

# Parting from the Four Attachments

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe





KHENPO NGAWANG DHAMCHOE

Parting from the Four Attachments

*Copyright © 2023 by Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe*

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.*

*First edition*

*This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.*

*Find out more at [reedsy.com](https://reedsy.com)*

# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	iv
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
Introduction	1
Attachment to This Life	2
Attachment to Samsara	6
Realms of existence in samsara	7
Hell realms	7
Hungry ghost realm	9
Animal realm	11
Human realm	12
Demi-god realm	14
God realm	15
Form realm	15
Formless realm	16
The causes of samsara	16
Negative karma – non-virtuous negative deeds	17
Positive karma – virtuous positive deeds	21
Neutral karma – neutral deeds	23
Attachment to Your Own Purpose	26
Bodhicitta	29
Loving kindness	30
Loving kindness meditation	34
Compassion	39
Grasping at Self	43
Meditating on emptiness	46

## Preface



*Parting from the Four Attachments* is one of four booklets that serve as readings for the second year of The Autumn Buddhist Philosophy Course. They concern another of the main traditions of Buddhism, the Mahayana tradition. The Mahayana accepts the main teachings of the Theravada tradition, but in addition, proposes the path of the bodhisattva striving to become a fully awakened Buddha for the sake of all sentient beings. There are four booklets in The Mahayana series – *Buddha Nature*, *Parting From the Four Attachments*, *The Two Truths* and *The Six Paramitas*.

These booklets are based on the recorded teachings of Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe.

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe is one of the most highly qualified Tibetan Buddhist Sakya lamas in Australia. He is highly respected in Australia and internationally for his profound knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism, the clarity and inspirational qualities of his teachings, and his understanding of the western mind.

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe has been a monk since 1971. At the age of nine, he entered the Sakya Monastery in Bir, India, and remained there for 10 years. When Khenpo was 19, the principal of Sakya College in Dehradun, His Eminence Khenchen Appey Rinpoche, asked the Sakya Monastery to send senior monks to join the Sakya College. Sakya College is one of the most famous Tibetan philosophical institutes in India. It was established by His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin and His Eminence Khenchen Appey Rinpoche.

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe was chosen to join the Sakya College. He studied there for just over 10 years, from 1979 to 1990. In his sixth year he was nominated as the Discipline Master. This was a challenging role, as some of the monks, including his peers, were older than him. In Khenpo's seventh year he was appointed a Teacher's Assistant, and in the eighth year he studied for the degree of Kacho Pa – the equivalent of a Bachelor of Arts, requiring intensive study. In Khenpo's ninth and tenth years he studied for the degree of Loppon, equivalent to a PhD degree. At the same time, he taught and conducted examinations at the college.

In 1994 His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin appointed Khenpo as Resident Teacher at Sakya Tharpa Ling, a Buddhist centre in Sydney, following the passing of the 14th Gyalsay Tulku Rinpoche. In 2002, His Holiness bestowed on him the title of 'khenpo', or abbot, in recognition of his teaching ability. The bestowal of the term 'khenpo' recognises something considered rare and precious. His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin recognised Khenpo's special qualities and deep understanding of Buddhist philosophies, both in sutra and tantra, and held an Enthronement Ceremony in the Bir Monastery Northern India, promoting Khenpo from the term Loppon to Khenpo in March 2002.

The term 'khenpo' has at least three meanings in Tibetan Buddhism: a scholar who has completed an extensive course of study in sutra and tantra,

a senior lama who can give ordinations, and the head of a monastery. The khenpos have been the main channels for keeping the purity of Buddha's teachings alive from generation to generation within the Tibetan monastic tradition.

Since 2017 Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe has lived and taught at Kamalashila Tibetan Buddhist Centre near Tilba on the South Coast of New South Wales, although he travels to many countries to spread the Dharma.

From 2017 to 2019, Khenpo taught the first component of the Seven Year Complete Path for senior students which was coordinated by the International Buddhist Academy in Kathmandu under the strict guidance of, and within the program developed by, His Holiness the 42<sup>nd</sup> Sakya Trizin.

In 2019, Khenpo began to develop The Autumn Buddhist Philosophy Course, a three-year program teaching the main concepts and practices of the three main traditions of Buddhism – Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. The inaugural program began in 2022.

There are many to thank for *The Mahayana Booklets* but first and foremost we would like to thank Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe for his precious teachings which he has given so generously and diligently to his students over so many years. They have greatly helped his students to understand and to apply the Dharma in their lives to such good effect. These Booklets were prepared over three years and with many hours of work by transcribers and editors. The best gift of appreciation we can give our teacher in return is to try these methods and to practise the Dharma.

*May the precious Dharma continue down through the ages  
to guide countless beings on the Path.*

*Carole Kayrooz Emeritus Professor and Lael Morrisey,  
November 2022*



## Acknowledgements

We have many to thank for their work on *The Mahayana Booklets*, a series based on teachings by Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe.

*Parting from the Four Attachments* is one of the booklets in the series. It was prepared over several years and with many hours of work by transcribers and editors. *Parting From the Four Attachments* was transcribed by Lael Morrissey, Robert Garran, Carole Kayrooz, Katarina Lozinski, Gerlese Akerlind, and Carole Kayrooz and edited by Gerlese Akerlind, Lael Morrissey, Robert Garran and Carole Kayrooz.

Lael Morrissey and Ulladulla Printing and Signage prepared the layout and design.



# Introduction

In Tibet, there are two outstanding mind training teachings. One of them is the *Seven Point Mind Training* by Chekawa Yeshe Dorje. The second is the teaching on *Parting from the Four Attachments*, which is the focus of this booklet.

We say that the Sakya Master Sachen Kunga Nyingpo first received this teaching from the Buddha Manjushri. Then, from Sachen Kunga Nyingpo it was passed down to his son and disciples, and then to his son and disciples, up to my most precious teacher and guru, His Holiness Sakya Trizin. I received this teaching from them. So it goes right back to Manjushri in an unbroken lineage.

*If you are attached to this life you are not a Dharma practitioner.*

*If you have attachment to samsara, you do not have renunciation mind.*

*If you have attachment to your own purpose, you do not have enlightenment thought or bodhicitta.*

*If there is grasping, you do not have the view.*

# Attachment to This Life

*If you are attached to this life you are not a Dharma practitioner.*

In this first teaching, we are to overcome attachment to this life and need to do two things. First, realise the preciousness of human birth, which motivates us to realise the importance of practising the Dharma. Second, realise that life is impermanent. The main way to not attach to this life is to think about impermanence. The more you realise that life is not going to be forever, then the less you are attached to this life. You practice Dharma for future benefit, for the sake of future lives. Until you have that feeling of the impermanence of this life, it's very hard to practise Dharma for the sake of future lives. For this reason, it's always good to understand the concept of impermanence and let that become a reality for you in everyday life.

Death is definite, but the time of death is indefinite. It could happen at any moment. Then after that, there is only the impact of karma. It is good to reflect on the following three points:

The first point is that once we are born, then birth is the reason itself we are going to die. Don't deceive yourself that you are going to be here forever. It's good to remember the reality. So, that helps you to remember, "I should not put every effort only for the sake of this life, because one day I will die and there is nothing I can take with me. What goes with me is only the karma I have accrued." It is important not to accrue bad karma to take with you, rather you should take good karma with you.

The second point is that this body that we have now is more or less like a bubble. It can blow up anytime. The body is very fragile. For instance, you may eat the wrong food, and that is enough to make you sick and die.

Once you die, what is the use of this body other than to cremate, bury or in a different way dispose of the body? Nothing is going to live forever. What is the point of investing millions of dollars for this body? It's only a temporary guest house. It's important to maintain it and look after it well, but the guest house is not going to last.

The third point is that every minute we should find the time to live. Every second counts, every minute counts, every hour counts. So, in this way, we should try to value each moment. It's the moment to do something good for oneself, to do something good for the future, to do something good for others. We need to value the time that we have so that we do good things, not harmful things. Remember that, it's important. For this reason it's good to think that death is definite and the time of death is indefinite.

Dharma is the same as a plant. You can't force a leaf to grow, or a branch or flower. Everything works by nature. At the right time, you need to look after it, maintain it, water it. Then naturally it will grow by itself. The time will come when you can see the leaf grow, flowers grow and fruit grow. It is the same with Dharma. You can't force it to achieve these things. You have to cherish the root, the trunk, then gradually comes all the right experience. Just like growing a plant, if we collect the right causes each and every day, the result we want will come. But if we are not creating the right causes, but simply aiming for the result – happiness, joy – we are never going to get it. Buddha says you don't need to worry about the result. The result will come if you create the right causes.

What is the purpose of the Dharma? The purpose of the Dharma is, temporarily, reducing the affliction mind and, ultimately, helping you achieve liberation. When you practice Dharma, temporarily it helps you to reduce your affliction mind, and that brings you some expectation of peace in your mind. Then, ultimately it brings you liberation. That's the Dharma. It's the same as with medicine. When you take medicine, temporarily it reduces your sickness and, ultimately, you are liberated from the sickness. That's the right medicine.

Dharma should act to eradicate the affliction mind. Dharma is the antidote of the affliction mind. But most of the time when we do Dharma, we are not

turning it into the antidote for the affliction mind, rather we are creating the conditions to increase the affliction mind! This is because we are becoming attached to practice that makes us feel happy and peaceful in our life. Any practice you do for the sake of this life is not Dharma. So this way you know whether you're doing Dharma practice or not. If we engage in practice for the sake of happiness and peacefulness in this current life, then what we're doing is spiritual practice, not Dharma practice. This way, you can differentiate between spiritual practice and Dharma practice. Spiritual practice will bring you certain satisfaction, but that spiritual practice is not necessarily Dharma practice.

At the same time, I'm not saying you are doing something negative if you are doing spiritual practice. It's positive, not negative, but not as positive as Dharma practice because it doesn't help to free you from suffering. It brings you suffering of change. That is, when you do feel happy and peaceful after a meditation, retreat or mantra, it changes, you can't hold onto it. So if we develop attachment to the practice of Dharma, we're creating suffering (that is the seeds of future suffering), not freeing ourselves from suffering. We need to be aware of this.

Let me explain further. Attachment and enjoyment are slightly different things. When you practice Dharma you may have the experience feeling great, feeling joyful. It's right to have that feeling of enjoyment because you are doing good things. When you do good things, you're going to have a good feeling. So it's all right to feel that way. But don't become attached to this good feeling. That feeling is not going to be there in the next minute. When the next minute happens, you may feel unpleasant or you have lost the good feeling. You will get distracted in your mind. We're always living in the past or in the future, never dwelling in the present. We're dreaming about the future, we're missing the past. So, that wastes an enormous amount of our time. A big chunk of time is lost just thinking about the past and the future. Then when you realise and wake up, you are almost grey-haired, wrinkled, there's not much time left to do practice – like me! So, it's important not to miss this time.

Sometimes the teachings talk about attachment to mirages. A mirage is

## ATTACHMENT TO THIS LIFE

not going to quench your thirst. It's the same with attachment to this life, it's not going to give you happiness. The real happiness comes with wisdom. Attachment may appear to make you happy, but this happiness is like a mirage. You become attached to a mirage by thinking it's water, but the mirage is not water; it cannot quench your thirst. Similarly, attachment seems it's going to make you happy, but when you get what you are attached to, it's not going to make you happy. Rather, in time it makes you more miserable, because you can't hold onto it. So, with this awareness we should not be attached.

So that's the first teaching. If you have attachment to this life, you are not a Dharma practitioner.

## Attachment to Samsara

*If you have attachment to samsara, you do not have renunciation mind*

The second teaching is in order to gain freedom, you must have renunciation mind. In order to gain freedom, we need to be free from samsara, from the endless cycle of worldly existence. In order to be free from samsara, we need to understand the faults or defects of samsara. If you don't see the faults of samsara, then the motivation to free yourself from samsara is not going to come to you. So, first we must reflect on the defects of samsara.

Samsara has two aspects, a mental aspect and a physical aspect. In conventional life, we typically see the physical and mental as separate. That's how we perceive things. But when Buddha described the nature of everything, he showed us that the physical is a manifestation of our mind. There is no external physical aspect separate from the internal mind. Mind manifests the physical. Most of the time when we talk about samsara, in our own mind we get more of a picture of physical samsara than mental samsara. But the real samsara is not the physical, it's the mental. It's created by the mind. So it's important to identify different types of mind and the realms of existence they create.

The faults of samsara also include three types of sufferings: the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and the suffering of conditions. Each type of suffering is most strongly associated with different minds or realms of existence. The suffering of suffering exists most strongly in the three lower realms – the hell realms, hungry ghost realms and animal realms. Suffering of change primarily exists in the three fortunate realms – the human, demi-god and god realms. Suffering of conditions is strongest in the form and formless



realms.

## Realms of existence in samsara

There are so many minds, each creating different realms of existence. The most common are the desire realms, created by desire mind. We can sum the desire realms into six different types, created by six different minds, or beings, which are the embodiment of minds. There are three lower realms: hell being, hungry ghost, and animal realms; and three higher realms: human, demi-god, and god realms. But these six realms do not represent the entirety of samsara because they don't include the form realm and the formless realm, which also include sentient beings. On top of the six desire realms we add two more. So altogether there are eight samsaric minds or beings or realms of existence. In this way, whatever their experience, whatever they are going through, physical, mental, emotional, all beings and realms of existence are primarily created by the individual mind.

### *Hell realms*

I will not go into detail here about the hell realms, because there are so many types of hell realms to describe. But I will explain what Buddhists mean by hell. From a non-believer point of view, hell does not exist. From the Christian point of view, God punishes you with hell. But from the Buddhist perspective, your own mind and actions are the creators of these hell realms. Without mind, no such realms exist.

The point is there is no physical place such as the hot hells. From a scientific perspective, if a body burns at 100 degrees, it's impossible to survive, you will die. But from a karmic perspective, it may be a million degrees in the hot hell realms. Physically, if it is a million degrees hot, the body cannot last for a second. It will be ashes. Even the ashes are not going to survive. But mentally, due to karma, still you are alive, still there is consciousness there. Even though there is the experience of intensive burning of your body, still you are alive – because it is a mentally created heat, not a physically created

heat. This is the suffering of suffering.

If you live more from anger, you're creating a mental gas. And when you have so much gas you will keep burning. The less gas, the less intense the heat. The more gas, the more intense the heat. That is how anger creates heat. Buddha said, there is no existent hell. Hell is a manifestation, the embodiment of anger mind. When you hear about the hell realms, in one way you are scared by the intense suffering of the hell realm, but another way to look at it is that this is created by your mind, and mind is changeable. That's the good part. There is hope. You can tell yourself, 'It's up to me whether I want to face this or not. It's not up to somebody else.' This is so important. The moment anger arises, look into the danger of the anger. For example, if health conscious people see something delicious but unhealthy, their desire wants them to eat it. But the moment they start to eat it, they think of the negative effect on their body and they stop eating that food. It's the same thing with anger. The moment anger arises, it may look like it's protecting you, making you energised, but really it does not do anything good for you. It actually harms you. In this way, anger is the prime cause of the experience of hell.

There are also cold hell realms. Imagine being born in a place where there are ice-capped mountains, everything is frozen, every wind touches you like a sharp sword. This is the suffering of suffering. But again, there is no real place like this, the mind has created it. And you go there for not just a day or month, it feels like you have to spend hundreds and hundreds of years there. That suffering really exists, even though it is created by the mind. Right now, while we are talking, someone is experiencing this out there, unfortunately. And oh, we think this is so awful, but we aren't really affected because it is so far away from us. But the moment you die you may be there! It's not far. You don't need to go thousands of kilometres to reach hell realms. The moment you die you may be right there. Because we never know how much anger there is stored in our mind.

But that's not the finish. You are born again. You exhaust your previous karma, then you are born again in some other life. Then you start again, accruing negative karma, doing the same things. You never learn the lessons. Then one day you go back to the hell realms again. You may never come out

of that cycle. It's like a person who is addicted to alcohol or drugs. They may temporarily stop, but when trouble comes along in their lives, they go back again to the addiction. They've managed to come out of it, but some months later they go back to the path of going out with a friend, having a few glasses of alcohol, and then getting drunk again. You repeat the habit. Once you are in that state, it's very hard to come out of it. It takes a long, long time.

At the time of dying, a person who commits many non-virtuous negative deeds will have much fear. The reason they have fear is because they see in their minds fearful beings chasing them, harming them, causing them much disturbance. But the reality is that these beings do not exist outside your mind. If these beings really existed, then your loved ones surrounding your bedside might see who is causing such trouble to you. But they don't see anything around you. The only person seeing these things is yourself. Your mind is the creator of all these things. You don't deliberately want to create them, but the nature of negative mind comes in these kind of forms, it manifests in these forms.

Someone who has never heard of the Dharma won't see that these beings are created by the mind. They think there are real beings out there causing them trouble. Similarly, if you know of the Dharma but don't practise it, you won't remember at the moment of your fear that the Dharma said this. So still you will think the beings are real. Only people who have heard the Dharma and do a little practice, are able at the moment of fear to do exchanging meditations. They turn the panic state into the path.

### *Hungry ghost realm*

Next is the suffering of the hungry ghost. As with all realms, hungry ghosts experience this realm due to their karma. Stinginess mind is the prime creator of the hungry ghost realms. They see a place where you cannot find food and drink, but there is not really such a place. It's more that you do not have the karma to perceive food and drink, rather you see something that is uneatable or undrinkable, and you get the suffering of hunger and thirst. For example, when you look at a glass of water, a human being sees something to quench

their thirst, a fish sees the glass of water as a place to live, hell beings see the glass of water as something not drinkable, like pus or blood. But the water is not actually a different substance, it's due to our karma that different minds perceive the same glass of water in a different way. It's always created by our mind. There's no real glass of water out there. If there's a real glass of water out there, then why don't fish see what we see?

Another example is that for us grass is nice and green for our eyes, but we don't see something you can eat. The cow, goat or sheep see yummy food. What we see they can't see. What they see, we can't see. What we see as grass to the human mind, is not grass to the cow or sheep. What they see is totally different. It will help you to always remember that everything we see is created by our own mind. It's not real, apart from your mind. This logic may help us to understand the concept of hell beings or hungry ghosts. If you don't look at it in this conceptual way, if you think what you see is real, then you will not be concerned about cause. If we don't see we are creating the experience, then we don't have control to overcome that experience. It's so important to know that these are created by our mind. Anger mind or stinginess mind creates these experiences. Anger mind is the primary creator of the hell realms; stinginess mind is the prime creator of the hungry ghost realm.

Stinginess and anger are the result of attachment. The more you are attached, the more you become stingy or angry. If you are scared of hungry ghost realm, you must be scared of stinginess. If you are scared of stinginess, you must be scared of attachment. If you can overcome attachment, you can overcome stinginess. If you aren't able to overcome stinginess, you can't overcome the hungry ghost realm. You are creating or designing that realm right now through your stinginess.

When you become a hungry ghost it could be not just for one day, one week, one year, it could be for hundreds and hundreds of years. In the *Abhidharmakosa*, it says that 50 years for a human is just one day for a hungry ghost. Just imagine if you have to live a hundred years in that hungry ghost realm. It's an incredible length of time you have to stay. This is the suffering of suffering. You will be there until you exhaust the karma of stinginess mind.

Think about how uncomfortable we feel when we are not eating for a day. These beings spend years and years in this state. Just imagine!

### *Animal realm*

Third is the animal realm. We divide animals into three groups: animals who live in the oceans, animals who live on dry lands in the wild, and domesticated animals. Just think about the oceans. Every day how many trillions are killing each other. There's no certainty whether they are going to live, what they are going to eat, what is going to happen in the next minute. Humans see the Great Barrier Reef as beautiful, but the ocean animals don't experience the pretty realm the human eye sees. There they live full of fear. Many of us pay a lot of money to visit the Great Barrier Reef. But the fish are scared of us. Just imagine if you live in a village and tigers come in to eat the people, are we going to enjoy that? We would be so scared of tigers and lions roaming around our street in the village. The animals feel this way, but we don't see this or understand it.

In the wild on dry land, again there is the same thing. The big animals are killing the small ones. The small ones are killing other small ones. Virtually their whole source of food is each other. They are also sentient beings who feel hunger. They come for food and you are that food. It's a fearful life in the animal realm.

For domesticated animals, humans look at them and think they are lucky – cows have so much grass, the sheep are so nice. But they are in a prison, they are like prisoners. They cannot go beyond the fence they are put in. For many of them it is like a death sentence. If you look at the chicken farms, some chickens we keep for meat, some for eggs. If you look at the cow farms, some are kept for milk, some for meat. It's sad to be kept just for your meat. But even if cows are kept for milk, as long as they give milk they are fine, but once they stop giving milk they are sent to the butcher. The humans who own them are running a business. If they can't get milk from their cows, how are they going to feed them? They end up making dog's meat or cat's meat out of the cows. That's very sad. It's the same for chickens. So long as they

lay eggs its fine, but the moment they stop they are going to die. This is the suffering of domesticated animals.

The luckiest domesticated animals are our pets. But still they are much restricted by the bosses. 'I like this food so I'll give them this one' 'I like this collar so they will wear it'. But the dog may not be happy about it. The degree of control over their lives is incredible. Compared to other animals they are the lucky ones, they have food and a nice place to stay, but still they don't have freedom. They are completely controlled by humans. This is the suffering of the animal realms. From the moment you are born till you die you have to face that suffering.

### *Human realm*

If you talk about human beings, from the point of view of the individual self, from the time of our birth until now we have done so many things to create our own happiness. The result of that is that we may have a certain level of happiness, but no happiness that will last. In the *Thirty Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, it says our pleasure is like the dew drop on the grass, in a very short time it disappears. We have very short periods of happiness, then we have to start all over again to create happiness. We get a little bit then it's lost. This is the suffering of change.

For example, some of us think we are happy that we can sit on a cushion. But if you sit long enough you feel really uncomfortable. Now you think, 'I'm lucky now, I can get up'. Then you get up, things are so good. Then you feel, 'Oh I'm tired, I have to sit down'. Where is the happiness? You may say, 'I'm so hungry now; I must have some really delicious food'. Then you keep eating and eating and say, 'Oh I'm eating too much, I feel so heavy'. Again, where is the happiness? Then you say, 'Oh I'm so tired, I need to go on a holiday'. In the beginning, you are so excited, 'Oh I cannot wait to go'. Then by the at the end, 'Oh I can't wait till I go back home. I'm tired of sleeping in others' beds. I miss my own bed'. Where is the happiness? If you really think about what is human happiness, there is really no happiness. The nature of human happiness is unhappiness! In the ordinary world you are not going to find

any real happiness. We see and think it's happiness, but then we experience it and then that very happiness turns into unhappiness.

Other examples. For those who are outspoken, if people listen to you, you feel on top of the world. But then something goes wrong and no one listens to you. No one values what you are saying any more. This is the suffering of change. Some of us when we were young were strong and healthy and could do so many things. But when we get old our minds may want to do so many things, but our body is not in a position to do those things anymore. We experience so much suffering from this. When we are young we may be surrounded by a beautiful family, friends and so much fun. But when we grow up where has all this gone? 'Now I'm by myself. I can't find one person I can sit and talk with'. Then we may find so many great friends, but we lose them or often part from them.

Nothing can last, it's all temporary. One minute you have a best friend but the next minute they are your worst enemy. One minute you are famous, the next minute you don't have any power even in your own life. We never stay the same, there's always change. This is the suffering of change. It's not created by the place where we are staying. It's our mind that is creating all this suffering. What mind is creating is primarily ignorance. But ignorance manifests as desire, so desire is the prime manufacturer of the suffering of change. But surprisingly, although we feel uncomfortable with the suffering, we don't feel uncomfortable with the creator. Instead, everything that we do supports the creator! And as long as you keep feeding the creator the result is always going to be the same. So if you really don't want to be suffering, you need to work on the creator, the desire mind.

We as humans are victims of our desire mind. We look out there to get pleasure. That's the reason for our six senses. Think of our eye consciousness looking for good things to see, ear consciousness looking for nice sounds, nose consciousness looking for good smells, tongue consciousness looking for every restaurant. We've experienced all these sensations, but are we really increasing happiness? We've seen so many beautiful things, we've heard so many beautiful songs, we've tasted so many delicious foods. But are we each and every day increasing our happiness? Not at all! Because still we are as

hungry, as filled with desire as ever before. In this way, our desire mind is not the right mind to search for happiness. So why do we rely on the desire mind? One minute you see a beautiful view, the next minute you see it as ugly. Then you want to change again. One minute you see a beautiful song then you say I don't want to listen to that one. First you pay money to listen to that song, the next time it is played for you free, you are now bored with it. This is the human suffering of change that we are always living in.

### *Demi-god realm*

The demi-gods are hard to describe. They have good karma, they are born with a perfect life, they have everything. But what bothers them, what they are not pleased about is that the god beings have things even better than them. They get jealous. Jealousy is undermining all their pleasure. We can relate this to us by thinking that many of us have a comfortable life. What makes us uncomfortable is comparing our lives to others. 'He has a better job than me. She has a better car than me. He wears better shoes than me'. Soon this comparison with others, that very mind of comparing, makes you unhappy. That's the demi-god realm. You forget the gratefulness for what you have because you are comparing it with what others have. 'They have nice things, I don't have things as nice.'

But look closely at whether having nice things that are not as nice as others have is the real cause of your suffering, or whether it's competing with others that is the cause of your suffering. It's not the others having nice things that causes suffering, it's your mind being jealous of others. In rich countries, people are like demi-gods. You have everything, but you don't appreciate it because you are constantly comparing it to what others have. And when you compare with others, others do not even necessarily have things better than you, it's just that you *think* they have things better than you. When you don't have what they have, you become unhappy, you're jealous.



### *God realm*

Beings in the god realm are born with everything. It's as if you were elected as the prime minister or president. As soon as you are elected the government creates all the right facilities for you. So life is perfect. But the moment it is time to die, the god drops. That's the god realm of suffering. Beings in the god realm don't realise that these things are not going to last. They never prepare because they think they are going to be here forever. We have a saying that when you throw an arrow in the sky, it can go very high. But the arrow cannot go on forever. Eventually it will have to return. So no matter how great your life, it will end. And depending on your karma, one day you might return to a humble life. That's the god realm of suffering. You have a great time for a long period, but once it is over you are back in the normal world, not a perfect place. You will be reborn. Nothing is forever. There is no permanent state. This is the suffering of change.

### *Form realm*

Form realm beings don't have attachment to physical objects, such as form, sound, smell, taste, touch. Nothing interests them. They are only interested in meditating, just meditating. It is the experience of peace that they are attached to. But being attached to a sense of peace from meditating is affliction mind. While you are meditating you have peace and calm, but the moment you are distracted you are back to the desire realm. This is because you are not free from the grasping self, because you are not free from the clinging or attachment to your sense of peace. The form realm is like a Japanese pebble garden. You put plastic underneath and you put pebbles on it. As long as the plastic is there the grass will stop growing. But you haven't uprooted the seed. So the moment you take away the plastic, then again the grass grows. So the form realm means that afflicted mind is temporarily suppressed, but it's not uprooted. This is the suffering of conditions. We might think that it's a perfect place, but time spent there is actually wasted.

### *Formless realm*

Now you are not attached to any physical form, not even your body, not even your interest to meditate. You don't have interest in physical things but only in consciousness. As long as you are meditating you have perfect peace but the moment you are distracted, you are back to desire. You are still in samsara. You have not managed to be free from samsara.

### The causes of samsara

If you look at the six desire realms, the form realm and formless realms, nowhere is free. With this awareness you are less attracted to samsara. You need to think, 'How can I get free? How can I liberate myself?' In order to liberate yourself from these states you need to know the cause. The root cause of these states is the self-grasping mind. The self-grasping mind is at the root of all the sufferings of samsara, the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and the suffering of conditions. So this leads you to think, 'I must free myself from the self-grasping mind'. The way to free yourself from the self-grasping mind is through renunciation.

First, you must understand what renunciation means in Buddhism. That's so important. We're using the English word renunciation, and in English it has one meaning, but that meaning is not the same as what Buddhists mean when they talk about renunciation. So, don't take the literal meaning of renunciation, think about what it means in the Buddhist sense. The Tibetan word we use, we call it *nyenjung*. It means, 'I must free'. So, just think, when you're in such an awful place as samsara, what are you going to think: 'I must leave this place. I cannot stand this place'.

You really want to free yourself for the sake of your own benefit. This is called renunciation. Lots of people have a wrong interpretation of renunciation. They think, 'Oh, you're a Buddhist, you should not really enjoy yourself. You're a Buddhist, you don't sing songs. You're a Buddhist, you should not wear nice clothes because Buddhists should not be attached'. But attachment and enjoyment are two different things. The entire goal of

the Buddhist path is to attain the joyful. So, to achieve the joyful, we never say renounce joy. But attachment doesn't bring you joy. It brings misery. So we're saying, abandon the attachment, we're not saying abandon the joy.

The root of samsara is the self-grasping mind. Out of the self-grasping mind arises attachment, ignorance and affliction mind. The self-grasping mind creates the karmic formations. Karma has three aspects: positive karma, negative karma and neutral karma. First we will talk about negative karma, the creator of the three unfortunate realms in samsara. There is a way we can free ourselves from the unfortunate realms through avoiding negative karma and accruing positive karma. But we need to know the cause of negative karma to do so. The cause is non-virtuous negative deeds.

### *Negative karma – non-virtuous negative deeds*

Mostly when we talk about non-virtuous we use the term in the religious sense, but in Buddhism non-virtuous means deceptive mind, or dishonest mind, or dishonest actions. It's important to recognise that our mind is dishonest. If you do not recognise this, it will be difficult to avoid non-virtuous deeds and negative karma. Think of your friend. If they are honest with you, you trust them, but if they are dishonest, you will no longer be friends with that person. How can you be a friend to someone who is always dishonest with you. It's the same with our own mind. We are such friends to our own mind, but that very mind causes so much trouble to us. This mind is always dishonest, but we do not recognise it. When you listen to the Dharma, it will help you identify when your mind is dishonest to you. This becomes the basis for changing and retraining your mind.

Why do we call the mind dishonest? If you think about the nature of attachment, it comes from desire mind. With desire mind, it *seems* that your mind is helping you get what you desire. But the more you listen to this desire mind, the more you get suffering. When you are angry, thinking I am angry with him or her because she treated me badly, she caused me this suffering, it seems that anger is supporting you to defeat your enemy. But in reality, anger does more harm to you than to your enemies.

It's the same with ignorance, which takes advantage of us. Ignorance is the reason we don't have wisdom or don't know what to do. The opportunity is there to learn and practice Dharma, but what stops us from learning and practising Dharma is ignorance. It appears that ignorance is your friend but in reality it causes you much disadvantage, it does not let you gain wisdom. This is again a dishonest mind. It says one thing and does other things. Anything that harms you is negative mind.

It is the body, speech and mind that creates negative deeds. There are three non-virtues associated with the body, four with speech and three with the mind. Each of these creates negative karma.

Three non-virtues of negative actions by the body

The most gross physical misdeeds are killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. We commit these acts out of attachment mind, aversion mind and ignorance mind. These are the motivations or causes of the suffering of the unfortunate realms. No one has the power to create my suffering apart from myself. There's no reason to be mindful of what other people say or do, I need to be mindful of myself. At the end of the day it's up to me.

Four non-virtues of negative speech

If we speak out of the three poison minds, attachment mind, aversion mind and ignorance mind, our speech will become non-virtuous. This includes lying, divisive words, harsh words and idle talk. These four speech non-virtues are actually stronger than the physical non-virtues, because killing, stealing and sexual misconduct are not conducted easily, whereas lying, divisive words, harsh words and idle talk can be performed every day. We perform them much more frequently than physical misdeeds. In this sense, speech is more dangerous than action.

Three non-virtues of negative mind

These are coveting mind, harmful mind and wrong view. These non-virtues are stronger again than speech because with speech we can keep noble silence, but we cannot keep noble silence in our minds. We try to keep noble silence in our minds but it doesn't work. Our minds are always chattering with the opportunity to create coveting mind, harmful mind and wrong view.

Think about how many times we create these negative deeds, from the

moment we get up to the time we go to bed. In ancient times, the Kadampa schools used white and black pebbles. Whenever students did wrong things, they took one black pebble. Whenever they did right things, they took one white pebble. At the end of the day they had only one or two white pebbles, most were black pebbles. That tells you how many negative deeds are undertaken in one day. When you realise that, you stop blaming the world whenever you have problems. You realise, I'm the person who created this situation, therefore I need to be more mindful. I know why I'm unhappy, because I am creating the cause of my unhappiness.

On the one hand, it's unfortunate that we are creating so much negative karma, on the other hand, we have hope that we can change it. If you are born as an animal there is no opportunity to differentiate what is good or bad. There is no opportunity to change your mind. Animals are just stuck in karma till they die. As humans there is no need to be stuck. There is tremendous opportunity to change the way we act. We have so much freedom to change. No other beings have that freedom. We need to realise how fortunate we are that we have the opportunity to change ourselves. Negative karma is the cause of all our suffering.

Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend* sum ups three components to negative karma:

1. There needs to be intention to harm someone.
2. You need to act out of that intention, either directly or indirectly.
3. You feel satisfaction, not remorse, for your actions.

If you commit such actions, speech or thoughts, you have a chance to change it by purifying it. But if you do not do this then one day, when the appropriate conditions arise, the negative karma will arise or come to fruition for you. This is called ripening, completion or purification of karma. But even once the karma is complete, it's still not exhausted, there arises further disadvantage. Once you complete negative karma it will bring you suffering. It then becomes really difficult to do positive things out of that suffering. It becomes much easier to do negative things. This becomes a non-virtuous cycle. It's very hard to get out of this cycle. It's not just that you do one thing wrong, then

you purify it, and then you're free. Once you do one thing wrong, it's very hard to come out of it. This is very dangerous.

Every deed of negative karma that you commit has four results:

1. the ripening result
2. results similar to the experience
3. results similar to the action
4. the fundamental result.

Take for example killing. The ripening result is rebirth in the lower realms, in the worst case the hell realm; a medium case as a hungry ghost and the lesser case would be in the animal realms. Results similar to the experience include that, once you exhaust or complete your karma in the lower realms and you are reborn as a human, you will have a short life or you will always be unhealthy. Results similar to the action would include, even if you are reborn as a human, you like killing so naturally you want to kill. Once you start killing then you are back to the same negative karmic cycle. The fundamental result would be that you are born in a warring country. From childhood you would be taught to love to hold a gun and to kill others. So negative karma has a negative result, which in turn creates other negative results, which means that it is very hard to break out of the cycle of negative karma.

Similarly, if you steal, the ripening result would be rebirth in one of the three lower realms. The result similar to the experience is that, in your next human life, you will be born poor. You will want wealth, but no matter how much hard work you do, you will never get wealth, you will always be poor. Then the result similar to the action is that, even if you have no need to steal, you will automatically steal things. The fundamental result is that the place you will be born will be limited in everything.

Sexual misconduct is the same thing. The result similar to the experience is that it will be hard to find a nice partner. Even if you find a nice partner, it won't last. The result similar to the action is that when you are born again you will have affairs over and over. Ethically you will not be a good person. This harms so many people. The fundamental result is that where you are

born and grow up there will be no ethics.

If you are aware of these things then you know what you need to do when you practise Dharma. Dharma practice is not about something you achieve, Dharma practice is about something you prevent. If you prevent this wrongdoing then the suffering of unhappiness and miserableness is not going to be there. Absence of that is nirvana. The goal is absence of all that is suffering, which is nirvana. Right now we are maintaining these unethical things, yet we want happiness. For the happiness of ourselves and others it's so important to identify non-virtues and prevent them from happening in our lives, that is Dharma practice.

For example, if someone undertakes alcohol and drug therapy, or violence and aggression therapy, the therapists will talk about the danger of alcohol and drugs, or violence and weapons. If you take drugs or use weapons they will describe what will happen. They are not trying to frighten you, they are just telling you the truth. So if you are smart, you think, I can't afford to damage my life in this way, I can't afford to harm others. When you realise this, it becomes a turning point, where you realise you don't want to do these things. It's the same with Buddhists, who advise that we are mentally addicted people. Through our mental afflictions we do so much damage. So we need to be aware of the danger of the mind. We don't need to be frightened, we just need to be mindful. We need to identify the danger of non-virtues, and in that way we will be in a better position to protect ourselves. We do not need to focus on protecting ourselves from others. We need to focus on protecting ourselves from our own mind. That is the Dharma practice.

### *Positive karma – virtuous positive deeds*

Virtuous is the opposite of non-virtuous. It is the absence of attachment, anger and ignorance. Its nature is healthy and happy. When you live healthily and happily, this creates the same state, a state of healthiness and happiness. Unhealthiness cannot create healthy states. So we need to aim for a healthy mind, healthy actions and healthy speech.

Virtuous mind

A virtuous mind is a healthy mind. Healthy mind means that, when you have nice things, you wish others to have nice things. You don't have coveting mind. You are always thinking about what you can do to make someone feel good rather than thinking a harmful thought. When you see others having good things, think that they have created these by their own actions. Don't have coveting mind. Have a positive mind, wishing others to have good things, wishing others to be happy. Karmically, whatever good things we have comes from a good cause. Just bring this to your mind, then you will see that your mind is completely free. It will not be restricted, not controlled, not suppressed. This is the best state for your mind. This is a virtuous mind.

#### Virtuous speech

Virtuous speech is saying whatever is helpful for the other person. When there is a problem between two people think, 'What should I say to bring them closer rather than separating them?'. Instead, we often think, 'How can I separate them rather than bringing them closer?'. We make up stories such that the division becomes bigger and bigger, and we end up destroying good friends. You need to always think, 'How can I bring people together and make them closer to each other?'. Instead of saying a harsh word, say a pleasant word. Nagarjuna said there are three kinds of speech. One is helpful, like honey, sweet. Another is like a flower, just to listen is to make one happy. The third is like a weapon that harms and which you should avoid. Always be mindful of wrong speech because it will harm you more than the other person. Try to say something honest, that brings people together, that is pleasant. Say something that is meaningful, purposeful. Then you are not wasting your time. Right speech will make for happiness.

#### Virtuous action

Instead of killing, try to save others' lives. Instead of stealing, practice generosity. I'm not saying to give everything that you have. Give things that you do not require and that someone else can benefit from. Instead of sexual misconduct, show respect to others, value others. You can become a wise person who can have a virtuous life. In the short term this is most valuable because it brings so much joy. At the time of your death, there will be nothing to regret. You will be confident that you will have a better rebirth in a future



life. That is a good way to die. You have created enough good cause that you will have a better rebirth.

Just as with non-virtuous habits, each of these virtuous habits has four karmic results. The ripening result is higher rebirth. You can be reborn in higher realms. The result similar to the experience is that, if you save others' lives in this one, you will be reborn to have a long healthy life. Scientists who research why people live long lives can draw the wrong conclusion, e.g. they might say the person eats two eggs every day, that's why they lived longer. Then everyone starts eating two eggs. This may affect life a little bit, but primarily Buddhists believe it is karma that determines a long life. You might eat exactly the same as a person who lives over one hundred years but there is no guarantee that you will live that long. But if you create the same karma as the person who lives over one hundred, it's guaranteed you will live that long. Karma is the primary cause of the nature of your life rather than external things. The fundamental result is that you will be born in a place where there is a favourable environment, like less pollution.

Understanding this motivates us to practice more virtues because this is what is going to give us what we want. We won't practice non-virtues because they bring us what we don't want. Understanding about the virtues and non-virtues creates the right state of mind and shows us what to adopt and what to abandon.

### *Neutral karma – neutral deeds*

Neutral actions are neither virtuous nor non-virtuous. For example, washing dishes, cleaning your house, driving cars, sleeping. These are neutral, but you can turn them into virtues or non-virtues. For example, in itself, sleeping is neither virtuous nor non-virtuous, but if when you go to sleep you remind yourself that when you wake up you will help more people, then your whole sleep is virtuous. Or instead, if you say to yourself, 'Oh I'll have a good rest, then tomorrow I'll rip off some people!', your whole sleep is non-virtuous!

The motivation for our actions is also important. For this reason, whenever you commit virtues deeds, you must have renunciation or bodhicitta mind.

If you commit virtuous deeds with renunciation and bodhicitta minds, then none of these virtuous deeds is going to cause you samsara. But without renunciation or bodhicitta as your motivation, deeds may be virtuous but they still count as samsaric. The human realm is created by virtuous mind and actions, the form realm and formless realm are also created by virtuous mind. But if these virtues have the absence of renunciation or bodhicitta, the being is still in samsara. This is because, without renunciation or bodhicitta, one is attached to self, and when we create virtues out of this, they will be samsaric virtues. The same virtues but with a different motivation makes for a different result. To free the grasping self and attain liberation is the path of buddhahood.

We need to realise that samsara is full of suffering. Only if you are free from samsara is there nirvana. Therefore my prime goal to practise Dharma is to free myself from samsara and attain nirvana. The actions we create as humans never end. Our actions have karmic consequences – cause and effect. The more you do, the more karmic consequences come. In the morning you wake up and think, I have so much to do, I am so busy. You rush to work until you collapse! But does it really matter if you do fewer things? No. Because tomorrow you wake up and it is the same process all over again. While we are keeping busy in life, our precious life is being wasted. If you enjoy what you are doing, then it's good. But it's not good if you not enjoying it and whinging about it. What's the point if you are so caught up in these cycles of work and busyness, but it doesn't make you happy? It causes so much stress. If you are caught up like this, one day your life is just gone. Then when your life is gone, you are reborn and it starts all over again. The busy work is never going to be finished until you exhaust your desire mind.

But each and every day we are not reducing our desire mind, we are making it stronger. Today I achieve this much, tomorrow I will do more. Our desire is getting stronger each day and our body is getting older. This means trouble. When you are young you feel less exhaustion because your body is healthy. Then your body gets old. Your desire wants to do so much but your body hasn't got the strength. The main manufacturer of the activities is our desire mind.

The sad thing is whatever we have done in this life, in the end we have to waste everything. This is the suffering of conditions. This is like a child building sand castles on the beach. At the end of the day, the waves come and wash the sandcastle away. We build so much, and at the end somebody destroys it. If you go to the tip, people are throwing so many things out. They create so much effort to get these things, then they chuck them into the tip. This is the suffering of conditions. Even if you are dying in your hospital bed your mind is thinking, 'Oh, I haven't finished some meeting'. Still you are attached to something out there. You are caught up because you are a slave of your desire mind. It's not worth it. We need to be mindful of the suffering of conditions. What we really need to do is be virtuous. This is what will help us in this life. This will help us in future lives.

The creator of all this suffering is the three poison minds – attachment mind, aversion mind and ignorance mind – all selfish minds. Dharma practice acts to free us from these three poison minds, the selfish mind. If you become free of these things, then the suffering of samsara is not going to be there. This is renunciation mind. Renunciation is not negative, it is not rejecting something. Renunciation means to free your mind from things that cause you trouble. Just imagine if you are a bird or a mouse caught in a cage. You're not going to be happy in the small cage. You are going to try everything to free yourself from that small cage. Renunciation mind is that you want to free yourself from the cage. We should look forward to renouncing suffering! Buddhists never ever encourage renouncing the good things that you have in your life. Buddhists say to renounce things that cause you trouble. People misunderstand and think, 'I will have to renounce my possessions, my family, my pleasure!'. That's not renunciation. You renounce things that cause you trouble. You identify these things and free yourself from them.

# Attachment to Your Own Purpose

*If you have attachment to your own purpose, you do not have enlightenment thought or bodhicitta.*

The third teaching is, if you have attachment to your own purpose, or self-interest, you do not have enlightenment thought or bodhicitta. Once we have a really good understanding of the suffering of samsara, we begin to think: 'I must do something to avoid all this suffering. I must get liberation.' You have two options to gain liberation:

1. One is to obtain liberation for your own self, arhatship.
2. The second is to obtain liberation for the sake of all sentient beings, buddhahood.

You have these two options. When you have two options, you need to make a decision. If you are a smart person, you are going to choose the best option. The best option is to work to obtain buddhahood, for the sake of all sentient beings. The reason is, if you use this opportunity, this human life, to simply gain your own liberation, it's a great thing, you're free from all suffering, but you're only just helping yourself. You miss out on helping all other sentient beings. It's incomplete. You really do not want to waste this opportunity, this precious human lifetime. You should use your time, you should use this opportunity to achieve the best result. If you achieve something incomplete, you cannot help others to complete their liberation. This is why it is so important.

So many of us, when a samsara opportunity arises, we grasp it. Yet this

opportunity to follow the Dharma and work towards buddhahood is the most excellent opportunity possible, but we don't grasp it. We're constantly losing it. This is not the first time we have had this opportunity. We have had it many times in the past with previous lives. Yet we don't regret that missed opportunity. In contrast, when you miss even a tiny opportunity in samsara, you regret it: 'Oh I wish I had taken that one'. Then you talk all the time about that opportunity you missed, 'I didn't grab it when I had the chance!'. But it doesn't matter if you lose a samsaric opportunity. The one thing you should *not* lose is the opportunity to practice Dharma to obtain buddhahood. Because once you lose this, it's very hard to find it again. First, finding human life is extremely difficult. And even if you attain human life, finding the Dharma that will help us to understand the path to liberation is also rare. So when it all comes together it is almost magical, miraculous, if you really think about it.

This is why you need to really reflect on it, until you deeply feel that this is the moment I can achieve everything. You need to develop that kind of feeling. When you have that feeling, then you treat every moment as a treasure. When you treat something as a treasure, it's not stressful, it's not a hardship, it's such a joy. Just think about when you are parting from your most loved one, and then suddenly that loved one comes back to you. You might just have half a day together, but how much you cherish that time. How joyful is that moment. In the same way, Dharma is not available forever. It's only available for a very short time. So we should cherish that. We should be grateful for that.

Out of gratitude, when your loved one comes, it's not difficult cooking food, cleaning, you have such a joyful way to cook and clean, everything is part of a celebration. In the same way, if you really realise that Dharma is so precious, then every sitting, every chanting, every practice becomes part of celebration. It's not difficult at all. But when you do not realise that, when you think: 'Oh I have to do it. If I don't do it I feel guilty. But my energy is so low I can't do it. My gut feeling says I should do Dharma practice, but my emotion says that I'm tired'. You're fighting with so much confusion.

Many of us realise how wonderful Dharma is, yet we are always saying, 'I'm

busy now', or 'I'm tired now. I will do it later'. We always make practising Dharma the second option, not the first option. Buddhism says that is laziness. There are two types of laziness. One is, you feel like you are tired, you don't want to do anything. That's passive laziness. The second is when you think, "I have so much to do. I have to do that first. Then, when I'm done, then I'll practise dharma". That's active laziness.

Active laziness and passive laziness are the main obstacles to practising Dharma. To overcome that, we need to think about impermanence. You can wish to practise Dharma next, as a second priority, but the time may not wait for you until tomorrow. Because once we are born, we are definitely going to die. The time of our death is uncertain. After death, the only thing that helps you is the Dharma. Nothing else helps you. So these things are important. Whenever laziness arises you should recognise that that's our disease. To remove this disease we need to take medicine. The medicine is recognising impermanence. Recognising impermanence is the medicine for laziness.

Buddhism says it is so important that we should create the right environment for practice. The atmosphere is so important. First you create the environment, the atmosphere. Once you have the right environment, the right atmosphere, then Dharma is not that difficult to practise. The reason we find it so hard to practise Dharma is because at the moment we don't have a good enough environment. We're not doing enough to create the atmosphere for Dharma practice. For example, think about people who create entertainment – this involves not just the people who are acting and entertaining you, there's a whole environment with a sound system, a lighting system, all these things come together. When they're combined, people get excited about it. If there's no lighting and no sound, just the person singing or dancing, it's not very effective. So many things contribute to make an entertaining show. It's the same with Dharma. Just to be sitting here, chanting, is not going to give you that much inspiration. You need to create the right atmosphere and environment. Then it will really entertain you, then you don't want to come out of it. It's really important to create that atmosphere.

From another point of view, while we have this human life, there are four things that are achievable in our life as a Dharma practitioner:

First, when you practice Dharma it brings you great joy in this life.

Second, when you practice Dharma you will achieve better human rebirth in the future.

Third, when you practice Dharma you can gain your own liberation.

Fourth, when you can practise Dharma you can attain buddhahood.

That's four things you can achieve. Now that you think about it, which one's the best? To achieve something joyful this life alone, or to achieve buddhahood? There are four choices. A wise intelligent person realises the best one to obtain is the last one, to obtain buddhahood.

Sometimes we say it is not good to be greedy. But when this option is offered to you, you should be greedy. You should not be humble. You should be greedy. Choose the last one, not the first one. But you're choosing this greedy way, the last option, not for your own purpose, but for the sake of all sentient beings. In this way, sometimes we have the view that the word greedy is always negative. But it depends on the context. If you can be greedy for the sake of others' benefit, it's better to be greedy. But if you're greedy for your own purpose, it's not nice.

## Bodhicitta

When you want to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings, we call this mind bodhicitta. Bodhicitta mind is the only medicine to get rid of the self-grasping mind. It is self-grasping if you have attachment to your own self purpose. When you are solely focused on your own purpose, there's three things you can achieve through Dharma practice. The first one is that your purpose when you practise Dharma is to have a wonderful life in this lifetime. Second, your purpose might be to have a better life in the future, or rebirth. Third, your purpose might be to practice Dharma to attain arhatship. A focus on self-purpose cannot take you beyond those three options. We need to find a path that can take us beyond that, to buddhahood; it's bodhicitta. Doing something virtuous for the sake of your own purpose is great compared with neutral deeds and negative deeds, but it's not the top option. The top option is bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the only medicine for uprooting self-purpose.

So how can we come to bodhicitta? You have to cultivate it, gradually. Bodhicitta is the result of great compassion, and great compassion or bodhicitta is the root of obtaining buddhahood. In the absence of great compassion you're not going to have bodhicitta mind. It's impossible. Therefore, we need to cultivate great compassion.

Great compassion is not just going to come to you, it also must have a cause. The cause of great compassion is loving kindness. We say loving kindness is moisture. If you plant a seed in the dry soil, it's never going to germinate. The seed is only going to germinate when the soil gets wet. When the soil is moist, it supports the seed to germinate. Similarly, loving kindness moisturises our harsh, dry mind.

### *Loving kindness*

Now let's talk about the practice of loving kindness. How can we practise loving kindness? We could just say, 'I wish everyone to have happiness, I'll think of that'. But that's not such a full path to develop compassion because it is too distant from us. To take the full path to developing compassion, you really have to feel in your gut that you cannot live without this important, urgent requirement. It's an emotional feeling that you need to cultivate. That's so important. Most of the time when we meditate, we don't have much feeling. We're used to approaching things from our intellectual mind, especially in the West. But Dharma is more in the heart, not the brain. When you study Buddhism, of course you need a brain to understand these things. But when it comes to practice, your knowledge comes from the heart. Doing something from your heart is more genuine, more effective.

So first, we should think about just one person, a person who is very important to our life. Traditionally, we choose our mother. Once, when His Holiness Sakya Trizin came to Australia, we had a little time to chat. His Holiness mentioned to me that he had been to Europe and given a teaching about loving kindness meditation. His Holiness uses very traditional, authentic teachings. Following the authentic tradition, he explained the Buddha's teaching using the mother as an example. He said, 'Your Mother



is so important, and when you realise that, then it's easier to practise loving kindness towards her,' and so on and so forth. After His Holiness finished the talk on loving kindness, there was a tea break. During the break a western student came up and said to His Holiness, 'Your teaching is wonderful, but in the West, people don't have a good connection with their mothers, so it's not a good example'. So, His Holiness knows that people in the West often have a mother problem. But he doesn't want to modernise the Dharma. He prefers traditional practice as being more authentic.

Buddhists say it is our mother that gives us this life. She has sacrificed much for us. She has given us wonderful advice and teaching. First, let's talk about the life she has given us. From the moment we were conceived, our mother kept us in her womb, for nine months. Think about how much she sacrificed for us during those nine months. For example, the things she loved to eat that were not good for the baby that she sacrificed. Think about how, while she was walking or sleeping, how uncomfortable it was to carry this extra weight. How often did she wake up in the middle of the night, feeling uncomfortable, without having any negative thought about the baby. Whenever she moved her body she made sure it was not hurting the baby. She does this not just for one hour, one day or one week. For nine months she cherished this baby more than her own life. That is how much she really cared for this baby. Just think about how we can repay that long kindness that our mother has shown us. If you really think about it, you're going to get really emotional about how much your mother sacrificed for you.

Then you were born. You didn't have any idea about how to survive. You were just a worm. You didn't have any idea what was dangerous, what was not dangerous, how to keep warm, how to keep cold, how to feed yourself. You didn't have any idea. Your mother did everything for you. She protected you from danger. When you were hungry she fed you. When you were thirsty she gave you a drink. When you were hot she made you cool. When you were sick she gave you medicine, and took you to the doctor. Until you could communicate, she just looked at your body language, she just looked at your body expression. She did everything, completely. She completely forgot herself. Every moment the first thought that came into her mind was the

baby. That's the reality. So when you think about it, you're going to realise how shameful it is thinking negatively about your mother, someone who's been so kind to you. You're going to feel embarrassed, if you think about it. Think about how much your mother gave to you.

The next thing she did was, according to her circumstances, decide which kind of child care was the best, which school was the best. Within her capabilities, she tried to send her children to the best child care centre, the best possible school. Then, when you finished school or child care, you'd come home and be like a king or queen, demanding 'Mum, Mum, where's my food, where's my drink, where's my jumper?', those kinds of things. But she didn't mind at all. She always provided for you, in a joyful way. 'Oh darling, your food's here'. Just think how much time, energy, and funds she invested in you. Just imagine how much of everything she gave you, such sweet words, and her smiling face and warm heart, the kind of environment you were brought up in. It was such a wonderful thing.

Then when you become a teenager, you say all your problems are your mother's fault. You blame it all on her. So your poor mother is heartbroken. Still, she does not get angry. She thinks, 'I know I have to take it, as long as it makes my child feel comfortable'. Just think how much junk, how much pressure, you put on your mother as a teenager. Next you say, 'I'm sick of living with you, I'm going to leave'. So you leave, but in a short time, you go back home. 'Oh Mum, I have troubles. I need to call you'. No one else listens to you, to your junk. The only person who listens to you is your Mum. Then your mother says, 'Come back, I can help you'. Again, she forgives you everything, all the trouble you caused. She wants to do everything for you. This is the reality.

We all have mothers. If we really think of these things, we all find they are so true. You're not going to find any person in your life kinder than your mother. You're not going to find anyone. Sometimes people forget. When they grow up, they make friends and think, 'Oh, I love this friend'. But you forget what your mother did for you compared to what this friend has done for you. If you compare them, you will find your friend did maybe 2 per cent of nice things for you, and your mother did 98 per cent. But you forget these

things.

You have to recognise this reality. Be true to yourself, be honest with yourself. When you're truthful and honest, you will feel how kind your mother was to you. Not just intellectually, but emotionally, you will feel how valuable your mother is. For this reason, in Buddhism we give much time to sitting and thinking about the kindness we received from our mother. So wish the best for your mother in her life. Wish for her to really have happiness. You have every reason to give loving kindness to your mother. She deserves to have you offer her your love. She is the first person, the right person, you should wish to have happiness, that you should feel loving kindness towards.

When you feel genuine loving kindness towards your mother, that state of mind is probably going to change your personality. You will have a completely caring nature. This caring nature is very magical. It is almost like the medicine that reduces your selfish mind. Now you're not thinking about yourself, but what you can do for someone else. You're taking more responsibility for another person. You're no longer a cold person, you become warmer. In that state, you have the wonderful feeling that you're doing something that you love. Now she's giving you the opportunity to love her. At that point, don't think 'She was very kind to me, now, I'm being nice to her'. If you think, 'You did so many good things for me, now I'm doing so many good things for you', it's almost like a business transaction. But it's not joyful for Dharma to turn into a business. What you're getting out of it is more for your benefit than simply your gratitude to her.

The sort of happiness where you wish for your mother to have a wonderful house by the beach, that's not real happiness. Wishing for your mother to have a wonderful holiday in Europe, that's not loving kindness. The really happy state of mind is the virtuous state of mind. What will really make her happy is turning her body, mind and speech to virtue. You need to be the kind of person who creates the right environment for your mother to become virtuous in mind, body and speech. If you can manage to encourage that sort of virtuous state, that's the greatest happiness she can have. If you have a virtuous state of mind, you don't need to have so many things, you're a happy person. But if you're not in a virtuous state of mind, no matter what else you

may have, nothing will make you happy. This is what the Buddha means by wishing others to have happiness. It means wishing for them to have all the virtuous qualities that will lead to positive deeds, positive karma, reduced suffering and eventual liberation. Wanting your mother to be happy in this way causes you to be happy.

Now, as well as thinking about all the positive things your mother did for you, think about how much negative karma your mother created in the things she did for you. Remember, for the sake of protecting you, how often she told a lie to others. For the sake of protecting you, how often she was angry towards someone else. How many other things did she do for your sake that created negative karma for her? She created so much negative karma for the sake of your happiness. From that point of view, you also have to be very compassionate to your mother.

Now if you wish your mother to have happiness and the causes of happiness, it is something real that you are doing from your heart. If you can achieve that kind of experience it's very powerful, really powerful. That powerful practice, if you meditate for 10 minutes, is far greater than sitting on a cushion for an hour to just think, 'I wish my mother happiness'. It's a very literal fact. For this reason, the fastest engine, the best engine is *really feeling* it when you do loving kindness meditation for your mother. This is so important.

### *Loving kindness meditation*

As I said, in practising loving kindness meditation, you should first start with your mother, as the person most important to you, for whom you can most easily feel deep loving kindness. But you should not be limited to practising loving kindness meditation for just your mother. You can extend it. The happiness is not limited. It is limitless happiness. To develop this limitless happiness, think about a second person who is very kind to you. The kindest person means someone who loves and supports you. It does not mean someone you desire. It means somebody who is truly kind to you. Think of that person, how much kindness and support they have given you, how much he or she is there for you. Then wish her or him to have happiness.

When you have two people as the focus of your meditation, you don't feel the same amount of loving kindness, you feel even more. You're increasing the joy.

In this way, gradually think about more loved ones. That's the first group we meditate on, the ones we love.

The second group to use as the object of loving kindness meditation varies in different traditions. Some say to meditate on loving kindness for your enemies. It may seem very hard to practise loving kindness towards your enemies, but think about it. 'If I practise loving kindness to my enemy, what advantage do I get? If I don't meditate on loving kindness for my enemy, what's the disadvantage?' You have to think about it. The advantage is, when you practise loving kindness towards your enemy, however they treat you, you don't have a resistant mind, you have a positive feeling towards them. So this positive feeling will become the antidote to your own anger. Nothing will disturb you. There's more advantage than disadvantage to you. But when you're not meditating on loving kindness to your enemy, what you will have in your heart and your mind is that you're always angry with that person. You're always unhappy with that person. There's nothing to prevent that anger and unhappiness. You just feel angry with that person. And there's more disadvantage than advantage to you from this.

With this understanding, if you're smart, you will recognise that you need to protect yourself from anger and negative karma. The best way to protect yourself is to develop kindness towards that person. That's one reason you have to practise loving kindness. Because when you do that, it prevents you from becoming angry, it protects you from becoming angry. That's one point of view.

Another point of view is to recognise that there are many ways, so many reasons you can change your mind. It's really important, but it takes lots of time. When you have difficulty with someone, think, 'It's not really common sense, it's not logical'. Say, for example, that you want something from this person, and then he or she doesn't give it to you. It's really your fault that you want that thing, that you are frustrated about not getting it, but you don't see that. He or she doesn't give you what you want, so you treat that person as

your enemy. But they're not coming to attack you, just because you didn't get what you wanted. Yet you treat them as your enemy. Most of the time that's unreasonable.

We always think the problem is with others. We never point the finger at ourselves. Every problem that you have, you think it is with others, it's always that person's fault. But the reality is, you're the person who created that problem through your desire mind, not the other person. In this way, we don't use our logical mind. We don't use our honest mind. If you look carefully, at the end of the day you actually created the friction with this person, they didn't create it. If you are aware of that, it's easy to love that person. You think, 'How much stress I caused for that person. Now I'm a Dharma practitioner. Being a Dharma practitioner means I need to have some wisdom'. So use this wisdom. Through this wisdom, if you look, you will realise he or she was not the cause of the trouble. You were the person who caused this trouble all along.

How can you reconcile yourself with this wisdom? It's not enough to say you're sorry. 'Sorry' is just a word. Instead of saying 'sorry', *own* the word, whether this person accepts it or not. From your heart, wish this person always to be happy. That's a better way to restore the relationship. That's one way you can create the right environment for practising loving kindness to your enemies.

Another possibility is that this person is continually annoying you, causing trouble, causing difficulty. Yet again, there's no point in getting angry with him or her for this will only disadvantage you. Think about it. This person, whenever they see you, is disturbed so much. Think 'This poor person. How much is he or she creating negative karma for themselves. I'm not doing them harm. It's just he or she is creating their own suffering'. So, feel compassion for their suffering. As you're a Dharma practitioner, remember, 'I'm a Dharma practitioner. This means I can see how much this person is disadvantaged by the difficulties they're causing. My job is to wish him or her happiness'. From that point of view there's no point in getting angry, even if they cause you trouble. That way, when he or she causes you trouble, it has very little effect on you. The problem is much greater for the person causing the trouble. This

awareness allows you to practise loving kindness.

If you look at it from a different angle, the Dharma is about creating the right opportunity for practising loving kindness. Then one day, in your mind, there will no longer be any enemies. Your mind will be safe. Your mind will be free. You become the happiest person, someone who has no enemies in their life. That's the best life. And it's not up to others to create this situation, it's up to you. For this reason, just think about it from your own point of view, how wonderful it would be to have no enemies out there. This is another reason it is right to meditate on loving kindness towards your enemies.

The third group for whom you practise loving kindness is complete strangers, whether human or non-human. Think about every sentient being's right to be happy. Everyone has the right to be happy. Think 'It's not right to keep happiness just to myself. It's not right to wish happiness just for my mother. It's not right to wish happiness just for my lover. Every sentient being has the right to be happy'. From that point of view, there is no limit to loving kindness meditation. You wish everyone to have happiness. When you open your heart, you wish all beings to have happiness. If you can manage to cultivate this, and look into it, that's the most beautiful feeling you can have. That kind of feeling you cannot buy from the shop. No one can give it to you. For this reason you need to be aware of how powerful it can be to use your mind in this way. A danger is to think 'I'm wishing love to everyone, but I'm missing out. They're getting more out of it than me'. You have to recognise such thoughts when they happen. Don't think that way. If you really want the best feeling in every day of your life, just practise love for everyone.

Now you see the value of loving kindness to gradually think of the value of loving kindness, then create this love for everyone, then, eventually, the more you do it, the more you will experience happiness and joy. Once you find this joy there's no difficulty practising loving kindness to all sentient beings. It's not difficult. Through loving kindness, when you genuinely wish others to have happiness and the causes of happiness, that very feeling develops compassion. Loving kindness compassion is not separate from your mind. As loving kindness grows it becomes more mature, it becomes compassion. Compassion won't be there if there's no love. If you really want

to be compassionate, you must have love first. So, saying that love is when you wish others to have happiness, that aspect we call loving kindness. One day that very mind will want to free all beings from suffering and the causes of suffering; when that happens, that love has turned into compassion.

Start with your mother. Think what kind of suffering she may have. She may be sick, she may be unhealthy, or she may be lacking something. You can imagine so much suffering. Then, think about how she created the causes of her suffering, how often she created non-virtuous mind, body or speech. Next, think about wishing your mother to be free of suffering and from the causes of suffering. Think about this for your mother, then your enemy, and then for everyone. In this way, now you're wishing others to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. Wish sincerely for all these people to have loving kindness and happiness and to be free from suffering.

However, if you ask 'Can I really help them to have happiness, free them from suffering?' If you ask that, the answer is that you cannot do it right now. You are an ordinary person. You're not in a position to really give them what they want. You can't really take them away from their suffering. Even someone who is much greater than a bodhisattva, they're also incomplete, they cannot provide relief from suffering. The only person who can help all sentient beings to actually progress to great happiness and become free of suffering is Buddha. When you become a buddha, you have become perfected, you have become complete. Someone who is completed in this way, this person can help others to achieve this complete stage. In this way, if you really want all sentient beings to be happy, and free from all suffering, what you need to do is to attain buddhahood. For this reason, you must attain buddhahood for the sake of sentient beings.

Traditionally, when beginning sadhana we are taught to say 'I'm doing this practice to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings', and every beginner teacher tells you you should practise bodhicitta. These practices arise from culture or religion. But the real bodhicitta comes when you *understand* the loving kindness, when you *understand* compassion. This bodhicitta is more genuine. True understanding of love and compassion creates bodhicitta mind. This gives you more reason to attain buddhahood.



The reason you want to attain buddhahood is that you really *want* for all other sentient beings to achieve happiness and to be free from suffering. The only way you can achieve this is when you attain buddhahood. Apart from attaining buddhahood, you can only pray or wish that you could help other beings.

In this way, loving kindness is creating in you the compassionate mind, the great compassion. Then, the great compassion creates the bodhicitta mind. In this way, bodhicitta arises. This bodhicitta is now the main antidote for overcoming self-purpose. When you have achieved the state of bodhicitta there is no self-purpose. I call this the wisest selfish mind.

If you really want to be a great person, you should practise bodhicitta to attain buddhahood. If you attain buddhahood, you will achieve the greatest thing. That's wise selfishness. Right now, every one of us is selfish, but it's very ignorant selfishness. You want the best, but you get the worst. That's not good selfishness. Selfishness is something you do to be the best you can be. That's good selfishness, that's wise selfishness.

### *Compassion*

We can talk about compassion in more detail. Sometimes people say every religion is the same, because every religion talks about love, every religion talks about compassion. Of course, many major religions have this emphasis. His Holiness the 41<sup>st</sup> Sakya Trichin, Kyabgon Gongma Trichen Rinpoche is always saying that every religion has a beauty of its own. It's good that they have that beauty. But not every religion necessarily has a complete path. Every religion talks about love and compassion. But not every religion talks about bodhicitta.

It's good to think about the way every religion talks about loving kindness. It's good to study their point of view. Nowadays, modern technology makes it easy for us to do this. We have lots of studies of the Christian point of view about love, the Muslim point of view about love, the Hindu point of view about love, the Buddhist point of view about love. It's good to compare them. I'm not saying one is good or bad. You should not say any of them are bad.

They're all good. But it is important which school of thought gives you a more complete picture. The Buddhist view of loving kindness is wishing all beings to have happiness and the causes of happiness; the Buddhist definition of compassion is wishing all beings to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. It's at a different level. Other religions may help you to establish a good foundation of love and compassion. But Buddhism takes you much further. That's the difference.

Buddhism is about compassion for all sentient beings, not just specific sentient beings. Coverage-wise, it's much bigger. Think about it this way. There are many mobile phone companies in Australia – Telstra, Virgin, Optus, Vodafone. They all give you a phone service, but they have different coverage. Telstra is supposed to be the best, it works even in remote regions. Buddhism is more like Telstra, it covers every sentient being. That's the reality. Religions have different coverage. All of them work with sentient beings, but some don't have coverage everywhere, and others cover everything. That's the difference.

In Buddhism, we talk about three stages of compassion. The first stage refers to compassion for any being you see who are experiencing suffering, whether mental, physical or emotional. When you see such suffering, you truly wish that they did not have to go through what they're going through. That's the very basic compassion. The first stage of compassion, to be really wishing and hoping to reduce someone's suffering. We call it common compassion.

In the second stage of compassion, the object of compassion is not a being who is obviously suffering, the object of compassion is anyone who is living, even if the object of your compassion is a most successful person. This is because this successful person does not realise life is impermanent, they are still so much caught up in generating worldly success. But this person, this poor person, is so busy they have no time to eat properly, no time to rest, because they are working so hard to gather possessions, wealth and money. Buddhism says you need to have compassion for this person. The Buddha said they are objects of compassion because they don't know their life is impermanent. But even if they don't know this, still, tomorrow they may die,

even though today they're so busy, so caught up in their business.

The third stage of compassion is even deeper. Every one of us feels that we have happiness, we have sadness, we have emotion. We think all this is real. But nothing is real. It's an illusion, it's a dream. Yet we see the dream as the reality. We're caught up with that. Buddhism says, 'These poor people. Really everything is an illusion.' This is another way to develop compassion. In this way, sometimes, when you are caught up in suffering, you feel that it's real. But if it's an illusion, why am I so serious about it? Why does this feeling have such intensity? But when you realise it's not real, you don't feel it so strongly. It's just like a dream, it's just like watching a movie. You may wonder why you are so caught up with that feeling. Yesterday you may have thought something was important. But now you can look back and see it's just a dream. But yesterday you did not realise that. You thought it was real. But then this afternoon, what we felt yesterday, we now see that it was an illusion. In this way, we lack awareness of reality. We're always caught up with things, and then we stress out about everything. It's always good to think about this.

But other religions have no such object of compassion. They focus only on common compassion, the first stage of compassion. That's the uniqueness of Buddhist compassion. This way, if you really study Buddhism, from the point of view of compassion, it's unique. It's much deeper. It's much more relevant. That's what Buddhist compassion is about.

The Buddhist view is that it is not just mental, physical or emotional suffering that is suffering, but that lack of understanding of impermanence causes suffering, and lack of understanding of illusion causes suffering. So now try to understand all this, so that you're free from that lack of understanding and that suffering. You should not be in a dream state. You should not be in an illusion state. You should not be in an ignorant state. We should try to awaken from that state. That's the practice. Bodhicitta is like an alarm clock. It wakes us up, because it has wisdom. It wakes us up from this sleeping state, because at the moment we are not awakened. We are doing everything in a dream state. We think we are awakened, but we are not awakened yet. This is compassion.

## PARTING FROM THE FOUR ATTACHMENTS

Compassion is the really fundamental cause of bodhicitta mind. If you have that compassion, then you're going to have a bodhicitta mind. Without that compassion, just wishing to reduce others suffering is planting in your mind some sort of good seed. But you're not yet cultivating bodhicitta. If you think, 'I really want other beings to have happiness, to be free from suffering. How can I achieve that?' If you think about it, then you say, 'I can only achieve that if I attain buddhahood. If I attain buddhahood I have the possibility to help others to achieve happiness and freedom from suffering.' Once you realise that, and you really want to attain buddhahood, that very mind is the bodhicitta mind. It's a genuine feeling. You really want it. You hunger for it. You're really hungry to attain buddhahood to attain happiness for all sentient beings, this is wishing or inspiration bodhicitta.

# Grasping at Self

*If grasping at self arises, you do not have the view.*

One who discovers this key point, that mind is the cause of all problems and all solutions, learns to unlock, to disentangle all things associated with the mind. In the end, one finds no other culprit. Mind is the perpetrator of everything that happens, the projector of everything that manifests. Pleasant or unpleasant, whether we go up into higher rebirth or down to the lower realms, whatever we experience is the result of our own mental state. Realising this, we should no longer grasp at any perception or conception that might arise toward seemingly real phenomena.

Meditation can give you insight into the true nature of reality, that is, the inherent emptiness of all phenomena. By ‘emptiness’, we do not mean nothingness, but that no phenomenon exists independently of all other phenomena. Phenomena do not exist as separate objects independent of our perceptions of them, and what we see is not the phenomenon as it is, but the phenomenon as perceived by our mind. This includes the emptiness or selflessness of persons, as described in the Sutrayana.

The emptiness or selflessness of persons, *gang zag gi dag me*, and the emptiness or selflessness of phenomena, *chö kyi dag me*, are described separately in the Sutrayana, but they are not empty in different ways. The Sutrayana talks about the emptiness of persons and phenomena together – that no phenomenon, including people, has an external, independent existence.

From the start of beginningless time, so much has been imprinted in our mind, and this creates what we see in the world. For example, water. Humans

see something to drink, fish see a home and bees see something altogether different. They only see what they have imprinted in their mind. We are not seeing anything out there that is independent of the mind; it is the same as the mind.

When I look at a jar, you will not see the same thing I see. If we saw exactly the same thing, we would think about it exactly the same way. But in actuality, we all have different perceptions of it. And a dog would not have any idea of what the jar is! Whatever we have imprinted in our minds, we project onto phenomena. The colour or shape that we see as humans does not exist in the mind of a cow or dog or god. If you look at it from that perspective, you will see that this demonstrates that what we see is dependent on our mind, rather than something that exists independently. If it were something that exists independently, it would be seen the same by all.

A person who lives locally sees the town where we are now differently from someone who has just come to the town. They see an entirely different town. The person who lives here thinks it's boring because there's nothing new to see. The new person will see it differently. It's the same town, but we each see it according to our own mind. So, things you like or dislike are all to do with the mind. Whatever we have imprinted in our mind is what we project out there.

People often argue against this concept of emptiness: 'But I can see and touch things, everything seems solid. I can hear things, I can smell things. If these things don't exist externally, how can I touch, smell and taste them?' But even if you can touch, smell and taste things, it does not mean that they exist independently. It's like in a dream, where you can touch things and everything feels solid, and you may have food with a good taste and smell, but none of them really exist externally. The mind projects the food, taste, objects. You only realise these things when you wake up. But the mind projects when you are awake as well, you just haven't realised it yet. It takes time to digest this.

The good news is that if everything were separate from the mind, it would be very hard work to fix everything in the world, because there are so many things to fix. The problems are so huge they will never be fixed. But instead,

Buddha says to fix your mind, because by doing so you will fix everything. 'I do not fix my problems. I fix my thinking. The problems fix themselves.' Once you fix your mind, you fix everything.

Every one of us knows the dream mind is illusion, because we see something that is non-existent as existent. But our ordinary mind is also like a dream mind. The objects we perceive don't exist, at least not as we perceive them. There's no such object as the one we perceive. It is an illusion. It's like watching movies, watching a mirage, watching a magical show. If objects were separate and independent from us, everyone would perceive them the same way, but we don't. So, what we perceive is not the real object. It doesn't exist as an independent object in its own right. There's no such object, yet still you perceive the object, which is illusion or dream mind.

This applies to ourselves as well. Our sense of ourselves as independently existing is also an illusion. This is because the object being perceived and the subject doing the perceiving exist in an interdependent way. All perception of the object is interdependent. But if there is no independent object, then there is no independent subject, because subject and object are interdependent. This demonstrates the inherent emptiness or selflessness of persons. If object-phenomena are empty of independent existence, then so are subject-phenomena.

Belief in independently existing objects and subjects is called dualism. Belief in the absence of an independently existing object and subject, that is, that subjects and objects exist in an interdependent way, is called non-dualism. In Buddhism, non-dualism is described as absolute mind, truth, wisdom, emptiness, realisation, the view and ultimate view. Within that view there is nothing to grasp, because nothing exists independently of us. To grasp something, it needs to be either existent or not existent, that is, to have *independent* existence. But if something is both existent and non-existent, or neither existent nor non-existent, as with *interdependent* existence, there is nothing to grasp. What are you going to grasp when there is nothing to grasp? And who is doing the grasping when there is no subject? When you see this, you realise that notions such as 'I' and 'mine' are illusions, and cause nothing but suffering. You can drop them. So then your mind becomes completely

free of grasping. This is wisdom, which has the flavour of emptiness..

This View is very powerful. Buddhas, bodhisattvas and arhats all have this View. Whoever stays with this mind of perfect wisdom, of the inherent emptiness of self and objects is an arhat, bodhisattva or buddha. If you look at it from this point of view, buddhahood is achievable, bodhisattva is achievable, arhatship is achievable. We need to free our mind from the illusion of independent existence. Within this state, Buddhists say there is nothing to purify. In the emptiness state, there is no independently existing person to commit negative karma, so there is nothing to purify.

You have the full right to investigate anything that exists out there. Is it existent, non-existent, both or neither? But when you investigate, you are not going to find anything independently existent. There is nothing to grasp. You are only grasping at emptiness. This is the right view, the ultimate view. Once you realise this, you need to remain in this state of realisation, or wisdom. As soon as you start grasping, you realise you are grasping at emptiness, you realise this is illusion. You say to yourself, 'I shouldn't want this. I shouldn't buy this. I should wake up from this illusion.' Like in a dream state, when we wake up, we realise it's not real. Gradually you introduce this ultimate view into your life.

## Meditating on emptiness

When you do Vipassana meditation, you start the same way as with shamatha meditation, by reflecting on the Triple Gem and bodhicitta, the wish to attain enlightenment to reduce the suffering of all sentient beings. Then you meditate on emptiness, and in the end you use Vipassana to further develop compassion. You realise that all this suffering is due to the illusion mind, and wish all beings freedom from this illusion mind. Then, as with shamatha meditation, you finish with the dedication – whatever merit I have attained, may this be offered for the sake of all sentient beings.

When meditating on emptiness, you should not think, 'I am Buddhist, I should just accept the doctrine'. As a Buddhist you need to search for the reasons yourself. You need to study the Buddhist reasons for proving that



everything has no independent existence. This is a much more convincing way to investigate, because you investigate the reasons.

So you need to prove for yourself that there are no independent phenomena, that they all come from the mind. There is a vast difference between someone who *says* that everything is from the mind, and someone who studies and can *prove* that everything is from the mind. Compare someone who actually sees someone stealing something from another person, with someone who just hears about it from others. There is a vast difference between them; the first person has direct evidence, the second only hearsay. Similarly, some of us simply hear from others that everything is in mind. But if we do not have a reason or proof, then our understanding of this will be very shallow. We need concrete reasons that prove that there is no objective reality, that everything is interdependent.

Without study you may say everything is emptiness, but you will not really understand. Saying everything is empty are empty words. When you receive this teaching on Vipassana, it is very foreign to the conventional mind. Your mind needs to *know* what is true. As you reflect, you will find that the claim that everything is emptiness is true, you will find proof that everything is emptiness. Gradually, you need to introduce this idea to your conventional mind. Then one day, this very foreign concept becomes part of you. It's the same as when meeting a new partner. In the beginning, you might not like him or her, then you spend time together and become very close, until eventually you become like one person. In the beginning the concept of emptiness is foreign, then you study with your mind and it becomes familiar.

One who discovers the key point that mind is the cause of all problems and all solutions learns to unlock, to disentangle all things associated with the mind. In the end, one finds no other culprit. Mind is the perpetrator of everything that happens, the projector of everything that manifests. Pleasant or unpleasant, whether we go up to higher rebirth or down to the lower realms, whatever we experience is the result of our own mental state. Realising this, we should no longer grasp at any perception or conception that might arise toward seemingly real phenomena.

