

## **A Commentary on “A Lamp for the Path”**

**His Holiness, the Dalai Lama**

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Good morning. Now over the next few days there will be an explanation about Buddhadharma according to the Tibetan tradition. This means that if we examine the text, which we learned by not only reading or study but also learned by heart. All those major texts were actually written by the pandits or scholars of Nalanda Buddhist University in ancient times in India. So all of our practice is actually based on those texts so therefore is really worthwhile to mention that Tibetan tradition is Nalanda tradition, pure Nalanda tradition. The text that I will explain which was written by Atisha Dipamkara. He also originally studied at Nalanda and later at Vikramashila so all his knowledge actually based on the text written by Nalanda scholars like Nagarjuna, Arya Asanga, Aryadeva, Vasubandhu, Dignaga like that.

Usually I make sort of a correction. Some scholars, mainly from the West describe Tibetan Buddhism as Lamaism, not genuine, original Buddhism. This is a mistake. Since the Nalanda scholars or Nalanda institution they practiced or studied all Buddhist traditions, Theravada system, Bodhisattvayana as well as the Vajrayana. All of the Nalanda scholars had different views whether the texts were regarding Tantrayana or Madhyamika; some were written using one name. Some scholars say there were two Nagarjunas, not the same. Of course Dipamkara Atisha accepted the Tantrayana tradition.

So the Tibetan tradition which comes from the Nalanda tradition includes all the practices, Theravada system, Paramita-Sutrayana system, and the Tantrayana. So therefore usually I describe Tibetan Buddhism as a complete form of Buddhism. (Dalai Lama in English)

If one looks at the textual evidence one finds that it is quite obvious that within the Nalanda tradition, among the Nalanda masters there were great masters who had actually written treatises on Vajrayana Buddhism. For example the well known commentator on the Perfection of Wisdom literature, particularly the commentary known as the *Commentary on the Twenty-five Thousand Lines on the Perfection of Wisdom* composed by Moktesayna (SP?). When he discusses the concept of the Buddha's four embodiments, the four kayas he alludes to an alternative tradition which clearly suggests that he was referring to the Vajrayana understanding of the Four Kayas.

Similarly one of the main Indian sources for the lineage of the Sakya tradition was Virupa who was previously known as the great master at Nalanda as Dharmapala. He was a great pandit who later also became to known as Virupa who is the source of the major lineage of Sakya practice. So all of this suggests that the Vajrayana teachings and practices were actually present during the time of the Nalanda teachers.

(H.H. in English) So of course all major traditions of religion particularly in the Buddhist tradition the main task is to check or watch our own minds then try to transform it, particularly the emotional level. One unique thing I think about Buddhism is trying to transform emotion through intelligence, through reasoning. This is perhaps one unique aspect of Buddhism.

So the next three days our main task is to transform our minds, of course not easy (laughter). For example in my own case I think since age six-seven I started Buddhist study, supposed practice also. But I had no interest in practice, even no interest in study (Laughter) but around fifteen-sixteen years old then I began to develop a genuine interest in practice. So now today I am almost sixty-seven years old and still I am practicing, still studying. Whenever I have time I read, think, analyze and try to absorb at my emotional level. Still not at all a satisfactory

result but certainly I feel that as the result of practice I got immense benefit in my daily life. So therefore it is useful; it is something really worthwhile. Make attempt but at the same time you should also know that it is not easy, takes time and needs regular effort.

Perhaps among the audience here some are followers of different traditions, maybe some non-believers. As I said last evening first I think it is important to have good heart, sense of caring for one another, sense of community, sense of responsibility. This is I feel most important qualities of human beings. So long as we are human beings we need these basic human values because without these human values that person will not be happy person. Wherever that person goes always create some problems and the person himself or herself also not be happy. Always some kind of frustrations inside.

But as far as religious belief is concerned, yes if someone has religious beliefs in order to increase and strengthen these human values, it is very good. But otherwise without any religion you can be a good person, you can be a happy person. So for a good life, for a happy life religion is not necessary so it is perfectly alright if you remain a nonbeliever provided you are a warm-hearted, good person, sincere person, honest person. This is very important.

Among the believers there are different traditions. Some differences are fundamental. Usually I make two categories, one is a godly religion, a theistic sort of religion like Christianity, Muslim or Judaism, most Hinduism. The other category I usually describe as godless religion, no god, no concept of god and here is Jainism, a part of the Samkhya tradition and Buddhism, no concept of a creator. So there are these fundamental differences however both emphasize the importance of the message of love, compassion, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, relief of suffering. So all teach human values and therefore in spite of different philosophies and different way of approach the main target is to try to make a contribution for humanity, try for a human being to become a good human being. All have this same potential to help humanity, to serve humanity.

Looking at it this way, in spite of different philosophies it is the same goal, not ultimate goals like nirvana or heaven, I'm not talking about that. But as far as transformation of a compassionate society, good society, happy society, all have the same potential, same goal. Since among humanity there are so many varieties of many dispositions therefore we need a variety of religions. Quite simple. So with understanding this certainly it is very, very important to respect and appreciate, to admire all different traditions, all major traditions.

Therefore whenever I give a Buddhist teaching, Buddhist explanation to Westerners or non-Buddhist community, I always make clear that I am not trying to promote the Buddhadharma but simply trying to promote basic human values. For this, I ask how to make a contribution from my tradition in order to build happier human family, more peaceful human society. This is my thought, my view.

Those of you who follow different traditions, it is much better and safer to keep your own tradition. In the meantime out of these thousands of people some like Tibetans, the majority, 99% are Buddhists however among Tibetans there are Christians and Muslims. Muslims have been there for the last few centuries. So similarly in the Christian countries the majority of the people are Christians but at the same time some may have an inclination or the mental disposition which places them closer to the Buddhist approach, this approach is more suitable.

So for an individual there are two choices, either remain nonbeliever, which I sometimes call radical atheist because Buddhism also is atheist. So a radical atheist means no belief at all in any value of spirituality. So one is either a radical atheist or Buddhist. From some individuals there are only two choices, either accept Buddhism or remain radical atheist. In the meantime the

radical atheist view is also quite similar, not satisfactory so then prefer it to Buddhism. This is okay if that person if they are not comfortable within their own tradition, find it unbelievable or is unacceptable, not suitable. Then if they find the way of the Buddhist approach is suitable then okay but in this case also think very carefully, don't follow fashion or fad. Think very carefully. After you really carefully think that the Buddhist approach is most suitable to you then okay as an individual right follow to Buddhism, accept Buddhism.

But then one important thing is after you become Buddhist you must not show disrespect to others' traditions, particularly your own previous tradition. This you must avoid. You must respect. Although in your own case your own tradition no longer has an effect but that does not mean that it no longer has any effect at all for humanity. Your previous tradition still helping millions of human beings on this planet. So we must respect, must avoid any kind of disrespect.

Those people from Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, China, Korea, Japan and all of Tibet and Mongolia, people from these areas the majority of them are Buddhists, traditionally they are Buddhist. Usually I feel more comfortable to give Buddhist teachings to Chinese and also Mongolians but to give Buddhist teachings to traditional Buddhists there is no danger of competition.

Now I will explain the Buddhadharma in Tibetan. Firstly it is much easier for me and I can rest while he translates. Also more importantly if I try to explain in my broken English then although I have studied English since 1947, I am a very old student of English study (laughter). But I never progress, no progress. Also I am getting older, my English also is getting older, so more difficult (laughter). Thank you.

Normally when I give teachings in a context where there are gathered various members of the Buddhist tradition then I request the members of the Pali Sangha to chant the Moggallana Sutra. (Chanting). Among the followers of the great teacher Buddha Shakyamuni there are many different traditions and of all of these traditions what is known as the Pali tradition is in terms of seniority the most senior. It is probably the case that in fact the teachings that were originally given by the Buddha were given in the language of Pali. So this is why we are honored to have the representatives from the Pali tradition to chant the Pali Sutras.

Tomorrow if there are members of the Chinese Sangha who can recite the *Heart Sutra* in Chinese I request them to do so tomorrow morning. In terms of chronology the Chinese Buddhist tradition is the second most senior Sangha. On the third day I would request members of the Vietnamese Sangha to chant again the *Heart Sutra*. Now we will do the recitation of what are known as the three daily practices which will be followed by the recitation of the *Heart Sutra* in Tibetan.

Next is a salutation to the Buddha from the *Fundamentals of the Middle Way*.

**[I prostrate to the Perfect Buddha,  
The best of teachers, who taught that  
Whatever is dependently arisen is  
Unceasing, unborn,  
Unannihilated, not permanent,  
Not coming, not going,  
Without distinction, without identity,  
And free from conceptual construction.]**

**Mulamadhyamakakarika**

Now is the salutation to the Perfection of Wisdom from Maitreya's *Abhisamayalamkara*,

the *Clear Realizations*. It was the established tradition in Nalanda whenever one engages in the conduct of either giving a teaching or listening to a teaching to cultivate the appropriate state of mind and motivation. This done by going for refuge to the Three Jewels which distinguishes the uniqueness of the path of the Buddha and this is followed by cultivating the altruistic aspiration to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings, the generation of bodhicitta. This is to reinforce one's commitment to the wellbeing of others and through this way both the teacher and also the students who participate in the teaching are advised to cultivate the right frame of mind when engaging in such activities. If am I right this verse was composed by Atisha himself, Atisha Dipamkara.

In Tibet there was a particular custom which evolved in the eastern part of Tibet, the Kham region which I inherited from the late Khunu Lama, Tenzin Gyaltzen Rinpoche where on the part of the teacher before beginning the actual formal exposition of the teachings to remember the Buddha. One pays homage to him as the teacher by reciting some verses of praise to the Buddha so I will do that now.

As it is widely known in the conventional sense in terms of history the Buddha Shakyamuni emerged on this planet more than 2,500 years ago. This great teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni when shared his teachings with the world he did so by giving several public series of sermons. The first public series of sermons is known as the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma and the main topic or theme of these teachings was the Four Noble Truths. One finds in fact that the teachings embodied in the Four Noble Truths laid the basic framework for the overall aspects of the Buddha's teachings.

If one looks closely at the teachings of the Four Noble Truths what one finds is that Buddha lays out all of the key aspects that are important for one's engaging in the path towards enlightenment. What one finds in the Four Noble Truths are the objects of one's practice thus laying the foundation where one establishes a basic understanding of the way things exist. On the basis of this one then finds the actual practice that is presented or embodied in the three higher trainings, morality, concentration and wisdom.

Of these three higher trainings, morality serves as the basis and in this teaching one has different categories of precepts. For example broadly speaking there is the layperson's precepts and the ordained members' morality or precepts. All together there are listed seven or eight different classes of precepts which together embody the teachings on morality.

So taking morality, the ethical discipline as the foundation, as a basis then the individual practitioner cultivated single-pointedness of mind thus developing the second higher training, which is the higher training in concentration. The reason why Buddhists refer to these practices as "higher" trainings is to distinguish them from just ordinary practices of ethics or single-pointedness. The practice of single-pointedness in itself is nothing uniquely Buddhist so what is required in the context of Buddhism for such a practice to be a higher training is to have the appropriate motivation. One is to take refuge in the Three Jewels particularly the Dharma Jewel as understood as the cessation of suffering, as moksha or liberation. Also one's practice of single-pointedness must grounded on a deep realization of true renunciation. So with these two as a basis then cultivating the practice of single-pointedness of mind becomes a "higher" training in concentration.

On the basis of these two, morality as the basis and single-pointedness as the method, then the actual path is enshrined in the teachings on wisdom. These teachings on wisdom are explained in the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma within the framework of what are known as the Thirty-seven Aspects of the Path to Enlightenment.

There is then the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma where all of the teachings exist in Sanskrit. These teachings, particularly the most popular set of teachings known as the Perfection of Wisdom were taught by the Buddha at the summit of Vulture's Peak in Rajagaha. These scriptures which belong to the Second Turning emphasize and explain in great detail two essential points of the Buddhist practice. One is the cultivation of the altruistic intention to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of the infinite numbers of sentient beings, whose numbers are equal to the infinity of space. Based on compassion towards all of these sentient beings one cultivates the altruistic aspiration to attain Buddhahood for their sake. This is the first essential practice taught in the Second Turning.

The other aspect of the practice that is presented in these sutras of the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma is the ultimate nature of reality. When one speaks of the ultimate nature of reality one is really referring to a deeper understanding of the Third Noble Truth. The First Noble Truth is the Truth of Suffering, the second is the Truth of the Origin of Suffering and the third is the Truth of Cessation. In the Perfection of Wisdom texts the Third Truth, the Truth of Cessation is explained and elaborated further in great detail with a deepening understanding of the nature of true cessation.

In order to understand what is the true nature of cessation, cessation refers to the cessation of the afflictive emotions and thoughts, which one achieves as the result of applying the appropriate antidotes or remedies. In order to understand the true nature of cessation first of all one needs to have some understanding of what lays at the root of the afflictions. What state of mind acts as a direct antidote to the afflictive thoughts and emotions? Do these afflictive emotions and thoughts have any sound basis? Is there the possibility of rooting out the basis of these afflictive emotions and thoughts?

The point is in what sense can one understand the possibility of attaining such a true cessation? What makes it possible for the afflictive emotions and thoughts to be eliminated? These points are developed in great detail with a deepening understanding in the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma. The need for understanding the ultimate nature of reality which the scriptures refer to as Suchness, the ultimate mode of being and how in one's day-to-day experience in engaging with the world often one sees a gap between the way things exist and the way things really are and the way one perceives them. So there is a gulf between the appearance of perception of things and the reality of things. Thus through deepening one's understanding of the ultimate mode of being of things or ultimate reality then this gulf can be bridged.

All of these explanations are found in great detail in the Perfection of Wisdom sutras and this deepened level of understanding is in fact the true path. So what one finds in the teachings of the Second Turning are a further elaboration on the themes that were presented in the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma, particularly the Third and Fourth Noble Truths, the Truth of Cessation and the Truth of the Path.

The Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma is where the term "three turnings" itself came from in the Mahayana tradition. This is found in the Sutra called Samdhinirmocana, the *Sutra Unraveling the Intention of the Buddha* in which the distinction is made between the Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma. The Samdhinirmocana Sutra is identified as representing the key sutra of the third class of public teachings of the Buddha. It is also described as the sutra clearly differentiating the ultimate intentions of the Buddha.

Of course this understanding is from the point of view of the Mind-Only School whereas other Buddhist traditions do not recognize this sutra as representing the definitive teaching of the Buddha. The scripture that is then cited as the key example of the definitive teachings of the third

class of public teachings is the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra*, the *Essence of Buddhahood Sutra*. This sutra is the basis for Maitreya's composition of well-known *Uttaratantra*, the *Sublime Continuum* in which there are detailed discussions of the understanding of the ultimate nature of mind. A teaching is given that so far as the ultimate nature of the mind is concerned, it is luminous and devoid of inherent existence.

This is a further presentation of emptiness of mind as opposed to an external object such as a vase. Although in so far as both the emptiness of the vase and the emptiness of the mind are concerned, they are both emptinesses without any difference. However given that one is the emptiness of mind while the other is the emptiness of an external object, there is a vast difference between the impact is has by understanding these two different emptinesses. In the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra* and Maitreya's treatise based upon it, it is presented that if one examines the ultimate nature of the mind carefully one finds that the ultimate nature of the mind is empty, devoid of intrinsic existence.

In fact mind in its natural state is luminous, a mere knowing and clear. All of the afflictions that pollute the mind are separable in principle from the basic mind by applying the appropriate antidotes and remedies. This suggests the afflictions of the mind are in some sense adventitious, not part of the essential nature of the mind. They are adventitious while the potential for the perfection of enlightenment, the potential for the realization of omniscience or the potential for the enlightened qualities of a Buddha are all inherent in the mind.

Maitreya points out that the afflictions of the mind are adventitious, removable and separable from the essential nature of the mind. The qualities of enlightenment, the qualities of perfection lay in the very mind one possesses in the form of a seed and is referred to as the Buddhanature, the essence of Buddhahood. These qualities of the Buddha are not something that need to be cultivated from outside but rather the seed or potential exists naturally in all of us therefore what is required is the activation of this potential and the perfection of this potential.

These points are explained in great detail in the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra* and in this sutra there is a very profound understanding of the Fourth Noble Truth, the Truth of the Path.

The text on which this teaching is being given is *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* is a very comprehensive text, which brings together all the essential points of the teachings of all three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma. These are complemented by a brief discussion on Vajrayana Buddhism as a means of clarifying doubts.

Some of the Kadampa masters in Tibet when teaching Atisha's *Lamp of the Path to Enlightenment* given the fact that it integrates most of the essential points of the various scriptures even though the text itself is very short (three folios in Tibetan), would slightly boast. They would say that although this text is short, it is so profound and pulls together from all of the various scriptures that when this is taught they could feel the other volumes of great teachings shake.

This text was composed by the Indian master Atisha Dipamkara and the place where he composed it was in Tibet. The immediate catalyst was the request for its composition made by the Tibetan monarch in Western Tibet, Byang-chub-od. When he requested Atisha to teach he explicitly made the request that he was not seeking a profound sounding teaching or very impressive but rather a teaching that would be of benefit to the people of Tibet. When this request was made Atisha was deeply touched and pleased by the sincerity of this request composing this text as a response.

In terms of the transmission of the teachings of this text, my own lineage, I received the transmission of this text from the late teacher from Drepung, the Khunu master, Rinzen Tempa

(SP?) who in turn received this teaching from Depsekansha (SP?) Rinpoche. I received another line of transmission from the late Serkong Rinpoche who himself received the teachings from a very sincere meditator from Drepung-Gomang whose name I think is Gendun Tushi (SP?). He was an ordinary monk but a great practitioner and meditator. So I received the transmission of this text from two different lineages. It appears as if at a certain point the transmission of this text was quite rare. For example both of my tutors did not have the transmission of this text.

We will now read from the text. It opens with the Sanskrit title ***Bodhipathapradipam*** and in Tibetan ***Byang-chub lam-gyi sgron-ma***. This is followed by a homage to Manjusri:

**Homage to the bodhisattva, the youthful Manjusri.**

The first verse reads:

- I pay homage with great respect**  
**1 To all the Victorious Ones of the three times**  
**To their teachings and to those who aspire to virtue.**  
**Urged by the good disciple Byang-chub-'od**  
**I shall illuminate the Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment.**

In Tibet there was an established custom in order to indicate the authenticity of the teaching that is being imported from India, particularly those texts originally translated from an Indian language, to first give the Indian title. This was to affirm the origin of the text and also its authenticity. Of course in later times even for texts written in Tibet, some Tibetan masters used a Sanskrit title as well but originally the practice was to reassure the reader of the authenticity of teachings.

In terms of the meaning of the title of the text, *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, the term enlightenment in Sanskrit is bodhi. Etymologically speaking bodhi has the connotation of dispelling something, clearing away something but also it has a connotation of realizing something, perfecting something. So the Tibetan translators instead of choosing one word choose two syllables to carry the dual meaning. The Tibet equivalent for bodhi is byang-chub with byang indicating the notion of dispelling or clearing away while chub connotes the perfection or realization aspect. Together they carry the notion of enlightenment.

Now to relate the understanding of the term byang-chub, which translates the Sanskrit word bodhi, which is part of the title of the text and translated here as enlightenment. The term bodhi or enlightenment can be related to the discussion of the Four Noble Truths, which I presented earlier. Here there are the two elements of meaning of the term enlightenment, one the clearing away and dispelling, the other the realization or attainment. These two relate to the Four Noble Truths and also indicate the two key aspects of the enlightened qualities of a Buddha. One is Buddha's quality of the total abandonment or elimination of all defects and the other is the total realization of all positive qualities.

Now to relate this to the discussion on the Four Noble Truths. The idea of dispelling or clearing away is directly related to the first two Noble Truths, the Truth of Suffering and the Truth of the Origin of Suffering. What is cleared away, what is being dispelled is all of the sufferings and their origins. So when one talks about suffering in the context of the Buddhist path, of course one needs to understand that suffering occurs at different levels. According to Buddhism one speaks of three different levels of suffering. First is obvious suffering that all can

instinctively identify as painful, undesirable and so on and is known as the suffering of suffering.

The second level of suffering is known as the suffering of change which conventionally speaking one tends to identify this level of experience as pleasurable and not painful. However if one continues to persist in this experience even these pleasurable experiences ultimately culminate in dissatisfaction, suffering and pain. Therefore these are known as the suffering of change.

Underlying both of the previous two levels of suffering, the suffering of suffering and the suffering of change is a much more fundamental state of being which again Buddhism characterizes as a state of suffering. This is the very conditionedness of one's existence and this level of suffering is known as the suffering of pervasive conditioning. This is the very fact of one's existence as a conditioned being and serves as the basis that then gives rise to the two other levels of suffering.

What is being dispelled here, what is being cleared away in the context of understanding the term bodhi or enlightenment are these sufferings along with their causes and conditions that give rise them, the origin of suffering. Through the application of the corresponding antidotes and remedies, when one attains a state of freedom from these sufferings and their origin then one has actualized the Third Noble Truth, the Truth of Cessation. The Truth of Cessation and the path that leads to it, the means that make cessation possible are what are being realized in the context of enlightenment, byang-chub.

Although cessation is not directly produced from causes and conditions but it is still a consequence of effort and also by seeking the conditions that give rise to it. These conditions and the effort that is involved in making the cessation possible are the Truth of the Path. Therefore the second element of the term byang-chub, chub or realization relates to the Noble Truth of Cessation and the path that leads to it. In this way when one looks at the two syllables one understands that in the very etymology of the term bodhi or byang-chub there is an understanding of the essential points of the Four Noble Truths. Also by extension one understands the two aspects of the qualities of the Buddha's mind, one is the total elimination of all defects and the other is the total realization and perfection of all positive qualities.

When one speaks of the path it refers to progressive stages of development in one's mental continuum beginning from the earliest stages of spiritual realization culminating ultimately into the omniscient mind of the Buddha. In this state of full enlightenment the individual is able to perceive both conventional and ultimate truth within a single cognitive event, within a single moment of time. So the path refers to this whole process from the beginning to the ultimate realization of the Buddha's omniscient mind.

Therefore it is referred to as a path as a path is something that one travels upon. Here the metaphor of a path is used for a journey that is internal, that takes place within one's own mental continuum. The lamp here refers to the actual teaching itself as embodied within this text because the teaching presents all of the key elements of the path in their proper order and with all of the essential points completely defined. The right sequence of practice is explained and also all of the relationships between the different elements of the path are explained properly. So in this sense this text serves the function of a lamp showing the path one is to follow and this is why this title is given to the text, *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*.

When one speaks of enlightenment generally speaking according to Buddhism, it is understood that among the spiritual practitioners there are different mental inclinations. Based on these inclinations some practitioners are more inclined towards the enlightenment of a sravaka or Listener, some are more inclined towards the Pratyekabuddha or the Solitary Realizer's



enlightenment while some are more inclined towards the bodhisattva path culminating in the full enlightenment of Buddhahood. The enlightenment referred to in this particular text is the enlightenment of a Buddha therefore it is sometimes also referred to as the Great Enlightenment to distinguish it from the other two aspects of enlightenment.

Next is the salutation to Manjusri, which has been inserted by the translator of the text. There are two purposes for the translator inserting a salutation right at the beginning of the text. One is to insure that the task of translating this text will not face obstacles, that it will be successfully completed. More specifically the purpose is to conform to a decree that was issued by one of the early Tibetan monarchs that when texts were being translated from an Indian language into Tibetan that in order to assist the reader to identify which of the three main scriptural collections a particular text belonged to. The three scriptural collections are the Tripitaka of Vinaya or ethical teachings, the Sutras and Abhidharma. If the text belongs to the Vinaya Pitaka then a salutation is made to the omniscient Buddha. The rationale here is that when one speaks the minute aspects of the ethical precepts, particularly the ethical codes of conduct for the monastic community and what constitutes an infraction this can only be fully understood by an omniscient mind. In order to acknowledge this humility homage is paid to the omniscient Buddha if the text belongs in the Vinaya collection.

If a text belongs to the Sutra collection then the salutation is made to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. If the text belongs to the Abhidharma collection then the salutation is made to the Bodhisattva Manjusri, which is the case with this text here. Although *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* brings together teachings from all three scriptural collections but the main theme that is presented belongs more to the Abhidharma collection so this is why a salutation is made to Manjusri here.

The first stanza comprises the salutation and the promise to write the text. The **Victorious Ones** refers to the Buddhas who are described as victorious because they have conquered the Four Maras or the four obstructive forces. Both the gross levels of the four obstructive forces as well as the subtle levels of the obstructive forces have been overcome. The subtlety here is defined in terms of the afflictive emotions and thoughts and also the underlying propensities for the afflictions which are known as the subtle obstructions to knowledge. So the fully enlightened Buddhas are those who have gained victory over all four of the obstructive forces and so homage is made to the Buddhas **of the three times**.

Homage is also paid **to their teachings**, to their Dharma, which refers not so much to the literary texts but more to the inner realizations of these Buddhas and the Arya Beings, especially Bodhisattva Aryas who have attained high levels of realization along with the direct realization of the ultimate nature of reality. So what is translated here as **teachings** or Dharma actually refers to the inner realizations of the Buddhas **of the three times** and also the bodhisattvas as well as the Arya Beings who have gained direct insight into the truth.

This is the Dharma. Then it reads **to their teachings and to those who aspire to virtue** and this refers to the Sangha. The Sangha here refers to the Arya Beings who have attained the Path of Seeing and thus have gained a direct realization of the truth. So a salutation is thus made to the Three Jewels, the Jewel of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

After this is the promise to write the text. Why did Atisha compose a salutation to the Three Jewels? What is the task he will undertake? He states **I shall illuminate the Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment** through writing this text. Why is he writing it? Atisha writes that he was **urged by the good disciple Byang-chub-'od**. The reason Atisha explicitly mentions that he is writing this text because he was urged to do so is that this adheres to a general practice in the

Buddhist teaching. One can read in the *Pratimoksa Sutra*, the *Scripture on Individual Liberation* where it states that one should not give teachings without being requested to teach. So generally it is the custom in Buddhism that one should not give teachings unless one is requested to do so.

I would like to make a short comment on the translator's salutation to Manjusri. It reads **Homage to the bodhisattva, the youthful Manjusri**. It seems the translator was rather enthusiastic in using the word "youthful". When referring to Manjusri in the Tibetan tradition there is a different understanding of Manjusri in different contexts. For example in the Vajrayana context Manjusri is recognized more as a fully enlightened Buddha rather than a bodhisattva. However in the context of the Perfection Vehicle teachings Manjusri is understood at the level of a bodhisattva rather than a Buddha. So one needs to understand the different contexts in which bodhisattvas like Manjusri, Avalokiteshvara and Maitreya appear.

The name Manjusri in Tibetan is Jampel with jam meaning gentleness and pel referring to glory. So again just like the two syllables for enlightenment byang-chub, here the name of Manjusri, Jampel is composed of two syllables, gentleness and glory. In the Sanskrit itself Manju and sri are two syllables and connote two aspects of the enlightened state. One is the overcoming of all defects, here connoted by the term gentleness (jam) describing his state of mind or his mental continuum as he has been made gentle by eliminating all of the afflictive forces that could make his mind agitated or disturbed. Freedom from this brings about the gentleness or settledness of mind. Glory (pel) alludes to Manjusri's attainment of the various major and minor noble marks that define or illustrate a person as a fully enlightened being. So if it is in the context of a sutra then Manjusri is a bodhisattva at a very high level of realization who has attained a similitude of the major and minor marks of a fully enlightened Buddha. The point is again is that in the name of Manjusri one sees both the qualities of abandonment and accomplishment or perfection.

In the verse of salutation of this text, the object of homage was identified as the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. So these are the three objects of refuge and in Buddhism they are known as the Three Jewels. The first jewel is the Buddha who is defined as a being who has attained total perfection of all realizations and knowledge as well as the total elimination of all defects and limitations. How does one understand such a fully enlightened being? How does one understand the characteristics of such a fully enlightened being?

In this respect it is helpful to reflect upon a verse written by the Indian master Dignaga. In his text *A Compendium on Valid Cognitions* he pays homage to the Buddha by pointing out that "You who have *become* a valid being".

**[I bow to the One who turned correct,  
Who helps all beings, the Teacher,  
The One who went to bliss,  
And our Protector.]**

**Compendium of Valid Cognition**

The operative word, the key word here is the word becoming. The point being made here is that the fully enlightened Buddha, the teacher was not an eternally enlightened being but rather someone who had *become* a valid teacher, *become* fully enlightened. So this word becoming has a very significant meaning, which is that Buddhahood, does not come about without any cause; Buddhahood comes about from causes. Also it does not come about from causes that are completely discordant with the result. In other words the causes are themselves not permanent. Enlightenment comes about from a cause and it also comes about from causes that are

commensurate with their results.

Dignaga then identifies what is the key cause for attaining Buddhahood. It is the cultivation of universal compassion, the great compassion is identified as the key factor, the key cause. So in the salutation to the Buddha made by Dignaga he pays homage to the Buddha as someone who has become a valid teacher, a valid being, an authentic being through the sustained practice of compassion.

**[And now out of love  
For those mistaken in their logic]**

What one sees here is that the fully enlightened being had attained that state of enlightenment as the result of a sustained and prolonged practice of compassion as well as other associated aspects of the path such as the wisdom realizing emptiness. The key here is the realization that the Buddha has attained which is the true Dharma. It is on the basis of the realization of the Dharma that one defines the Sangha and the Buddha because those who are still on the path and have attained the Path of Seeing gaining a direct insight into the ultimate nature of reality, they are the true Sangha. Once one proceeds on this path and attain the total culmination of this realization, that is the state where one has attained Buddhahood. So it is on the basis of the Dharma that the other two jewels, the Sangha Jewel and the Buddha Jewel are also defined.

This is how one needs to understand the nature and characteristics of the fully enlightened Buddha on the basis of understanding the nature and characteristics of the true Dharma. In terms of chronology of a particular era then there is a sequence in the Three Jewels in terms of an evolution. In the case of the present Buddha Shakyamuni in terms of the evolution of the teachings of this Buddha, first the Buddha Shakyamuni came as a Nirmanakaya, an Emanation Buddha. Buddha then taught the Dharma, initially the teachings on the level of scriptural texts therefore there are the scriptures taught by the Buddha. On the basis of the scriptures taught by the Buddha his disciples engaged in the practice and cultivated the realizations of these scriptures thus evolved the Dharma as realization. Those who gained realization of the Arya stage, the Path of Seeing then became the Sangha.

So within the context of a single era one can say that the Buddha comes first, the Dharma comes second and the Sangha evolves third. Because of this the order in which one offers refuge or pay homage to the Three Jewels is always the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Because of this one finds in texts when referring to these Three Jewels the metaphor of medicine is used. The Buddha is likened to a physician, the Dharma is likened to the prescribed medicine and the Spiritual Community, the Sangha is compared to a sick nurse, the one who helps and looks after the sick. What is to be understood from this analogy is that it is in fact the Dharma that is the true medicine that directly counters the spiritual ailment. It is the Buddha who prescribes the medicine of the Dharma and the colleagues, companions on the path, the Sangha act as a support while one is going through this process of therapy. Therefore the Three Jewels are often referred to as Buddha, the true teacher, Dharma as the revealed teaching and the Sangha as companions whom support one in one's practice.

The question arises what exactly is this Dharma Jewel which defines the other two jewels of the Buddha and Sangha? What are its characteristics? How can one cultivate it within oneself? As I mentioned earlier when one speaks of the Dharma Jewel in the context of the Three Jewels, the true Dharma really refers to true cessation, which is the Third Noble Truth. Cessation here refers to the freedom that an individual gains as the result of applying the antidotes against the

afflictive emotions and thoughts, those negative aspects of the mind. As a result of applying the corresponding antidotes, when one gains a kind of a freedom that prevents the future arising of the afflictions is called a cessation. These cessations can be of many different levels. This is the true Dharma and also the path that leads to that cessation is also the true Dharma. So the true Dharma here refers to the Third Noble Truth, the Truth of Cessation and the Fourth Noble Truth, the Truth of the Path.

Now the question is if the true Dharma refers to this cessation of the negative aspects of the mind, the afflictive thoughts and emotions then what is the process or procedure for bringing about such cessation? How can one cultivate the antidotes and how do they work in bringing about the cessation of the negative aspects of one's mind? One needs to understand that according to Buddhism one's very existence as conditioned beings is itself understood to be characterized by suffering. Conditioned existence is referred to as the pervasive suffering of conditioned existence, the third level of suffering. In this sense one's being including one's physical embodiment is of the nature of suffering and something that ultimately needs to be gotten rid of or eliminated.

However in Buddhism when one speaks of one's very existence as suffering this does not imply that mere physical or bodily existence is suffering. From the Buddhist point of view even the Buddha Shakyamuni is seen as an embodied being however the Buddha is free of suffering as well as the Arhats who have gained freedom from all negative emotions and thoughts even though they still have the five skandhas. What is being referred to as suffering is a conditioned existence, one's present existence that is conditioned by karma and the afflictions.

The root of one's conditioned existence is the causes of karma and the afflictions. Karma here refers to an action, an individual act with a positive or negative motivation. When one speaks of actions, a sentient being's actions it automatically implies an agency, a motive or intention. The acts themselves are not the primary cause; the primary cause is the motivation behind the action, what propelled the action. So here one is talking about the world of intentions, the world of thoughts and emotions.

Underlying much of one's karma, particularly the negative actions are afflictive states of mind. Ultimately what one arrives at the root of one's suffering is the afflictions, the afflictive thoughts and emotions. In Buddhism they are called kleshas and the etymology of klesha suggests that they are states of mind whose very occurrence brings about disturbance within the individual's mind. These defile one's thoughts and emotions afflicting the individual from within. It is these afflictions that lay at the root of one's suffering and it is these afflictions that need to be eliminated by applying the direct antidotes.

Now the question is how do the antidotes work when countering the afflictions? These afflictions do not go away simply by making prayers or wishing them away. These afflictions need to be eliminated by cultivating their corresponding remedies or antidotes. How does this process of applying the antidotes work? One can observe similar processes in the physical world. In the physical world one can contrast hot and cold. If one is suffering from being too hot by moving to a cooler spot one can counter the effects of the heat and if one is too cold then one applies heat to counter the cold. Even in the physical world one can see instances where opposing forces counter each other.

Similarly one can use another metaphor such as light and dark. These oppose each other. The moment a light source is on the darkness is dispelled and when there is darkness there is no light. There is an instantaneous relationship or dichotomy between these two opposites. However in the world of internal emotions and thoughts the process in which antidotes oppose their

opposites is different. For these one needs to cultivate a specific antidote or right state of mind in order to counteract an affliction. The way in which it does this is by focusing on the same object but by cultivating directly an opposite way of engagement with it.

For example one has hatred and compassion or love. In the case of hatred and compassion they are two different emotions but they can both be focused on the same object such as another being. Based on this when one experiences hatred or anger one has a hostile experience toward that object. On the other hand if one has compassion for the same object one's attitude and feelings towards that object are completely different. In fact one could say that by reinforcing one side one can automatically and naturally diminish the force of the opposing feeling.

For the sake of argument say there is an individual who dislikes compassion and wishes to decrease whatever remnants of compassion that might be left within them. In such a case the individual could most effectively do this by deliberately cultivating hostility towards any object that would generate feelings of compassion. Along with this they would try to analyze the downside of having compassionate feelings, the disadvantages of loving-kindness and so on. Through this way one could envision that anger and hatred could be increased.

However for a spiritual practitioner this is not the goal because anger brings one harm, it brings disturbance and affliction. Therefore from the perspective of a spiritual practitioner anger and hatred are something that needs to be dispelled, needs to be relinquished while compassion and loving-kindness need to be deliberately cultivated. These bring peace of mind, benefit and help. So this is how the antidotes work in decreasing and eventually eliminating the afflictive thoughts and emotions.

One can ask the question if in the case of two opposing states of mind, two opposing emotions like hatred and compassion, if it is the case that by reinforcing one the other automatically diminishes the force of the other, does this mean that there is total symmetry between the two? Is there no difference at all between them? Could one completely eliminate compassion? It is important here to have a deeper understanding of the contrast between the positive emotions like compassion and loving-kindness and the negative emotions like anger and hatred.

Generally speaking if one looks at the Buddhist understanding of what is meant by klesha or affliction, one observes two general categories of afflictions. On the one hand are afflictions that tend to be instinctual such as attachment, anger and so on. Although in certain circumstances there might be some immediate catalyst where reason may play a role but generally these afflictions are reactive and impulsive. On the other hand there is a category of afflictions that tend to be much more cognitive and here is included false or wrong views such as selfhood as well as false views grasping certain extremes views as being authentic or valid. Although these are afflictions they are more cognitive, more in the category of the intellect. In fact this second category of afflictions is sometimes referred to as afflictive intelligence since reasoning plays a greater role in their development.

This is a general Buddhist understanding of the two broad classes of afflictions. However if one looks deeper one will understand that the deeper nature of the emotions, the root of them is a subtler emotion of delusion, particularly the delusory mind grasping at the true existence of things and events. Here one finds a deeper understanding of the nature of the afflictions in the Madhyamika writings. For example in the *Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way* Aryadeva wrote that just as the bodily faculty permeates all of the sensory faculties in the same way delusion underpins all of the afflictions. The point made here is that when one examines

carefully the experience of a strong affliction like anger or attachment one finds underlying it is a cause, which is some kind of grasping on to an object. This object can be perceived as desirable or undesirable which then gives rise to an emotional response or reaction.

**135     [As the tactile sense [pervades] the body  
Confusion is present in them all.  
By overcoming confusion one will also  
Overcome all disturbing emotions.]  
Four Hundred Verses**

So at the gross level delusion serves as a cause for the occurrence of these afflictions however at the subtle level in fact Aryadeva suggests that the delusions coexist with the afflictions themselves just as the body organ permeates all of the sensory faculties. In the same way the delusion grasping at the true existence of things and events underpins all of the afflictions. In fact one can say that the arising of afflictions is dependent upon this grasping at the true existence of things. This delusory mind grasping at the true existence of things is distorted because the real nature of things is emptiness. However this delusory mind grasps of to objects as having some kind of real or true existence.

In contrast if one looks at a positive emotion like loving-kindness although there are cases where delusory grasping on to an object's true existence may give rise to or support loving-kindness, but the arising of loving-kindness is not dependent upon grasping on to the object as having some kind of true existence. In fact loving-kindness is an emotion that can be developed to an infinite potential whereas negative emotions like anger, because their underlying root is a distorted state of mind and therefore do not have a valid support or valid ground in either reason or reality. Because of this by cultivating a direct insight into the true nature of things, which is emptiness, one will be able to penetrate through the delusion of the misunderstanding of reality as having some kind of true existence. Through this way one can eventually eliminate the afflictions by undercutting the very basis for the arising of the afflictions. So certainly there is a vast difference between the positive emotions like loving-kindness and compassion on the one hand and the negative emotions like anger and attachment on the other in terms of their sustainability and their potential for infinite development.

The question now arises if underlying all of the afflictions is this delusion, which underpins them on what grounds does one understand this delusion to be the grasping at the true existence of things? In the *Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way*, immediately after the verse I cited earlier, Aryadeva wrote that it is by gaining insight into the truth of dependent origination that one will bring about the cessation of delusion. The point made here is that when an individual develops deep insight into the subtle aspects of the teachings on Dependent Origination then they will bring about the cessation of their delusion. The delusion here is identified or defined as a misconception or a state of mind that perceives the world and the self in a way contrary to the principal of Dependent Origination. According to the principle of Dependent Origination all things and events come into being as the result of dependence on other factors.

**136     [When dependent arising is seen  
Confusion will not occur  
Thus every effort has been made here  
To explain precisely this subject.]  
Four Hundred Verses**

The opposite of this would be to accord a status of independence existence to things and events. If things possessed an independent status or independent existence then of course they cannot have the nature of dependence upon others. This projected status of independence is what is being referred to as self in the context of the teaching on selflessness. By teaching selflessness the absence of an independent existence of things and events is taught because all things and events come into being as the result of depending upon other factors such as causes and conditions.

Aryadeva concludes by saying that which dependently originated cannot possess the nature of independence. This absence of independent existence is what is called Dependent Origination.

As to whether or not this delusion grasping at things and events as possessing true existence, whether or not this is considered to be a defilement in the category of the afflictions or a subtle obstruction to knowledge, among Nagarjuna's disciples there is a divergence of opinion. On one side are commentators like Bhavaviveka who understood this grasping at true existence of things to be a subtle obstruction to knowledge rather than a defilement or affliction. While based upon Nagarjuna's own *Seventy Stanzas on the Middle Way* other commentators maintained that it is actually part of the afflictions or an afflicted state of mind. They argued that even to attain the state of an Arhat or freedom from samsara one needs to eliminate this grasping at true existence. It is on the basis of this understanding that the assertion is made that the insight into emptiness is the sole path to liberation; there is no second path or door other than the wisdom of no-self or selflessness. Here the wisdom of selflessness is understood in terms of what are called the Three Doors of Thorough Liberation where the insight into emptiness of things and events is cultivated on the basis of understanding its nature from the point of view of its causes as well as its effects.

When speaking about this reaching on no-self and the understanding of selflessness one needs to relate back to the teachings on the Four Noble Truths from the first public ceremony that the Buddha gave. When the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths he presented them in terms of sixteen characteristics, four in relation to each truth. The four characteristics of the first Noble Truth of Suffering are impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, emptiness and no-self. All of the different schools of Buddhism, all of the followers of the Buddha in one way or another understand the key teaching of the Buddha to be embodied in the teaching on no-self or anatman.

Of course there are divergent interpretations as to what this no-self means. In fact if one looks at the history of philosophical thought in India one sees a very long tradition of analysis on this nature of selfhood, the nature of being. When one experiences pain or pleasure, who is it that experiences it? Who is it that undergoes this experience? When one speaks of the accumulation of karma, who is it that accumulates the karma? Who is the agent of the karmic act? When one speaks of experiencing the fruits of one's ripening karma, who is it that experiences the fruits of karma?

The fact that there is an individual, a being that one labels, as "I" is something that is commonly accepted but the question is what exactly is the nature of this self, what is the nature of this being? Here one finds a very long tradition in ancient India in the analysis of what the nature of this self is. On the whole among the non-Buddhist schools in India especially those schools that accept the idea of rebirth, there was a convergence of opinion that since the physical body is contingent upon a particular life and it is transient since it ends at death, the self cannot be identified with the body. Therefore on the whole the non-Buddhist schools maintained that the self must be something completely independent of the physical and psychological constituents

that make up an individual's existence. There must be a self, an eternal principle that is enduring in that it transcends individual life cycles and maintains its continuum throughout all of these temporal stages. Whether or not they characterize it as eternal, unitary and unchanging the belief in this atman if one probes deeper these three characteristics are thought to be the main characteristics of the self; that it is temporally speaking eternal, unitary or indivisible and that it is independent or self-governing.

This is the atman or self and on the whole all Buddhist schools reject this kind of notion of a self, the notion of an eternal self. However within Buddhism the different schools have divergent opinions as to if this kind of self can be posited then how does one understand the notion of a person? How does one understand the agency? Who is this being? Among the Buddhist schools there are some schools who try to identify the person or self on the basis of the psychophysical aggregates. For example some schools maintain that the totality of the five skandhas is the self while others maintain that the self is the continuum of consciousness. The Mind-Only School of the Followers of Scripture maintains that it is not just the mental consciousness but rather there is a unique continuum of consciousness called the foundational consciousness that is identified as the person.

The followers of Nagarjuna especially those who understand his ultimate standpoint maintain that any attempt to identify self as something independent of the body and mind is untenable. How do they explain the relationship between the self and the transient body and mind? Equally untenable is the attempt to identify self within the body and mind. The followers of Nagarjuna particularly those who take Nagarjuna's subtle view maintain that both of these dichotomies identifying the self as either independent of the body and mind or identifying the self as either one of the aggregates are problematic. The self or person must be understood only as a mere label, an appellation, a designation given on the basis of the aggregation of the mind and body. So one must understand the nature of self or the person to be mere designation, something without any intrinsic or absolute reality.

If one observes things and events deeply one will recognize that all things and events come about as the result of the aggregation of many factors. They are dependent upon many factors for their existence and none of them enjoy any type of independent existence. The ultimate nature of all things and events is mere dependence upon other factors. However when one perceives or observes things and events somehow one tends to get the impression that they possess some kind of discrete, independent reality of their own. One does not perceive things and events to be interconnected and dependently originated but as each having its own independent, discrete, identifiable units.

There is this gulf between the way things really are and the way that one perceives them. This disparity between one's perception of the world and the reality of things underpins the various afflictive and emotional responses that one has in dealing with the world. Therefore this suggests that the basis, the root of many of the afflictions such as attachment, anger and so on is a distorted state of mind, a distorted understanding of the world.

So the root of the afflictions is this distorted state of mind and secondly this perception of the world as having an independent reality is groundless, without valid grounds. Thirdly when one cultivates the direct antidote, which is the wisdom of no-self then this wisdom of no-self will directly counter one's misconception of the world as having some kind of true and independent existence. When one compares the two, the false view of the world as opposed to the insight into no-self, one has a very valid grounding in both experience and reason while the false view is without valid grounding in reason or experience. Because of this when one compares the two



views and let them compete with each other, obviously the view with valid grounding in reason and experience in reality will as the result of cultivating it, as the result of developing it, one will get to the point where one will be able to totally eliminate the false view of the world.

Furthermore this insight into no-self, the wisdom of no-self because it is a quality of mind, its basis is very enduring. It is not a characteristic like a physical quality whose basis is limited; it is a mental quality whose basis is very enduring because of its continuum. Another characteristic of this mental quality is that once one cultivates it to the point where it becomes spontaneous then for further development one need not make a deliberate conscious effort to bring it to mind. A simple catalyst or impetus can immediately give rise to this understanding, to have that mental quality arise in one's mind.

So when one compares all of these points together and when one also understands that the afflictions are separable from the essential nature of the mind as their basis is a distorted state of mind that can be overcome then eventually one will arrive at a point where the word liberation or moksha has a truly profound meaning. One will also get a sense that liberation is possible and this is what is meant by liberation. So when one understands that liberation is possible then one can extend this combining this understanding with one's understanding of Buddhature as explained in the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra*. In this sutra the essential nature of mind is described as luminous, mere luminosity and unpolluted. When one understands this then one will also come to realize that not only are the afflictions removable but also the propensities and imprints left by the afflictions can also be removed. If the afflictions themselves can be eliminated then of course their propensities and imprints left by the afflictions can also be eliminated. Through this way one gets an understanding of the real possibility of liberation.

**[With my Buddha vision  
I see that all sentient beings are like this.  
Within the mud shell of passions,  
All have the Tathagata-nature.  
By means of adamant wisdom,  
We break the mold of kleshas  
And reveal the Tathagatagarbha,  
Like pure, shining gold.]**

**Tathagatagarbha Sutra**

In this way one also understands the possibility of attaining Buddhahood, which is the total elimination of not only the afflictions but also their propensities and imprints. When one speaks of the resultant state of Buddhahood in the Bodhisattva scriptures, the Mahayana scriptures it is defined and described in terms of the Four Embodiments of Full Enlightenment or the Four Kayas. The most profound and detailed understanding of the Four Kayas can be developed on the basis of reading and studying the Vajrayana texts. There the understanding of the Four Kayas is presented on the basis of the subtle mind, the fundamental innate mind of Clear Light.

Here the emptiness of the fundamental, innate mind of Clear Light of the state of Buddhahood is described as the Svabhavakaya, the Natural Embodiment of the Buddha. The omniscient mind of the Buddha at that state is described as the Wisdom Dharmakaya or Wisdom Truth Body. The subtle energy or prana that is inseparable from the Buddha's Dharmakaya state is explained as the Sambhogakaya, the Buddha Body of Perfect Resource. When this subtle energy assumes a form that is visible at a gross level then that embodiment of Buddhahood is

described as the Nirmanakaya, the Buddha Body of Perfect Emanation. So one can see that the Vajrayana explanation of the Four Kayas is done in terms of the understanding of the fundamental, innate mind of Clear Light.

With this understanding if one reflects along these lines then one will get a deeper understanding of what is meant by Dharma and on the basis of Dharma one will understand the Buddha who is the example of the total perfection of the Dharma as well as the Sangha that is those who are on the path of the realization of this Dharma. This is how on the basis of the first verse of this text, the verse of salutation to the Three Jewels that one can gain a general introduction to what is meant by Buddha Dharma.

So it is important for one who considers themselves to be a practicing Buddhist to have these understandings so that when one goes for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha one knows or has an understanding of the objects of refuge. By cultivating a deep admiration by reflecting upon the qualities of the Buddha one goes for refuge in the Buddha of the past and cultivates deep conviction and faith in their qualities and attainments.

But it is also important to understand that one is going for refuge to the Three Jewels must be related to one's own inner realizations and experiences of the path so that when one goes for refuge in one's faith there is also faith of emulation. Not only does one have admiration for the Three Jewels but also one emulates their examples so that one aspires for oneself the realization of the Three Jewels. Derived through the faith of emulation then one engages in the path and cultivates in oneself all of the various levels of realizations, beginning from the level of the initial scope. As the result of attaining the true path one attains cessations which then allows one to be part of the Arya Sangha and as a result of continuing along one's path which culminates in one's own realization one attains the state of Buddhahood. So in this way one should be able to not only understand the act of going for refuge in relation to the historical Three Jewels but also to one's own resultant future attainments of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Having now explained the verse of salutation, starting with the second verse the actual explanation of the teaching begins. It reads:

**Understand there are three kinds of persons  
2(a,b) Because of their small, middling and supreme capacities.**

What is presented here and what is unique about this text by Atisha is that here the presentation of the teachings is arranged in such a way that there is a definite sequence to the order of the different topics of the practices. These are arranged in conformity or in relation to the way in which these should be practiced in their proper sequence.

For example in various other Indian treatises such as Nagarjuna's *Madhyamikakulakarika*, the *Fundamentals of the Middle Way* and Candrakirti's *Supplement to the Middle Way*, *Madhyamakavatara* all of the paths are presented correctly and most of the key elements of the path are presented. Of course this is done with different degrees of emphasis. For example in Nagarjuna's *Fundamentals of the Middle Way* the main emphasis is on the teachings of Dependent Origination and emptiness and their relationship. However the other aspects of the path are also presented.

What is lacking in these treatises is that the presentation of the teachings is not done with a definite sequence of the practices by actual application for one wishing to initiate practice. Atisha points out that this is very important in order to engage in the practices to have a full

understanding of the proper sequence in which one should engage in the path. What practice should be undertaken first? What practices should follow this initial practice and so on?

Atisha states that without this knowledge then the effectiveness of one's practice may not be very great. For example take the example of bodhicitta, the altruistic aspiration to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings. It is not simply enough to say may I attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings. It is easy to say in words but when it comes to actually cultivating it, how does one go about cultivating such an altruistic aspiration. Until and unless the practitioner has developed some understanding of what is the object of aspiration, Buddhahood or full enlightenment then it is not possible to truly develop bodhicitta. So some understanding of what is meant by enlightenment is important.

What is also important is to have some deeper understanding of the nature of suffering that one wishes others to be free of. In order to develop this strong compassion seeking for others to be free of suffering, one must have a deeper understanding of the nature of suffering in relation to one's own personal experience. On the basis of this personal experience of one's own understanding of suffering then one will be able to cultivate a strong desire to gain freedom from this suffering which is true renunciation. When all of these elements are combined together then one will be able to give rise to bodhicitta, the altruistic aspiration to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.

What one sees here is that in order for an important aspect of the path such as bodhicitta to take root in one's mindstream, one needs to cultivate the different components of it individually first. When one does this then eventually one will be able to cultivate bodhicitta. So there is a certain order to the actual development of these aspects of the path and Atisha in this text explains these various aspects of the path in relation to the actual sequence of individual practices and their cultivation. Here he does so by using the framework of the practitioner of three different capacities.

When one speaks of the small, middling and supreme capacities one is not necessarily referring to three completely different individuals. In fact what is being referred to here is the different levels of mental states which an individual practitioner may attain through progressive stages. So at the beginner's stage the practitioner can be referred to as one with a small capacity and then as the result of practice progresses to the next stage and is then referred to as one of the middling capacity. As the individual continues to progress they reach the supreme capacity. So these three capacities can be understood in relation to an individual practitioner in a progressively evolving stages of mental development.

Atisha explains the importance of understanding the proper order of the practices and referring them to the different levels of mental realizations. He wrote:

**I shall write clearly  
2(c,d) Distinguishing the individual characteristics.**

One can see an analogy to even modern education, which is composed of elementary school, high school and college where one slowly specializes into an area of study. These three levels of practices in correspondence to the three capacities can be likened to the different levels of schooling.

One can also relate Atisha's teaching on the three scopes or three capacities to an earlier division of the three phases of spiritual development found in Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way* where he wrote that at the first stage one must avert or reverse one's

unwholesome deeds. In the middle stage one must reverse one's preoccupation with the self or grasping at selfhood and in the final stage one must eliminate all wrong views, dismantle all views. This can be related to Atisha's presentation of the three scopes because when one says unwholesome deeds these are referring to negative actions and thoughts which are the main causes of one's suffering.

**190      [First prevent the demeritorious,  
Next prevent [ideas of a coarse] self.  
Later prevent views of all kinds.  
Whoever knows this is wise.]  
Four Hundred Verses**

When one speaks of the causes of suffering here one is talking about karma or actions. Within karma there can be made three distinctions, negative or unwholesome karma, meritorious or wholesome karma and immutable or unchangeable karma. Negative karma gives rise to suffering in the lower realms and it is meritorious karma that gives rise to birth in the higher realms as a human or celestial. It is the immutable or unchangeable karma that gives birth in the Form and Formless Realms.

One can say that Aryadeva's first stage where the practitioner is advised to reverse or eliminate all negative karma corresponds to Atisha's initial scope or small capacity practice. Here the main objective is to gain freedom from the immediate causes of suffering, the obvious sufferings of the lower realms. In this scope the spiritual quest is motivated by a fear of undergoing the experiences of suffering in the lower realms. So motivated by this fear one seeks freedom from it and the main practice to accomplish this is embodied in the practice of morality of abstaining from the ten negative actions of body, speech and mind. This is the precept of the actual practice of going for refuge which is to live one's life in accordance with the ethical discipline of refraining from the ten negative actions. One consciously adopts the ethical discipline by refraining from these and is the actual practice of the initial scope corresponding to the first phase of the practice as referred to Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses*.

The second line in Aryadeva's text states that selfhood must be eliminated or averted. This corresponds to Atisha's second middling scope because the main motivation or aspiration of the practitioner of the middling scope is to gain freedom from cyclic existence. The actual practice is to eliminate the afflictions that give rise to the experience of cyclic existence.

The third line of Aryadeva's text where he says that finally all views must be dismantled and this corresponds to Atisha's third scope of supreme capacity. The motivation here is to not only gain freedom from the sufferings of cyclic existence but to also gain full enlightenment for the benefit of all beings bringing about the cessation of suffering for all sentient beings.

One can see that if one is to use the analogy of combat, one can say that the practice of Dharma is to engage in combat with one's inner enemy, the afflictions. So when waging a war against the afflictions, the first stage is to insure that one has a very good defense so that one is secure, not vulnerable to the attack of the afflictions. In order to do this one needs to build a defense and this defense is built by trying to overcome the manifestations of the afflictions in one's bodily and verbal actions as well as one's thoughts. This is accomplished by adopting the ethical discipline of refraining from the ten negative actions of body, speech and mind thus insuring a security for the practitioner.

Once one has gained confidence in having a secure defense, that one is not vulnerable to attacks from the afflictions then at the next stage one actually takes on the afflictions head-on,

directly; one counters them directly. One can do this as one is now assured of one's own defense. Finally, not only must the enemy be defeated, the afflictions be eliminated but also one must insure that not even traces are left, in other words not even the propensities of the afflictions are left in one's mental continuum. This is the third phase of spiritual practice as mentioned by Aryadeva, which also corresponds to Atisha's third scope.

One can understand this process of development in terms of the three different levels as Atisha's explanation of the three scopes or Aryadeva's three phases of realization or practice. From another perspective, from the object of one's aspiration what one as a practitioner aspires to is the attainment of higher rebirth as a temporary objective and one's ultimate objective is to attain liberation from cyclic existence along with the omniscient state of Buddhahood. So the practice of the initial scope the key practice is embodied in the ethical discipline of refraining from the ten negative actions of body, speech and mind. This insures the fulfillment of the temporary objective which is the attainment of rebirth in the higher realms such as a human or as a celestial being.

As Nagarjuna points out in his *Precious Garland* that for the spiritual practitioner there are two primary objectives. The temporary objective is birth in one of the higher realms [high status] and the ultimate one is definite goodness. In terms of the factors that give rise to these two achievements, faith is primary for the attainment of high rebirth and wisdom is primary for the attainment of definite goodness. Definite goodness here refers to liberation from cyclic existence and also Buddhahood, the fully enlightened state.

**[Eliminating defects and acquiring good qualities  
230 Are the practices of those seeking high status.  
Thoroughly extinguishing conceptions through consciousness [of reality]  
Is the practice of those seeking definite goodness.]  
Precious Garland**

The second scope and the third scope obviously relate to one's quest for the attainment of definite goodness. When one speaks of faith in the Buddhist context, although generally speaking there are many different kinds of faith, faith is understood as something that is reinforced by wisdom or intelligence. In fact it is important to have faith grounded in reason or wisdom as well as having wisdom reinforced by faith and compassion. These should be cultivated in a mutual, complimentary manner between the skilful means aspect of the path and the wisdom aspect of the path as one reinforces and compliments the other.

This can be summarized by saying that the practices that are associated with the quest for attaining higher rebirth [high status] and those practices are of the initial scope. Within definite goodness there are two levels, liberation from cyclic existence where liberation is constituted by the elimination of the afflictions. Then there is the ultimate definite goodness; the attainment of full enlightenment defined as a state where not only the afflictions have been eliminated but also their propensities and imprints. All of the practices that are associated with the attainment from cyclic existence belong to the middling capacity or scope and all of the practices that are associated with the attainment of the omniscient state of Buddhahood belong to the supreme capacity or scope.

Although one can imagine that there could be three completely different individuals each following the practices of a different capacity. For example there could be an individual practitioner whose only wants to pursue the practices associated with the initial scope. However in the text here, in Atisha's text when he speaks of the three scopes or capacities he is referring

primarily of an individual who goes through each of these scopes in a progressive, evolving manner. Because the ultimate purpose of the practitioner of this text is someone who is seeking the attainment of full enlightenment, this text presents the point of view of someone who progresses through all three different stages of capacity.

The point is that even for the practitioners of the middling and supreme capacities, they must first undertake the practices associated with the initial scope. So there is a definite sequence in that the practices of the former scope are common preliminaries to the practices of the latter scope. The initial scope practices are common to the practices of the middling scope and the practices of the middling scope are common for the practitioner of the supreme scope. (End of day)

The great teacher Nagarjuna who is in fact considered as a second teacher in this era of the Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings, he states in his *Precious Garland* or *Ratnavali* that those who aspire to attain the state of full enlightenment must seek the three principal factors. He states that anyone who aspires to attain full enlightenment must seek its means, seek its causes. What are these correct causes? He identifies three principal factors. The first is bodhicitta, which is the aspiration to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings thus the generation of this altruistic intention, is the first principal cause.

- 174     **[Thus observe the practices incessantly  
And abandon those counter to them.  
If you and the world wish to attain  
Unparalleled enlightenment,**
- 175     **Its roots are the altruistic aspiration to enlightenment  
Firm like the monarch of mountains,  
Compassion reaching to all quarters,  
And wisdom not relying on duality.]**  
   **Precious Garland**

However this principal cause, which is the altruistic aspiration to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings is rooted in great compassion. He describes great compassion as infinite compassion with infinite here referring to the infinity of the number of sentient beings for whom one cultivates the wish to be free from suffering. Sentient beings are said to be infinite and equal to the expanse of space. So one needs to cultivate compassion not only wishing for all sentient beings to be free of suffering but in fact a more powerful compassion which has a sense of responsibility and commitment involved with it. Not only does one wish others to free of suffering but also in fact one shoulders upon oneself the responsibility to bring about this freedom from suffering. So this is the second principal cause.

The third principal cause that Nagarjuna identifies is what he calls the non-dual wisdom. Non-duality here refers to the wisdom of emptiness, which transcends the two extremes of absolutism and nihilism. This is the wisdom that penetrates into the ultimate nature of reality; the way things really are which is described as emptiness or the ultimate nature of reality.

One finds in the Bodhisattva scriptures the process of the path that is the process involved in attaining full enlightenment described as a very long process. It is described in terms of the Ten Bodhisattva Bhumis or levels and also in terms of the framework of the five paths. This

whole process begins from the instant the individual practitioner generates and gains the realization of genuine bodhicitta, the altruistic intention.

For an intelligent practitioner with higher cognitive faculties they begin the path by first cultivating the wisdom of emptiness, the wisdom of no-self. This wisdom of emptiness gives rise to the realization of great compassion towards all sentient beings. This compassion that aspires to remove others' suffering gives rise to a sense of responsibility, a sense of commitment to bring about the release of sentient beings from their suffering. This is called the extraordinary attitude or sense of responsibility, which then culminates in the realization of bodhicitta, the altruistic intention. At this instant the individual practitioner has become a bodhisattva, has entered the first of the Five Paths, the Path of Accumulation.

As the practitioner progresses on this path, deepening their realization of emptiness, the practitioner reaches a point where their understanding of emptiness does not remain merely at the level of the intellect but in fact acquires a meditatively-based experiential dimension. At this point the understanding of emptiness becomes derived from meditation rather than from intellectual understanding. This is point when the practitioner has entered the second path, the Path of Preparation or Linking.

As the practitioner progresses further deepening their insight into emptiness, they reach a point where the experience of emptiness becomes direct no longer being cognitive but direct. At this point the practitioner has entered the third path, the Path of Seeing. The practitioner has also attained the first bodhisattva level or bodhisattva bhumi. From the second bodhisattva level onward the practitioner attains the Path of Meditation. Within the ten Bodhisattva Bhumis or levels the first seven are referred to as impure levels where the practitioner is still not free from the afflictions and defilements. The last three levels, eighth, ninth and tenth levels are described as the pure levels.

It is through this process that the practitioner from the moment of first generating bodhicitta goes through the process and reaches the highest stage. These stages correspond to the periods of the accumulation of merit described in the Bodhisattva scriptures. It is said there that the attainment of Buddhahood requires the accumulation of merit over a period of three innumerable eons. The period of Paths of Accumulation and Preparation constitutes the first innumerable eon. The first seven Bodhisattva Bhumis, the impure levels constitutes the second innumerable eon of accumulation of merit and then the final three Bodhisattva Bhumis corresponds to the third and last innumerable eon of the accumulation of merit.

It is said that this attainment of Buddhahood during the period of three innumerable eons is in fact said to be a faster framework as some scriptures mention the attainment of Buddhahood as the result of thirty or forty innumerable eons. So the point being made is that the attainment of enlightenment or Buddhahood is not a matter of an instantaneous event. Although in some Vajrayana texts there are references to the attainment of Buddhahood within a single instance. For example there is a passage which says that by whose kindness one attains Buddhahood within a single instant and so on.

Sometimes people may get the impression that there might be some special practice that if one enter into a meditative session and during that session in a single instant by reciting the mantra HUM something happens so that one comes out of the session fully enlightened. This however is not the case. This is a very unrealistic expectation because the attainment of Buddhahood is a process that involves the transformation of one's mental continuum. One's mental continuum is permeated through and through with the pollutants of the afflictions and this pollution of the afflictions needs to be gradually removed, layer after layer. This is a gradual

process and it is through this gradual process that one's mental continuum becomes more and more purified and refined eventually culminating in the attainment of Buddhahood.

A question might then be raised that if Buddhahood takes such a long period of time then this is too much. One might feel discouraged. Here it is worth reviewing some of the passages one can find in Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland* where Nagarjuna states that the length of the period of time that it takes to attain Buddhahood should not be grounds for discouraging a practitioner or for one to feel exhausted. In fact if the practitioner is such that they possess the skillful method as well as wisdom, the union of these two then the time factor should not make any difference to their sense of commitment and endeavor. He compares this with one's own day-to-day experience. He states that if one is undergoing a painful experience then generally even if that period of time is very short, because of the painfulness of the experience it seems as if it is a very long time. In contrast if an experience is pleasurable and pleasant then even if the time of the experience is very long, one feels as if it were too short. This is generally the case.

If this is so Nagarjuna says that for a genuine practitioner who possesses both the skillful method of compassion and bodhicitta united with the wisdom realizing emptiness then at the initial stage although the practitioner may encounter painful experiences at a physical level but given the strength of their inner realization one can endure these hardships. As one progresses further then at a certain level of realization the practitioner becomes invulnerable to physical hardship, pain and so on. If this is the case then the practitioner no longer feels pain and suffering. Therefore when the practitioner is engaged in the practices of the path towards the attainment of Buddhahood then the length of time will not make any difference to the practitioner as there is no experience of pain. This is one reason not to feel discouraged.

- 224     **[Since thus they are not greatly harmed  
By physical and mental suffering,  
Why should they be discouraged  
Though they lead beings in all worlds?**
- 225     **It is hard to bear suffering even for a little,  
What need is there to speak of doing so for long!  
What could bring harm even over limitless time  
To happy beings who have no suffering?**
- 226     **They have no physical suffering;  
How could they have mental suffering?  
Through their compassion they feel pain  
For the world and so stay in it long.**
- 227     **Hence do not feel inadequate thinking  
“Buddhahood is far away.”  
Always strive at these [collections]  
To remove defects and attain good qualities.]**  
   **Precious Garland**

Another reason is that furthermore the bodhisattva practitioners have dedicated their entire beings for the benefit of other sentient beings. Nagarjuna expresses the sentiment in the *Precious Garland*, “May I be like the great elements of earth, fire, water and so on. May all parts of my being be of service to other sentient beings.” Similarly one finds in Santideva's *Guide to*



*the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* he expresses the sentiment, "For as long as space remains, For as long as sentient beings remain, May I too remain, And dispel the sufferings of the world".

**[May I always be an object of enjoyment  
483 For all sentient beings according to their wish  
And without interference, as are the earth,  
Water, fire, wind, herbs, and wild forests.]  
Precious Garland**

If one can understand these sentiments properly then one will understand that the bodhisattva practitioner is someone who has dedicated their entire life, their entire being for the sole purpose to bring about others' wellbeing and to serve others. If that is the case then the time it takes to become fully enlightened again has no relevance. Even if the person is fully enlightened the only task that remains is to serve other sentient beings, which is the goal of the bodhisattva practitioner anyway while they are on the path.

Furthermore when the practitioner is engaged with the path and dedicates their entire being for the service of other sentient beings then in a sense one is fulfilling the pledge that one has already made when generating bodhicitta, the altruistic intention as well as the Bodhisattva Vows. One is living the ideals that one has adopted and the pledge that one has accepted. When one thinks along these lines then one will understand that the notion of someone working for others wellbeing but somehow they have some other self-interest is in fact false. This is because the only task that a bodhisattva practitioner has is the service of others, bringing about the wellbeing of other sentient beings. So in these ways Nagarjuna explains that the time involved in the attainment of Buddhahood really has no relevance as far as the practitioner is concerned.

If one understands this point clearly then one will avoid the following danger. At times there is a tendency when a practitioner hears attractive statements like after doing a three year, three month retreat one will come out enlightened or will have great realizations. So when one hears such statements one becomes extremely interested and has great enthusiasm. However when one hears the Bodhisattva scriptures' description of the attainment of Buddhahood as requiring effort over three innumerable eons, one's interest diminishes. One can avoid this danger by having a realistic outlook.

In fact I too had this feeling when I was in my teens. Once when I was a teenager in one of my teaching sessions with my teacher with \_\_\_\_\_ Rinpoche I made the remark that after having looked at the Bodhisattva Sutras that the process of that path described in those sutras was so long that it seemed almost impossible. I said that probably the Vajrayana path where there is described the possibility of attaining Buddhahood in a much shorter time period would be more suited to me. He responded back by saying that how could one follow a viable Vajrayana path without the practice of bodhicitta or the altruistic intention. I remember that reply to this day very clearly.

Also Nagarjuna states in the *Precious Garland* that if an individual practitioner strives to cultivate bodhicitta with all of one's effort and if one dedicates all of these efforts to the generation of this altruistic intention within oneself then through this dedication in the cultivation of this altruistic ideal living within these ideals then one will gain a sense of deep satisfaction. This is because one will know that they have fulfilled the goal of one's human existence giving one a tremendous sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. This deep sense of satisfaction and fulfillment serves as a counterpoint preventing any potential for any feelings of exhaustion or fatigue. So in such a practitioner there is no room for any feelings of fatigue. Therefore when as

the result of striving for the cultivation of bodhicitta, the altruistic intention and compassion, if one gains the genuine realization of bodhicitta, uncontrived, non-simulated and spontaneous then one will attain a powerful state of mind. One's vision transcends all limits.

For example one's practice of compassion and bodhicitta is directed for the benefit of, for the purpose of infinite numbers of sentient beings. So far as the practice is concerned, it is infinite. The goal of the practice is infinite sentient beings. The purpose of this practice is to attain the state of Buddhahood whose enlightened qualities are infinite; infinite enlightened qualities are one's goal. The means by which one engages in the practice are the infinite numbers of bodhisattva practices so there is an infinity of bodhisattva deeds. The time during which one engages in these altruistic activities is also infinite over innumerable eons. So there is an infinity of sentient beings for whose benefit one is engaging in the practice. There is an infinity of enlightened qualities that are one's objective to attain and then there is the infinity of bodhisattva deeds that one engages in as the means. Finally there is an infinity of time over which one cultivates these practices.

When these four infinite factors come together, Nagarjuna says that this itself will make it possible for the accumulation of merit over three innumerable eons to take place on its own. This is similar to what the Kadampa masters said when they would say to place all of one's efforts into cultivating bodhicitta, the altruistic intention. This is because once one has cultivated bodhicitta, once one has generated bodhicitta then it will take care of everything. It will take care of accumulating one's merits; it will take care of purifying all of one's negativities. So all of one's activities must be directed towards the sole purpose of generating bodhicitta.

Similarly Tsongkapa said in his *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* that the cultivation of bodhicitta, the altruistic intention is such that when one engages in working for others' welfare, one's own self-interest will be fulfilled as a by-product. Therefore the practice of bodhicitta is such that one can say that it is the source of both one's temporary aims as well as one's ultimate aims. Often when one speaks of the enlightened qualities of a Buddha, one of these qualities described is the spontaneous achievement of any activity. In a way there is a similar spontaneity involved here. When one has realized bodhicitta then it allows one to fulfill all of one's immediate aims and it also helps to one's ultimate aim of obtaining Buddhahood. In a sense there is a similitude to a Buddha's enlightened spontaneous quality.

One also finds in the *Aspirational Prayer of Maitreya* a stanza that states, "It is with that the path to the lower realms will be blocked, It is with this that the paths to the higher realms will be opened. It is with this that freedom from birth, aging and death will be brought about. It is to bodhicitta that I pay homage".

In fact if one closely examine the entire spectrum of the Buddha's teachings one will realize that the practice of bodhicitta, the altruistic intention is really the essence, the main, actual practice. All of the other aspects of the Buddha's teachings and practices are either preliminaries to bodhicitta or supplements to it as precepts. For example one can see that within the framework of the three capacities, the three scopes that Atisha outlined, all of the practices that are associated with the initial scope and the middling scope are in one way or another preliminary practices to the actual practice of bodhicitta.

Then are the practices of the bodhisattva's Six Perfections followed by all of the practices and teachings of the Vajrayana. In fact the Vajrayana teachings can be seen as further elaborations on the last two perfections, tranquil abiding and wisdom, the Perfection of Concentration and the Perfection of Wisdom. One can see that all of the teachings and the practices as embodied in the Six Perfections and also in the Vajrayana teachings are precepts that

the bodhisattva practitioner of bodhicitta needs to engage in. So the heart or the main practice of Buddhism really is bodhicitta, the altruistic intention.

When one thinks about these points, what is entailed in the practice of cultivating bodhicitta, compassion and so on, if someone feels that this is completely beyond them, it is impossible, too difficult then of course one is free as an individual to choose not to engage in the practices. But then one needs to ask the question, if this is so then what other means are there to bring about the cessation of suffering that one does not desire?

Regardless of whether one accepts the notion of karma and afflictions, the fact remains that all of us are conditioned by karma and the afflictions. One's very existence, one's present existence is the product of karma and the afflictions. So long as one remains chained to the conditions of karma and the afflictions there is no room for lasting happiness. Calamities strike, undesirable events befall one; these are the natural facts of one's existence. One's sufferings include the natural sufferings of birth, illness, aging, death and so on but they are also other adversities that one faces in one's life.

So here it is worth remembering what a Kadampa master Potowa said. He said that when one observes deeply the nature of one's suffering including the sufferings of birth, aging, death and sickness, see if there is ever a possibility of exhausting completely this suffering simply by experiencing them and living them out. This however does not seem to be the case because since beginningless time one has endured these sufferings over and over again. But somehow time itself simply by living them out has not brought them to an end. If this is so then one can infer that even in the future simply through experiencing them will not bring about an end of these sufferings.

What is required is to consciously and deliberately bring about their end. This can be accomplished only by understanding the nature of suffering and seeking out the correct means to bring about their cessation.

A great scholar or geshe in a course of a conversation when discussing the nature of the self and the absence of selfhood, we talked about how elusive the phenomena of self is. When one probes into it and search for its existence, one finds that it is untenable; the self is not findable within the body or mind. The geshe then remarked that the self is very elusive and very complicated such that when one looks for it through critical analysis, one always tends not to find it. It is unfindable.

However if the self does not exist at all then in a sense that would make things very simple, would make things much better. There would not be any experiencer of suffering and pain; there would be no subject that undergoes such experiences. Everything would be much simpler however this is not the case. There is, regardless of whether one can pinpoint it or not, an individual being who undergoes the experiences of pain and pleasure, who is the subject of experience. Based on one's own experience one does know that there is something, whatever one may call it that makes it possible for one to undergo the various experiences.

There is something called discernment, the ability to perceive things, the ability to discern objects. In fact if looks at the experience of suffering, although some of the suffering may be at the sensory level, at the level of bodily pain, in fact the very experience of pain is intimately connected with consciousness, connected with the mind. This is because the experience of pain is connected with feeling and feeling is part of sensation with sensation being part of the mental world. This is what distinguishes sentient beings from other organisms like plants and so on. Sentient beings have this subjective dimension whether one calls it experience, consciousness, the mental world or whatever.

The question arises what exactly is this phenomenon, this mental phenomenon? Whether or not this mental phenomenon, mind or consciousness is one hundred percent contingent upon the body, whether one can identify this mental phenomenon totally with the physical world is the issue of the mind/body relationship. This has been a major area of interest in the philosophical traditions. So this is not an issue that is very recent. This is an issue that has been raised in ancient India for its entire history.

For example one of the ancient Indian schools adopted a materialist standpoint [Carvaka]. They argued that the mind is ultimately reducible to the physical body. There is no separate phenomenon other than the physical body. They argued that because the mind is entirely contingent upon the body that when the body dies, the consciousness also comes to an end. They gave the analogy of the mind/body relationship as being like a wall and murals painted on that wall. So long as the wall stands the mural is there but when the wall is destroyed the mural is also destroyed. Another analogy they used was like wine and its ability to intoxicate. When the wine is drunk and gone, the ability to intoxicate is gone as well. Similarly the mind and body are related in that manner so that when the body dies that is the end of consciousness.

However many other Indian philosophical traditions rejected this materialistic approach. In modern correlates of this discussion of the relationship between the body and mind is our whole cosmological understanding of the origin of the universe. For example according to modern cosmology the beginning of the current world system is posited as the event of the Big Bang. Also there is the question of whether that event was the beginning of everything. Where did consciousness arise? One thing we can understand through both scientific analysis and also from our own personal experience of perception is that whatever experiences one has now are consequences of conditions that preceded it. Nothing comes into being without causes.

Similarly just as in the material world everything must have causes and conditions that give rise to it, similarly in the mental world as well all experiences have their own causes and conditions. When one speaks of the causes and conditions of consciousness, the mental world there are two principal categories of causation or causes and conditions. One is a material cause or the substantial cause that turns something into something else and there are other conditions that are contributory factors that make the process of causation possible.

The Indian Buddhist master Dharmakirti pointed out in his *Pramanavarttika* or *Valid Cognitions* that something, which is not mental, cannot turn into a mental phenomenon. In other words, something that is purely physical or material cannot become a mental phenomenon. What Dharmakirti is pointing out is that for an instance of consciousness to take place it must have as its preceding continuum another instance of consciousness. Through this way one can trace its causation to the beginning of consciousness in this life and through this way one posits an earlier or preceding life.

Furthermore if one examines the Vajrayana literature there is an understanding of varying levels of subtlety of mental phenomena or the mental world. Normally when one speaks of mind or consciousness one gets the impression that one is referring to a single, unitary phenomenon. This however is not the case. Just as the physical world is diverse similarly the mental world of consciousness is also very diverse with varying levels of subtlety. It is obvious that the grossest level of experience one's consciousness' perceptions and conceptions are very contingent upon one's physical body. But as the level of consciousness becomes subtler there is a greater degree of independence from the physical body.

It is along these lines of reasoning that one accepts the never-ending continuity of the consciousness. From the Vajrayana point of view on the basis of this subtle, luminous nature of

mind. It is not the case that the ancient Indian schools including Buddhism who accepted the concept of rebirth simply make the claim for rebirth on belief alone. A great deal of thought and analysis, philosophical reflection has gone into this. Furthermore one also finds anecdotal evidence of very clear remembering of past lives by children. Even in some cases this has happened in families where belief in the idea of rebirth or previous existences was not held. Again of course one needs to constantly subject this to analysis and critical examination.

Generally when doing so I think it is important to bear in mind one very important logical point, which is the following. One must be able to distinguish clearly between cases where one does not find something showing that it is not the case, finding an object's absence and not finding an object. These are two different outcomes. Instead of not finding a phenomenon or confirming its absence many phenomena at the present may not be able to be found so far. One needs to be able to make a clear logical distinction between those instances where one has found something not to be the case, in other words having disproved something or instances where one simply has yet to find the phenomenon or reason.

It is important to be able to make this distinction between consensus where something has been found not to be the case and instances where we simply have not found what is being searched for. Also when one uses critical reasoning to analyze something one needs to understand the domain of the application of a particular style of reasoning. Different forms of analysis may have different domains, different scopes.

For example in the *Pramanavarttika*, Dharmakirti's text on logic and epistemology, many different forms of reasoning are discussed. If one is establishing the absence of something, proving the nonexistence of something then one cannot simply state that it does not exist simply because one cannot see it. This kind of simplistic reasoning does not operate. What one needs to do is to use the correct form of reasoning to the appropriate domain of discourse. For example Dharmakirti makes a distinction between two primary forms of logical negation. One is generally where the thesis being disproven, if it were to exist would be observable. Under such circumstances then if one can show that it can not be observed then one can prove its absence. There are however other instances where what is being negated is simply not perceptible, even under ideal circumstances. Under such a situation to simply state the fact that one cannot observe it cannot establish, cannot prove its nonexistence.

How does one go about negating something? There are two ways. First either by proving something that is contrary to the case is true, by establishing that object's contrary one can negate something. Or by negating something closely related to or causally connected with something then one can negate the thesis. The point being made here is that it is through making a clear distinction between not finding something and finding its absence. This is an important logical distinction.

It is through these methods that ancient philosophical traditions like Buddhism chose to accept the notion of rebirth and previous lives. If one compares the two standpoints, the standpoint rejecting rebirth and standpoint accepting the never-ending continuity of consciousness and previous existences then one can argue that the standpoint accepting rebirth has greater explanatory powers at its disposal. If one does not accept of the never-ending continuity of consciousness or the possibility of rebirth then there remain many phenomena that remain inexplicable. One could then choose to call them mysterious or miraculous which is shorthand for ignorance. In other words basically one has no explanation for such phenomena whereas if one accepts the notion of rebirth and previous existences through the continuity of consciousness then although one might not be able to give completely satisfying explanations to

everyone's satisfaction, but it at least gives one more explanatory resources.

Generally when speaking of proofs it is very difficult to try and prove something that another person cannot have experiential knowledge of. For example imagine proving the existence of dreams to someone who claims never to have dreamt at all. How would one prove that everybody experiences dreams? Similarly in the case of all of us although from the Buddhist point of view we have all experienced different lifetimes but when one changes lifetimes the body changes and much of the memory that goes along with the body also ceases to exist. Therefore one usually has no ability to recall one's past life experiences so it is difficult to say past lives exist because this is the case. One can say that between these two standpoints, because the standpoint that accepts rebirth along with previous existences has much more explanatory resource Buddhism choose to adhere to this standpoint rather than rejecting and denying rebirth.

When speaking of memory it does seem to be the case that much of one's conscious memory is very contingent upon one's present body, one's physical existence. So a meditator when they enter into a very deep stage of meditation, the meditator is able to take their consciousness to a subtler state. As they go deeper it subtler levels of consciousness then there is a greater degree of freedom from the contingency of the body. So it seems that among the meditators that I know personally there are individuals who have occasionally when entering very deep states of meditation had very vivid recollections of past experiences. These at the initial stage remain more like spontaneous glimpses, which are called *nyam* (SP?) in Tibetan which is more like a spontaneous experience. These eventually if the meditator is able to progress deeper and deeper may be turned into an actual realization.

This suggests that as one goes deeper and deeper into meditative states the subtler that state of mind becomes. One then has a greater ability to recall past life experiences which reside in a much subtler state of consciousness as it is the subtlest continuum of the consciousness that connects sequential past lives.

If consciousness is ultimately reducible the body then all of the functions of the consciousness must be functions of the body in which case it is only by effecting the body that the mind could be effected. The opposite could never be the case. However a growing scientific interest has performed experiments upon individual meditators. In some cases they are beginning to find evidence where as the result of an individual meditator's using purely the power of cognition or mind either through single-pointed meditation or another type of meditation the meditator is able to effect physical change at the biological level. Here one can see a reverse effect that as the result of a purely mental thought process taking place one can detect physical manifestations of that at a physiological level. So there is now a growing interest and continuing experiments are taking place which need to go further into this issue.

If however as the result of scientific or other critical investigation certain aspects of Buddhist thought are proven to be wrong or untrue then as followers of the Buddha, as Buddhists one must accept the consequences of this. I have often made the comment that for example the cosmological descriptions of the world found in the Buddhist Abhidharma texts such as the *Abhidharmakosa*, the *Treasury of Phenomenological Knowledge* describes the sizes of the sun and moon with very specific numbers. It also discusses the distances between the earth and the sun and moon as well as Mount Meru in center of the universe. Most of these cosmological descriptions that are found in the Abhidharma texts cannot be accepted because through modern cosmological studies these distances have been proven to exact measurements. According to the Abhidharma the difference in size between the sun and moon is describe as rather small but we now know there is a tremendous difference between the sizes of the sun and moon.

For example in the Abhidharma texts the distance is described as fifty-one yojanas. These can no longer be accepted as we now have very clear empirical evidence that suggests otherwise. As Buddhists who if an idea or concept has been disproven through very clear evidence then one must reject the disproven concept. Also for example Tsongkapa states in one of his texts, the *Differentiation Between the Definitive and Interpretive Meanings of the Scriptures* he states that he who accepts a philosophical standpoint that is contrary to reason, cannot be accepted as a reliable scholar. If this is the case then of course anyone who accepts or chooses to defy the evidence or empirical proof is even worse; one must accept the proof of the empirical evidence.

When understanding the Buddha's teachings on emptiness if one were to rely entirely on the authority of the scriptures then one will reach an impasse because there are so many different varieties of scriptures. Many of these scriptures on the surface make conflicting claims, conflicting philosophical standpoints. There is simply no way that one could arrive at a proper understanding of the Buddha's teaching on emptiness by only relying on the authority of the scriptures and their literal statements.

In fact there is a story that there was a not very bright student studying the geshe course and at the debate sessions whenever an argument was made this student would agree. Then when a counter argument disproving the other assertion was made this student would then agree with the counter argument. This is a similar situation to one who only relies on the scriptures at one's disposal as an authority.

In the Buddhist tradition one looks at all of the diversity of scriptures which teach on emptiness and then use one's own understanding and reason to arrive at a deeper, convergent standpoint. By using critical reasoning one distinguishes between different levels of subtlety of one's understanding of emptiness and by using critical reasoning one makes differentiations between the scriptures that can be taken literally at face value and those that require further interpretation.

If this is so then of course when dealing with the world of conventional reality, the world of everyday diversity then one must accept that there is a area of commonality between Buddhist explanations of the nature of the conventional world and the scientific explanation. Where one finds instances of empirical evidence suggesting something to be the case then since one is engaged in the common area of discourse and analysis, one must accept the validity of the empirical evidence.

However this is not to suggest that according to Buddhism all facts of the world, all phenomena can be understood simply by using one's critical faculties as ordinary individuals. For example there is an understanding that given the present state of one's cognitive abilities there are certain facts and phenomena that lay, at least for the time being outside the scope of one's comprehension or realization.

Therefore in Buddhism a distinction is made between three classes of phenomena. One is known as evident or manifest phenomena, phenomena that one can directly experience and perceive through one's ordinary senses and so on. Second are the slightly hidden phenomena or slightly obscured phenomena which one can still understand through inference, through using reasoning. Through the process of reasoning one can gain a cognition or recognition of these phenomena.

The third category of phenomena is described as extremely or deeply hidden and these are phenomena that at the moment, given one's limited current cognitive capabilities, these phenomena lay beyond one's present abilities to understand. These can only be understood on the basis of the testimony of someone who has gained direct experience of these. The acceptance

of this category of phenomena must be based upon the valid testimony of third person. I often use the example or analogy of one's birth date. Each of us knows our particular date of birth however this is knowledge that we have not acquired firsthand. All of us have acquired this through someone else's testimony such as our parents or government officials. If it was one's parents who told that a certain date was the date of our birth then one accepts that as a valid statement as there is no reason why one's parents should lie. Also one can rely on their words as authorities.

There are of course exceptions. These days in India we Tibetans need to make travel documents or registration papers. Sometimes there is flexibility on the dates. If the purpose is to seek retirement then one increases one's age and if the purpose is to seek employment then one reduces one's age. Of course these are different circumstances but generally one accepts the testimony of a third person that such-and-such a date is one's date of birth.

Similarly in Buddhism there is an understanding of this third class of phenomena which are extremely hidden and extremely obscure a fact that one accepts on the basis of scriptural authority of the Buddha. Again here the acceptance of this authority is not simplistic simply by saying Buddha was a holy person. This is not the case. Again the procedure for accepting his authority requires certain proper procedures. For example one of the principals of Buddhist analysis is known as the Four Reliances. One does not rely on the person but on their words. One does not rely on mere words but the meaning behind the words and so on.

So one subjects the authority of the Buddha to analysis first by critically examining other scriptures where he made claims that are susceptible to critical reasoning such as the Four Noble Truths and so on. If one finds those able to withstand critical analysis and prove them to be true then one takes this into account. One also takes into account the fact that there was no ulterior motive of the part of the Buddha to make these claims; there is no reason why the Buddha would be making false claims. So it is through a combination of various considerations that one accepts the authority of a third person. It is not the case that everything, all events and phenomena are accessible to one as an ordinary being at the moment with one's present cognitive faculties.

As I explained before the essence, the principal core of the practice of the Buddha's teachings is the cultivation of bodhicitta, the altruistic aspiration to attain Buddhahood. This as Asanga points out in his *Mahayanasutralamkara*, the *Ornament of Mahayana Scriptures* where he states that the root cause of bodhicitta is compassion, so one needs to cultivate great compassion. When one speaks of bodhicitta it is defined as a state of mind, an aspiration that is endowed with two components. One is the wish to bring about the attainment of enlightenment and the second is the aspiration to bring about the welfare of other sentient beings.

**[Its roots are compassion; it is desired; its constant aim is the happiness of others; liberation and dharma are also the object of sufficient knowledge.]**

**Mahayanasutralamkara Ch. IV Verse 3**

As I explained yesterday each of these two components that together lead to the experience of bodhicitta must be cultivated separately. For example in order to cultivate the aspiration to attain Buddhahood, one must first, especially if one is to follow the way of the intelligent practitioner, develop a deep understanding of what is meant by the enlightenment that one is aspiring for. So therefore one must have some degree of understanding of the concept of liberation, the meaning of the cessation of suffering. When one here speaks of cessation one is primarily speaking of the cessation of the origin of suffering, the afflictions. In order to develop a genuine, deeply felt aspiration to attain such a cessation, one must have a degree of



understanding of the nature of the afflictions. What kinds of afflictions are there? What are their dynamics? What degrees of subtlety exist amongst these afflictions?

One must ultimately gain a deep understanding of the distorted nature of delusion, which is the grasping at the true existence of phenomena. Without such a deep understanding of the meaning of liberation, the meaning of moksha it is simply not possible to have a genuine understanding of what is meant by the omniscient state of Buddhahood. Without this understanding one will not be able to cultivate a deeply felt yearning or aspiration to attain this. This is one component.

The other component is the aspiration to bring about others' wellbeing and this is the altruistic dimension, compassion. In order to cultivate such great compassion that aspires to bring about others' wellbeing two things are required. First is the experience of deep empathy and connectedness towards all sentient beings with a sense of the unbearableness of their suffering. One then has a deep experience of empathy and connectedness with all other sentient beings. This again needs to be cultivated separately.

Along with this it is also important to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of suffering that one wishes others to be free of. The view of suffering in Buddhism is the three different types of suffering as I described yesterday, the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change and the all-pervasive suffering of conditioning. In the context of developing deep insight into the nature of suffering one is primarily concerned with the third level of suffering. This is because as far as the first level of suffering, obvious or evident suffering, even animals can recognize this as undesirable and all beings wish to be relieved of these sufferings.

With regard to the second level of suffering, the suffering of change even non-Buddhist meditators can develop the aspiration to be free from this type of suffering but can also gain a degree of temporary release from this type of suffering. For example when an individual experiences or attains high levels of meditative states such as the Four Form Realm Levels, these levels are characterized by the absence of any gross pleasure or pain. These levels are characterized by an experience of total neutrality. So one can say that temporarily even these states are free of the suffering of change.

However it is for the cessation of the third level of suffering that one must cultivate a deep understanding. Freedom from this level of suffering is what is meant by nirvana. So when one speaks of the Dharma in the context of Buddhism, Dharma here refers to nirvana and this nirvana is the cessation of the third level of suffering. When one develops a deep aspiration to gain this realization then one has effectively cultivated the aspiration to attain liberation, which is renunciation.

The need to cultivate a deeper insight into suffering indicates how the practices of the initial scope and middling scope must precede the actual practice of bodhicitta. Seeking to be released from the first and second levels of suffering is the main objective of the practice of the initial scope. All of the practices related to seeking freed...(End of day)

Yesterday I spoke about how bodhicitta is the essence of the practice, the core practice. The cultivation of bodhicitta requires its undertaking through successive lifetimes. So although one's ultimate object of aspiration is the attainment of definite goodness particularly the fully enlightened state of Buddhahood but although this is the final goal in order to achieve this aim one needs to go through successive life forms suitable for undertaking this practice without interruption. Gaining appropriate life forms means to be born as a human or the higher realms of existence. It is necessary therefore to seek the conditions and causes for insuring the continual

attainment of higher realms, birth in the higher realms [high status] so that one can carry on with the practices that eventually culminate in the attainment of Buddhahood.

One can summarize all of the aspects of practice in the following manner. All of the practices that are related to the achievement of birth in the higher realms belong to the class of the initial scope. All of the practices that are related to the attainment of liberation from cyclic existence and the elimination of the defilements of the afflictions belong to the practices of the middling scope. All of the practices that are specifically related to the means of attaining the omniscient state of Buddhahood belong to those of supreme capacity or the higher scope.

As I explained before the main objective of the practitioner of this particular text, the *Lamp for the Path* are those who seek the attainment of full enlightenment of Buddhahood. So the practices that are explained as part of the initial scope and the middling scope are in fact prerequisites or common aspects of the path.

Verse three in the text reads:

**3        Know that those who by whatever means  
          Seek for themselves no more  
          The pleasures of cyclic existence  
          Are persons of the least capacity.**

The main point of this verse has already been explained. This refers to the practitioners of the initial scope where the primary objective is to seek the means of attaining birth in the higher realms.

What are the means for attaining birth in the higher realms that is the spiritual objective for those of the initial scope? I touched upon this yesterday. Here the key practice is living one's life according to the ethical discipline of refraining from the ten negative actions of body, speech and mind. These negative actions of body, speech and mind are the principal causes that lead an individual to take birth in the lower realms of existence and undergo the sufferings of those realms. Therefore by consciously and deliberately adopting an ethical discipline, refraining from these negative actions constitutes establishing the method or means by which one attains freedom from rebirth in the lower realms of existence.

What are these ten negative actions that one needs to refrain from? There are three actions of body, taking life or killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. There are four verbal actions, telling lies, divisive speech, harsh words and engaging in gossip or frivolous speech. There are three mental actions, covetousness, ill-will or harmful intent and harboring wrong views.

It is by living according to the ethical discipline of refraining from the ten negative actions that one seeks freedom from birth in the lower realms of existence. Therefore the practices that are involved for the initial scope are primarily of two categories. One category of the practice is to engage in the training of mind so that one cultivates the genuine aspiration or wish to gain freedom from the lower realms of existence. The second category is to then cultivate the means by which one can achieve this aim. The means here refers to cultivating the understanding of the laws of cause and effect, particularly that of karma and then living according to the law of karma by abstaining from the negative actions of body, speech and mind.

This is in fact the precept that one takes as the result of taking refuge in the Three Jewels because without having some understanding of the nature of the Three Jewels one will not be able to appreciate the important aspect of the law of karma. Therefore in this practice one needs

both going for refuge and then living out the precepts of refuge which is to live according to the principal of karma, the law of cause and effect. So one needs to cultivate conviction in the law of karma and also go for refuge. In order to do this one must first cultivate a genuine desire to seek freedom from rebirth in the lower realms of existence. In order to do this one must first develop some understanding of the intensity of the suffering in the lower realms. This is done by reflecting upon the suffering of the lower realms and also appreciating the transient nature of one's life.

In order to fully appreciate the importance of gaining a favorable rebirth through engaging in the practice one must first appreciate the preciousness of the opportunities that one has right now as a human being. Therefore it is important to realize the value of human life and also the opportunities a human existence provides for one. So in this way one can see how all of these various elements of the practices are part of the spiritual practices of the initial scope. One has recognition of the preciousness of human existence, the opportunities accorded to one by such a birth, understanding the sufferings of the lower realms of existence, going for refuge, developing conviction in the laws of cause and effect and understanding the transient nature of life. One can see that all of these are interrelated and constitute the practices of the initial scope.

Some Tibetan masters have said that when reflecting upon the value of human existence and its preciousness that it is important for spiritual practitioners to insure that the human life one now has becomes truly precious so that it becomes of source of jewels, something that leads to goodness. It is important to insure that one's human life does not become the source of one's own downfall, something that brings ruin and disaster to oneself.

What is involved here by engaging in these practices is in fact that one is engaged in a process of training the mind. It is through engaging in the training of the mind, through disciplining one's mind that one is trying to bring about transformation not only at the mental level but also that of one's bodily actions. So starting from the practices of the initial scope which involve adopting the ethical discipline of refraining from the ten negative actions, what one is doing is not living an ethical discipline which is imposed from outside oneself according to the law or dictates but rather it is a discipline that is voluntarily embraced on the understanding of its value. One embraces this discipline for oneself so it is a form of self-discipline that one embraces for oneself. It is through this process that one can expect to effect change. If the discipline is externally imposed according to the authority of some body such as a court or law then its impact on one's mental training may not be very effective.

In order for discipline to be effective it has to be voluntarily embraced and it has to be a self-discipline where the discipline is adopted on the basis of fully understanding its value. Therefore in order to develop this full understanding one needs to listen to someone who has this insight, this understanding. Therefore in Buddhism when one related to the Buddha Shakyamuni, one relates to the Buddha as a teacher. One refers to the Buddha as the teacher. For us Buddhists our relation to the Buddha Shakyamuni is not like relating to a creator, an all-powerful creator. Rather we do not expect the Buddha to have power over our destinies but rather we relate to him as a teacher. In fact Buddha himself has stated in the Sutras that oneself is one's own master and oneself is one's own enemy. One's own future destiny lies in one's own hands.

One can say that in order to develop a proper understanding of the practices one needs to rely on a teacher who is qualified in that they represent a tradition that stems from the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. So one can say that there is an uninterrupted lineage, custom or tradition has been maintained uninterrupted and a qualified teacher is someone who has inherited that body of knowledge, that body of insight. Therefore since the success of one's practice depends

upon learning it from a qualified teacher one finds that the role of the teacher is taken to be very important in the Buddhist practices. To emphasize this point one finds even in the scriptures that all of the very detailed qualifications of a teacher are mentioned starting with the Vinaya teachers up to teachers of the highest levels of the Vajrayana like Guhyasamaja or Kalachakra. All of this shows the importance of the teacher as well as the importance of one's teacher having the qualifications. Otherwise if the teacher does not possess these qualifications as described in the scriptures there is the danger that the students may be let down.

Now in the context of Lam Rim or the Stages of the Path practices, which is the main theme of text I am discussing, the qualifications that are required on the part of the teacher are mentioned in Asanga's *Ornament of Mahayana Scriptures*. There he lists ten such qualifications, the teacher must possess realizations of the three higher trainings (morality, concentration and wisdom), must be industrious in their dedication to living the ethical discipline, must have vast knowledge of scriptures, a realization of emptiness as described in the *Ornament of Mahayana Scriptures* as the selflessness of phenomena or at least a deep understanding of no-self, must be eloquent and skillful in speech, must possess compassion and finally the teacher must be resilient in that they do not feel demoralized or fatigued when teaching. These are the principal qualities that one needs to seek in a teacher of Lam Rim.

When discussing these qualifications of the teacher in his *Great Exposition on the Stages of the Path*, Tsongkapa makes a very concluding statement where he says that for someone who has failed to attain or discipline their own mind, since it is impossible for someone who has not tamed their own mind to train and discipline someone else's mind, therefore those who wish to act as teachers must first discipline their own mind. When speaking about the method for disciplining one's own mind it is not adequate simply to have one or two partial realizations but rather the method for disciplining one's mind should conform to the overall teachings of the Buddha. Tsongkapa explains the overall teachings of the Buddha within the framework of the three higher trainings. In other words the teacher must have both understanding and realizations of morality, concentration and wisdom.

If however after having found a qualified teacher, even though the teacher may be fully qualified in certain areas if one finds the instruction given to one are contrary to or in conflict with the overall teachings of the Buddha then it is stated in the Vinaya, the monastic discipline one must reject it. Similarly one finds in the scriptures, sutras quoted by Tsongkapa in his *Great Exposition* that those instructions that conform to the general ethical norms must be followed. However those instructions that do not conform to general ethical norms must not be practiced. In the case of the Vajrayana one finds in the *Fifty Verses on the Guru* that it is explained that if an instruction given to one by one's teacher one is either incapable of fulfilling that advice or if one understands that by following that advice one will cause harm then one needs to use common sense. One needs to explain to one's teacher the reason why one cannot implement the advice they have given. So these points are actually mentioned in the scriptures themselves.

**[24. The wise should strive to listen to what the guru orders with a happy mind. If one is not reasonably able to do it, explain that one is unable.]**

**Fifty Stanzas on the Guru**

There is a tradition in Tibet where a tremendous emphasis is placed on the authenticity of the lineage of one's teachings. In fact there is a saying that the source of pure water must be able to be traced to its source in pure snow-covered mountains. In the same manner the source of an authentic Buddhist teaching must be able to be traced the Buddha, the teacher. This I feel is very

important. Whenever one engages in Buddhist practices, particularly those who consider themselves followers of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, it is important to insure that one's practice is authentic so that it is traceable through an authentic lineage of transmission.

Sometimes there is a danger that when one isolates practices from their authentic roots then it can become very difficult to differentiate what is genuine Buddhist practice and what is not. In fact these days there is a tendency because of the so-called New Age phenomena to take pieces from here and there making up one's own amalgamation or mixture of practices. This may be fine but if one is following a particular spiritual tradition like Buddhism, particularly Tibetan Buddhism then it is important to insure the purity of the lineage, that there is an authentic source for one's practices. One does this by insuring that one's understanding of the teachings truly conforms to the broad framework that is laid out in the writings of the great Nalanda masters. This is so one's understanding and practice conforms to the traditions that have been established in Nalanda.

Of course among the scriptures generally speaking one can say that there are two principal types of scriptures. A teacher from Kham who had tremendous admiration for all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism although he himself was a Gelugpa, made a distinction that I think is quite relevant. He made distinctions among the scriptures by two principal types. On the one hand are those scriptures that make a general presentation within the overall framework of the Buddha's teachings such as the writings of the Nalanda masters. There is then the other category of the teachings, which are much more specific teachings in a specialized context. These include such as the Dohas or the Experiential Songs of Saraha which are very specific instructions written by a teacher for a specific individual. Sometimes one finds spontaneous experiential songs given in very specific contexts and circumstances. These are meant for very specialized circumstances where for the purpose of an individual the text was written. These are for practitioners who already have the basic understanding of the overall framework of the Buddhist path. Other factors and conditions came into play so that a particular teaching had a special resonance and effectiveness.

These are analogous to for example in the Vinaya during the time of the Buddha it is said that there was one particular type of ritual where the candidate was so ready that he didn't need to go through the elaborate ritual of the ordination ceremony. The Buddha simply said, "Come over here" and that constituted the actual ceremony of ordination. There is also a story in Tibet of a lama who was requested by a disciple for a specific instruction and the lama was in a hurry and said, "Go away!" In fact the student was so ready that he felt this admonition to represent a profound instruction and is said to have led to his realization. These are very individualized circumstances and therefore it is important to know that one cannot universalize from these types of specific types of instructions meant for specific contexts into an overall understanding of the Buddhist path.

There is another example. There is the story of a great Dzogchen master from Kham known as Khenpo Nisan (SP?) who is no longer alive. However I heard from one of his students that a student from Lhasa went to Kham to see the master. He felt tremendous devotion to this master just from hearing about him. When he actually met this master in person the master was reading from a text. As the student approached and prostrated to him, he was so moved that he cried. He felt tremendous devotion and deep connectedness with the master. When the teacher finished his reading the student approached and asked him to give him an instruction. The master said there was no need as he had already received it. The point is that because the student was so ready the simple encounter alone was adequate to give rise to a realization.

These show that when all of the conditions are present then a simple incident can trigger a realization. On the other hand if the conditions are not present then even if one attends a Kalachakra Initiation which lasts several days hardly anything will happen. The point I am making is that it is very important for one to develop one's understanding of the teachings on the basis of the texts written from a general framework of the Buddhist path. If one has this kind of deeper understanding of the overall aspects of the path then one will be in a position to understand the profundity of those texts that are written for specific circumstances.

It is not so much the general presentation but the presentation made within the context of an overall understanding of the Buddhist path. It is important to develop this kind of understanding so that one will then be able to appreciate the significance and meaning of those texts that written for more specialized contexts. Whereas if one lacks the first kind of understanding which is grounded in an overall understanding of the Buddhist path then there is a danger of misunderstanding if one approaches texts that are written for specialized contexts.

Another example I can give you is that in the Tibetan tradition there is a recognition of the Six Yogas of Naropa as representing a very profound instruction or practice. Lama Tsongkapa had written a separate commentary or guide to the practices of the Six Yogas of Naropa and praised this practice tremendously. However if the practitioner of this profound instruction, the Six Yogas of Naropa lacks the kind of understanding that I have spoken about concerning the overall framework of the Buddhist path then it is very difficult to conceive how such an individual could gain benefit from the profundity of these instructions.

In themselves many of these practices of the Six Yogas are common with non-Buddhist schools as well. If one looks at the teachings of non-Buddhist schools one will find the practices of transferring consciousness or phowa, the inner heat practice as well as vase breathing. There are also many techniques for bringing about the flow of the prana, energies and drops within one's channels. One also finds various techniques for the practices of dream yoga. Many of these can be found in the non-Buddhist practices so there is nothing uniquely Buddhist about these practices.

However if the practitioner of the Six Yogas grounds their practice in the deeper understanding of the overall framework of the Buddhist path then of course one will be able to really benefit from the profoundness of these instructions.

As for the specific explanations of topics of the Lam Rim practices such as the recognition of the preciousness of human existence, understanding the transient nature of existence and so on I shall not go into these in detail as of these can be studied from the many books that are available.

To read from the text:

**Those who seek these for themselves alone  
4     Turning away from worldly pleasures,  
       And avoiding destructive actions  
       Are said to be of the middling capacity.**

Destructive actions here does not refer to unwholesome actions in the sense of negative karma but rather destructive actions refers to the origin of suffering which is karma and the afflictive emotions and thoughts, especially the afflictions. Therefore those spiritual practitioners who aspire to gain freedom from these afflictions are practitioners of middling capacity. The means by which they turn away from these afflictions is by eliminating them.

As for the various elements of the practices that are associated with the practitioners of middling capacity, broadly speaking they fall into two categories. One category is the training of mind to cultivate the genuine wish or desire to gain freedom, thus cultivating renunciation. The second category of practices is the cultivation of the path that brings about the fulfillment of that wish. In order to train one's mind to cultivate a genuine desire to gain freedom from cyclic existence, one needs to reflect upon the defects of cyclic existence and also one needs to develop an understanding of the causation that exists between karma and the afflictions. So it is through these reflections, cultivating the wish to gain freedom and then embarking on the path to gain that freedom.

One finds that in the practices associated with the middling scope when describing the path that is key for bringing about the liberation that one is seeking, these practices are embodied in the Four Noble Truths. The First Noble Truth is the Truth of Suffering and when teaching the truth of suffering Buddha taught in terms of four characteristics of suffering. First is impermanence so that one finds here a contemplation on the impermanent to be an important part of the practice. One also found earlier in the context of the initial scope the importance of reflecting upon impermanence. However these two reflections on impermanence are different. In the context of the initial scope impermanence is understood more in terms of the transient nature of life and this impermanence is understood more at a gross level as the possibility of the cessation of a continuum at a certain point.

Whereas in the context of the reflection of impermanence associated with the Four Noble Truths, impermanence is much subtler and refers to the dynamic nature of reality where everything, all things and events go through momentary change, moment-by-moment change in a dynamic process. Nothing is stable. It is this understanding of subtle impermanence which then leads to an understanding of the unsatisfactoriness or suffering of cyclic existence. One can then on to an understanding of no-self or selfhood. This interrelatedness of gaining insight from impermanence to suffering and then to selflessness is explained in various texts such as Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses*. Also in Dharmakirti's *Pramanavarttika*, the *Exposition of Valid Cognition* he explains how the insight into the former (impermanence) leads to insight into suffering and the later into no-self.

How is one to understand this subtle impermanence? If one observes the world of phenomena around one whether it is a tree or a mountain, one feels as if there is no change happening. They appear to be enduring. However over time, years or more, or in some cases thousands of years even these seemingly enduring objects change. The fact that they change is something that one can observe with one's own eyes. In order to explain and account for this perceptible change one needs to accept that the process of change must be occurring on a moment-by-moment basis. If things did not go through change on a moment-by-moment basis then there simply would be no basis for accounting for the fact that over time one detects a perceptible change. On this basis one can say that anything that can be perceived as having changeable qualities is subject to a process of change on a moment-by-moment basis.

The question arises, what brings about this change? What is it that makes something come to the point of ceasing? Do things and events require a secondary condition to bring about their cessation? Or do things go through the process of cessation naturally? Here one can say it is not the case that things first come into being and then a secondary factor comes into play bringing about their cessation. In fact the very cause that brought about the object in question also brings about or is the very cause bringing about the cessation of that object. All things and events come into being with the "seed" for their cessation inherent within them.

Therefore all things and events are under the power of their causes and conditions so in a sense they are “other-powered”, governed by their conditions. In the context of one’s own conditioned existence since one’s own existence is also subject to the same nature of change then one’s existence is governed by causes and conditions.

In the context of one’s conditioned existence, what are these causes and conditions? Causes here refer to karma and the afflictive emotions and thoughts particularly among the afflictions the root is fundamental ignorance, the fundamental ignorance grasping at things as inherently existent. If this is so then one can understand that one’s very conditioned existence is under the power of this delusion, this affliction of ignorance. Even the very name ignorance suggests something wrong with it and distorted. So long as one remains under the power of such a force how could there ever be room for lasting goodness? Through this way one will then be able to gain insight into the unsatisfactory nature of one’s conditioned existence.

One can also understand this statement of how insight into impermanence can lead into insight of suffering and how insight into suffering can lead to insight into no-self or anatman in the following way. Once one realizes that one’s own very conditioned existence is under the power of afflictive forces such as fundamental ignorance then one will also realize that it is only by generating insight into no-self that is the direct opposite of fundamental ignorance that one will be able to dispel and eliminate this ignorance from within one. Therefore one then develops the conviction for the necessity of generating insight into the wisdom of no-self. Otherwise one may get the impression that this whole discussion of emptiness and no-self is so complex that what is its point? What is the point in engaging in such complex processes? But once one realizes that it is fundamental ignorance that binds one to one’s conditioned existence ...

I can tell you a story. If one doesn’t fully understand the importance of how it is by generating wisdom into emptiness, into no-self that one can bring about the elimination of this fundamental ignorance that binds one to one’s conditioned existence one will not appreciate this point. One may wonder what is the whole point of engaging in this complex process of trying to understand emptiness, which is so difficult and so complex. Once I gave an exposition on Nagarjuna’s *Fundamentals of the Middle Way*, which is basically on the topic of emptiness. One of the students who did not have a prior background of learning in the great treatises made a comment to another colleague. He said today’s session was a little strange because His Holiness began with a presentation of the Buddha’s path building up an edifice one layer at a time. Then all of a sudden he started talking about emptiness and the absence of inherent existence so that the whole edifice that he spent so much time building was then completely dismantled. He couldn’t see the point. So there is this danger however if one understands the importance of the need to generate wisdom into emptiness, the means for bringing about the cessation of the afflictions particularly fundamental ignorance then one will recognize the value of deepening one’s understanding of emptiness. Also as Dharmakirti pointed out in his *Exposition of Valid Cognitions* that emotions like loving-kindness and compassion cannot directly challenge fundamental ignorance. It is only by cultivating the insight into no-self that one will be directly able to counter fundamental ignorance.

Having explained the various aspects of the training of mind to cultivate a genuine wish for liberation from cyclic existence, then the actual path, the means by which one brings about this freedom is explained within the framework of the three higher trainings.

The text reads:

**Those who through their personal suffering**



**5 Truly want to end completely  
All of the sufferings of others  
Are persons of supreme capacity.**

This refers to the practitioners of the great scope where by taking their own personal experience of suffering as an example, as a basis then they extend this understanding of suffering to other sentient beings. They recognize the fundamental equality of oneself and others so as far as the desire for overcoming suffering is concerned. Thus they extend the wish to be free of suffering towards all sentient beings who are as infinite as the expanse of space. All of the methods that are related to bringing about that goal belong to the practices of great capacity or scope.

These practices are following the two broad categories. First is all of the practices that are related to cultivating the altruistic intention or bodhicitta and the second category is all of the methods for engaging in the bodhisattva practices following the generation of the altruistic intention. As for the procedure for training one's mind in generating this altruistic intention, there are various methods.

One method is the Seven Point Cause and Effect Method and the other is method of Exchanging and Equalizing Self and Others. As the result of either of these two methods or through a combination of both methods, once one has gained the realization of bodhicitta, this altruistic intention then the practitioner needs to affirm this by participating in a ceremony of affirming the aspirational aspect of bodhicitta. Having so participated this is then followed by taking the Bodhisattva Vows.

Now as for the actual process of the procedure for generating bodhicitta by following Seven Point Cause and Effect method, I earlier explained that in order to cultivate compassion first one must cultivate the various components that necessary for generating compassion. One of these components is a deeper understanding of the nature of suffering that one does not wish others to experience and to be free of. This deeper understanding of suffering as I discussed earlier must be generated and cultivated on the basis of one's own personal experience of the various types and levels of suffering. On the basis of this insight into the nature of suffering one needs to develop a deep sense of revulsion for this suffering and develop a genuine desire to seek freedom from this suffering. One's desire to seek freedom from suffering arises from one's feeling of the unbearableness towards one's own suffering. Once one develops this then in cultivating compassion one needs to extend this deeper insight into one's own suffering on to other sentient beings. One complements this by cultivating a sense of empathy or connectedness with others.

It is relation with this particular practice that one can see the difference between the Seven Point Cause and Effect method and the Exchanging and Equalizing of Self and Others method. These two methods are different means of cultivating a deep sense of empathy or connectedness with others. In the case of the Seven Point Cause and Effect method the main approach is to focus on cultivating a manner of relating with all beings by viewing them as one's most dear relation such seeing all sentient beings as one's mother and so on. One then reflects upon the great kindness of these sentient beings whereas in the method of Exchanging and Equalizing Self and Others the approach is not viewing all beings as being dear to one like one's mother but rather to go further and to recognize that even one's enemy is a source of tremendous kindness.

Thus one extends this recognition of the kindness of all sentient beings regardless of whether or not they are currently considered close to one. This is then followed by reflecting

upon the disadvantages of self-centeredness or self-cherishing and the advantages and virtue of the thought cherishing the wellbeing of others. This is done by finally concluding that the thought cherishing others' wellbeing is the source of all goodness, all virtue and all excellence. Self-centeredness and the attitude of self-cherishing are seen as the source of all undesirable events, all negative consequences and all calamities. Through this way one develops a feeling of empathy, intimacy and connectedness with all other sentient beings.

As the result of cultivating a deeper understanding of these various methods and engaging in their practices and one gains a certain level of realization of bodhicitta then at that point one needs to affirm it formally by participating in a ceremony of generating the mind of enlightenment. This is explained in the text starting with verse six. The actual ceremony for generating the aspiration is explained from verse six on where it reads:

- 6      For those excellent living beings  
        Who desire supreme enlightenment  
        I shall explain the perfect methods  
        Taught by the spiritual teachers.**
- 7      Facing paintings, statues and so forth,  
        Of the Completely Enlightened One  
        Reliquaries and excellent teachings  
        Offer flowers, incense, whatever one has.**
- 8      With the seven-part offering  
        From the *Prayer of Noble Conduct*  
        With a thought never to turn back  
        Until one gains enlightenment.**
- 9      With strong faith in the Three Jewels  
        Kneeling with one knee on the ground  
        And one's hands pressed together  
        First of all take refuge three times.**
- 10     Next, beginning with an attitude of love for all living creatures  
        Considering beings, excluding none  
        Suffering in the three bad rebirths  
        As suffering birth, death and so on.**
- 11     Since one wants to free these beings  
        From the suffering of pain  
        From suffering and the causes of suffering  
        Arouse immutably the resolve to attain enlightenment.**

From this point on the virtues and benefits of generating this aspiration is explained.

- 12     The qualities of developing  
        Such an aspiration**

**Are fully explained by Maitreya  
In the *Stalks in Array Sutra***

- 13 Having learned about its infinite benefits  
Of the intention to gain full enlightenment  
By reading this sutra or listening to a teacher  
Arouse it repeatedly to make it steadfast.**

***The Sutra Requested by Viradatta***

- 14(a,b) Fully explains the merit therein**

From this point onward the scriptural sources for these merits are given.

- 14(c,d) At this point in summary  
I will recite just three verses.**

- 15 “If it possessed physical form  
The merit of the altruistic intention  
Would completely fill the whole of space  
And exceed even that.”**

- 16 “If someone were to fill with jewels  
As many Buddhafields as there are grains  
Of sand in the river Ganges,  
To offer to the Protector of the World.”**

- 17 “This would be surpassed by the gift of folding one’s hands  
And inclining one’s mind  
Towards enlightenment  
For such is limitless.”**

- 18 Having developed this sentiment constantly enhance it  
Through concerted effort to remember  
It in this and also in other lives  
Keep the precepts properly as explained.**

So up to this point is the ceremony for generating bodhicitta. From verse 19 the text explains the taking of the Bodhisattva Vows. It reads:

- 19 Without the vow of the engaged intention  
Perfect aspiration will not grow  
Make effort definitely for it  
Since one wants the wish for enlightenment to grow**

**Those who maintain any**

- 20      Of the seven kinds of individual liberation vows  
Have the ideal prerequisite for the bodhisattva vow  
And not others.
- 21      The Tathagata spoke of seven kinds of individual liberation vows  
The best of these is the glorious pure conduct  
Said to be the vow  
Of a fully ordained person.
- 22      According to the ritual described in the chapter  
On the discipline in the *Bodhisattva Stages*,  
Take the vow from a good  
And well-qualified spiritual teacher.
- 23      Understand that a good spiritual teacher  
Is one skilled in the vows of ceremonies  
Who lives by the vow  
And had the confidence and compassion to bestow it.
- 24      However, in case one tries  
But cannot find such a spiritual teacher,  
I shall explain another  
Correct procedure for taking the vow.
- 25      I shall write here very briefly  
As explained in the *Ornament of Manjusri's Buddhaland Sutra*  
How when long ago when Manjusri was Ambaraja  
He aroused the intention to become enlightened.
- 26      “In the presence of the protectors  
I arouse the intention to gain full enlightenment  
I invite all beings as my guests  
And shall free them from cyclic existence.”
- 27      “From this moment onward  
Until I attain enlightenment  
I shall not harbor harmful thoughts,  
Anger, avarice or envy.
- 28      I shall cultivate pure conduct,  
Give up wrongdoing and desire  
And with joy in the vow of discipline  
Train myself to follow the Buddhas.

- 29      I shall not be eager to reach  
Enlightenment in the quickest way  
But shall stay behind to the very end  
Even for the sake of a single being.**
- 30      I shall purify limitless,  
Inconceivable lands  
And remain in the ten directions  
For all those who call my name.**
- 31      I shall purify all of my bodily,  
And my verbal forms of activity  
My mental activities too  
I shall purify and do nothing that is non-virtuous.**

This is how one engages in the training of generating bodhicitta, the altruistic intention. After having generated this altruistic intention, what are the actual deeds one must engage in, what is the task? The task is to engage in the practices of the Six Perfections.

These deeds of the bodhisattva which are embodied in teachings of the Six Perfections when elaborated are enumerated as the Ten Perfections. In this accounting the sixth perfection of wisdom is further divided into four which includes the Perfection of Power, the Perfection of Aspiration, the Perfection of Transcendental Wisdom. If condensed sometimes the Six Perfections are condensed in terms of the three ethical disciplines of a bodhisattva. These are the ethical discipline of refraining from negative actions, the ethical discipline of engaging in positive actions or wholesome actions and the ethical discipline of working for others' welfare.

I think that not only these three ethical disciplines of bodhisattvas are comprehensive but also there is a definite order to these three, a definite sequence. This is because in order to be effective in one's engagement in the ethical discipline of working for other sentient beings, first of all one must have the ability to live this ideal and for this it is necessary to engage in the ethical discipline of gathering virtues and engaging in positive actions. However to engage in positive actions one must first refrain from the negative actions of body, speech and mind. Therefore these three ethical disciplines of bodhisattvas are not only comprehensive but also have a definite order of sequence.

So although as I said earlier that although bodhisattva practitioners' aim is really to help others, but in order to do this they must first take care of their own mental continuums. So it is not sufficient for a practitioner of bodhicitta to say that their only wish is to help others and entirely neglect the need to purify their own minds; this doesn't work. It is inappropriate as the Tibetans say to use the language of working for others' wellbeing but in actual practice doing nothing.

In the text from verse 32 the actual method of engaging in bringing about the welfare of others is explained. It begins with an explanation of the practice of tranquil abiding, how to cultivate tranquil abiding or samatha. This significance of this is that in order to truly work for the benefit of other sentient beings it is helpful if one can develop a certain sensitivity to the needs of others, have some kind of ability to discern what is an appropriate level of teaching for a specific sentient being. Here Atisha describes in the text a method of cultivating a form of the

ability to perceive others' mental states, in other words clairvoyance or precognition. However for these qualities one must first gain a realization of tranquil abiding or samatha. In any case tranquil abiding and single-pointedness of mind, which is embodied in it, is a very crucial element of one's practice. Although by itself single-pointedness of mind, the practice of tranquil abiding is nothing uniquely Buddhist. In fact the practice is recognized as being common to both Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions in India. However this single-pointedness of mind is a faculty that is indispensable for one's spiritual practice.

When one speaks about bringing about the transformation of the mind it is something that can take place if one continues to reflect upon whatever the teaching point is and reflect deeply on it. One then tries to develop a deep sense of conviction grounded upon understanding. Then on the basis of this it is possible to voluntarily embrace the discipline upon oneself and it is through this type of voluntary embracing of the practice that mental transformation can take place. Otherwise one cannot expect the transformation of the mind to take place simply by imposing some kind of discipline or rule from outside.

As for the actual method for bringing about this transformation of the mind, generally there are two primary methods that are used. One is to utilize the critical faculty to analyze things and through that way develop an understanding based on analysis. So this is the first method. The second method is that once one has arrived at a certain conclusion as the result of the analytic process then one places one's mind single-pointedly upon the conclusion one has arrived at through analysis. One maintains one's mind placed on and absorbed to this conclusion. So it is through a combination of these two methods, analysis and absorption or placement, that one can bring about the mental transformation that one is seeking.

During the application of both of these two methods it is important to maintain one's focus upon the chosen object of meditation whether is the analytical meditation or one is placing one's mind single-pointedly upon the arrived at conclusion. In both cases it is very important to maintain one's focus undiverted from the chosen object of meditation because if one's mind becomes diverted, distracted by some other object extraneous to one's own practice then one's mind will not have the strength or force it would otherwise possess.

Therefore the cultivation of single-pointedness of mind as explained in the teachings on tranquil abiding is very important. Generally speaking as for the object of one's meditation on tranquil abiding or samatha, one can choose an external object or an internal object such as one's mind and so on. So the object of tranquil abiding can be anything that one chooses. However depending upon what kind of meditative process one engages in, one can describe that object as the object of tranquil abiding or the object of penetrative insight or vipasyana. This is because if the chosen object on which one is engaging, if this engagement is primarily analytical using one's analytic faculties probing into the deeper nature of that object, then one's meditation becomes vipasyana or penetrative insight. Otherwise if one's meditation is primarily focused on cultivating single-pointedness of mind and maintaining this single-pointedness of mind then this meditation is for tranquil abiding or samatha.

Of course one can also take emptiness as the object of one's meditation for both tranquil abiding and penetrative insight but generally this is the case for practitioners who already have a realization of emptiness. So in the texts one finds such expressions as seeking meditation by means of the philosophical view, the view of emptiness or seeking the view by means of meditation. Generally speaking then there are both cases where an individual practitioner may have first gained a realization of emptiness and from that cultivated an experience of single-pointedness, tranquil abiding focused on emptiness. Or there are instances where an individual

practitioner first cultivates tranquil abiding and then applies this to focus on emptiness.

For us however, for most of us it is very difficult to first have a realization of emptiness and then develop tranquil abiding focused on emptiness. This is because even if one has quite a deep intellectual understanding of the emptiness of inherent existence and then meditates upon it, it may feel as if one is cultivating a single-pointedness of mind focused on emptiness. However it is very difficult at the beginner's stage to insure that one's ascertainment of emptiness remains vibrant and firm. Often in the process of cultivating single-pointedness of mind one tends to lose the vibrancy or freshness of one's understanding of emptiness. So speaking generally for average practitioners one must first cultivate tranquil abiding and then learn to apply this faculty of single-pointedness on to emptiness.

Now to read from the text from Verse 32 onward which explains first the need for cultivating tranquil abiding and then the method for doing so. It reads:

- When those observing the vow of the active altruistic intention**
- 32 Have trained well in the three forms of discipline**  
**Their respect for these three forms of discipline grows**  
**Which causes purity of the body, speech and mind.**
- Therefore through effort in the vow**
- 33 Made by bodhisattvas for pure, full enlightenment**  
**The collections for complete enlightenment**  
**Will be thoroughly accomplished.**
- All Buddhas say that the cause**
- 34 For the completion of the collections**  
**Whose nature is merit and exalted wisdom**  
**Is the development of higher perception.**
- Just as a bird with undeveloped wings**
- 35 Cannot fly in the sky,**  
**Those without the power of higher perception**  
**Cannot work for the welfare of living beings.**
- The merit gained in a single day**
- 36 By those who possess higher perception**  
**Cannot be gained even in a hundred lifetimes**  
**By ones without such higher perception.**
- Those who swiftly want to complete**
- 37 The collections for full enlightenment**  
**Will accomplish higher perception**  
**Through effort, not through laziness.**
- Without the attainment of calm-abiding**
- 38 Higher perceptions will not occur**  
**Therefore make repeated effort**

**To accomplish calm-abiding.**

**39 While the conditions for tranquil abiding are incomplete  
Meditative stabilization will not be accomplished  
Even if one meditates strenuously  
For thousands of years.**

**40 Thus maintaining well the conditions mentioned  
In the collections of meditative stabilization chapter  
Place the mind on  
Any one virtuous focal object**

**When the practitioner has gained calm abiding  
41(a,b) Higher perception also will be gained.**

Since the achievement of tranquil abiding depends upon whether or not one is successful in gathering the right conditions for its realization, one finds in the scriptures various conditions mentioned for the practice of tranquil abiding. Some of these are seeking solitude as well as setting aside specific time for a deliberate, prolonged, concerted effort in the practice of single-pointedness of mind. When one engages in this practice one needs to have as many sessions as possible, very short sessions. The practice should be undertaken in such a way that there is no break during the day and night. There needs to be a complete cycle of many short sessions, one after another.

One also needs to do this over a sustained period of time as the achievement of tranquil abiding will not occur by practicing only once and a while when one can find the time. Rather one needs to set aside a specific amount of time and practice over a sustained period of time. In addition one needs to insure the right and conducive way of life and environment. One needs to make sure that one has as little responsibilities as possible with as few concerns as possible. One also needs to maintain a sound ethical discipline as well as an appropriate dietary regimen, which can make a significant difference. The diet one follows needs to be suitable and appropriate for this kind of sustained cultivation of single-pointedness of mind.

So the realization of tranquil abiding is something not likely to occur through the simple practice of single-pointedness here and there. For those who are practitioners of Vajrayana Buddhism however in the context of the generation stage which is the sadhana practice, although generally many of those practice require the practitioner having already attained tranquil abiding, there are some allowances in the sadhana practices where as part of one's meditation there are specific means for cultivating tranquil abiding. Given the various factors that are part of the Vajrayana meditation practices, it is said that in some cases the realization of tranquil abiding can be easier in the context of the Vajrayana practices.

When one is actually cultivating tranquil abiding one needs to choose an object of meditation. This object of meditation that is required for the practice of tranquil abiding is not something that is a visual image at the sensory level. Rather it is an image that needs to be cultivated at the mental level so the actual object of meditation is not a physical object but a mental image of the chosen physical object. Therefore these objects of meditation are sometimes referred to in the scriptures as meditative images or reflections on the meditative state of mind. One therefore first needs to cultivate familiarity towards the chosen object so that one can call to



one's mind this image at the mental level without having to visually look at the chosen object.

Once one has learned to call to one's mind the chosen object of meditation one then needs to make a strong determination that one will retain the focus of one's attention on this chosen object. With this determination one then tries to maintain this attention of focus to the chosen object of meditation. When one is placing one's mind on this object of meditation then there are two elements that are crucial. One is the ability to retain one's attention to the chosen object and the other is the aspect of the clarity and alertness of one's mind. These two elements need to be present at all times because if there is no stability or the ability to sustain one's focus on the chosen object of meditation then one's mind will become distracted. One's mind will become diverted by some other extraneous thought or object.

On the other hand even if one has the ability to sustain one's focus but if there is no clarity, there is no alertness then the quality of one's single-pointedness will lack sharpness. Therefore it is important to insure that both elements are present, the ability to sustain one's focus and the element of alertness or clarity.

What undermines one's ability to maintain one's focus? It is distraction therefore distraction is one of the most important and main obstacles for one's practice of tranquil abiding. That which undermines the ability to maintain one's clarity of mind and alertness is mental excitement or mental laxity/sinking therefore these two factors of mental excitement and mental laxity are considered to be the most important obstacles to the cultivation of tranquil abiding. Generally speaking there are other obstacles such as mental scattering and mental dullness but they are gross forms of the two basic obstacles of mental excitement and mental laxity.

The meditator's task therefore is to try to identify and develop a sensitivity to discern the arising of these obstacles in one's mind. This can be accomplished mainly on the basis of one's own personal experience by judging the thought processes in one's own state of mind and to really see what is at play within one's experience. One will understand that mental laxity arises when one's state of mind is too relaxed. When the state of one's mind is too downcast then laxity or sinking arises and in order to counter this one needs to find a way to uplift one's mind which will counter mental sinking or laxity.

On the other hand when one's mind is too uplifted then mental excitement arises. One then needs to find a means to bring the level of upliftedness down to a more sober state. So it is through these ways that the meditator needs to find for themselves subjectively and on the basis of one's own experience a proper balance so that one's mind is neither too excited nor too lax. One needs to have the right balance and this is something that needs to be done on the basis of one's own personal experience of the practice.

Generally for Buddhist practitioners it is very beneficial to take the image of the Buddha as one's object of meditation when cultivating tranquil abiding. If one does this it is quite helpful to choose an object that is the right size, not too large about an inch or two in height. One tries to imagine this image to be very brilliant and also rather substantial, having solidity. Imagine this image of the Buddha in front of one and one focuses one's mind upon it cultivating tranquil abiding. This is most beneficial.

It is also possible to cultivate tranquil abiding on the basis of using one's own mind as the object of meditation. This is the case in practices such as the Mahamudra or Great Seal tradition where when cultivating tranquil abiding the main object of meditation is chosen as one's own mind. If one does like this it is first of all necessary to have some understanding of the object of meditation, which is one's own mind. Here it is not sufficient to have only a definition of mind; mind is that phenomenon that is luminous and knowing. This alone is not sufficient, as one must

have an experiential understanding of what mind is.

How does one cultivate such an experiential understanding of the mind so that one can use it as an object of meditation for tranquil abiding? One method is to do the following practice. One tries to see if one can bring about the cessation of all past recollections, all thoughts directed and that delve into past experiences. One tries to put an end to these types and thought and then one also tries to put an end to any thoughts projecting into the future. These can be anticipatory thoughts, fear or whatever thoughts concerning the future. One thus tries to clear away all thoughts focused on either past experiences and thoughts projecting into the future. Once one finds this then one tries to maintain this focus on the present experience. One then searches for the gulf or gap and experiences a sort of a vacuum as normally in one's day-to-day experience not only during the active experiences of the sensory faculties but even in periods without obvious sensory experiences, one's thoughts are always colored by conceptualization. It is almost as if one's mind is totally wrapped in layers of conceptualization so what one is trying to accomplish is try to remove those layers of conceptuality away leaving an experience of mind-as-it-is.

This is accomplished by differentiating between thoughts dwelling on the past or dwelling on the future and the present moment. This initially may be experienced as a kind of a vacuum, a kind of a gulf with nothing. But this is not the emptiness that is spoken about; this is basically an absence of conceptualization that is directed on to the past or the future. Through prolonged and sustained practice if one can extend the gap or gulf that one experiences which initially may be very momentary, very fleeting but gradually as the result of continued practice one will be able to extend this period of the experience of the gap. Eventually one will gain a sense of what is truly meant by luminosity and knowing. One then uses that awareness as the object of meditation.

As a result of cultivating this meditative absorption, the process of which is described in the scriptures as involving nine stages of mental development, and these nine stages describe the gradual process through which the practitioner acquires greater and greater abilities to sustain their focus without distraction. Initially when one enters a meditative session one may experience more moments of distraction than moments of being able to maintain one's focus of the chosen object. However gradually as the result of sustained practice then that situation will change so that at least during the meditative session one will experience more moments of single-pointedness than distraction.

Still as one pursues further into one's practice then one will be able to refine one's faculties of mindfulness and diligence. These two faculties of meditational practice will become more and more heightened so that they will be able to counter even the arising of subtle levels of mental excitement or mental laxity. Thereby one gradually as the result of the increases force of one's mindfulness and diligence reaches a point where in the meditation session one is able to retain one's focus on the chosen object undistracted for as long as three or four hours. At this point the practitioner is said to have reached what is called the ninth stage of mental development. As the practitioner pursues the practice further then as the result of this heightened state of meditative absorption, one eventually experiences physical and mental pliancy, suppleness of the body and mind. This gives rise to an experience of bliss and at this point the practitioner has attained tranquil abiding or samatha.

From verse 41 line three on the text explains the necessity for cultivating the wisdom of emptiness. It reads:

**41(c,d) But without the practice of the Perfection of Wisdom  
Obstructions will not come to an end.**

**42 Thus to eliminate all obstructions  
To liberation and omniscience  
The practitioner should continually  
Cultivate the Perfection of Wisdom with skillful means.**

Lord Atisha then explains the importance of cultivating a union of the two.

**43 Wisdom without skillful means  
And skillful means without wisdom  
Are referred to as bondage  
Therefore do not give up either.**

**44 To eliminate doubts concerning  
What is wisdom and what is skillful means  
I shall make clear the difference  
Between skillful means and wisdom.**

**45 Apart from the Perfection of Wisdom  
All of the virtuous practices  
Such as the Perfection of Giving  
Are described as skillful means by the Victorious Ones.**

**46 Whoever under the influence of familiarity  
With skillful means cultivates wisdom,  
Will quickly attain enlightenment  
Not just by meditating on selflessness.**

The question arises, if one needs to cultivate wisdom unified with skillful means, what kind of wisdom must one cultivate? Generally speaking there are many different types of wisdom. For example the scriptures speak of the wisdom of understanding the conventional reality such as the five fields of knowledge as well as the wisdom understanding ultimate reality. Here the text identifies what is meant by wisdom. It reads:

**47 Understanding the emptiness of inherent existence  
Through realizing the aggregates, constituents and sources  
Are not produced  
Is described as wisdom.**

The question arises, if the wisdom realizing the absence of inherent existence of the aggregates and so on is the wisdom that needs to be cultivated here, how does one understand this wisdom of emptiness? When one looks at the aggregates, the constituents, elements, sources and so on do they have origination or come into being from causes? If so how can they be said to be devoid of

inherent existence?

The point made in the text is not that one is denying that those phenomena such as the aggregates, elements, sources and so on do not possess any origination nor that they do not come into being through causes. Rather what is being rejected here is that phenomena come into being, their origination is somehow intrinsic to their nature or somehow that phenomena possess any kind of intrinsic existence. For example when one conventionally makes the claims that from such-and-such causes that such-and-such effect ensues, for such-and-such factors that such-and-such results come about. When one makes such claims, one makes them at the level of conventional reality without probing or exploring deeper into the ultimate nature of phenomena.

If one is unsatisfied by an understanding of things, the operation of cause and effect at the mere level of appearance, the mere level of conventional truth then if one seeks for some sort of inherent existence of cause and effect then the more one searches one fails to find anything that can withstand such critical analysis. Therefore this unfindability is described as suggesting the absence of inherent existence. This mode of looking beyond what one directly perceives, looking for some kind of ultimate nature of things and events, an ultimate mode of being is described as seeking the ultimate truth or seeking their true mode of being. This true mode of being is their nature, which is described in the scriptures as emptiness and the realization of this emptiness is what is meant by wisdom in the context here.

As I explained earlier one should not have the notion that somehow there is an isolated emptiness that is independent of everything, that it exists “out there” on its own, not dependent upon any object or basis. When one speaks of emptiness one is speaking about the ultimate nature of things and events therefore emptiness can only be understood in relation to things and events. Therefore emptiness always needs to be explained on the basis of some object or basis and what is involved here is the quest or search to understand whether or not things and events exist in the manner in which one perceives them.

So when one is seeking to cultivate the wisdom of emptiness what one is seeking is to really understand is what the ultimate mode of being of things and events actually are. What is the ultimate nature of these things and events? Therefore one can never cultivate an understanding of emptiness divorced from the world of multiplicity. Because of this Nagarjuna stated in his *Fundamentals of the Middle Way* that without depending upon the conventional truth one would fail to realize the ultimate truth.

**10      [Without a foundation in the conventional truth,  
The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught  
Without understanding the significance of the ultimate  
Liberation is not achieved.]  
(Mulamadhyamikakarika, Chap. XXIV)**

Also in Santideva's *Sikṣasamuccaya*, the *Compendium of Practices* where he presents the teachings on emptiness he provides a profusion of citations from many different Mahayana sutras that all present an enumeration or lists of various categories of the path along with a taxonomy of reality. Based upon these categories and taxonomy Santideva explains emptiness. This is similar to what I said yesterday that in a sense what happens is that by presenting all of those vast citations one is building an edifice. After having built the edifice the point is then made that all of that is devoid of inherent existence; none of the categories or taxonomy possesses inherent existence. So in a sense there is a process of dismantling as well.

The point is that what is involved in developing the wisdom of emptiness is the analysis

to determine whether or not things and events exist in the manner in which one tends to perceive them or whether there is an ultimate mode of being, something different from the way in which one tends to perceive them. This really is the crux of the meditation on emptiness.

The basis on which one is cultivating one's understanding of emptiness are things and events that have a direct bearing on sentient beings' experiences of pain and pleasure. These are objects whose existence one cannot deny; they are real and have an impact on one's experience.

Furthermore in the scriptures the understanding of dependent origination is stated to be the most powerful means of arriving at direct knowledge of emptiness. So dependent origination is described as the most powerful proof of emptiness. This suggests that when engaged in the quest for understanding emptiness and as a result of deductively analyzing the aggregates and so on, then one does not when one fails to find an entity that possesses intrinsic reality, one does not arrive at the conclusion that therefore it does not exist at all. One does not draw this conclusion but rather one draws the conclusion that since an intrinsic identity cannot be found when searched for through critical analysis then things and events must only exist by means of dependent origination. Therefore a genuine understanding of emptiness must take place where the moment one reflects upon one's understanding of the emptiness of inherent existence that this very understanding indicates that things exist. One should feel almost as if when one hears emptiness, the implication that things and events exist through dependent origination arises spontaneously. Therefore a genuine understanding of emptiness is said to be where one understands emptiness in terms of dependent origination.

A similar point can also be raised in Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland* where when explaining the emptiness of the person, the selflessness of person he proceeds by explaining how in a reductive analysis he shows how the person is not the earth element, water element, fire element and so on. He approaches this analysis first through this reductive process. After then failing to find something called person independent of the elements and having failed to find the person to be identifiable as any of the elements separately or together, he then raises the question, if this is the case where is this person?

After this Nagarjuna does not immediately conclude that therefore the person does not exist at all but rather he then immediately brings up the idea of dependent origination. He states that the person is therefore dependent upon the aggregation of the six elements. The point raised is that the person exists and that the person is real. The person undergoes the experiences of pleasure and pain and also the elements that constitute the person's existence are also real. The elements can impact on the person's experience. Although the person exists, when one looks for it among the various elements that constitute the individual, which in a common sense way is where one could normally expect to find it, one fails to find the person within the elements where one would expect to find it.

The question then arises, in what manner can one understand this existence of the person? There Nagarjuna brings up the concept of dependent origination. He states that one can therefore understand the person's existence only in terms of its dependent origination. Having made the point of the dependent origination he then concludes that therefore the person is devoid of intrinsic existence. So this is an important point where the transition is from the reductive analysis failing to find the person then next is the assertion of dependent origination. As a result of understanding dependent origination one then arrives at the final conclusion that the person is devoid of inherent existence.

80      [A person is not earth, not water,  
Not fire, not wind, not space,

**Not consciousness, and not all of them.  
What person is there other than these?**

- 81 Just as a person is not real  
Due to being a composite of six constituents,  
So each of the constituents also  
Is not real due to being a composite.**

- 87 If [it is answered that] fire is well known [not to exist without fuel but the other  
three elements exist by way of their own entities],  
How could your three exist in themselves  
Without the others? It is impossible for the three  
Not to accord with dependent-arising. ]  
Precious Garland**

Similarly in the Twenty-fourth Chapter of Nagarjuna's *Fundamentals of the Middle Way*, one finds a question or objection being raised from the Buddhist Realists who charge that the Madhyamikas, the proponents of emptiness are nihilists. The objection is that if things and events are devoid of inherent existence, which means that all of samsara and nirvana are devoid of inherent existence. If this is the case the essentially what the Madhyamikas are saying is that nothing exists; everything is empty. The objection states that if Nagarjuna maintains that all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence then this is tantamount to making the assertion that nothing possesses any existence. Therefore Nagarjuna's view is nihilistic.

- 1 [If all of this is empty,  
Neither arising, nor ceasing,  
Then for you, it follows that  
The Four Noble Truths do not exist.**

- 2 If the Four Noble Truths do not exist,  
Then knowledge, abandonment,  
Meditation, and manifestation  
Will be completely impossible.]  
(Mulamadhyamikakarika, Chap. XXIV)**

To this objection Nagarjuna replies that such an understanding of emptiness as nothingness as the Realists present is a misconception of Nagarjuna's view. By emptiness the Madhyamikas do not mean mere nothingness. By emptiness the Madhyamikas mean dependent origination. Nagarjuna then explains that whatever is dependent originated he asserts that to be empty and in turn he asserts that to be dependently designated or labeled. This Nagarjuna calls the Middle Way. The point being made here is that by making the statement that all dependently originated phenomena are devoid of inherent existence Nagarjuna is saying that the Madhyamikas transcend the extreme of absolutism by rejecting any absolute reality of things. By stating that all things and events are devoid of inherent existence yet possess a dependent nature, that things and events exist as dependent originations, Nagarjuna transcends the extreme of nihilism.

**[We say that this understanding of yours**

- 7      **Of emptiness and the purpose of emptiness  
And of the significance of emptiness is incorrect.  
As a consequence you are harmed by it.**
- 18      **Whatever is dependently co-arisen  
That is explained to be emptiness.  
That, being a dependent designation,  
Is itself the middle way.]**  
(Mulamadhyamikakarika, Chap. XXIV)

Thus this freedom from the extremes of nihilism and absolutism represents the true Middle Way. Having made this identification of the understanding of emptiness as the true Middle Way Nagarjuna goes on to make the following statement. There is nothing whatsoever that is not dependently originated therefore there is nothing whatsoever that is not devoid of inherent existence.

- 19      **[Something that is not dependently arisen,  
Such a thing does not exist.  
Therefore a nonempty thing  
Does not exist.]**  
(Mulamadhyamikakarika, Chap. XXIV)

This is Nagarjuna's understanding of dependent origination in which he accepts nothing whatsoever that is not dependently originated. This is because Nagarjuna accepts nothing whatsoever that possesses inherent existence. The question arises; does this imply that according to Nagarjuna that all phenomena both transient as well as permanent phenomena are dependently originated? It is helpful here to understand that there are different levels of meaning to the concept of dependent origination.

For example on the first level one can understand the notion of dependence in terms of causes and conditions. So this understanding of dependent origination is relevant to the world of causes and effects. Here the dependence is understood in terms of dependence upon causes and conditions.

However there is second understanding of dependent origination that only covers conditioned things. A subtler level of dependent origination is where dependence is understood in terms of mutual dependence; for example in the case of the mutuality of concepts, when one speaks of long and short. Here there is a mutuality of concepts in that something can only be posited as long in dependence in relation to something short. Similarly when one looks at things one can understand that thing or event as having parts in relation to the whole with whole constituted by its parts. The parts can only be posited in relation to the whole that is the composite of those parts. In this sense one can understand the entire world, both conditioned and unconditioned as being dependently originated.

Also there is a third level of the understanding of dependent origination where dependence is understood in terms of the subject, the labeling mind. For example when one states that something exists and if one were to look for the essence of this object objectively nothing is able to withstand such critical probing. So when one searches for whatever it may be, when one searches for it objectively there is nothing whatsoever that can be referred to the true referent of the term. This does not suggest that whatever the mind labels becomes real. Of course the labeling process is there but also what is labeled must not be invalidated by another

conventional knowledge. Also it must not be invalidated by the critical analysis that probes into its ultimate nature. When one labels something as some thing and look for its true referent of the term labeled objectively, there is nothing that really stands out to justify the label given to that thing.

What does one conclude from this? Nothing possesses absolute, objective reality. The existence of things can only be understood and posited only as mere appellations, mere designations or mere names. One can therefore see that there are broadly speaking three levels of meaning to the concept of dependent origination. According to Nagarjuna dependent origination covers the entire spectrum of reality.

However Nagarjuna's understanding of emptiness as the absence of inherent existence of all things and events is something that is of course accepted by all. For example yesterday I spoke about the Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma and one of the principal texts of that turning is the *Samdhinirmocana Sutra*, the *Sutra Unraveling the Intention of the Buddha*, which is one of the primary scriptures for the Mind-Only School. The Mind-Only School does not accept literally the statements found in the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras where there is a categorical negation of inherent existence across the entire spectrum of reality.

So the followers of the Mind-Only School do not accept that those statements should be taken literally. They contextualize those statements by differentiating between three natures of phenomena. These are designated or imputed nature, the dependent nature and the perfect nature. In relation to these three natures, the Mind-Only School contextualizes and interprets the Buddha's statement that all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence. They differentiate meanings according to the context whereas the followers of the Middle Way School, the Madhyamika School accepts those statements from the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras as definitive and accept the categorical rejection of inherent existence across the entire spectrum of reality.

If one can understand the principle of dependent origination in terms of mutual dependence of concepts that I spoke about earlier then there is a certain simplicity to one's worldview because one can then posit the existence of things in relation to other things. For example one can then posit or define objects in relation to subjects, one can define objects of knowledge in relation to cognitions or one can define various things in relation to others. Therefore they will be a certain symmetry and also a kind of completeness to one's worldview.

There will be no need to struggle in the way in which the Mind-Only School struggles where in order to verify the existence of objects they posit valid cognition. In order to verify the existence of these valid cognitions then they need to posit a further faculty that is all-perceptive, reflexively self-cognizing and so on. This kind of problem arises when one fails to recognize the absence of inherent existence across the entire spectrum of reality and make distinctions between the world of internal consciousness or mind and the world of external objects. For example the Mind-Only School denies the reality of the external world of matter and maintains that the internal world of the subject such as consciousness and so on enjoy a greater reality. They thereby accord them a kind of inherent existence.

This is completely contrary to way in which the Madhyamika School understands the nature of the world. They understand the existence of things in terms of mutual dependence, the concept of dependent origination. Thus the Madhyamikas are able to maintain that all things and events including subjects, objects, valid cognitions along with their objects of knowledge and so on are all mere designations, mere labels or mere appellations.

If one is not able to truly understand the world in terms of this principal of dependent origination with one feeling the need to truly posit some sort of objective reality to things, then



one runs into all sorts of problems. For example if one is searching for what exactly is the nature of a person or self then if one engages in this analysis with an underlying belief that there must be a person somewhere that is objectively real that is findable at the end of one's search, then one is compelled to posit all sorts of means to identify what this objectively real person would be. In the example of the Mind-Only School there was the attempt to identify person or self with the mental consciousness and in some cases the mental consciousness is found to be too transient. This then lead to the need to posit another faculty that is supposed to have a much more enduring status called the foundational or storehouse consciousness, the alayavijnana.

On the contrary if one is comfortable with the Madhyamika worldview of understanding everything in terms of the principal of dependent origination then when analyzing the nature of person one will arrive at an understanding that person is a mere designation that exists in relation to the aggregates which constitute the person's existence. If one analyzes very deeply one's own personal experience of how one engages with the world one will find that many of the conventions that one utilizes in one's engagement with the world, the terms or concepts or conventions that one applies to one's experience, tend to be either grounded in some past experience, shared experience or something that has really happened in the past or are fears and expectations that are projected on to the future. Much of one's engagement with the world by using conventions, terms and concepts, these factors that one uses in one's engagement with the world come from either past experiences or one's projections into the future. Therefore if one were to insist on something directly relevant in the conventions of the terms that one applies to the world that are only applicable to the present with no relationship whatsoever to the past or future then there would essentially be nothing left. Almost all of one's engagement, all the apparatus that one uses to engage with the world mostly comes either from one's past experiences or one's projections into the future.

In fact if one tries to analyze and search for what is the present, it also is not findable. When one looks at units of time and tries to pinpoint what exactly is the present then one fails to find it. The units of time either tend to be past or they tend to be in the future.

One can rise the question, if by emptiness of inherent existence one is not propounding everything to be nonexistent, if emptiness does not entail nonexistence and nothingness and if emptiness really refers to the world of dependent origination then what is the point of trying to really go through this complex thought process of understanding how things really exist? In what sense do things exist? Things and events do possess a level of existence yet they do not have any objective, independent reality. If this is so then what is the point of trying to fine tune one's understanding of the existence of things and events since everyone can confirm their existence through their experience? Sufferings exist. Things and events exist. Everything is there so what is the point? Why not leave the world as it is? Why not leave the world alone?

Here it is important to understand the necessity or the importance of cultivating this kind of insight into the nature of things and events. If one observes one's own thought processes, one's own states of mind, one will find the occurrence of various states and instances of thoughts. For example one can have spontaneous thoughts of "I am" or "I am doing this". These thoughts such as the thought "I am" cannot be said to be invalid. They are valid thoughts.

However when these thoughts such as "I am" is accompanied by a powerful grasping at some sort of self as enjoying intrinsic reality then this grasping on to this sense of self as possessing intrinsic reality tends to give rise to other afflictions in the mind such as hatred, anger, attachment and so on. So there is a causal dynamic in one's mental states and it is that grasping at true existence of things, that grasping at the inherent existence of things that really serves as

the basis for the arising of the afflictive emotions and thoughts within one's mind.

Therefore by cultivating the true insight into the way things really exist, which is cultivating insight into the emptiness of inherent existence, one will then be directly attacking this grasping at the inherent existence of things. Thus one will reduce this grasping's force and the more one is able to reduce the force of this grasping then automatically the force of the various mental afflictions that derive from this grasping will also be reduced. Through this way one will be able to gradually eliminate the afflictions of one's mind. This is something one needs to analyze by referring to one's own experience.

For example when one has an experience of the perception of an object or person, try to examine how one perceives this person or object when one's state of mind is calm and there is no turbulence or afflictions. Compare this to one's perception of the same object when there is a certain turbulence such as anger, hatred and so on. See the difference between the two and try to do this comparison experientially and one thing that will be obvious is that when there is turbulence in the mind then one's perception of an object there is a much stronger emotional reaction to the object. When one experientially recognizes this point then one will feel that indeed this grasping at the inherent existence of things really does underpin much of one's afflictive emotional responses to things and events. One will also come to realize that this grasping at the inherent existence of things is a distorted state of mind; it is a false way of seeing things.

If it were simply a false view or simply a false perception without any consequences then that would not be much of a problem. However this is not the case. It is not only a false understanding but also it is a powerful force of misunderstanding that creates one's own downfall by bringing forth various negative afflictive emotions. So when one gains this kind of insight then one will realize the importance of cultivating an insight into emptiness. Similarly as one then combats with the negative and afflictive aspects of one's thought and emotions, at the same time one will then be able to strengthen one's positive thoughts and emotions which are not grounded in the grasping at the inherent existence of things and events.

When one is deepening one's understanding of emptiness generally it is easier to arrive at an understanding of emptiness by reflecting upon the dependent origination of things. One uses dependent origination as a reason then one can infer that since things and events are dependently originated they are devoid of independent existence. It is more difficult then to make the reverse inference, which is because things and events are devoid of inherent existence they are therefore dependently originated. However this reverse inference also needs to be cultivated and this requires sustained practice and familiarity. Eventually just as one can make the forward inference one will also be able to make the reverse inference.

One begins by developing an understanding of emptiness at the level of the intellect or an intellectual understanding by constantly reflecting and studying upon this. Once one has gained a degree of understanding then one needs to habituate to this through constant familiarity. Eventually one will arrive at the point where one will feel its impact on the emotional level and in this way the experience will be deepened.

It reads in verse 48 that:

**48      Something existent cannot be produced  
Nor something nonexistent like a sky-flower  
These errors are both absurd  
And thus both of the other two will not occur either.**

This is an allusion to a verse in the *Seventy Verses on Emptiness* by Nagarjuna where he points out that if things and events possess inherently existing reality then since they possess intrinsic existence causation would have no role to play. Therefore one cannot make a statement that they came about as the result of causation. On the other hand if things and events are completely nonexistent then again how could one speak of causation in relation to nonexistence? This would be like a flower growing in the sky since a flower cannot exist in such a way how can one speak of its coming into being.

**[16. Reply: If own-being were established, dependently arising things would not occur. If [they were] unconditioned, how could own-being be lacking? True being also does not vanish.]**

#### **Seventy Verses on Emptiness**

The point being made here is that when one speaks of cause and effect, when one speaks of causation one is speaking on the level of appearance, at the level of conventional reality. For example when one makes statements such as John is the son of Bob or that sprouts come from their seeds, one is making a simple statement that one thing gives rise to another. Above and beyond this simple statement one is not making a statement on the basis of searching for the ultimate reality of these things or events. One is not asking that if that is the case whether the cause that produced the effect in question ultimately identical to the effect or completely independent from the effect and so on. One does not make these conventional statements about causation on the basis of making such metaphysical speculations but rather one makes statements of causation based simply at the level of everyday experience.

Therefore when one tries to posit causation on the basis of metaphysical speculations then one runs into the problem of either having to choose things and events coming into being from causes that are ultimately identical or different. A position maintained by an Indian school in the past where their understanding was that all of the features of the effect must be present in some form in the cause [Samkhya]. The Buddhists critiqued this by pointing out that if all of the features of the effect are fully present at the causal stage then what need is there for a cause or its production. If one still maintains that production is necessary then this production would be infinite. So in this way these kinds of metaphysical attempts to define causation have been critiqued.

Similarly in the next verse it reads:

**49     A thing is not produced from itself nor from another,  
Also not from both nor causelessly either  
Thus it does not exist inherently  
By way of its own entity**

Again the point here is similar.

**50     Moreover when all phenomena are examined  
As to whether they are one or many  
They are not seen to exist by way of their own entity  
And thus are ascertained as not inherently existent.**

Similarly when one speaks of things and events the question can arise, do they exist as a singularity or as a multiplicity? If these characteristics of singularity and plurality are asserted as being intrinsic properties or inherently real properties of the things or events again many problems arise. If things possess inherently real identities then it makes it very difficult to explain the relationship between causes and effects. How can one understand a causal relation between two independently real, discrete entities? If their independently, discrete real entities there is no way of explaining their causal relationship.

Further it reads:

**51      The reasonings of the *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*  
The *Treatise on the Middle Way* and so forth,  
Explain that the nature of all things  
Is established as emptiness.**

**52      Since there are a great many passages  
I have not cited them here  
But have explained just their conclusions  
For the purpose of meditation.**

**53      Thus whatever is meditation on selflessness  
In that it does not observe  
An inherent nature in phenomena  
Is the cultivation of wisdom.**

Thus when one arrives at the understanding that all phenomena, all things and events are devoid of inherent existence then one needs to shift one's focus on one's analysis on to the very mind that is understanding emptiness. When one subjects the mind itself, cognition itself one again will find that the mind too shares the same nature of being devoid of inherent existence. In this way as the text explains one will eventually arrive at a nonconceptual understanding of emptiness.

One reads:

**54      Just as wisdom does not see  
An inherent nature in phenomena  
Having analyzed wisdom itself by reasoning  
Non-conceptually meditate on that.**

In the following stanzas Lord Atisha explains why it is important to cultivate this non-conceptual wisdom. One reads:

**55      The nature of this worldly existence  
Which has come from conceptualization is conceptuality  
Thus the elimination of conceptuality  
Is the highest state of nirvana.**

- 56      The great ignorance of conceptuality  
Makes us fall into the ocean of cyclic existence  
Resting in non-conceptual stabilization,  
Space-like non-conceptuality manifests clearly.**
- 57      When bodhisattvas non-conceptually contemplate  
This excellent teaching  
They will transcend conceptuality so hard to overcome  
And eventually reach the non-conceptual state.**
- 58      Having ascertained through scripture  
And through reasoning that phenomena  
Are not produced nor inherently existent  
Meditate without conceptuality.**

Then in verse 59:

**Having thus meditated on suchness  
Eventually after reaching heat and so forth**

Heat here refers to Path of Preparation or Path of Linking where the meditator, the bodhisattva has advanced in their realization of emptiness where this realization has now become meditatively derived.

**The Very Joyful and the others are attained.**

The Very Joyful is the name of the first bodhisattva level or bhumi.

**And before long the enlightened state of Buddhahood.**

From verse 60 on tantra is explained.

- 60      If you wish to create with ease  
The collections for enlightenment  
Through activities of pacification, increase and so forth  
Gained by the power of mantra**

These activities are the four activities of pacification, increase, influence and wrathful activities. Much greater resources of activities are found in tantra, which can be employed in one's task of bringing about others' wellbeing.

- 61      Also through the force of the eight  
And other great attainments like the good thought,  
If you want to practice secret mantra as explained in the Action and  
Performance Tantras**

- 62      **Then to receive the preceptor initiation  
You must please an excellent spiritual teacher  
Through service, valuable gifts and the like  
As well as through obedience.**
- 63      **Through the full bestowing of the preceptor initiation  
By a spiritual teacher who is pleased  
You are purified of all wrong-doing  
And become fit to gain powerful attainments.**

In verse 64 a question is raised that if this is the case how does an ordained member who is a Vajrayana practitioner relate to certain practices in the Vajrayana such as relying on consorts and so on. One reads:

- 64      **Because the great *Tantra of the Primordial Buddha*  
Forbids it emphatically  
Those observing pure conduct  
Should not take the Secret and Wisdom initiations.**

These two initiations should not be taken in actuality by ordained members. It is important for the practitioners to understand the appropriateness of the time when these different aspects of the Vajrayana path need to be applied in one's own life and also by judging the level of one's own realization. One needs to also compare the various presentations of the different teachings. So it is on the basis of all of this cumulative understanding that one needs to approach these tantric practices.

- 65      **If those observing the austere practices of pure conduct  
Were to hold these initiations  
Their vow of austerity would be impaired  
Through doing that which is proscribed.**
- 66      **This creates transgressions, which are a defeat  
For those observing discipline  
Since they are certain to fall to a bad rebirth  
They will never gain accomplishments.**
- 67      **There is no fault if one who has received  
The preceptor initiation and has knowledge of suchness  
Listens to or explains the tantras  
And performs burnt offering rituals or makes offerings of gifts and so forth.**
- 68      **I, the elder Dipamkarasri  
Having seen it explained in sutra and in other teachings  
Have made this concise explanation**

At the request of Byang Chub 'od.

**This concludes the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* by the great master Dipamkarajana. It was translated, revised and finalized by the eminent Indian abbot himself and by the great reviser, translator and fully ordained monk Gewa Lodra. This teaching was written in the temple of Tho-ling in Zhang-zhung.**

With this the transmission of the reading of the Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* with some commentary on the key points has been presented. Although I cannot myself claim to have any profound understanding or realization, use what I have explained here as a key. Try to deepen your own understanding through further study and practice. Also ask your teachers, especially if you are a member of a Buddhist center. Ask your resident teachers so that you can deepen your understanding.

Notes.

1. Quotes from the *Mulamadhyamikakarika* are from Jay Garfield's *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, Oxford Press.
2. Quote from Dignaga's *Compendium of Valid Cognition* is from Geshe Michael Roach, The Asian Classics Institute Course IV: The Proof of Future Lives reading materials.
3. Quotes from Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses* are from the translation of Geshe Sonam and Ruth Sonam in *Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattvas*, Snow Lion Publications.
4. Quote from the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra* are from William Grosnick's translation in *Buddhism in Practice*, Princeton University Press.
5. Quotes from Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland* are from Jeffery Hopkins' translation in *Buddhist Advice for Living & Liberation*, Snow Lion Publications.
6. Quote from the *Mahayanasutralamkara* is from translation by Surekha Limaye in *Mahayanasutralamkara*, Sri Satguru Publications.
7. Quote from Nagarjuna's *Seventy Verses on Emptiness* are from Chr. Lindtner in *Master of Wisdom*, Dharma Publishing.