, though, can improve and become gods and, from there, noble beings and then buddhas. There is a sequence in which these changes take place.

Whatever is closest to our way of thinking is the easiest to accept, so I feel you should apply yourselves to the preliminaries. That is why I chose this topic.

I have one more thing to say, and then we're finished. If I were to teach the Greater Vehicle or the Secret Mantra to you for two hours and then, at the end, got up and slapped this lady in the face, you'd undoubtedly think, 'He's a terrible person! He hit her!' If, in response, I were then to say, 'I didn't touch her. I don't accept your accusations,' you'd be even more incensed: 'You devil, you!' You would think even worse of me. But in the Greater Vehicle teachings I would have just been giving, I would have told you, 'All appearances are mind'. So,

if everything is mind, how could I be the one who was doing the slapping? It was just your mind! Nevertheless, in the end, you'd still be thinking poorly of me. So I think it's pretty clear that we aren't really able to fall in line with these higher teachings. To be able to think like that is extremely difficult.

That is enough for today. Tomorrow, if you decide to come back, you can ask questions. You can be as critical as you like. If you want to say, 'You're awful! The way you teach the Dharma is terrible! That's fine. Anything you wish to say is fine. But please be succinct. If the questions are too long and too vague, people get bored. If I give an answer and say something unpleasant, please be forbearing. And if you're critical of me, then I, too, will try to be forbearing. There's no need to write your name on the question either. If I know who's asking the question, I might be more hesitant about saying what I think needs to be said.

Day 2

Reminder

Please listen to the teachings with the motivation of the awakening mind, bodhichitta.

Giving such a reminder at the beginning of a teaching has become traditional; the teacher says we should listen to Dharma and put it into practice, having first given rise to the attitude of supreme awakening. But in truth, it's difficult for us to even understand what the awakening mind is, let alone actually give rise to it. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the teaching, a reminder is given, and the students think, 'Yeah, ok.' But, for the most part, it's become more of a simulation or pretence.

Two types of teaching: provisional and definitive

The Dharma contains two types of teachings: provisional and definitive. The provisional teachings, also called leading truths, accord with our own particular view. They lead us to the Dharma and help us to gradually develop and transform until we arrive at that which is definitive. As we change and progress, so do the teachings. They remain provisional but lead us ever closer to the definitive teachings. Having said that, we can see how the provisional and definitive teachings are interdependent.

For us, it's extremely difficult to correctly identify whether a teaching is definitive or provisional in meaning, as their distinction is so fluid. Provisional and definitive teachings can only be distinguished by looking at how they work for a particular individual at a certain point in time. Provisional and definitive teachings aren't fixed entities; they don't have their own true and objective reality but depend on how they are received.

Making good use of looking outwards

Today, I'll teach the common preliminaries: the four thoughts that turn the mind. It's essential for us to recognise that when something is in harmony with our own view of things, we're able to accept it, but if not, we'll most likely reject it. Similarly, people with similar views tend to get along quite well, while those with opposing views do not. And it's the same for Dharma teachings—when a Dharma teaching is close to our present view, we can accept it, but when it isn't, it's very difficult to accept. As I said yesterday, the view presented in the preliminaries is very much in harmony with our own, since the preliminaries work on the basis of 'me' and 'you', which is our basic view too. So they are very compatible.

As sentient beings, we project everything outwards, not back at ourselves. There could be someone with a menial job, like a gatekeeper, who is critical of his boss. He might think, 'This boss of mine isn't so competent or successful; they could be doing a much better job,' all the while remaining dumb to the fact that he spends most of his days watching over the gate to their mansion. In truth, when compared with his boss, the gatekeeper is the one who is neither very successful nor influential. After all, if he were so excellent and competent, he wouldn't be watching a gate while his boss is giving the orders and paying his salary.

It can also happen that the electorate starts to criticise their prime minister or president, feeling that they are incompetent and have achieved nothing. The truth, however, is that having worked their

way up the ladder and having been highly successful, they've become the leader of a country. It's not the case that we would refuse or not aspire to such a position ourselves; it's simply that we are not as capable as they are. They've obtained that position through their personal abilities, drive and so on. It's very easy to be critical of those who are more capable and more advanced than ourselves while totally ignoring our own shortcomings.

The basic point I'm trying to make here is that we don't look back at ourselves. We tend only to look outwards at others. This seems to be an inherent trait of human beings. Because the preliminary practices also work by looking outwards, this is another reason why they are compatible with us and our way of thinking.

In what manner are we concentrated externally when doing the preliminary practices? Well, when contemplating the difficulty of finding the leisures and opportunities, we start by looking at the leisures; we think about hell beings, deprived spirits, animals, barbarians, and all of the other states and types of sentient beings. With impermanence, we again look at the external world and its inhabitants, sentient beings, until we really come to feel, 'Ah, they are all impermanent. Nothing lasts!' In relation to karma, cause and effect, we look more internally, but still examine external things too. And then, in contemplating the defects of samsara, a lot of emphasis is given to the external world and beings.

But what's more, these practices have a special feature. Explicitly, they make us examine what is outside of ourselves; indirectly, however, they lead us to look at ourselves. Seemingly, they guide

our attention to the outer world, but through that, we are led to reflect inwards. They are provisional meaning teachings, leading truths. If they were to immediately lead us to look inwards, they wouldn't be compatible with our view, since that's not our normal way of going about things. So, the teachings that show the way to examine and think about external things are called *the preliminaries*.

Sometimes when we receive teachings from a lama, we judge the teachings and we judge the lama. 'Today, they taught very well,' or, 'They didn't give a very good teaching today.' This implies that we see ourselves to be more learned than the lama; learned enough to be able to judge them and their teachings: knowledgeable enough to say, 'This is good and right,' and 'This is bad and wrong'. We act like a judge holding the gavel in a court. You have to be extremely learned to be able to judge whether the teachings of the lama or the Buddha are, in fact, correct or mistaken.

But we don't recognise that our way of thinking is strange in this regard because we don't know how to look within ourselves. We're only able to look out at others, judging them and their deeds, rather than casting a critical eye toward ourselves.

Necessary in the beginning, the middle and the end

Another important point is that we must know how the practice works before we begin. This is why the path has definite stages: study, contemplation, and meditation.

Study is the first step, but most of us don't feel we need to learn or contemplate all that much. We just go straight to the meditation, the practice. Not having studied, we lack knowledge and understanding of how and why the practice works and what we really need to do. The stages of the path show us clearly that there is nothing more profound, excellent, or important than the preliminaries.

What did Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche teach this morning? He taught that impermanence is essential in the beginning for bringing us to the Dharma, in the middle for helping our Dharma practice develop, and in the end for taking the practice through to completion. Impermanence, then, is important at every stage of the path, not just the preliminaries. And the same applies to all four thoughts: they are all important in the beginning, middle and end. Please do your best to take on the view of treasuring the four thoughts. Value them and see the importance of studying. This is exceptionally important.

What's more, the preliminaries and the actual practice must be connected. We see them to be totally separate and distinct, and so aren't very keen on the preliminaries, only on the

actual practice. The main reason we think like this is that we don't understand the preliminaries—their purpose and importance. We think that the actual practice is so high and wonderful, and that the preliminaries are lowly and poor. We think, 'I'm going to do the better one, the actual practice. I'll skip the lesser practice; it won't make much difference if I ignore it.' That's the view many of us have—it's the view of someone who's ignorant and doesn't know how things really are. In truth, for someone with such a view, the preliminaries are in fact the most profound. As the past Kagyu masters said: 'The preliminaries are more profound than the actual practice.'

Who was such a statement meant for? For those of us who haven't really understood the Dharma. For that type of person, the actual practice is not profound. The view of the actual practice is so distant from our present view that it's impossible for us to accept and take on. And if we can't take it on, it's not profound for us! The preliminaries, however, are quite close to our way of seeing things; we're able to take them on and accept them, making them more profound and more beneficial for us.

In the Dharma, there are different ways of presenting the teachings. Some teachings say the preliminaries are more profound than the actual practice, others that the preliminaries are less profound. Which statement best applies to a person depends on whether that person holds a worldly view or not. For those with a worldly view, the preliminaries are more profound than the actual practice. For those whose view has transcended the world, the actual practice is more profound. Such statements must be applied and taken

according to the view of the particular person in question. This is extremely important.

When we consider the four thoughts that turn the mind, the difficulty of finding the leisures and opportunities is the aspect of method; and the contemplation on death and impermanence relates to the aspect of intelligence. The contemplation on the defects of cyclic existence is the method aspect, and the teachings on karma, cause, and effect are the intelligence aspect. In brief, the four thoughts are aspects of method and intelligence, and it's through these that we traverse the path and come to realise the actual view. That's one way of looking at it, at least.

In truth, method and intelligence are not totally distinct—we must understand their union. Contemplating the difficulty of finding leisure and opportunities can also be said to have both aspects of method and intelligence, as can death and impermanence. It depends on our way of thinking and practising.

Difficult from the start

When we encounter the contemplation on the difficulty of finding the leisures and opportunities, our very first thought is one of disbelief and scepticism. How so? Well, it teaches about the eight states without freedom, of which the hell realm is the first, and we don't believe in hell or hell beings. This means that we can’t even develop confidence in the very first subject of our meditation, and this pattern continues as we move on to the next realm, because we don't believe in deprived spirits either. So, as soon as we come to the practice of Dharma, we struggle; we have a hard time because it's profound from the very beginning. These topics may be profound and difficult for us, but in terms of Dharma, they are the easier ones. Dharma is just difficult from the start.

It's like moving between different cultures and education systems. For me, English is very hard. When you speak English, I don't understand you. But I'm guessing those of you who grew up in English-speaking countries don't find it difficult at all; it just comes naturally to you. The same goes for the Dharma. When we haven’t been brought up in a Buddhist environment, it’s difficult and we have a hard time with it. A villager who’s never left their village will have a hard time if they find themselves in a city. They'll probably find bus timetables and subway systems very hard to traverse indeed. But someone who’s grown up in a city won't struggle with them at all. They'd think, 'What's the problem? All the signs and the notice boards are so clear and self-explanatory!’

What we find difficult or easy depends on the society we grew up in and the area of knowledge that we hold. When it comes to the Dharma, we are like a country bumpkin trying to catch the underground. We're told that hell exists, but we don't really believe in it. We end up pretending to accept it while our mind doesn't really believe it, and, therefore, the contemplation doesn't elicit any feeling for us. Renunciation doesn't arise, and we don't get the results that we should.

Anyway, this is not for me to say. You have to think about it for yourselves, look into it and come to your own conclusions.

Realistic expectations

One of the main reasons for our lack of development is that we don't receive good instructions and don't properly rely on excellent lamas. We dedicate a few days to receiving teachings, and if we give it a few months, we feel we've dedicated loads of time to study. We then read a few Dharma books and, based on that, think, 'OK, now I'm going to practise.'

Looking at how the past siddhas went about things, it should become clear that it's not possible to make real progress in the Dharma while giving so little time to learning it. In Marpa's life story, we see how he spent between forty and fifty years studying the Dharma. That's how the father of our lineage went about it. And the Kagyu Lineage is said to be the confluence of the Kadam and Mahamudra, so we can also look at Atisha, from whom the Kadam teachings originated. To receive a single set of mind training teachings, he sought out Serlingpa and relied on him for twelve or thirteen years. For us, it's rare that we'll spend twelve or thirteen days—or hours even—receiving these teachings. And as long as that's the case, we're simply not going to reach the level of knowledge required to make any progress on the path.

As I was saying yesterday, we approach our study of the Dharma in the same way we approach the study of secular topics. We relate to the Dharma as being a study of something external, where all the facts and figures have to be memorised and so on. But this approach brings no benefit to our minds whatsoever.

We get stuck in a rut such as this when we don't rely on lamas with true experience, and this applies to most of us. We spend our time reading books and listening to recordings, but these won't transform our mind. The approach of studying mundane topics is vastly different to that of studying the Dharma. Our mind needs to undergo a transformation through our interaction with the Dharma; as long as that doesn't happen, we don't get the true benefits. Many of you are from Western countries, places where people are well educated. You understand the way of learning and education, so you'll be aware of whether you can learn something for two or three days and then actually get a job or do something of real use with that. During a job interview, they'll ask about your qualifications, and if all you can say is, 'I've attended several weekend courses and watched dozens of YouTube videos,' how likely is it that you'll get the job? Is the employer likely to see you as someone who is qualified and knowledgeable?

If we apply this to the Dharma, how likely is it that we'll be able to meditate and practise the Dharma after studying it for a few days? Strangely enough, we think we can! 'Yes, I know how to meditate now. Rinpoche taught us how to do that this morning. He spent two hours talking about it.' Or you might think, 'I received teachings on this last year, so I've been doing it for a year now.' But practising is the equivalent of actually going to work, actually implementing what we've learnt. What are we going to implement after two or three hours, or two or three days of training? Perhaps we've spent a bit more time on it and attended a whole week of teachings. For many of us,

even that is difficult. And as long as things remain like this, we're not going to gain good results.

The result we expect to see from studying day after day, month after month, year after year in a secular field is money and status. Of course it's not guaranteed we'll find a well-paid job or the happiness and comfort we seek, but nevertheless, we work hard for a long time, studying with these ends in mind. We have to spend a long time studying to get a decent job; I'm sure many of you have spent a good few years educating yourselves. What was your aim? I assume it was the comfort and well-being of this life.

What do we expect to gain from our Buddhist study and practice? We might say something lofty like, 'We are practising to attain full awakening, Buddhahood.' Or we might say, 'I'm practising for the benefit of my future lives.' Or 'To be well-balanced, comfortable and happy in this life.' Either way, we expect a lot from our practice, but we invest next to no time and effort in order to gain the desired results. This reveals some deep-seated issues with our basic way of thinking about the Dharma.

A matter of communication

I often advise people to become proficient in both spoken and written Tibetan. Not because I'm Tibetan, but because, if you're studying and practising Tibetan Buddhism, the language is very important. If you know Tibetan, you can go directly to the original source, which is correct and authentic. If not, you have to rely on translations, and it's difficult to say whether those translations are correct and authentic. It's not easy to make good translations. Furthermore, most of the highly learned and precious Tibetan lamas teach in Tibetan. I'm not saying that I'm one of them, even though I may be speaking in Tibetan, I'm not. But Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche was teaching in Tibetan this morning, wasn't he?

It's not easy to interpret teachings well and make good translations. The language, the words, can be translated, but to convey the feeling of what's being said is very difficult.

For the students, connecting with the feeling that the lama has when teaching is the most important thing. When a certain feeling is instilled within our mind, transformation takes place. This is one of the main reasons why we rely on a lama. It is the direct interaction with the lama that stirs in us a feeling for the Dharma; that's what the lama has and conveys. This is far more important than the words that are used, and that feeling is very difficult to transmit through translation.

When the teachings are being translated, even though the lama's own words may be charged with feeling, the students

can't understand what's being said. I could be sitting here saying terrible things about you, but there would be no outrage or the like from you as I'm saying it. You'd only get angry once it was translated (and that's only if the translator dared to translate it directly). There's a delay, a lack of direct communication and interaction, so it's very difficult for the translator to convey the feeling of the teaching. If I were to pour my heart out to you, relating the pain and suffering of a tragedy that's befallen me, it's unlikely that you'd be as moved or able to empathise when hearing it through a translator, as you would be upon hearing me express myself directly, in my own words.

It is for these reasons that I tell people to learn Tibetan. Many people respond by saying: 'Oh, but it's very difficult to learn a language. I don't think I can do it. It's going to be too hard and take too long.' But if I say, 'Learn the Dharma thoroughly,' they'd say, 'Yes, okay.' They don't say, 'Ooh, that's very difficult. I can't.' So we can see from this that they feel the study of Tibetan to be harder than the study of Dharma. In truth, the study of Tibetan is a piece of cake compared to learning the Dharma. I personally don't find Tibetan that difficult, whereas I find the Dharma extremely difficult; I don't really understand it. Sometimes, when I'm teaching, I come to a section and think, 'I don't understand this.' I don't know how to explain it, and just read on. I don't understand the Dharma, but I understand Tibetan.

Most people see the Dharma to be very simple; those who think it is difficult to understand are extremely few. People approach the study of Dharma as if it's straightforward and

easy, but it’s not like that; it’s very hard. Now, I’m not telling you to learn Tibetan—you wouldn't listen to me anyway. I am using this as an example to show which direction our thoughts should be heading in.

The interconnection of the four thoughts

You're probably thinking, 'He really does go on about all sorts of stuff. He said he was going to teach the four thoughts, but we're halfway through the teachings and he hasn't said anything about them yet. He's just giving us a hard time!'

So I said that the difficulty of finding the leisures and opportunities is the aspect of method, and impermanence is the aspect of intelligence. So what does this mean? Method is the apparent aspect, and intelligence is the empty aspect. Human life itself is the apparent aspect, but when we examine it, we see that it's not permanent—it changes moment by moment. As we start to understand that, we get closer to an understanding of emptiness, the intelligence aspect. This is how we have both aspects of method and intelligence.

Precious human life in and of itself can also be seen to have both aspects of method and intelligence: Human life is the method aspect, but it comes into being through certain causes and conditions, like maintaining moral discipline and so on. Through thinking about causality in this way, we can gain an understanding of interdependence and emptiness—that is the intelligence aspect.

Another way of looking at it is that the practice of the difficulty of finding the leisures and opportunities contains all four preliminaries. When we do this one practice properly,

all four preliminaries arise within our mind. When we think about this precious human life, we reflect on the causes and conditions through which it is obtained. This will lead us to an understanding of karma, cause and effect. Understanding causality, one comes to an understanding of the defects of cyclic existence—they're one and the same thing.

It goes without saying that the difficulties of finding the freedoms and advantages are contained within the contemplation of the precious human life, but so is impermanence. Further, the fact that this human body arises from causes and conditions shows that this practice also includes the contemplation of karma, cause and effect. We know that once we've gained a human life, we will experience difficulties, troubles and hardships; that's the truth of the situation. Thinking about this constitutes the contemplation of suffering, the defects of cyclic existence. So, through our contemplating the difficulty of finding the leisures and opportunities, we in fact have all four thoughts coming to mind. What's more, we'll even gain the ultimate view because, along with the understanding gained through the contemplations, we start to understand the nature of cause and effect and, therefore, the manner of appearances, the apparent world. This, in turn, will lead us to understand emptiness, the ultimate view.

So, what we find is that the contemplation on the difficulty of finding the leisures and opportunities includes both the preliminaries and the actual practice. We tend to think that the preliminaries and the actual practice are unrelated. If that were the case, then one would not assist the other in

any way, and the preliminaries could not be the preliminaries to the actual practice. Wouldn't it be strange to say, 'This body is so important, so difficult to obtain; oh, but it's nothing, it's empty!' If it's empty, then what's so important about it? We see the actual practice to be emptiness, and the preliminary practice to be thinking about the human body, but if we see them to be totally unrelated, one won't serve the other.

Another example is that when we come to the preliminaries, we're told: 'Think about this.' 'Look into that.' 'Contemplate this.' And when we get to the actual practice, we're told: 'Think nothing at all,' so we don't know whether we're coming or going. As long as we see the preliminaries and the actual practice to be in contradiction with one another, it's as if we're being tricked by the practice, 'This precious human body is so important… just joking, it's empty!' And with that, we'll lose all inspiration to practise the preliminaries.

We must contemplate the preliminaries, and we can practise them because we have so much to think about. We have a body and appearances all around us—we have all of these things to look into and examine: there's 'me', there's 'you', and all of our thoughts. Through thinking about these things and looking into them, a feeling of how things truly are stirs within us. We start to gain experience of the mind, and this arises from thinking about and looking into things. It's by examining the things that we can conceive of that our mind will be stirred and moved forward.

When we get to the actual practice, it's all about inner experience and realisation. It’s not how we think it is. It's not a simple matter of ‘It exists,’ or ‘It doesn't exist.’ But this needs more reflection.

True understanding is transformative

Understanding the Dharma is not a matter of being able to give eloquent explanations. With real understanding comes change or transformation. Let's say I buy a Swiss watch, for example, and I think it's wonderful. But then a friend who I know is well-informed about such things comes along and tells me it's a fake and can prove it. The thought of it as being wonderful vanishes immediately. When I thought it was real and valuable, I felt the need to look after it; I was attached to it and would have struggled to give it away. But now, understanding that it's a fake and seeing it as such, all such attachment evaporates. I no longer feel I have any use for it and would happily let someone else have it. This change of mind takes place instantly. Such an example demonstrates what we mean when we say 'understanding' in Buddhism.

We can extrapolate from this example to clarify what understanding means in Dharma terms. Let's say we have an object that, for us, is real; it truly exists in and of itself. But then, having heard many explanations and lines of reasoning, our way of thinking changes and our clinging and our attachment to the object as being real diminishes. With that, we can say some understanding has been gained. Without such transformation within our mind, we cannot say that there is any understanding. Merely having heard the words and being able to repeat them is not what is called 'understanding'. That is called 'knowing the theory', not 'understanding the meaning', which is something else entirely.

At the beginning of the teaching, we recited the *Dorje Chang Tungma*—the *short Vajradhara Lineage Prayer*—in Tibetan. Those of you who don't read or understand Tibetan recited the phonetics so that you can make the sounds, but you didn't know what you were saying. Similarly, just because we can parrot the explanations found in the texts we've received teachings on, it does not mean we have understood them. As long as there is no real change in the mind, no reduction in our clinging and attachment to things, there is no understanding, not of the Dharma at least.

This shows us that acquiring real understanding is not simple. From the very start, with the preliminaries, understanding does not come easily. This is because right from the outset it's linked to the actual practice. The preliminaries show us the importance of being human, the potential and the capacity a human life is endowed with. This is very important. We have to know what we are capable of, what our abilities are, how far we can go and what we can accomplish. If we don't know our level, we won't be sure whether we can actually accomplish what we set out to do. This is an obvious obstacle. Through contemplating the difficulty of finding the leisures and opportunities, we start to see the preciousness, importance and capacity of our human life. Seeing that, our confidence grows.

Seeing our worth

Often we lack confidence and are burdened by thoughts like, 'Oh, I can't do that. That's beyond me. I don't have time for that. I'd never be able to achieve that.' It's through a lack of self-confidence that we become overly self-concerned. We don't feel we are able to achieve the greater good of the many, so we just concentrate on ourselves. Even then, we only concentrate on our short-term goals and well-being.

By contemplating the difficulty of finding the leisures and opportunities, we can come to a visceral feeling of just how precious our current life is. Then we become able to achieve our own and others' long-term goals and well-being on a vast scale. We start to feel that being human is special, that it comes with immense potential, and we therefore lose this debilitating lack of confidence.

This growing confidence in our potential is the result we need to see from our practice. We might pull a bit of paper from our pocket, and on recognising that it's a fifty-dollar bill, put it in our wallet. If, instead, we see that it's a used bit of tissue, then we throw it away. We don't throw away the fifty-dollar bill because we know that, among the different types of paper, this one is quite special. We keep it because we value it; we know we can buy food and other goods with it. Used tissues are not regarded as precious or valuable, so we throw them away without regret or a sense of loss. Similarly, if we know the value of being human, we'll think that it is too precious and valuable to let go to waste and that we must make the most of it. With that view, we become less

lazy and start applying ourselves; the feeling, ‘I must accomplish something,’ arises within us. Without this view, we will not be able to accomplish the Dharma.

For that very reason, this practice comes at the very start of our Dharma path. It makes sense, doesn't it? When we think, ‘I have amazing potential. I can achieve so much! We start to want to work hard and apply ourselves. We won't do that if we think we're useless. This is why this practice comes at the start. Our difficulty, however, is that we don't fully accept and engage with the methods that give us this confidence, which will allow us to see our value, our worth, and our ability. Basically, we don't trust the methods.

Why don't we accept the methods that enable this confidence to shine forth? Well, the first method is to consider hell beings, but we don't really believe in them. So that’s one method we’re unable to use. The next is the deprived spirits, but again, we don't believe in them. If we did and, with that belief, were to contemplate their pain, their terror and constraints, then we would definitely feel extremely fortunate and appreciate just how free we are, how capable we are of achieving something meaningful.

The next method is to consider the lives of animals. We see animals, and so we believe in them, but we don’t believe that we could become an animal in the future. If we could accept that in the past we have been born as animals, then things would be a lot easier. If someone tells you that you’ve put on a lot of weight and are looking very fat, you wouldn't be very happy about that. But if you were told you are like an

animal, you'd be even more upset and annoyed. Being an animal is worse than being fat, isn't it? Even if we're fat, at least we're still human at the moment.

You might be told that you've aged a lot, but, again, compared to being told you look like or act like an animal, it wouldn't be nearly as infuriating. If we were to accept that we could become an animal in the future, we'd become terrified and spurred to action. The problem is that we just don't have that view; thus, we close the door to a practice that would fill us with confidence and an appreciation of our worth. In brief, thinking about the lower states of misery is one way to see the preciousness of human life. We can also contemplate the various predicaments that humans encounter and, through that, come to appreciate the value of our own present situation.

For myself, there have been very few instances where I've been terror-struck by the thought of being born as an animal. Yet the cause for being born as an animal, which the Buddha taught to be confusion, is rife within me. So even though I have more than enough of its causes, I'm hardly ever scared of being born as an animal. I have, however, often been worried about getting fatter. Not because I'm worried about getting uglier, but because fatness can cause many different illnesses and being sick is suffering, isn't it? I'm scared of that, but still am unable to give up the causes of becoming fat; I crave food, and as I keep eating, I keep getting fatter. That's how it is. I'm sure many of you often worry about ageing. Everybody is worried about that. But how many times have you worried about being born as an animal? I'm

guessing not very much. This shows us that the Buddhist way of thinking is not very deep within us; that it's rather weak or superficial. So, in this way, we can see that the practice of Dharma is not easy.

Questions

Question one

Did you say that the Buddha is not human? If not, then what is he or she, and how will I recognise a buddha if I see one?

Answer

That question is a little bit like hearing that animals are not humans, and then asking, 'What is an animal then?'

An animal is an animal, a human is a human, and a buddha is a buddha. This is linked to what I was saying earlier: we must study the Dharma. Only by learning the Dharma will we come to know what the body, speech and mind of a buddha are.

There are various vehicles in the Dharma, and they vary in what they teach about what a buddha is. In the Hearer Vehicle, buddha is taught to be quite similar to us humans. Buddha is explained as having a form, the perpetuating aggregates that experience pain, pleasure and so on. Once we come to the Greater Vehicle, the way buddha is explained is totally different to humans; and so it goes without saying that this is also the case in the Secret Mantra Vehicle. If you want to know what buddha is, you should study The *Sublime Continuum* (Skr. Uttaratantra Shastra). In this text, buddha body, buddha speech and buddha mind are very clearly explained. If we compare the attributes and the qualities of a buddha's body, speech and mind to our own, we will see whether they are the same or not. And we will come to understand that buddhas are not humans.

The *Sublime Continuum* is translated into English, and if you study it, you'll see what I am saying. What is a human body? A human body is made up of flesh, blood and bones. And we can compare that to the explanation of the body of a buddha, and see if it is made of flesh, blood, bones, with bowel waste and so on. If we see that it is not explained like that, then we can deduce, 'Oh, the body of buddha is not like the human body.'

When it comes to speech, our human speech is such that if we are speaking English, we are not speaking Tibetan. Someone who only speaks Tibetan or Chinese won't understand what is being said when someone is speaking English. Someone speaking Chinese won't be understood by someone who only speaks English or Tibetan. This is how human speech is. Right now, you do not understand what I am saying because you don't understand my language—it needs to be translated. When I talk, you just stare at me with blank faces. But the speech of buddha works differently from human speech.

When we come to the mind of a buddha and its qualities, again, we need to see how our human mind works. As humans, we think, 'He is fat', 'She is thin', 'She's nice', 'He's not nice', 'I love you, but you don't love me', and so on. This is the way our mind works, but it's not how the mind of a buddha works. Looking at the various aspects like this, we will see that buddhas are completely different from humans. It's good to study these things because then we'll know.

Question two

If we only talk about faults, isn't it possible that people will become discouraged? Isn't there a need to balance the discussion between the qualities and the faults in order to keep people inspired?

Answer

Yes, that is one way of looking at it. First of all, it's important to have a basic understanding of how Dharma works. When we think about a sick person, for example, we don't need to think of that person as being in good health. A sick person has to be related to as someone who has health problems. When a doctor is dealing with a patient, they don't need to regard them as being in good health. They don't need to talk about their good health. They don't need to know everything that is right with their patient's body. They need to concentrate on the illness and how it can be cured.

It is with such a view that we need to study the Dharma. As Dharma practitioners, we need to relate to ourselves with the thought, 'I've got faults, problems and issues that need to be remedied and therefore must apply myself.' We have to enter into the practice of Dharma in this way. If we feel we're fine as we are, without faults or issues, then what need do we have to train? A Dharma practitioner has to approach the practice with the thought, 'I have problems'. And then the lama says, 'Yes, you have got problems. *These* are your problems. *This* is what you need to do.'

If the lama sees that the student has not been able to abandon their problems, they will continue to talk about them. Yes, the

student may well become discouraged, but I'm not saying that their problems cannot be dealt with. I'm saying that they can be cast off and let go of. We must recognise our problems and issues and then abandon them. That's the way.

Question three

If, because of politics or money, a wrong tulku is identified, they may well die earlier than the real tulku. Would that not make it more difficult to find the authentic tulku in the future, because now they will be looking for the tulku at the wrong time?

Answer

Well, I have never recognised a tulku, so maybe you should ask somebody who has recognised a tulku.

Okay, we'll leave the questions there for today.

The way to receive the Dharma

Today, many nuns have come from Thrangu Gompa. I am told that a certain khenpo has said that they must come. There are also many lamas here, most of whom have been through the retreat centre. I'm not sure if they really want to be here or not; maybe they are thinking, 'He'll be annoyed if we don't show up!' Whatever the case, when receiving the Dharma, we should do so out of faith. To attend a teaching because you are worried about whether the teacher will be annoyed or displeased if you don't is really not in tune with the Dharma. As it is taught, 'Do not teach those who lack respect.'

We should receive the Dharma out of faith and see it as important. We should think, 'I really must receive this. This is something excellent, something I truly need.' That's the way to receive the Dharma. It's not good to receive Dharma teachings just because we've been sent or because we think that somebody might be annoyed if we don't. As I see things, it's good to receive Dharma teachings when you truly wish to, when you have faith in the teachings and in the lama teaching them. That's the way to receive Dharma teachings.

If you're being forced, or if there are other factors involved making you feel obliged to come, then I think it's best not to come. That's my feeling. I can't imagine that any of you Westerners have been forced to come. Maybe some of you are here out of curiosity, 'I wonder what he will say?'

Day 3

Reminder

As I was saying the other day, our motivation is extremely important; it is like the goal we set ourselves. There are three types: negative, positive and neutral. But these aren't fixed, they're relative. For example, the motivation of a lesser capable individual would be considered an excellent motivation when compared to the normal worldly motivation. But it becomes poor when compared to the motivation of an individual of middling capacity. In this way, we can look at any one particular motivation from many different angles.

Faith, openness, gratitude

When we think about things objectively, it becomes clear that we need to have a firm foundation of faith. We only benefit from the teachings when we listen with this basic attitude of faith in the lama and the Dharma. Without it, any sort of beneficial outcome is very unlikely. So, for our minds to take on the Dharma, faith and belief are essential. Without them, the mind simply doesn't accept what it hears; with them, the teachings ring true, and we feel that there is good reason for what is being said. Listening to teachings without faith taints whatever we hear—we become suspicious of what is being said.

When I look at my motivation for teaching the Dharma, it's not to please those who are listening. My motivation is to teach whatever Dharma I know to the best of my ability. If my priority were to make it so that you had an enjoyable time, what I'd be saying wouldn't be Dharma; true Dharma would be lost. Why's that? Well, students don't enjoy having their faults pointed out. But the Dharma is all about eliminating our faults, and for that to happen, they must be spoken of. The quality of a Dharma practitioner is determined by whether they are working to eliminate their faults or not. If we're not able to abandon our faults, we can't become good Dharma practitioners. So, whether somebody can teach the Dharma well or not also depends on whether they're able to point out the faults of the students; do their teachings penetrate and identify the students' faults? Now, whether the students are open enough to accept what's being said depends on their level of faith.

Many students, for example, would love to hear their lama tell them what great meditation they have, even if they have no meditation practice at all and even though such words would be detrimental to them. If someone doesn't have good meditation but thinks they do, telling them that they do is not going to help them one bit. Quite the opposite; from a Dharma perspective, it'll harm them tremendously because they'll then think, 'I'm excellent. The lama said so.' But if a student who's not very good is told, 'You're not good,' they may well be saddened to hear that, but at least they'll go away and think about it. The words will stay with them and, one day, they may come to see, 'Oh, what was said is so true.' And the moment they see a fault of theirs, they'll change.

But our problem is that we don't know the way of Dharma. We've never been raised in a Dharma environment or studied the Dharma very much, which is where a lot of our issues stem from. Once we know the way of Dharma, we'll see that the teachings mostly point out our faults. When we see how this works, we won't get annoyed or upset anymore; we'll only feel gratitude.

The teachings must hit home

Let's take the sixth chapter of Chandrakirti's *Entering the Middle Way* as an example. I'm not sure whether many of you have studied this or not, but it's a Greater Vehicle text that clarifies the intent of the revered master Nagarjuna, and is thus considered very important by Greater Vehicle practitioners. Chandrakirti was an Indian pandita, and his teachings and works are accepted by all Tibetan Buddhist schools as authentic and important.

How does the illustrious sixth chapter start? It starts by looking at the faults of non-Buddhist, or tirthika, schools. It looks at how their views fall to the extremes of either permanence or nihilism. Next, he turns his attention to the flaws of the Hearer (Shravaka) schools: the Great Exposition Followers (Vaibhashika) and the Sutra Followers (Sautrantika). Then he turns to the Greater Vehicle and talks about what's wrong with the view of the Mind Only School (Cittamatrin). Next, he comments on the Middle-way School (Madhyamaka), of which there are two camps: the Autonomists (Svatrantika) and the Consequentialists (Prasangika). He points out the faults of the autonomist view and then presents the consequentialist view as being true and authentic. From start to finish, he focuses solely on faults. But nobody gets upset or angry when these faults are pointed out. I could sit here and explain all the various faults from the tirthikas upwards, and none of you would bat an eyelid.

Why not? Because we are all sitting here thinking, 'I'm not a tirthika.' We don't know how to look to see what our own view

is. To see whether it falls to the extremes of permanence or nihilism**.** We think, 'I'm not a hearer,' and so we don't get angry. Similarly, we don't think of ourselves as autonomists, adherents of the Great Exposition or Sutra Followers. We feel everything that's said is said about *them,* so we don't get upset. But if I were to say, 'You Westerners are no good because...,' then I am sure you'd get upset.

Using the label 'Westerner' instead of 'tirthika' or 'Great Exposition Follower' makes your reaction quite different. Why is this? Because it's hitting the mark, it becomes direct and personal. The whole profundity of a teaching depends on whether it penetrates our view, whether it hits home or not. When it does, then we get something to think about. When it doesn't, and all the teachings are directed towards *them,* we remain unmoved, and the teachings have no real effect.

Those who've not studied *Entering the Middle Way* can look at the text that Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche is teaching today. Right from the start, faults are being pointed out. Some very directly, some indirectly, but our faults are being pointed out all the same. It says things like, 'Many people are meditating these days, but things are not going very well; their practice tends not to be very successful.' And even though this applies to us, we remain calm and unruffled because we don't count ourselves amongst those being referred to.

But let's say it was made more personal: 'These days, many of you Westerners are practising the Dharma, but very few of you make decent progress.' If the same words are said, omitting 'You Westerners…', people don't get angry. It becomes even

more troubling if, instead of the broad label *Westerners,* I were to say, 'You…', and point the finger, or mention you by name, saying, 'You're no good. Your problem is….' This would definitely trigger a reaction. But when we understand the way of the Dharma, we see that almost all the teachings are there to show us where we're going wrong. And as long as those faults persist, we won't make any progress.

It is like the question from yesterday: 'Surely it can't be helpful if only our faults are pointed out?' Many of you think like this, but it's the way of thinking of somebody who is either new to the Dharma or who's been around for some time but hasn't received much Dharma teaching.

For example, this morning Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche mentioned the text, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher.* Many Kagyupas and Nyingmapas study this text, whose primary objective is to show practitioners where they are going wrong. In fact, it even says, 'The best instructions are those which land directly upon your faults.'

It contains many scoldings, mainly for lamas, monks and nuns. They are given particular attention because they were the main ones practising in Tibet. Previously, there weren't many lay people practising intensively; they mainly practised reciting Mani mantras and the like. Very few lay people would practise in any depth. It was primarily the monks, nuns, and lamas who studied and meditated, so many of the teachings are geared towards them. Initially, the teachings found in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* were given one-to-one, but later,

seeing them as important for future generations, they were written down.

I myself will never try to teach in order to please you, unless, of course, I deteriorate heavily as a Dharma practitioner. Otherwise, I'm one hundred per cent certain that I'll never try to please you when I teach. Maybe I'm a bit strange, maybe there's something not quite right with me, who knows? But in general, teaching Dharma is not about pleasing people. The teachers must try to present the Dharma as it was truly intended, and then the students must try to practise it as authentically and properly as possible.

To give an example of how this way of pointing out faults is present in all aspects of life, we can think about building houses. Once a house is built, it is inspected; the inspectors don't look for original features that are immaculate and stylish, they look for flaws, for what needs to be corrected. And it's like that with any activity: we have to see where the issues lie in order to rectify them. It's very strange, when it comes to the worldly areas of life, our reasoning is razor sharp, and we can examine and come to understand things from all angles. We see why something might have been said and what was behind it—both provisional and definitive meanings are crystal clear to us. But when it comes to the Dharma, we seem to be utter fools; we can only understand things at face value and often totally miss the point.

We don't seem to see the reasoning behind things and only understand things as they appear to be. As I see it, if telling you what wonderful and excellent practitioners you are would

make you stable in the practice and thus excellent practitioners—if it were that easy—then I think it's safe to say that it would've happened by now. Many Tibetan lamas have already praised you extensively and have talked about how wonderful you are and how great you are, so if that were ever going to work, it would have done so by now, I reckon. But it doesn't seem to have brought the desired results; you don't find people gaining accomplishment through this approach. The fact is that it doesn't work because there's no grounds for it to work.

There's a particular approach to the study and practice of Dharma. We're sentient beings trying to become buddhas, but sentient beings are riddled with faults that stop them from reaching that goal. So those faults absolutely have to be clearly identified, pointed out and explained. Then it's a matter of the student being able to relate to that correctly, going away and thinking about it, looking into themselves, and thereby bringing about a change within their mind.

The lama's words as medicine

For example, we never get angry with doctors, do we? If we're not feeling very well and go to see a doctor and they say, 'Yes, you have a problem with your stomach, we need to operate,' we don't get angry because we trust that they're trying to heal us. We think, 'Wow, I've got a big problem and this is the remedy.' We don't think, 'This doctor is a terrible person! He says he's going to slash my stomach open!' On the face of it, there are good grounds for being outraged—he just told you he wants to cut you open—but you don't get angry, do you?

Likewise, the lama will say things like, 'Your problem is…', 'Your anger is like…', 'You have desire and you give in to it when…' or 'Your meditation is useless.' For someone who's really practising, these words are like a doctor's prescription. They'll see themselves as the patient and be very grateful for such instructions. Our problem is that we don't really have the basic Dharma outlook, so when the lama is honest with us, we get annoyed and upset. Dharma doesn't become Dharma because we relate to it in a worldly way. When a doctor tells us we have a problem with our eyes, we don't get angry. Even though we have to pay them for this bad news, we feel grateful. And even if we're short on money, we do whatever we can to scrape together enough so that the doctor can knock us out and cut our eye open, or what have you.

In truth, when it comes to the Dharma, our way of thinking is incredibly poor. Staying with this example, we see the doctor because we know something is wrong with us physically, don't we? We feel that something isn't right. We see the doctor, and

they say, 'Yes, you have such-and-such problem.' But we don't get angry, we are grateful. We think, 'Ah, now I know what I need to do to get better. I need an operation and to take this medication.' It's because of our way of relating to what the doctor says that we accept their advice, even though it's not certain they are right. We might not need an operation. Sometimes they make mistakes, don't they? Sometimes people even die as a result of such mistakes. Nevertheless, we trust and appreciate the doctor more often than not. This is our way of thinking.

We must maintain this same patient-doctor attitude when receiving Dharma—that our mind isn't right and that we have issues to resolve. If everything were fine, why receive the Dharma teachings?

What are the problems, then? Desire, anger, confusion, pride and ego-clinging—as well as not knowing what these problems are and how they operate. We don't really know what's going on, and that's why we go to see a lama and receive their teachings. So when we're told, 'You have desire and it is like *this*…, You have anger and it is like *this*…, You're full of confusion and it is like *this*…,' we need to listen with a big smile on our face, delighted that we're finally finding out what's going on. This is what we came for, after all. We need to see the truth of what's being said and accept it readily. If we do, then all will go well in Dharma. This is the way to study and receive Dharma teachings.

I said on the first day that our way of studying the Dharma isn't correct, that we study it the same way we study worldly

topics. We don't know how to look at the positive and negative aspects of our mind. Therefore, we relate to the Dharma teachings as a study of external objects, like the study of pillars and walls. But this is not the way of Dharma. Dharma is all about the mind, about learning to look at our mind and deal with it directly. When we know that, we will be able to accept whatever the teacher tells us.

Desire and anger are our mind; they don't arise within pillars, walls or vases. A pillar doesn't have self-clinging; it doesn't regard itself as 'me'. All afflictions and ego-clinging are our mind. This is what the Dharma teaches and explains; therefore, this is what the lama needs to tell us. That’s very important. As I know the Dharma, at least, it’s essential. But who knows, maybe my understanding of Dharma is mistaken.

The ways of past lamas

If we look at Milarepa, he first studied black magic, then relied on a Nyingmapa lama and trained in Dzogchen. At the start of his training, the lama said to him, 'This Dharma is extremely profound; those who meditate on it during the day become enlightened during the day, those who meditate on it during the night become enlightened in the night, and those who have a special karmic connection with this practice don't even need to meditate at all!'

That sounds great, doesn't it? And Milarepa thought, 'Well, it only took me a few weeks to gain signs of accomplishment in black magic, and now I've come across something even easier. For somebody with as much merit as I, this will be a piece of cake. I'm not going to need to push very hard, I have excellent karma,' so he took it easy. I'm sure it wasn't the case that he didn't do any meditation at all; he must have been meditating somewhat. Maybe a bit like how we go about our meditation. But basically, he took his time, thinking it would be simple. This Dzogchen lama was an adept, an accomplished being, so after a few days, when there were no real signs of success in the practice, he said to Milarepa, 'I'm not able to tame you, I'm not the lama for you. You need a very strict lama!'

This shows us that his Nyingmapa lama was a truly authentic lama. Two signs show us this: firstly, he had clairvoyance since he could see Milarepa's mind; and secondly, he said, 'You'd be better off going to another lama. Someone you have a strong Dharma connection with.'

I don't have the clairvoyance to know that sort of thing about students; on top of that, I would fear losing my students to other lamas. So I'd say, 'You just stay with me; you'll be fine. Just stay here, and it will all come good eventually. Those Kagyupas are no good; you don't want to make connections with them. You're much better off with us Nyingmapas.'

It is quite possible that some lamas might talk like this: 'The Nyingmapa Dharma is the most profound. There's nothing beyond Dzogchen. If Dzogchen doesn't work for you, nothing's going to work. It's the very pinnacle of Dharma!' What's more, if Milarepa were alive today, he'd most likely only meet lamas who'd say, 'You're wonderful.' Even though he'd committed terrible misdeeds, they'd say, 'It's excellent that you have come to the Dharma and wish to study and practise, you're great.' But his Nyingmapa lama wasn't like that, was he? He was able to say, 'Well, I'm not able to tame you, things are not going as they should. You should go to Lama Marpa; you have a karmic connection with him.'

Marpa was clairvoyant, too, so he knew he could tame Milarepa and that he was destined to become his principal student, his heart son. His method of taming Milarepa was to pretend that this wasn't the case at all. Just think of the hardships Milarepa had to endure before he received anything even resembling Dharma, and then how hard he worked to put the teachings he received into practice.

If we read his life story, we see that the Dharma he received and practised was no different from what we have today. The Dharma hasn't changed; what's changed is people's level of

faith, their way of thinking and their diligence. We aren't turning out like Milarepa, are we? Look at me, for example; my belly alone is probably equal to Milarepa's entire body mass.

Getting the point

We should look to the lamas of old: what they did and why, and how they thought. How were the teachings given? How did the students receive and accept them? Of course, this only matters if we wish to study and practise the Dharma truly. If we wish to train in the Dharma truly, it's not going to work if we're taking it easy and the lama speaks to us softly and gently. We've had this already, and it hasn't been of much help. So we should think about Milarepa and Phagmo Drupa. In the Kagyu lineage, there are four elder and eight younger schools, and Phagmo Drupa is the source of the eight younger ones. He attained the path of insight by receiving a scolding from Gampopa. Gampopa wasn't being all soft and gentle with him. Instead, he scolded him. I'm not just making this up; it's what we see if we look at his life story. What's more, if we look at the texts in general, and how they're presented, some are very explicit scoldings and admonishments. They tell us where we are going wrong. If we are open to them, that's what we'll see. Some of them scold us more subtly, but if we take the time to stop and think about it, we'll see that's basically what's happening.

For example, if we're given a pointing-out instruction where the lama tells us how the mind is, that's not an obvious scolding. Instead, it feels like we're being told something good and pleasant, we're being told the way the mind is. It doesn't feel like our faults are being exposed. But on the other hand, we are basically told that we're stupid, 'Look! This is how it is! You don't know, so I have to tell you.' In actuality, it's a scolding. Everything depends on how we relate to and think

about things. If we're told our problem is desire, or our issue is anger, then it's obvious that we're being scolded because our faults are being directly pointed out.

When you see a doctor and tell them about a problem you're having with a particular part of your body, what do they do? They poke, squeeze, and prod the sore area—the exact area we just told them was painful. After which the doctor says, 'Yep, you really do have a problem here. When I squeezed, it hurt, didn't it?' They don't gently blow on it and then see what your reaction is.

A couple of years ago, I was in Spain and had a problem with my heel, so I was taken to see a chiropodist. What did he do? He examined my foot using this tool that looked like a small hammer, which he proceeded to jab right into the heel. I almost went through the roof, it hurt that much. Then he said, 'Ah, very good, I think I know what the problem is.' What did he do next? He stuck a needle in it and injected something into it, and then asked: 'Is it ok now?' On the face of it, he treated me terribly. I went in there saying my foot was hurting, and he went and stabbed it, which immediately made it hurt a lot more. That was his approach to curing the problem. And this is how it works in the Dharma, too. We have anger, desire and so on, but they're not very apparent to us because our confusion and ignorance are just so dense. It takes the spiritual friend to come along and tell us what our problem is. They point everything out very directly. Then it's up to us to get the point so that what was hidden becomes apparent.

How strong must Milarepa's faith have been in Marpa? If we were in his shoes, we might have wanted Marpa thrown in prison. We'd think, 'This guy abused me. He treated me terribly. Look at what he made me do! He made me build a tower all by myself!' We'd rush off to phone CNN or the BBC. But that wasn't how Milarepa was thinking, was it? He couldn't even think of Marpa without tears of devotion welling up. Even when he spoke a single line of Dharma, he would start with the words, *Homage to Marpa the translator* or *Homage to Father Marpa*. That shows how much he revered Marpa. He didn't hold a grudge against him, thinking, 'Look what he made me do! He made me build all these buildings by myself and tear them down... and me, all on my own. He didn't treat anyone else like that!' Milarepa was able to recognise what he had gained because of such methods. We see in his life story that despite the hardship, he was even keen to carry on building. He said, 'Well, my body's a mess, I've hardly any strength left, but my only wish is to continue serving my lama.'

That's it! That's the way to study and practise the Dharma.

Honesty can be kind

For yourselves, I suggest that if you're unable to think about it in any other way, think about your path in terms of therapy. What needs to be done in order to remedy an illness is something we can conceive of. It boils down to the same basic point: we have the illnesses of mind, namely desire, anger, jealousy, confusion and so on, but, as these are not the nature of the mind, just like the illnesses are not the nature of the body, they can be remedied and cured. And to recognise the afflictions, we need the diagnosis of a lama. And just as the doctor wouldn't be doing us any favours if they told us we were fine when in fact we were gravely ill, the lamas would be doing us a disservice if they said that we are ok as we are. It's much kinder and more helpful for them to tell us what the actual situation is. Someone with a Dharma way of thinking will feel extremely grateful to a lama who shows them their problems. They'll feel that this lama, who was able to exactly identify the problem, is extremely precious. With the recognition that remaining unaware obstructs one's development and thus is a cause for many lifetimes of suffering, they'd appreciate the great kindness that lies in having the problem pointed out and being shown the methods to remedy it.

That's how I understand the Dharma, but different lamas have different ways of teaching. I'm sure that if a lama knows the way of Dharma, they'll definitely be thinking the same way regarding faults and how they must be known. Although the manner in which they introduce the student to those faults may differ. Maybe my style of teaching makes for

something of a harsh atmosphere. Maybe there are other lamas who are able to effectively point out their students' faults in a more pleasant fashion.

We become Dharma

To put it simply, if we bring our worldly view to the study and practice of Dharma, things will not go well. When we are learning the Dharma, we have to do our very best to give up our own view. Without letting that go, we can't change for the better. The worldly view and the Dharma view are different; the whole way of thinking and seeing things is different, and therefore our study of Dharma cannot go well if we are trying to study and practise while holding on to our worldly view and values. There is no doubt about that.

For example, if I wanted to teach you about something mundane like computers, I would not myself need to be a computer, I only need to know about computers. You also don't need to become a computer. Neither party will think I'm talking about a computer that is you or your mind. This is the approach of all secular study—the mind needs to *know* the thing, but doesn't need to *become* the thing.

That's not how it is in the Dharma. If we come to the Dharma and start learning about renunciation, the person teaching us must have it in their own mind. That way of thinking must be present within them. If you want to train in the awakening mind (bodhichitta), which isn't an external object but a quality of the mind, then the person teaching first needs to have it themselves. Think about it in terms of your own path: do you wish to learn the words, or do you want to learn renunciation? Do you wish to learn the terminology of bodhicitta, or bodhichitta itself? If you think, 'I'm not in this just to learn words and terminology. I actually want to gain bodhicitta and

renunciation,' then you have to learn these from someone who has them. There's no other way. If the other person only has the words, they can't help you gain the thing itself.

If you see that they don't have renunciation or bodhicitta, you should think, 'What are their words going to do for me? They don't have their own personal experience, so how can they help me?' If, however, you recognise that the lama embodies these qualities, then you should see them to be special. You should relate to them in a way that is very different from how you see ordinary teachers. If this person has renunciation, they are not an ordinary person.

Dharma—A major undertaking

It’s not at all easy to have renunciation or bodhicitta. It is not even easy to plan and put things in place to have a decent life, or even just a few decent months where we can be free from trouble and strife. Even to arrange it so that we have just a few days of comfort and well-being is not easy. For example, I've noticed that a few of you, worried that it might be painful and uncomfortable to sit on the floor, went to the effort of buying yourself a chair. It’s not so straightforward to buy a chair and bring it here just for a few hours of relative comfort.

When we consider the study and practice of Dharma, it's very hard. And it is so hard because the basic view of Dharma is trying to do that which will make us happy for many lifetimes, not just a day, a week, a month, a year, or even a single lifetime. We are working so that we will be free from suffering in all our future lives. Right from the start, it is a major, difficult undertaking. This is how I see it, at least. For instance, when you learn English, the first thing you learn is 'A', followed by the rest of the alphabet, but when you come to the Dharma, even the equivalent of 'A' is not easy. It’s the contemplation of the difficulty of finding the leisures and opportunities.

When we start the contemplation on the difficulty of finding the leisures and opportunities, we first need to think about the eight states without freedom. As I was saying, right from the start, we focus on the problems. Being without freedom is a problem; it's not something good. Of these eight states, which is the first to contemplate? It is hell and the sufferings of hell

beings. When we don't believe in these, we really have our work cut out for us. As soon as we hear such teachings, we think, 'Oh dear, I've got to think about this, but I don't really believe in it.' That's not so easy, is it? Not believing in the existence of hell, there's no way we can meditate on it, no way for us to get our teeth stuck into this contemplation. Next, we look at the deprived spirits and the experiences of that realm. But exactly the same thing happens again. So we put aside thinking about hell beings, then we put aside the spirits, and therefore end up with no practice that we can or will actually do. We have to put *this* one aside, then *that* one aside, 'I don't believe in *this* one, I don't accept *that* one,' and so on. Even when we try to force ourselves to believe, with thoughts like, 'They do exist. They exist. They *are* real. It's true, it's true, it's true! Nothing really changes. We can meditate for a month on the hell realms, telling ourselves, 'They exist, they exist, they exist. They are hot, they are hot, they are hot. They are cold, they are cold, they are cold. Ouch, ouch ouch!' But it doesn't make any difference because the mind doesn't believe it deep down.

An example of this that many of you might have some experience of is couples who live together but can't stand each other. One of the couple might be speaking very charmingly to another person, but their partner will not accept what they're saying; in the back of their mind they will be thinking, 'Just wait until they show their true colours. Believe me, this is not who they really are.'

A person who has this sort of relationship with their partner has a hard time of it. Similarly, for us as Buddhists, if we don't

accept the existence of hell and so on, we'll have a very hard time getting on in Dharma. Speaking for myself at least, I find practising Dharma difficult. I struggle with even the basics, never mind the higher stuff. But it's not surprising that it's difficult because our objectives in Dharma, compared to those of the world, are so far-reaching. Making a house for ourselves, making ourselves happy and comfortable just for a single lifetime is nothing really, at least not from the perspective of our goals in Dharma.

When we consider what it takes to really change ourselves, to change our way of thinking, it's no simple matter. It's taught that we have become habituated to our present way of thinking since beginningless samsara, and we know how difficult it is to change our habits. Even those formed over just a few years, months or even weeks are difficult enough to break. If you were told you had to stop drinking tea and coffee and eating bread and butter, you'd find that difficult because you've been consuming them your whole life. But these are habits formed only in this life; it's not that you have been drinking tea and coffee and eating bread and butter continuously over many lifetimes. And even in this life, you haven't been consuming them constantly—only at certain times of day. So even the habits of this life are not easy to give up or change. I think if you had to go a whole year without a single cup of coffee, that'd be hard; you'd probably think about coffee a lot. And it's the same with bread: if you didn't have any bread to eat for an entire year, you'd really miss it. It's like the monks here, if they go abroad and don't get any dal for a while, they start to miss it. For many Tibetans, it would be tsampa. And these are habits that have been formed over

months and years alone. So we certainly aren't going to be able to improve and better ourselves without great and prolonged effort. At least this is what I understand of the Dharma, but please think about it for yourself.

Questions

Question one

Referring to your teaching yesterday, it seems that as a Westerner who doesn't understand Tibetan, these short teachings are not going to be of much benefit because I will not get the proper feeling for the teaching. Is it then the case that I am wasting my time being here, or did I misunderstand?

Answer

Whether it's a waste of time or not depends on your plans for the future. Having received the teachings, have your future plans changed or not? How much has your self-clinging reduced as a result of receiving these teachings? How much renunciation have they inspired within you? How much compassion have you given rise to? The Dharma teaches that renunciation is the cause for liberation and that bodhichitta is the cause for Buddhahood. So what changes have you noticed in these areas? What has developed in you that wasn't there before? This is what we need to think about. Doing so, you'll see for yourself whether your time has been wasted or not.

But there is something else that you have to be aware of. Time wasted would be quite a minor negative outcome; there are many outcomes that are much worse. There are individuals who become jaded, who become samaya (secret mantra pledge) breakers or vow breakers. Many such faults are listed in the teachings, and you should take special care in relation to each of them. People become jaded and impervious to the Dharma through listening to the Dharma; it doesn't happen by not receiving teachings. And that outcome is much worse than

wasting time. Likewise, you can only become a vow breaker once you have taken vows, or a samaya breaker once you have accepted the samayas. There is a particular hell realm called *the unrelenting hell*, avici hell, and it's only people who have practised the Dharma who can end up in this particular hell realm. So, wasting time would be a favourable outcome compared to what else could happen.

In the tantras, the history of a particularly vicious and powerful spirit called Rudra is taught. He became such a potent demon through the power of deity meditation, mantra recitation and meditating on emptiness. So again, just wasting time is quite minor and insignificant compared to these sorts of possible outcomes. And it's good to be aware of this sort of thing. We must first study the Dharma, since only then will we come to know what is what.

Question two

What about if we feel that we're imperfect? Some people have the feeling that they are unworthy. Buddha Nature is taught in the Sublime Continuum so that people would not become discouraged and depressed. What about them?

Answer

The Kagyupas and Nyingmapas don't accept that the *Sublime Continuum* is taught to merely remedy discouragement and depression. Some Gelugpas say this, but there are different ways of elucidating the intent of the treatises. There's good reason for both explanations; they are not based on petty squabbles about whether the text is actually taught as a remedy for overcoming discouragement.

For example, the view that things truly exist, the view of you and me, is very ingrained within us, and it wouldn't be appropriate to teach the *Sublime Continuum* from that viewpoint. It's because of such an approach that Buddha Nature is said to be a provisional meaning teaching and not a definitive teaching. The Gelugpas tend to teach it from that perspective, so this is why they state that the teachings on Buddha Nature are provisional in meaning. When taught like this, it is said that the seed of Buddhahood is within all, so sentient beings need not be discouraged. It is taught to inspire them. So in this context, it's a leading truth. But we have to keep the main purpose of Dharma in mind, which is to ensure that we gain an excellent view. And to make sure that that happens, various methods are taught and employed.

The Nyingmapas and Kagyupas would say that the Buddha Nature teachings are definitive meaning teachings, and not taught just to ease the concerns of those who might get discouraged and depressed. They were not taught to fool people so that they remain upbeat. The Kagyupas and Nyingmapas relate to the Buddha Nature teachings literally, that those teachings tell us how things actually are. There are different ways of explaining it, but in general, the Nyingmapas, Kagyupas and Jonangpas take the intent of the final turning of the wheel of Dharma to be definitive in meaning.

But there is not a whole lot of benefit in talking about this unless we have some understanding or insight that serves as a foundation. There is a lot of debate about whether the

Buddha Nature teachings are provisional or definitive meaning in nature. Both explanations are very important and precious instructions. As I said, the way we make progress is by becoming aware of our faults. The system of debate is just that, it's a system which concentrates on faults. The fault being pointed out here is that our minds and our views only ever go in two directions; we either see things to be real or unreal. When our minds go in the direction of existence, we've fallen to the extreme of permanence. When they go to the side of non-existence, we have fallen to the extreme of nihilism. As sentient beings, we only ever fall to one of the two extremes. To realise the view of union that does not reside within either of the two extremes is very difficult.

If we are to finally untangle ourselves from the two extremes, we need to be corrected. And that is only going to happen when the faults of falling to either extreme have been pointed out, refuted, and rejected. For those who fall to the extreme of permanence, the faults of the view of permanence need to be pointed out so that it can be abandoned. For those who fall into the view of nihilism, the faults of non-existence have to be pointed out so that they can go beyond it. By abandoning these two faults, we come to realise the ultimate view.

If you fail to correctly understand the Buddha Nature teachings and instead come to conclude that they teach a view of permanence and true existence as the ultimate state, that needs to be refuted and pointed out as being provisional meaning. That's what a person who clings to the Buddha Nature teachings as real needs to be made aware of. By

explaining the flaws of the view of nihilism, the person has something to think about and can adjust and correct their view. But if someone has fallen to the extreme of nihilism, the teachings on Buddha Nature become a remedy to correct their view by saying that the Buddha Nature teachings are definitive in meaning. So it is not that one or the other view is wrong. It doesn't work like that.

If we want to realise the view of union, we have to know that things are beyond existence and non-existence. Saying that something is provisional or definitive in meaning is, in fact, a method for guiding the students. Both of these teachings are needed. Otherwise, we can’t come to the true view. So both explanations are extremely important. It’s not a matter of squabbling, 'Our view is better than yours!' Certainly not.

Fundamentally, the different schools are of one view and share one and the same Dharma. This is why people of the different schools rely on lamas from other schools. Kagyupas rely on Nyingmapas, Sakyapas and Gelugpas. Gelugpas rely on Sakyapas, Nyingmapas, and Kagyupas because they essentially have the same view and the same Dharma. While there are differences in what the schools emphasise as the means to come to the perfectly true view, one always needs both streams of thought that correct the two extremes.

I'll share an example with you from my own experience; it is not the thought, ‘Oh, I have Buddha Nature, therefore I should practise,’ that inspires me personally. I am not usually encouraged by the Buddha Nature teachings because I don't have a good understanding of Buddha Nature. What does

encourage me is thinking about our human life and how capable we are as humans; how other species are not able to do what we as humans can. This thought makes me feel, 'I must make the most of this opportunity!' This is what usually encourages me. I don't know how it is for you. I am just sharing how it is for me.

Day 4

Reminder

Please listen to the teachings with a pure and correct motivation. With that in mind, the Dharma to be listened to is the preliminaries, the four thoughts. Although that was the intended topic, so far, I have mainly spoken about how a practitioner goes about transforming their mind and how that transformation manifests.

The four thoughts: the heart of the matter

When training in the Dharma, some aspects are important at the start, some in the middle and some at the end of the path. Whatever the case, the heart of the matter is this: whether we are a practitioner or not is determined solely by whether or not the preliminaries, or ngondro, are firmly rooted within our mind. There is nothing more important than that. Without the view of the four thoughts, we cannot attain higher realisations. To attain such results, their causes need to be in place, and for that to happen, we need to put aside all of our worldly ways of thinking and take up the Dharma way of thinking. This change is brought about through the preliminaries, the four thoughts.

Unfortunately, we modern Buddhists don't see the four thoughts as very important. We prefer to chase after the actual practice even though we're unable to do it. This happens because we haven't trained our mind properly in the preliminaries, and, as long as that is the case, our actual practice will not go as it should. In Tibet, there used to be a tradition of practitioners developing the four thoughts over many years, thereby becoming authentic Dharma practitioners. Only then would they even start to think about Mahamudra, the study of mind and receiving pointing-out instructions. This is how they became decent meditators. We have many accounts of how such masters went about their lives and how expansive and trouble-free their minds were during death.

Nowadays, having very little regard for the four thoughts, people rush off to retreat and claim to have completed the preliminaries after just a few weeks. But they haven't actually integrated the practice. We've only completed the preliminaries when renunciation is born within us—until that happens, the ngondro remains unfinished. But we don't have the habit of checking our minds to see whether we have developed renunciation or not. In fact, most of us don't even meditate on the four thoughts. When we think of the preliminaries, we think of doing prostrations, reciting the hundred-syllable mantra, offering mandalas and doing guru yoga practice. But, it's the same story for these uncommon preliminaries as well. For example, we practise guru yoga without really increasing our faith in the lama. We think of 'guru yoga practice' as just reciting the seven-line prayer, 'Bless me that I give up ego clinging…,' and so on. Then, once we've completed a certain number of repetitions, we feel and claim that we have finished the preliminaries. As long as that's the case, it's going to be very difficult to become decent Dharma practitioners.

It is as Khenpo Gangshar Rinpoche said, 'There are many people who say they're practising, studying and meditating, but very few actually see it through to completion.' And if they were rare in Khenpo Gangshar's time, there must be hardly any around today. These days, the quality of Dharma practitioners in general is deteriorating rapidly; it's not improving. This is as clear as day. Think about how many arhats and siddhas there used to be flying through the sky, tunnelling under the earth, or passing through rocks. The

quality of practitioners has deteriorated just as the Buddha predicted. He spoke of the different phases of Buddha Dharma: the phases of result, practice, theory and of mere signs. The Buddha said that things would get worse, not better. Where is it that we go wrong? It's at the stage of the preliminaries.

To start with, we don't make sure to receive good instructions on them. When we wish to start, we take our text to the lama, saying, 'I want to start the ngondro, please give me the reading transmission.' Then we go home and start working through it as best we can by ourselves. That's not enough. So one area where we're going wrong is with the instructions. The second area is with the practice itself. The main text we rely on for this practice is *The Torch for the Definitive Meaning*, although some use *The Ocean of Definitive Meaning*. If you read those texts, you'll notice that very little is taught about how to recite the text, about the need for doing one hundred thousand prostrations or how to physically do them, and so on. What's taught in these two texts is the meditation; the way we need to think. Our mind transforms when there is a change in our way of thinking. This is why the instruction manuals focus solely on that. You can look for yourself; how many pages in these texts are dedicated to how the mind needs to think, and how many to what needs to be done with the body and speech? You'll see that over ninety per cent is concerned with what we need to do with our mind.

We, however, put ninety per cent of our focus on the physical and verbal aspects of the practice, dedicating little time and effort to what our mind should be doing. But that's something

that we've decided to do; it's not what is taught in the texts. So is this how it is, or not? Am I speaking the truth, or not? Am I just being critical for no good reason? If you look into it, maybe you'll be able to accept what I say as true. As long as we put all our emphasis on the physical and verbal aspects of the practice while ignoring the mental aspects, we will not attain the excellent results and benefits that the texts describe.

As I said the other day, these teachings have been organised mainly for Western Dharma students, and so the points that I'm making here are tailored mainly for you. If I were teaching the nuns and monks, I would have to tailor them slightly differently.

A change in the way we see things

The preliminary practices are like the ABC of Dharma, and it's essential that we relate to them in that way. If you want to read Tibetan, you have to learn Ka Kha Ga Nga. You can't ignore the Tibetan alphabet and separate learning the alphabet from learning to read. The alphabet only consists of single letters; reading is more difficult because you have to know how the letters join together to form words. The next step in the learning process is the grammar, which is even more difficult. And like that, with each step, the difficulty only increases. In truth, we should relate to the preliminaries and the actual practice in the same way. At the moment, not understanding their connection and relationship, we see them to be totally unrelated. But if they were unrelated, the preliminaries would not be able to help us move towards the actual practice. When we don't see the use of something, we throw it away—and that's exactly what we do with the preliminaries. We say things like, 'Oh, I've finished those,' and forget about them.

Continuing with this example of learning Tibetan, if someone hasn't mastered the alphabet, they can't give up on it or leave it aside if they still wish to learn Tibetan. They continue studying the alphabet because they recognise that we can't read if we don't know it. Similarly, someone who knows the way of Dharma does not abandon the preliminaries to move on to the actual practice. The preliminaries and actual practice are not different from one another. They both are concerned with how we view samsara, the way we view our mind and thoughts. This view progresses over time. It is not by

abandoning samsara or thought that we come to realise the view; it is a change in our way of seeing these things that indicates progress.

For instance, we may not have a good impression of someone after meeting them for the first time. But then, as we get to know them a little bit better, we may get a totally different impression and see them to be excellent—we may even become close friends or partners. They haven't changed, they are the same person we first met; it is our view of them that has changed. Likewise, we don't give up thought or samsara in order to progress. Instead, we change the way we see them.

There was a question in Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's teaching this morning about how the essence of thought is Dharmakaya. Well, you can't find the essence of thought by abandoning thought. When we talk about the essence of something, we're talking about its basic substance. If we reject the thing itself, of course we reject its essence. Only by looking at the thing itself can we know its substance. In that same way, we can't find nirvana by rejecting samsara and thought. We have to bring about a change by reflecting on them. The process of change is that, first of all, we come to have the view of the preliminaries. Then, with that mindset, we gradually work towards the actual practice.

The view of someone with the preliminaries is very different from that of everyday people. It's by examining and looking into life that we gain the view of the preliminaries. When we contemplate cyclic existence, we start to relate to it as a state of suffering and therefore something to be rid of. We lose all

fondness for it. Thinking carefully about hell, deprived spirits and animals, we wish to avoid such states of suffering. Then, as we come to the Greater Vehicle, we start to see that samsara is not to be rejected. We recognise that all of these cyclic beings have been our parents, our kind mothers, and that we must help them. Such thoughts will start to form as we work our way through the different stages of the path. This is how our view of samsara changes. At the level of the Secret Mantra, we start to see all men as Chenrezig and all women as Tara. For instance, in the practice of Chod, a practice which some of you may be familiar with, as we say, 'Peh!' we're not thinking, 'All men are horrible and all women are terrible,' or even regarding them as objects of compassion who need help. Instead, we're thinking that they are deities.

Broadening our view

As we work our way up from the Hearer Dharma, our view of sentient beings changes at the different stages of practice. Going back to the example of the person we don't take to kindly at first, if we retain a poor view of them, we will never consider marrying them. Even if forced into it, as long as we feel ill disposed towards them, we will be miserable while living with them. Likewise, if we have to force ourselves to practise the Greater Vehicle and Vajrayana Dharma, we won't have an easy time of it. Forcing ourselves into holding a view that we just don't have is not going to be much fun.

If we are all sitting in the shrine room together with our Chod drums shouting, 'Peh! All men are Chenrezig. All women are Tara, but we simply cannot stand the person sitting next to us, so what are we cutting through? [Chod means to 'cut' or 'sever'.] Our mind has not even taken the step from seeing men and women as suffering sentient beings to seeing them as our dear parents. Unless we follow the progression and change accordingly, our mind will just not be able to do the more advanced practices because it cannot accept or accommodate them. When we recognise that someone has been so kind to us, has been a mother to us, we are already quite close to seeing them as Tara or Chenrezig.

For example, even though a child's mother may be disgusting and horrible, the child will still love her to bits. If we fancy someone, even if they're not much of a looker, to us, they are attractive because of how we think about them. And in the same way, if we can relate to someone as being our mother or

father, that's not so far off from seeing them as a deity. Even if we can't see them as a deity, we can see them to be excellent and wonderful, and then we won't find ourselves in that situation where we are practising Chod, saying that all women are Tara and all men are Chenrezig, while turning our nose up at one of them. It wouldn't happen because now we see them as our father, our mother, someone we love. We might not have faith in them, but there is this fondness or love. We see them to be excellent.

Punching above our weight

When it comes to practice, there is a definite order and process of transformation. The preliminaries, therefore, are not to be looked down on. In truth, there's nothing more important than the preliminaries. That's why it is said, 'The preliminaries are more profound than the actual practice.' In *The Torch for the Definitive Meaning*, at the end of the section on the four thoughts Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche says, 'These days, those who have a little bit of the preliminaries in their mind are better off than those who claim to be practising the stages of approach and accomplishment of the four classes of tantra.' And when we look at the map of the Dharma path, there is pretty much nothing higher than these tantras, and Dzogchen and Mahamudra are the heart of the unexcelled class of tantra.

Of course, it is excellent that we aspire to the higher practices, but it also brings a lot of problems that hamper our progress. For example, you find those who try to punch above their weight when looking for a partner. They think, 'I'm not going to settle for a pauper. My partner must be rich and good-looking,' and they spend their lives looking for the perfect partner. In the end, they might live out their days all alone or get lumped with someone far from ideal. If they had settled for someone not so good-looking ten years ago, they might have had a much more pleasant life. Similarly, if we put all our time and effort into trying to practise the higher teachings, we could end up at death's door without even having gained a practice of the four thoughts. We may have worked very hard, but with very little to show for it.

That's not the way to go about it. Instead, right from the start, we should set a good foundation and work through the different stages of the practice in the proper order. That way, we won't waste time, we'll become decent Dharma practitioners, and it's quite possible that things will go well. Jumping straight to the higher practices will not work.

In truth, the Buddha's teachings are very special; they have many unique features. That the actual practice is right there within the preliminary practices is one such special feature of the Dharma. The qualities of the preliminaries are also present in the actual practice. This is why even a beginner can feel like they understand something when they receive teachings on the actual practice. At the same time, even arhats don't properly understand the actual practice—no need to mention afflicted individuals like ourselves. An arhat is someone who has relinquished all desire, anger, confusion, pride and jealousy; someone who has conquered the enemy of the afflictions. The Sanskrit word *arhat* is translated into Tibetan as *drachompa* (foe-destroyer), meaning someone who has destroyed the foe that is the afflictions. But even a noble being of that level cannot practise the Greater Vehicle Dharma. And I don't think it is going to be easy for us to understand something an arhat cannot understand. This is how I see it, at least.

Likewise, it is taught that through Secret Mantra practice, you can attain awakening in one, seven or sixteen lifetimes. But the fact remains that it is no easy thing to be someone capable of practising the Vajrayana. In the sutras, it's taught that even eighth-level bodhisattvas do not understand Secret

Mantra practices. There are places where it is taught that only on the tenth level will one eventually understand it and thus attain complete awakening. In many places, it is taught that one cannot attain full awakening through the Sutra Vehicle, but only through the Vajrayana. So if it's that difficult for even these high-level bodhisattvas, I don't think we ordinary sentient beings can jump straight into practising it. We must know our own level, or else things become very tricky. If you think you are the prime minister when in fact you are not, and you go to the Houses of Parliament and sit on the prime minister's seat, all you will get is a slap from a policeman and perhaps a night in a cell. Similarly, if we are sitting on our cushion thinking that we have a high view and practice, it's quite possible that the foe that is our afflictions, will escort us down to the lower realms. I don't really see any other outcome, to be honest.

So we should take careful note of the stages of the path because, if we work at them accordingly, we'll find ourselves naturally making progress. If we are learning to read and we start with the alphabet, then naturally we'll find ourselves in a position where we can start spelling words. Likewise, when it comes to our practice, we don't need to jump to the higher practices and pull our hair out trying to do them. If we work at the level of Dharma that corresponds with our level of practice, then just naturally we'll progress to these higher stages.

Only one thing to think about

By thinking very carefully about the phenomena of samsara, we will come to know its nature. To know the nature of samsara is to realise the view, through which we'll naturally develop renunciation. In a nutshell, there's only one thing we need to think about: samsara.

If we want renunciation, we have to think about samsara; if we want compassion, we have to think about samsara; if we want to know the nature of samsara, we have to think about samsara. How is anyone ever going to find the nature of samsara by rejecting it? How are we going to develop compassion or renunciation by ignoring it?

Through familiarity with samsara, knowing samsara, we gain renunciation, bodhicitta, and the ultimate view. That's how I think about it, at least. Although I'm not a Dharma practitioner and don't know very much, I have met good lamas and heard a bit of Dharma. What I just told you is what I heard in the teachings that I received.

In brief, do your very best to see the four thoughts as extremely important. If you can do that, you will naturally become a Dharma practitioner. You'll just naturally give rise to the view. These are my thoughts on the matter; this is what I've understood. As long as our view is not that of the four thoughts, any scraps of understanding that we might gain will not serve us very well. For example, when we are ill, there's no choice but to see a doctor; it's unavoidable. We do whatever they say: we take medication, we travel great distances for an

operation—we may even have a limb amputated. We go to whatever expense is necessary and do it all readily when we know that we are ill. Likewise, if we truly give rise to the view of the four thoughts, we can give up whatever needs to be given up. We can do whatever needs to be done. But without the four thoughts, no matter what practice we do, the mind doesn't really change very much.

Therefore, in my view, nothing is more important than the four thoughts. I feel this is true for yourselves, too, and you should put all your efforts into cultivating this mindset.

Questions

Question one

How do you feel about teaching Buddha Nature or basic goodness as an antidote to the Christian view of original sin?

Answer

I'm not very familiar with Christianity. In Buddhism, there is the notion of sin, or wrongdoing, and we do say that sentient beings have accrued misdeeds. But even though there is similar terminology used in Christianity and Buddhism, I'd imagine that the way sin is taken to be varies greatly between the two. Buddhism does teach that sentient beings have sins and have had them since beginningless samsara, but these sins are not seen to be inherent or primordial. Sin and cyclic existence are said to be adventitious, transient. Since they are not a fundamental part of a sentient being, they can be eliminated. They are not an innate aspect of a sentient being. If they were there right from the start, they couldn't be eliminated; they would be part of sentient beings' nature and thus irremovable.

For Buddhists, misdeeds are seen to be removable precisely because they are not present in the fundamental nature. They are adventitious because they arise due to other factors. I would imagine the Christian and Buddhist ways of relating to sin are quite different. If the Christian view is that sin is original, is part of beings' nature, then the teachings on Buddha Nature cannot remedy that view because both sin and Buddha Nature would be considered a fundamental part of a sentient being. I can't see how that could be. Therefore, I don't think the teachings on

Buddha Nature could really work as a remedy for that. In other words, sin and Buddha Nature would become synonymous. One could not remedy the other if both are considered to be present fundamentally, from the very start.

If Christianity considers sin to be temporary, fleeting, adventitious, and delusory, then the teachings on Buddha Nature would be remedial. This would mean that there is only a difference in terminology, but no real, fundamental difference in the views of Christianity and Buddhism.

For example, the other day I talked about what's taught in *Entering the Middle Way*. This text refutes the views of sentient beings, deluded perception. The different philosophical schools and stances go by different names. We have the tirthikas, the non-Buddhists, who are those with a worldly view or one of the two extreme views of permanence and nihilism. These views are refuted in *Entering the Middle Way*. Basically, all of the different non-Buddhist philosophical schools fall within these two extreme views. Granted, there are some with higher views similar to those of Buddhism, so it's certainly not the case that all non-Buddhist schools are useless. But when we are gauging the quality of a spiritual tradition, we have to gauge it by its view. In Buddhism, there are many different philosophical stances that vary greatly, and not all are said to be excellent. Basically, if we are able to find contradictions within a particular view by analysing it with our intelligence, then it has issues.

So my answer to the question of whether the teachings on Buddha Nature can remedy the view of original sin is this: If

original sin is seen to be established as something fundamental, then the teachings on Buddha Nature cannot remedy that view. If original sin is seen to be something not innate to a being and thus removable, then the teachings on Buddha Nature might act as a remedy.

To get a good understanding of something, you need to know what it is that's being spoken about. For example, when we're looking at sin, then we have to know what that means. What is sin, other than just the word 'sin'? When Christians use the word sin, what are they actually talking about? If we're clear about that, we become clear about whether something can be a remedy for it or not.

As I've been saying, that which is to be refuted is something unfavourable. The negative aspects are easier to identify because, at the moment, for us, they are stronger and more prevalent, and whatever is bigger or stronger is always more noticeable. But if we're not able to recognise and understand these more coarse aspects, the subtler positive aspects will be impossible to know. So we need to think carefully about what is to be eliminated. How is it? What is it like?

When I'm teaching a certain group of people for months on end, I don't usually take questions. Generally, questions eat up a lot of time, and it's rare that someone asks a question that gets to the heart of the matter. Often the questions themselves are not very clear, and so it's difficult to give a clear answer. If we take this present question about original sin, it's not a bad question at all, but we're not really clear about what is meant by 'sin'. Therefore, we will not be clear about whether the

teachings on Buddha Nature can remedy that view or not. A few words might be said that we find agreeable, but nothing that would really settle the doubt. When I'm teaching in the retreat centre, for example, people don't ask questions because I'm giving teachings all the time. I teach for many months on end, so their questions are resolved by themselves. That's what happens if we listen to a lot of Dharma; our questions and our doubts are just naturally dispelled.

But I do give time for questions and answers in these shorter two or three-day teachings, primarily because people feel satisfied if they've been able to ask their question. Most of the time, they are not in a situation where they receive daily teachings and have their questions naturally resolved. It's not necessarily the case that this happens through answering individual questions either, but at least the questioner feels somewhat satisfied in that they had the chance to ask. For example, this morning in Rinpoche's teaching, somebody asked about the essence of thought being the Dharmakaya, and Rinpoche answered it. But I'm pretty sure that no one came to understand that thoughts really are the Dharmakaya. Although it was unlikely anyone benefited from that question and its answer, Rinpoche was still given the task of having to answer it.

People may feel satisfied in the knowledge that they had the opportunity to ask questions, but other than that, I do not see Q&A being all that useful. To give an example, if someone like me, who knows nothing about computers and has given little thought to how they work, were to ask a computer expert, 'When I tap these keys on the computer, letters appear on the

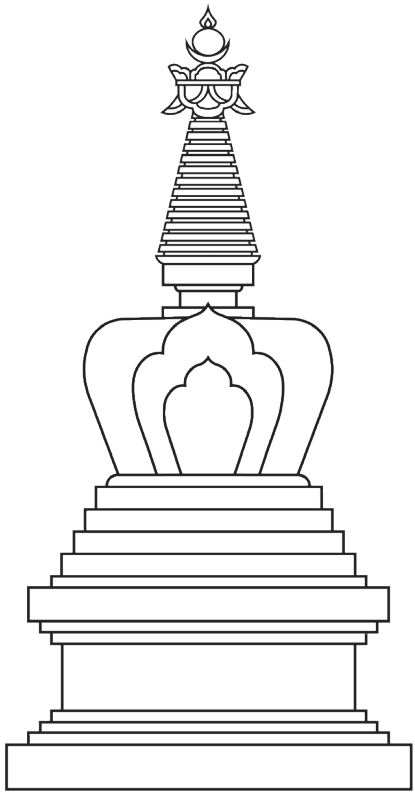
screen. How does that work?' In answer, they might explain at length how the computer is programmed and so on, but it wouldn't help me at all. I'd understand next to nothing and would still be none the wiser. That is how the question and answer sessions go in Dharma teachings, for the most part. They are rarely helpful.

Let's say someone has been studying the Dharma in depth over many years, like in a shedra, for instance, and there's a point that has been bugging them for a long time. They may have been debating it, studying it and contemplating it without finding the answer. Then they ask a learned person about it; the answer they receive may resolve something for them. They are likely to gain new understanding based on that answer, just like how someone who is knowledgeable about computers will understand the answer from the expert. Similarly, if someone has done an extensive study of mind but has not yet resolved how it is, an answer to their question might lead to understanding. But most of our questions are not like that. They are fleeting and transient. They're like thoughts. A question just pops into our head, so we raise our hand and ask it.

Generally, we are not very familiar with our mind and thoughts. It's a very strange thing that we are accompanied by them constantly and yet don't really know what they are, how they are. It's like how we never see our own face; the mind is always with us, yet we don't know it. This is why it's very difficult to give an effective answer. This is how I see it, at least.

- The End -

"Precious mind of awakening,
May it arise in those who are without it
And never fade from those who hold it
But continually grow from strength to strength."



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