

KHENPO NGAWANG DHAMCHOE

Taking Refuge and Bodhicitta

including the precepts and vows



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First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

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Preface



The Refuge and Bodhicitta including the precepts and vows is one of four booklets that serve as readings on The Hinayana. The Hinayana is one of the main traditions of Buddhism and the subject of the first year of The Autumn Buddhist Philosophy Course. There are four booklets in The Hinayana series – *The Four Common Foundations*, *The Four Noble Truths*, *Refuge and Bodhicitta including the precepts and vows*, and *Shamatha and Vipassana*. The Hinayana refers to a system of thought based on the sutras, one that leads its followers ultimately from suffering to self-liberation. Its practitioners are generally concerned with the achievement of nirvana as an arhat or pratyekabuddha.

The Refuge and Bodhicitta including the precepts and vows are central to the

main Buddhist traditions or vehicles of The Hinayana as well as to the other traditions of the Mahayana and Vajrayana. They are called vehicles because they are thought to carry us to enlightenment. The vows and precepts are important because they begin our work on the Path.

The 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 for more than 40 years. 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 for 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 was chosen. He studied at the Sakya college 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 to 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 as in the name Rinpoche. 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 has lived and taught at Kamalashila Tibetan Buddhist Centre near Tilba on the South Coast of New South Wales. 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 and the program developed by His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin. In 2019, he 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 is scheduled to start in 2022.

There are many to thank for *The Hinayana Booklets* but here 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 apply the Dharma in their lives.

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We have many to thank for their work on the series entitled The Hinayana Booklets. *The Refuge and Bodhicitta including the precepts and vows* was prepared over two years and with many hours of work by both transcribers and editors. *The Refuge and Bodhicitta including the precepts and vows* was transcribed by Lael Morrissey and Sherry Stumm and edited by Linda McKeone, Ann Kelly, Robert Garran, Lael Morrissey and Carole Kayrooz.

Transcribers painstakingly noted down the words of Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe which were drawn from different recorded sessions. This took many hours and sometimes weeks of work. Editors then substantively reviewed the overall structure, content and flow of the manuscript. The Hinayana Booklets will be updated again at the end of 2022 to include a Glossary and Index.

TAKING REFUGE AND BODHICITTA – including precepts and vows

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is about the vows and precepts for Refuge and bodhicitta. Taking Refuge and bodhicitta are central to the main Buddhist traditions or vehicles of Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. They are called vehicles because they are thought to carry us to enlightenment. The vows and precepts are important because they begin our work on the Path.

Taking Refuge is the beginning of our journey to Buddhahood in all three vehicles. By taking Refuge in the Triple Gem- the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha- we awaken from confusion and commit ourselves to freedom. Taking Refuge is the foundation of committing to Buddhism, the necessary first step that represents a commitment to Buddhism as the path.

In the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, developing the mind of bodhicitta is a major step on the Buddhist path. It is the wish to attain enlightenment motivated by great compassion for all sentient beings. Bodhicitta is the mind that strives towards empathy for the benefit of all sentient beings and it goes hand in hand with the realisation of the illusion of an inherently existing self. It is a vast wish to awaken the heart. To cultivate bodhicitta, we need to have a deep interest in the Dharma, not just a passing interest. A passing interest means it comes and goes like a fashion, but a deep and serious interest means it is with you forever.

TAKING REFUGE AND BODHICITTA

The very first thing we need to do when studying Refuge and bodhicitta is to establish the correct motivation. The right motivation is most important because it sets the highest aspiration. In both the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, we study to seek enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

'For the sake of infinite sentient beings, I must obtain full enlightenment and, for this purpose, I am interested to hear this precious Buddha Dharma, so whatever I may understand I will put into my practice.'

Our highest motivation for studying the teachings is not to create the conditions for a better rebirth or to attain self-liberation but rather our highest aspiration is to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Imagine going to a treasure island to collect some treasure but you go there with only a small collection pot. People would say this will not help you because you want to collect a lot of treasure. It's best to bring the biggest pot because you can then hold more of the treasure inside. The biggest collection pot is the supreme opportunity to obtain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. When we create this highest motivation, then all the teachings you hear and understand become the path to gain full enlightenment.

TAKING REFUGE

The Refuge vow is the foundation for being a Buddhist in all the different traditions or ‘vehicles’ and it is taken in a ceremony with a qualified teacher. It is the commitment to seek liberation from suffering. The Refuge Vow is also called the Triple Refuge Vow or the Three Jewels because we take Refuge in the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. In my Vajrayana tradition, we say the following Refuge prayer each day

To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha

I go for Refuge until I am enlightened

By my merit from giving and other perfections

May I attain Buddhahood so as to benefit all sentient beings.

Lay people have five precepts called the Upasaka that are linked to the Refuge Vow. Thus, Upasaka means the lay persons’ vow.

These five Upasaka vows are

1. Abstain from killing living beings
2. Abstain from taking that which is not given
3. Abstain from sexual misconduct
4. Abstain from telling lies
5. Abstain from intoxicants.

Whilst the Refuge Vow is the foundation, these five Upaska vows build on that. By following these five precepts we follow the guidance of the Buddha, we integrate the teachings of the Dharma in our lives and we are inspired by the Sangha. Taking Refuge in the Triple Gem is the root of all the Dharma.

Without taking Refuge in Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha there is no other gateway to enter the Dharma. According to your capacity and, in addition to the Refuge, you can take all five vows, none of the vows or a combination of the vows. You may commit to only one Upasaka vow such as 'I am not going to kill anyone in this entire life'. Later, you may then commit to other of the vows. You might have good intentions when you take Refuge but, at the end of the day, you must know your own capability. You need to ask yourself can you really commit to take this vow or not? Judge for yourself. If you feel comfortable and think you can manage it, then take the additional vows. If you feel you are not ready, then perhaps wait but keep in mind that if you just keep waiting, you may never feel you are ready. In this instance, you may need to encourage yourself to try.

The first single vow is taking a vow not to kill anyone. Then the second vow is to not steal anything from anyone. The third is not to tell lies in your entire life. These three vows are almost the complete Upasaka vow but it's not fully complete Upasaka. We need to take two more vows if we want to complete it: to not engage in any sexual misconduct; and to not take any intoxicants. Once you have taken all five vows then you have taken the full Upasaka vow which is the very good lay persons' vow. From a dharmic and a social point of view, anyone who follows these five precepts will have a healthy life.

Taking these vows develops the discipline to fix our afflicted minds. In this sense, the vows are like medicines to fix our mind and the damaged life that an afflicted mind can bring. Once we have disciplined our mind and created a foundation, we then need to establish a virtuous life. Here, you do not merely accumulate virtues, you actually go out there to help others who need your help. Although we are often scared of discipline, it's not that difficult to commit to something that is going to make for a really healthy life. It's like committing to not eat cake anymore because you are health conscious. Even though you know it's a yummy taste, you can commit to decline cake because it's not good for your health. If you cherish your health you can make the commitment. Likewise, if you really cherish your mind, then these commitments are not difficult.

The vows taken by monastics after taking the Refuge vow are more extensive than the lay vows of the Upasaka. These are the Pratimoksa Vows or individually liberating vows. Pratimoksha can refer to the Upasaka and the monastic vows. In Sanskrit, prati means 'towards' and moksa means 'liberation' from cyclic existence (samsara). Drawn from the Vinaya or the moral code of behaviour laid down by the Buddha, the Pratimoksa vows have 36 precepts for novice monks and 227 precepts for fully ordained monks. There are 311 precepts for nuns. These precepts are followed by the monks in the Hinayana and Vajrayana traditions although the Mahayana and Vajrayana take the Bodhisattva precepts sometimes as well as the Pratimoksa and, in the Mahayana tradition, they are sometimes taken instead of the Pratimoksa.

Let us now look in more depth, and in turn, as to why we take Refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

WHY WE TAKE REFUGE IN THE BUDDHA

Normally our main way of explaining the importance of the Refuge is that we are not Buddhist if we do not take Refuge in the Triple Gem. In other words, taking Refuge is in order to become a Buddhist but I would like to share that when I woke up one morning I wanted to understand more deeply about the reason for taking Refuge. I felt strongly about the importance of taking Refuge in the Buddha. At a deeper level, the importance of taking Refuge is profound, for why do you want to be Buddhist? On that morning, I searched for an answer. I reflected that the Buddha is the person who is fully aware of the entirety of the method of how to obtain a higher rebirth and the Buddha is the only person in our aeon who realised the path that takes us to self-liberation and full enlightenment. Only the Buddha can guide us, can supervise us to achieve a higher rebirth, self-liberation or full Buddhahood.

So, as a follower, we follow according to the Buddha's instructions to create the cause to obtain a higher rebirth and to practice the path to gain one's own or full enlightenment. The instructions from the Buddha prescribes taking Refuge. Without these instructions, we would not have any idea what the path is to lead us to a higher rebirth, and which path is needed to take to gain

liberation, to full Buddhahood. Without taking Refuge in the Buddhadharma and the Sangha there is no way to know the path, no way to achieve the result you wish to achieve.

WHY WE TAKE REFUGE IN THE DHARMA

The Dharma is the taming and eradication of defilements of the mind in order to free our affliction mind. This is the Dharma, the wisdom. When you free this affliction mind this is wisdom. Wisdom then is used to help others, which is compassion. Compassion arises out of wisdom. Wisdom is looking within oneself and compassion is when you look outwards to help others. On the Mahayana Path, compassion does not exist in the absence of wisdom.

We also take Refuge in the Dharma because without the Dharma we cannot accumulate virtue.

Nagarjuna stated in The Precious Garland:

Absence of the three poison minds is the virtuous.

Nagarjuna quoted from the sutra or the teachings of the Buddha, if you wish to practice proper virtues, one must know what is the Dharma. Without the Dharma, we cannot accumulate virtues, without the virtues there is no higher rebirth, and without a higher rebirth, there will be no true happiness.

We take Refuge in the Dharma to gain one's own liberation. To gain liberation, one must recognise the true nature of the five aggregates or layers of existence that constitute human experience. These are–

- form – the physical world
- feelings – likes, dislikes or indifference
- perceptions – the recognition of sense objects and the mental labels we create about them
- mental formations – volitional mental actions, triggered by objects that produce karma
- and consciousness - cognisance including thoughts of the mind.

In recognising the nature of these aggregates, we come to see that everything

TAKING REFUGE

is always changing, and impermanent. It is always subject to conditions and lacking in any substance; it is essentially ungraspable. To gain liberation, we need to recognise the true nature of this 'selflessness' - the illusion of the permanence and substantiality of the self. Without understanding the true nature of the aggregates in 'selflessness', it is impossible to gain self-liberation.

Lastly, to attain Buddhahood, one needs to understand the emptiness of all phenomena, the illusion of the permanence and substantiality of everything. Without knowing that all things lack an inherent nature in themselves, we cannot attain Buddhahood.

Within the Mahayana, the teachings say that we practice loving-kindness, compassion and bodhicitta. Although these are not the direct antidote to uproot the afflictions of obscurations, they do help us to minimise the afflicted mind. To truly uproot afflictions, we must have wisdom. In this way, wisdom is the Dharma. Without the Dharma, it is impossible to gain one's own liberation or to attain Buddhahood. From this point of view without taking Refuge in the Dharma, we cannot achieve any of these practices and views. Therefore, it is very important to take Refuge in the Dharma.

WHY WE TAKE REFUGE IN THE SANGHA

To take Refuge in the Sangha means taking Refuge in a spiritual companion or spiritual support who preserves and supports your spiritual development towards enlightenment. We, as practitioners, need support for our spiritual realisations and practice. Who can help us on the path to enlightenment? Even though someone may have a genuine intention to help you, they cannot be effective if they are less developed spiritually than yourself and do not have the right qualities to help you. Only highly experienced and highly achieved beings can help you with your practice, and by this, I mean those who have attained the first bhumi to the tenth bhumi bodhisattvas. Through their support and companionship and their inspiration, they help us to develop wisdom and compassion, which ultimately leads us to attain Buddhahood. From this point of view, it is impossible to attain Buddhahood without the Sangha's support.

In summary, taking Refuge in the Triple Gem is extremely important. Without taking Refuge in the Triple Gem, firstly you will not find the right path; secondly without taking Refuge in the Dharma there is no path, and thirdly, without taking Refuge in the Sangha there is no support or inspiration.

TAKING REFUGE FROM THE SMALL, MEDIUM AND GREAT PERSPECTIVES

The purpose of taking Refuge varies depending on which perspective is taken- small, medium or great. From the small or worldly person's perspective, the goal of taking Refuge is to not be reborn in the lower realms in future lives. From the medium person's point of view- the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddha perspective - the goal of taking Refuge is to gain one's own liberation. From the great person's or Mahayana point of view, the goal of taking Refuge is to attain Buddhahood. To achieve any of these three goals, it is necessary that one must take Refuge in the Triple Gem.

The small worldly mundane purpose

From the small worldly beings' perspective, the reasons for taking Refuge are to fulfil this life's wishes or future lives' wishes. This is referred to as a 'mundane purpose' and, as such, it is very limited. Beings in this category may wish for good health and happiness, success in whatever they do, and in future lives to not be reborn in the lower realms, to always be reborn in the higher realms. This mind that only wishes to achieve worldly gain is a worldly mind yet the object this mind seeks help from is the Triple Gem which is not a worldly object. It is an extraordinary object.

If you wish to have a healthy life, a happy life, and then after death to have a better rebirth, the mundane wish is good but we can achieve much greater than this. As the object of our wishes, the Triple Gem is perfect, it is our worldly desire mind we need to change. If we take Refuge in the Triple Gem to attain full Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings, these simple wishes for health, happiness and a better rebirth are already included rather

than excluded. This worldly 'mundane purpose' is very limited. Our natural tendency is to be driven by short term wishes. When these habits arise, we must remember this teaching: 'I can achieve much greater than what I desire'. Remembering is the mindfulness needed to replace this short-term view. Instead of worldly gain as your aspiration, try to achieve beyond worldly success. This is part of your practice, to see where you are and then to see how to improve. Doing so will take your aspiration and practice to a higher level. If we stay as we are, there will never be any progress in one's practice. Practice means to take one step further, one level beyond where you are presently.

The medium supramundane purpose of the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

The medium perspective for taking Refuge in the Triple Gem is the beyond worldly (or 'supramundane') perspective. The purpose of taking Refuge is to gain their own liberation and it is taken by the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. The śrāvakas are the distinguished disciples of the Buddha who strive to attain the level of arhat (those who have overcome afflictions and who proclaim this to others) and the pratyekabuddhas (those who have attained enlightenment on their own as solitary realisers). It is wonderful to have this positive mind to gain one's own liberation if we compare it to worldly beings' wishing to have a successful life and a higher rebirth, or with beings living in negativity in this life and then reborn in an unfortunate realm. But this purpose is still not the supreme one; we can do much better than this. We must always aim to improve our practice. Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas' purpose is much higher than the small worldly perspective of searching for short term benefits in this life and future lives. This medium perspective of the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas is extremely difficult to attain and aims to be completely free of samsara, but it is not the supreme purpose. Although the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas' purpose for taking Refuge is much better than the worldly mundane purpose, it is still not the perfect purpose.

The great bodhisattva purpose

The great perspective for taking Refuge is the bodhisattva's perspective, the main purpose of taking Refuge is to alleviate the suffering of all other sentient beings. It is for the sake of other sentient beings that bodhisattvas must attain Buddhahood. Of the many things that we can achieve, the best amongst them all is to achieve Buddhahood, you cannot achieve beyond Buddhahood. When we say there is no better than Buddhahood; this is from a logical perspective, not from a religious perspective. What does it mean to attain Buddhahood? Buddhahood means that the mind is completely free from all obscurations and its residues; there is not one speck of dirt to obscure the mind. It is a completely clean mind.

We have been brought up in the environment where we desire to attain or achieve things, then we find the Dharma and use the same motivation and state, 'I want to achieve Buddhahood'. In seeking Buddhahood, we believe attaining it is something external, an object that we can attain but Buddhahood is realising our natural state and this means we do not need to acquire anything. It means the opposite that we need to clear away or remove defilements so that we can see our true nature. One of the names we give the Buddha is *tsog pay dzong pay*, meaning completely finished: the Greatly Finished (nothing more to do). The whole purpose of the path is to finish with all the affliction, obscuration and residue in our mind. Once the mind is fully purified and cleansed, you are left with a perfect and pure mind. This is the Buddha. When you reach this state of Buddhahood you are fully awakened, there is nothing obscuring you to know, understand or see.

In this way, the intelligent person sees that it is achievable that one's mind has the potential to end all obscurations, as well as seeing that all others have the same potential. The Mahayana practitioner intelligently sees the possibility of completely purifying the mind, and that it is possible to purify others' minds. The Mahayana practitioner looks towards the Buddha as a great example. The Buddha achieved this perfect state of mind, and, after this, he turned the wheel of Dharma so that others could achieve this perfect state of mind. Once we become aware of this, we want to be a Buddha, to

purify our minds and then to help others to purify their minds. This is the highest purpose of taking Refuge. Without the guidance of the Buddha we don't know what the right path is, without the Dharma there is no right path, without the Sangha there is no companion or support. Therefore, to accomplish one's goal one must take Refuge in the Triple Gem. Thus, we talk of three purposes in taking Refuge, the supreme purpose being to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

WHAT TO ADOPT AND WHAT TO ABANDON

WHAT TO ADOPT – GENERAL PRECEPTS

There are three general precepts for taking refuge. The first is always to stay close to the teacher; the second is to listen to the teachings and study the Dharma; and the third is that we must practise the Buddhist teachings according to what the Buddha taught.

The right teacher

To become a better person, it is important to associate only with the right type of teacher and to find the right teacher, one must search for certain qualities. The first quality is that the teacher has studied and gained knowledge of the three baskets of the Tripitaka –

- Vinayapitaka (or rules that govern the Buddhist community),
- Sutrapitaka (the Buddha's teachings in the form of sutras) and
- Abhidharmapitaka (Buddhist philosophical elaboration of the sutras).

It is especially important to find someone with this knowledge. Whoever has a deep understanding of these three baskets can explain them to their students. This teacher can use this knowledge to tame the mind with genuine gentleness. Understanding these three helps one to become a better person, a more enlightened person.

The second quality is that this teacher must have genuine compassion, and third, needs to recognise the importance of the Dharma. The primary reason for sharing the Dharma is not to be proud: not to think how intelligent I am, or how good I am. It is to be there for their students who are consciously or subconsciously facing difficulties, in the knowledge that the practice of the Dharma is the only way to remove these difficulties. The teacher then offers this Dharma to their students to prevent difficulties. This awareness comes out of compassion, a willingness to help recondition others through the Dharma. These are the basic requirements of being a teacher.

Three mistakes of a teacher are:

1. to teach out of his or her own thoughts, not from the Tripitaka
2. to be arrogant, jealous and selfish
3. to not have any willingness to help others, but instead, to be focused on what they can gain from the student. In this mistake, the teacher has self-interest in mind, rather than the interest of the student.

One must find the right teacher who will become the right companion on the path. Finding the right teacher can change one's life, just the same as finding the right partner in your life. Companions have a great influence on our life. Finding the wrong teacher can be very harmful, like being with the wrong partner who can change your life from good to bad.

Listen to the teachings and study the Dharma

The requirement to practice proper Dharma is to study the Tripitaka: the Vinaya, sutra and the Abhidharma (within the sutrayana path). If you study the mantrayana *or tantric* Path then it must be studied according to one of the four classes of tantra: Kriyatantra, Charyatantra, Yogatantra or Anuttarayoga.

The Buddha himself taught both the sutra and mantra, then this was passed down through his lineage to different masters. Within Mahayana, there are the Cittamatrīn School and Madhyamika School. The Cittamatrīn School was passed down from Buddha to Maitreya Buddha to Asanga and so forth. The

Madhyamika Tradition comes from the Buddha to Manjushri, to Nagarjuna, Shantideva, and so forth. In Buddhism, it is very important to establish the authentic lineage and the authentic teachings that come from that lineage then we need to listen to, and study, the valid teachings of Maitreya Buddha to Asanga, Vasubandhu, Nagarjuna, Dharmakirti, Chandrakshita –in the sutras and shastras (their commentaries). Sakya Pandita recommended that one should study the Dharma of these great masters through the lineage back to the Buddha.

Non-Buddhists may read about these masters in modern books and gain some idea, but once you have been involved in learning the Dharma for five or six years then there is no use in reading modern books. It is best to read translations straight from the masters - Nagarjuna's teachings or Shantideva's teachings in English. It is best to read primary sources, not where ordinary scholars add in their own opinion. This is pure Dharma, which becomes clearer as you study, and enables you to understand the profound meaning of the Dharma.

Practise the Dharma according to what the Buddha taught

After listening to the right Dharma and gaining a clear understanding, we need to practice it. There are three parts to the correct practice of the Dharma:

i. Self-examination according to the vinaya

It is important to examine our behaviour in this life to see if we are living according to the vinaya tradition. This means we need to examine whether we are living as virtuous a life as possible, which, in turn, means to live according to the ten virtuous deeds. The Vinaya style of life is to avoid negative activities, avoid saying any negative things and avoid letting any negative thoughts arise. Sometimes these negative actions, speech and thoughts can seem quite pleasant but their consequences are very negative. One of the teachings says that some poison can be tasty but afterwards one gets very ill. Similarly, we have a strong habit of having negative actions speech and thoughts. which seem to be pleasant to us at the time, but afterwards they bring negative consequences. With this awareness, we must stay mindful of what we are

doing speaking and thinking, not allowing harm to oneself.

In relation to negative thought, mindfulness is combined with wisdom by recognising that this is a negative thought. The awareness that it is negative is the wisdom aspect, and asking oneself about whether it will harm myself or others is the mindfulness aspect. When you practise the vigilance and mindfulness aspects, they will prevent you from having negative thoughts. The sooner you apply wisdom and mindfulness, the faster you can stop the negativities. In this way, the vinaya lifestyle develops a healthy mind.

In relation to negative speech, when we are going to say unskilful or negative words, think to oneself this is the wrong speech. If I use wrong speech that can disturb others and oneself, I need to recognise that it is wrong, will cause harm and I should not speak this. Again, with this mindfulness, one can prevent negative speech and use healthy speech.

Likewise, in relation to negative actions to harm and disturb yourself or others, recognise it, then stop it. We may not be able to live this way the whole day but if we apply this a few times within the day, it will change one's personality. This is how we can live a more meaningful life.

Below are the ten non-virtues and their corresponding virtues positioned under the three vajras of body, speech and mind.

		Ten non-virtues	Ten virtues
Body	1	killling	protect life
	2	stealing	practice generosity
	3	sexual misconduct	discipline and fidelity
Speech	4	lying	speak the truth
	5	harsh words	pleasant speech
	6	slander	reconcile disputes
Mind	7	gossip	meaningful talk
	8	coveting	rejoice in others' fortune
	9	cruelty	help others
	10	wrong view	right view

ii. Meditation according to the sutrayana

It is important to meditate according to what the Buddha taught. Whenever we meditate, we must remember that meditation is like direct medicine for our mind. It is not correct to say, I feel this way, so it is a better way to meditate, or I feel that way so it's a better way to meditate, or somebody taught me this or that and so I will meditate that way. It is correct to refer back to the sutrayana, for example, when meditating on impermanence remember how it is explained in the sutrayana – remember that the time of death is indefinite. When practicing shamatha meditation, know the structure and instructions given in the different teachings. First, you learn, and then practice according to that type of meditation. Again, meditating on loving-kindness, compassion or bodhicitta you must learn correctly from an authentic text how to meditate on these topics and, according to this, you will meditate correctly. The result will then be what the teaching has said it will be. If you practice your own version of meditation then you will only get your own version of a result, not the result stated in the sutra and tantra. When you meditate, it is very important to meditate according to the sutrapitika.

iii. Explaining according to the Abhidharma

When explaining the Dharma, it should be taught according to the Abhidharma. The Abhidharma contains detailed study of conventional and absolute wisdom. Conventional wisdom explains the reality of me/us, as in the five aggregates: form, feeling, perception, mental factors and consciousness but, in absolute reality, this 'I' is not only one, there are so many individuals. When you truly understand every aspect of the five aggregates, the grasping of 'me' will not be there. If we lack an understanding of the five aggregates, we then have the wrong view to grasp at oneself. The Abhidharma helps to free one from the idea of self, from ignorance mind, so that you can know the reality of who you are.

Regarding absolute wisdom, the Abhidharma states that everything is the mind and further, the mind is an illusion. There is no objective reality that is substantial, independent and enduring apart from mind perceiving it to be so. The reason that mind itself is an illusion is that the mind perceives an object when there is no object. We can liken the workings of the mind to that of a dream mind. Whilst we are dreaming, we don't realise it is like an illusion, but when we are awake, we realise it is not real, that it is an illusion. Similarly, right now we do not see reality as an illusion, but once our defilements lessen, we will realise the mind is not real, it is an illusion mind. In this way, gradually we are introduced to the nature of all phenomena as free from all four extremes and we come to know reality ultimately as emptiness. Freedom from the four extremes means that we recognise that phenomena do not arise from themselves, from others, from both themselves and others, or from neither themselves or others.

In conventional reality, we accept that things exist, as single independent entities. In absolute reality, there is no single entity but only phenomena dependent on many aspects. Absolute reality in this sense is beyond one and many. This is the Abhidharma way. Once you understand how to live a vinaya way of life, how to meditate on the sutra way of explanation and to explain according to the description of the Abhidharma way, this is the best way to practice the Dharma.

Sakya Pandita (1182-1251) was one of five founders of the Sakya order.

In those days in Tibet, Sakya Pandita felt that many people contradicted the Tripitaka even though they thought they were talking Dharma. Similarly, in these modern times, many people claim to teach Dharma, but they contradict what the Buddha taught. Sometimes we have this idea that all spirituality is the same, and we practice based on this belief. In the Dharma, it is not just believing that is needed to make one a Dharma practitioner. To be a Dharma practitioner means one has great wisdom and nothing is contradicted, and what one thinks, says and practises is in accord with what the Buddha said. This is the Dharma. In this way, the Dharma is the antidote to overcome our affliction mind, it is the path to gain liberation, and is the path to gain lasting happiness. It is so important to find the right Dharma, which is the medicine that is needed to implement and to practise the Dharma.

In summary, the three things we need to adopt are: the right teacher, the right Dharma and the right practice. Having adopted the right teacher, right Dharma and right practice, we then need to resolve to never abandon the Triple Gem. When you are sitting, you think to yourself, 'I am relying on the Triple Gem'; when you are travelling, think 'I am relying on the Triple Gem'. When you go in a different direction (east, south, west and north), remember the Buddha who resides in that direction, for each of these different directions have different Buddhas. The five dhyani Buddhas are emanations of the first Buddha, Vairocana who symbolises the pristine awareness of the ultimate dimension of phenomena. Each Buddha has different qualities and is represented by a different direction. If you travel in these different directions, you can think of and supplicate to that Buddha.

- If you travel east, think of the Buddha Akshobya and the quality of non-dual mirror-like pristine awareness.
- If you travel south, think of Buddha Ratnasambhava – pristine awareness of equanimity.
- If you travel west think of Buddha Amitabha – discriminating awareness.
- If you travel north think of the Buddha Amoghasiddhi- fearless accomplishing pristine awareness.

Sakya Pandita said that there are so many benefits in thinking of a direction Buddha. Thinking in this way can free one from obstacles. It can fulfil one's wishes in this life and, assist one ultimately to meet these Buddhas. Thinking about the direction Buddhas is almost like programming your mind, in a practical way. Most of the time when we are travelling we are driven by our desire mind, our greedy mind, our anger mind. These minds then bring many obstacles in our lives. We cannot achieve what we want to achieve due to these negative states of mind. However, we can replace this negativity with thoughts of the Buddha.

Obstacles are a manifestation of a negative state of mind. When our mind focuses on the Buddha, our mind cannot create obstacles. By thinking of the Buddha, we can fulfil our wishes. We all want good health and a happy life but there needs to be a cause to achieve this state. The cause is the positive thinking achieved by remembering the Buddha.

A teacher of mine once said that hearing the name of the Buddha can be the result of numerous good causes. It is very hard to even hear the name of the Buddha. The name of Buddha isn't just for someone who has simply been given full enlightenment but rather the name of the Buddha is a result of someone who has practised virtues for all sentient beings for three countless aeons. Just to hear this meritorious word, one needs to have acquired enormous virtuous requirements. If simply hearing the name requires such virtues, just imagine the mind required to achieve enlightenment. Logically then, it will be tremendously beneficial to work out how to minimise our obstacles and how to fulfil our virtuous wishes.

One day you will meet this Buddha. We need to realise that the Buddha is not that far away from us. There is no need to travel thousands of kilometres to meet such beings. Buddha is there the moment one thinks that the Buddha is right in front of us but, due to our obscurations, we cannot recognise him. When we keep thinking of the Buddha, it cleanses our mind, then once the mind is purified, Buddha is right in front of us. Changing one's mind to the positive is one of the ways to cleanse one's mind so that we can recognise the Buddha.

Eating yoga

Eating yoga is another practice to adopt once one has taken Refuge. Before you eat, it is good to offer the first portion of food to the Triple Gem, which also helps subdue our greedy mind and blesses the food. From a Dharma practice perspective, food is a neutral substance; it cannot help you or harm you, but our way of thinking can change the qualities of the food. If you eat in a greedy way, the food can become like a poison and can cause indigestion. If you take food as a medicine and as a blessing, you can receive the nutrition your body needs and it can help your mind. In this way, the mind has the power to transform the food to make it either poison or medicine. With this awareness, we can do eating yoga.

Sakya Pandita brought this quotation from Sachen Kunga Nyingpo's text:

Om mahaguru vajra naividye ah hum

This means, I offer this food to my Great Guru. It is good to recite this mantra. *Om mahaguru* – means great guru: *vajra* – means indestructible: *naividye* – food: *ah hum* – I am offering the blessing of all the Buddhas' and bodhisattvas' body, mind and speech, offering this food to my great guru.

Secondly, I offer this to the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, tutelary deities, Dharma protectors, whoever you wish and as much as possible with the following mantra:

Om sarvabuddhabodhisattvanam vajra naividya ah hum.

Thirdly, one needs to offer tormas, which are cone shaped ritual food offerings sculpted in different sizes and colours, to some of the lower realm beings such as local spirits, offering a small portion of food, saying the mantra: *Om akaromukham sarvaDharmanam adyanutpannatvata om ah hum phat svaha.*

One can make an offering to the hungry ghosts by reciting this mantra:

Namah sarvatathagata avalokite om sambhara sambhara hum.

You can recite the five names of the thathagatas-

Vairocana, Amogiddhi, Amitabha, Ratnasambhava, Akshobhya.

You can offer water, etc., there are so many eating yogas.

The whole point of the eating yogas is to share your food with every single being, to give them blessings. Doing so subdues our desire mind. Normally

we think, 'I am so looking forward to this food, I'm so hungry', which if left unchecked, can cause indigestion issues. To completely eradicate these thoughts, we gently think of all others, and eventually this brings respect for the act of eating and the way it can be offered to others. Food can be wasted so easily, we must remember that, without food, we cannot survive, so it is a very precious part of our lives. With this awareness, we can train our minds to share our food from Buddha to the ordinary beings. Then one can consume the food.

Nagarjuna said that if you take the right amount of food it can be medicine for you, if you take more than required it can become poison/toxic.

This is eating yoga, the right way to eat, from a sutrayana point of view.

Sleeping yoga

Sleeping yoga is an important practice once you have taken Refuge. When we go to sleep, it is important not to go to sleep 'animal style'. An animal is not aware of going to sleep, and most of the time, they unthoughtfully go to sleep. As a practitioner, we consciously sleep, taking as our example the Buddha when he passed into parinirvana. One's head should be facing directly to the east or north, the right hand lying on the bed under your head, the left hand lying on the left side of the body. We may not be able to stay the whole night like this, but just when falling to sleep, it is important to be in this position. One must try to train to sleep in this way. Just as you are drifting off to sleep, imagine within your mind you are going into Buddha Amitabha's meditational state. If you can do this then your whole sleep becomes virtuous sleep.

Normally sleep is neither virtuous nor non-virtuous, for example, if we go to sleep saying 'I am so tired' and fall asleep in this state, it is neutral sleep. However, if one goes to sleep thinking 'I am so unhappy today' and in an unpleasant and negative mood then our whole sleep becomes negative. If we go to sleep with a positive intention, then our whole sleep becomes a very virtuous sleep. In this way, the Dharma turns every action into something useful rather than wasteful. We try to bring to mind Buddha Amitabha's

meditative state as we fall asleep. This means that we are in the Dharmakaya state with awareness but no thoughts. This state is non-dualistic, with no thought, no subject and no object. Awareness and thoughts are two different things: thoughts have an object, whereas awareness doesn't always have an object. So, in the Dharmakaya and Amitabha awareness state of no thought, we go to sleep.

The next morning when you wake, just think about coming out of this sleeping yoga state in the nirmanakaya form, carrying out your daily activities. The nirmanakaya form of the Buddha is the form that appears in the world to teach people the path to liberation.

Everyday Life

In everyday life, whenever you are having a happy time and are excited, or when you have good experiences, do not forget the Triple Gem and the Guru. The reason for remembering the Triple Gem and the Guru is that, as soon as you become attached to the happy time or the good experiences, the attachment exhausts the good karma and will not last long. In order to sustain this happy time, to reproduce and multiply it, offer it at that exact time to the Triple Gem and the Guru, then instantly you are creating a cause to reproduce and multiply the happiness. This will not run out, it will remain there and bring one great joy, and greater pleasure in future times. This is because pleasure and happiness arise from our positive state of mind. Apart from that, there is no creator of pleasure and happiness. You have created this happy time and it is very smart to reproduce it. Creating such joy and offering it to the Triple Gem and the Guru, in turn, brings more joy to oneself. In this way, never forget to make offerings to the Triple Gem and the Guru.

When facing challenges in your life, such as sickness, difficulties, suffering and misery, don't be discouraged or become hopeless, where you can't manage to do anything and experience despair. Think about doing what Buddha said, that is, 'I practice the Dharma, I associate with the Sangha, these things can be overcome, they will not last forever'. No matter how painful and difficult one's circumstances are, remembering the Triple Gem, the Guru and

impermanence brings hope, which in turn gives one strength.

One of the Thirty Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva which is a teaching about how to train the mind, says you may have multiple challenges in your life such as bankruptcy, separation of family, no place to stay, nothing to eat, and feel you are not worth anything. At the same time, you remember the mind training – remember how many beings are out there are suffering the same as myself – and that feeling will help one to develop great compassion towards others. You will wish ‘...may they be free from that state’, and this will truly give you strength.

In this way, we realise how wonderful the Dharma is. Even when we are in the lowest of feelings of life, still you can have lots of strength. Strength comes from two aspects:

- wisdom - this will not last forever. It is only temporary. This is wisdom in the awareness of this temporary state.
- compassion – wishing others to not suffer in the way that I am suffering.

When wisdom and compassion are brought together in this moment, instantly one has strength. Within this world there are countless depressed people. Professionals are constantly researching how can we help people with depression, yet they could use this mind training technique. If we can genuinely use this wisdom and compassion it can bring strength to one’s mind, and reduce suffering. In this way, when you are sick or depressed, it’s important not to think ‘I am a helpless person’, instead remember that the Triple Gem and the Guru are there to help us, not to actually take our hand to lead us to the right place but to remind us that we have the mind to turn all situations into wisdom and compassion. Remembering the Triple Gem and the Guru helps us to turn our mind to the positive.

Prayers alone may not be enough. We can take practical action to bring our mind to the positive, for example, we can not only recite mantras, such as the Medicine Buddha mantra, but we can take medicine and ask others to do prayers. One of the vinaya that is, the precepts that govern monastic life, states that when a monk or nun gets sick, they should take medicine.

Prayers alone may bring problems as the result. The main vinaya position is to take the medicine. Taking medicine is then not against the religion. Taking medicine is the practical action needed to bring the mind to the positive.

WHAT TO AVOID: INDIVIDUAL PRECEPTS

First, once we take Refuge in the Buddha, we should not take Refuge in non-Buddhist deities. This means that if you take Refuge in the Buddha – now the Buddha is your spiritual guide. If you take Refuge in a worldly god, then you lose this Refuge.

Second, once you take Refuge in the Dharma, from then onwards you are not allowed to harm any sentient beings, and of course not to take any being's life.

Third, once you take Refuge in the Sangha you are not allowed to receive spiritual advice from non-Buddhist friends. You can be friends, but you may be taken down the wrong path if you seek their spiritual advice.

Sakya Pandita gives us excellent advice in *Clarifying the Sage's Intent*. Many of us are so concerned with small inconsequential things but we are dismissive of the consequences of the big things in life. There is no need to worry so much about small mistakes made here and there; our concern should be to not make big mistakes. Sakya Pandita tells us that people may say one should not step over the Buddha's texts as this is disrespectful, or sometimes one should not sell Dharma books or statues, as selling Dharma is non-virtuous. But Sakya Pandita says it is not that harmful when people disrespect Dharma texts by selling or buying them. It is much more serious if someone is disturbing or stopping a teacher from teaching the Dharma, or is disturbing a student who is trying to listen to the Dharma. When you sell or buy Dharma things, it is a minor negative action, but it does not harm others. When someone stops a teaching or stops one from listening to the Dharma when that result could lead to Buddhahood, then the action harms the being's potential of reaching Buddhahood and, as a consequence, has the ability to harm so many other beings. For this reason, we must consider these to be much more serious than a small mistake.

In the east, it is commonly thought that a piece of yellow or red cloth of the Sangha robes should not be thrown in the rubbish, but needs to be put in a high place. If one does so, it is seen as a transgression. Putting the cloth in a high place is done out of respect for the Triple Gem. However, at the same time, people may gossip about a monk or nun and as a consequence this can have a bad effect on the whole community. This latter transgression is much more serious. We can apply this example to our Dharma centres and monasteries, for Sakya Pandita says that gossip is directly harming so many beings. We must have vigilance and mindfulness to avoid gossip. If someone makes a mistake by gossiping, it can create a lot of misunderstanding between people. This misunderstanding can create a wild fire where it multiplies and can lead to many people having a negative mind. This can be caused by one person's wrongful gossip. This transgression is far more serious than someone throwing a monk or nun's robes in the garbage, which is disrespectful, but not anywhere near as serious as gossiping about one's Sangha members. Even gossiping about a Dharma practitioner is very serious because this will cause so much harm to so many beings in the way that it disturbs and changes others' perceptions. In this way Sakya Pandita says that we need to be mindful in not being too concerned about the less important matters, but focus instead on the more harmful matters. This is part of taking Refuge: to always think that every Dharma is important whether it is part of the Theravada, Mahayana or Vajrayana tradition. Every sangha is important, and the person who practices it and needs to be respected far more than the clothes he or she wears.

THE TEMPORARY AND ULTIMATE BENEFIT OF TAKING REFUGE

Taking Refuge in the Triple Gem purifies much of the karma that we have accumulated since beginningless time. This is possible because, whilst karma is a habit of the mind that is carried moment after moment through lifetimes, we can determine to change this habit by constantly thinking of the Triple Gem. Now rather than going with the non-virtuous habit, we can think constantly of the Triple Gem, and so change and purify this habit of the mind. The more we change this habit of the mind, the more we diminish the negative karma we have committed. The benefit of thinking about and chanting the Triple Gem in prayer is that we change the pattern of our minds. Scientists have studied those who carry anger, scanning their brains and finding that their brains are different from others. If these same angry people then consistently think of love and compassion then when the brain is examined again, it is different. This brain is an organ of the mind, so when the mind changes, it will affect the brain. This is very practical, not a religious belief such as praying that the changes will happen. Turning the mind into a positive state lessens the negative mind. This is the benefit of taking Refuge to cleanse our karma.

Negative minds can attract negative beings, those unseen spirits who can possess our mind and disturb us. These beings come into our life and severely disrupt our emotions, thoughts or psyche. But if one takes Refuge genuinely from the heart and develops a positive mind, these beings are not attracted to you. Your positive mind prevents these kinds of diseases and disturbances.

Reciting the Refuge prayer can also help improve our health. Health issues arise due to a sickness or due to our karma which is inseparable from our mind. To constantly genuinely and sincerely think of the value of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha can change your mind, which changes your physical health, and, as a consequence, you experience less sickness. Most sicknesses come from an unhealthy state of the mind. When you dwell in a negative mind, you become worse not better. The more you eliminate this negative habit, the less sickness your body will experience. To turn away from this

situation, we need to turn our mind to the positive.

The Triple Gem is the method to make our mind virtuous. Just thinking of the Triple Gem helps to reduce our sadness and unhappiness. Thinking of all sentient beings genuinely and most sincerely from our heart, and taking Refuge on behalf of all of them, will bring us such joy. When this joy arises, sadness and unhappiness are not there, this is tremendously beneficial. The Refuge practice is the method to cleanse these unwanted phenomena.

There is a story of the benefit of taking Refuge. There was a village where lived an old lady and a newly ordained older monk. This old lady really wanted to learn some Dharma before her death. She searched and found the old monk. She did not know his background, but because he was physically old, she assumed he was a great monk. She asked if she could come to see the monk, and she begged him 'please give me some teachings'. This newly ordained old monk was stressed all night long for he felt he did not have any knowledge of the Dharma. By the morning, he was riddled with stress and told the old lady that his ignorance was causing him stress but rather than seeing him as unable to help her, she thought his teaching for her was that ignorance is the cause of all suffering. She meditated on this and gained many realisations from this 'teaching'.

The realisation that suffering comes from ignorance inspired this old lady to become devoted. The story continues with the old lady offering a piece of cloth in thanks to the monk. There was a thief who lived in the area, and who planned to steal the cloth from the monk. He followed the monk, and once he arrived at the monk's residence, he yelled, 'give me your cloth now'. The monk became very frightened and called out to the thief 'if you want this cloth come to the window'. The thief put out one hand and the monk said 'that is disrespectful, put out two hands to receive this cloth'. Once the thief put out his two hands, the monk tied them up. The monk then went outside and started beating the thief with the cloth, and as he did so, telling him 'take Refuge in the Buddha, take Refuge in the Dharma, take Refuge in the Sangha'. Then the monk let the thief go.

The thief headed back to his village and on his way stopped overnight under a bridge for a rest. He remembered the monk's words and began chanting the

Refuge prayer. Usually at night-time this bridge had lots of ghosts, but none could cross the bridge that night due to the powerful Refuge chanting. One of the ghosts asked the thief, 'What are you doing? We can't cross this bridge due this powerful chanting!'. The thief replied, 'I'm just chanting Refuge'. The ghosts said this Triple Gem must be very blessed to have given rise to such devotion and faith. In their next life, these ghosts were reborn in a place where they could take Refuge in the Triple Gem. This part of the story shows that even though you may not understand the meaning of the words, just chanting the Triple Gem has immense benefit for you and others, and even hungry ghosts.

I mentioned earlier that the name of Buddha isn't a minor thing, it is the result of three countless aeons of accumulated merit to achieve this state. From this perspective, just think how inexpressibly blessed we are that we can chant the name of the Buddha. It took three countless aeons of effort by the Buddha to achieve this Buddhahood. Whenever we are mentally disturbed or physically sick it is immensely beneficial to just think of the Buddha or the Triple Gem.

Once we take Refuge in the Triple Gem, then we become a Buddhist. Your name changes in that you are now 'Buddhist'. The meaning changes because once we take Refuge in the Triple Gem then one is part of the family. When you are part of the family, even worldly gods pay respect to you. This is the temporary benefit of taking Refuge; it purifies so many unwanted results and then these promote our name and everyone's respect for us.

ULTIMATE BENEFIT OF TAKING REFUGE

The ultimate benefit in taking Refuge has two aspects: the benefit to the self and the benefit to others. From the perspective of benefitting one's self, by taking Refuge in the Buddha, one day, you will attain Buddhahood. In the beginning, Buddha was an ordinary person like you and me. He was not a Buddha. He took Refuge in the Triple Gem, then one day he became a Buddha. Likewise, we are ordinary beings now but, if we take Refuge in the Buddha, one day we will become a Buddha. The result of taking Refuge in the Dharma

is that one day we will turn the wheel of Dharma ourselves. The Buddha, after three countless aeons of practising the Dharma, attained enlightenment. He did not just turn the wheel of Dharma automatically. Similarly, just as it is not automatic for us when we take Refuge in the Dharma, one day when we become Buddha, we will turn the wheel of Dharma until the end of samsara. Right now, we take Refuge in the Sangha, but one day we will attain Buddhahood and turn the wheel of Dharma for countless Sangha, teaching the Dharma to them.

From the perspective of benefit for others, taking Refuge means that once you attain Buddhahood you are capable of leading others to this state. Buddha himself, by reaching Buddhahood, turned the wheel of Dharma which, one day in turn, led us to attain Buddhahood. One can also attain Buddhahood, turn the wheel of Dharma and teach infinite Sangha. The result of this is that all those beings that you have taught the Dharma to will reach Buddhahood. This is helping others; and you can see how many you can reach with great benefits.

These teachings are from an authentic lineage passed down from the Buddha himself. These teachings are not from my own thoughts, but were taught by Sakya Pandita. Sakya Pandita's teaching was based on the Vajra Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra that Maitreya Buddha dictated to Asanga. Maitreya Buddha was not talking from his own point of view, he learned this from the sutra that Buddha taught. What the Buddha taught was from his own perfectly true experience. If we take Refuge according to what the Buddha taught, we will attain the result but to achieve this, it is important to have genuine clarity with no doubt.

MOTIVATIONS TO TAKE REFUGE IN THE TRIPLE GEM

At the beginning of this book, I explained that our highest motivation for studying the teachings is not to create the conditions for a better rebirth or to attain self-liberation but rather our highest aspiration is to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Here I want to provide a more detailed explanation of the motivation to take Refuge in the Triple Gem and also bodhicitta (which I will explain in the next section). Understanding the philosophy and purpose underpinning this motivation helps us to properly orient ourselves towards taking Refuge and bodhicitta. The motivation to take Refuge and bodhicitta differs according to whether we are followers of the Hinayana tradition or the Mahayana tradition. The Hinayana motivation to take Refuge is to attain self-liberation while the Mahayana motivation to take Refuge is to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

HINAYANA (OR ŚRĀVAKAYANA) MOTIVATION

The Hinayana motivation is self-liberation and has two aspects – śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha. You may remember that the Hinayana has śrāvaka who are ‘hearers’ or distinguished disciples and it also has pratyekabuddhas or ‘solitary realisers’ who attain enlightenment by themselves. The śrāvaka Buddhas have had teachings from the Buddha and, as a result, want to be free from suffering and attain self-liberation. In the beginning of the Madhyamakāvatāra there is one line meaning ‘hearer’ (as in śrāvaka). They received teachings from the Buddha directly such as The Four Noble Truths. Receiving these teachings helped these sravakas to understand the entire nature of samsara is suffering. When they realised this, they wanted to be free from all the suffering of samsara. They realised that they can motivate themselves to be free from this state. Pratyekabuddha is similar to the śrāvaka motivation, in that these ‘solitary realisers’ who gain liberation by themselves, without a Buddha to guide them, also understand samsara is full of suffering and wish to attain self-liberation. Pratyekabuddhas gain their own liberation even without the

Buddha's guidance.

MAHAYANA MOTIVATION

The Mahayana motivation for taking Refuge is to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. The notion of bodhicitta, or enlightenment for the sake of all, is central to the Mahayana motivation and it comes through two great traditions: the Cittamatin tradition and the Madhyamika tradition. The Cittamatin tradition comes from Buddha, to Maitreya Buddha, to Asanga, to the Cittamatin School followers. The Madhyamika tradition comes from Buddha to Nagarjuna, to Chandrakirti and Atisha to the Mahayana School followers. The Cittamatin professes that everything is emptiness, but they say that the mind is ultimately or absolutely existent. The Madhyamikans cannot prove the existence or non-existence of the self, the mind or any phenomena. Their philosophy is free of the four extremes that the self, the mind or any phenomena exists, or that they do not exist, or that they both exist and not exist and also that they neither exist nor non-exist.

From the Madhyamika perspective, the Cittamatin view is a mistake, it cannot free you from samsara. The reason is that the Cittamatin hold that the mind is absolutely existent, and for anything to be viewed as absolutely existent, one has not completely realised emptiness. Cittamatrins do not accept this as a contradiction. Primarily nowadays Cittamatin followers are in the Chinese tradition and Zen.

Madhyamika does not assert any particular position on reality. All phenomena are valid providing that they are not examined closely. When conventional reality is analysed closely, it cannot prove existence or non-existence of phenomena. Madhyamika is beyond any view of existence or non-existence. If we conclude that something exists in the absolute sense, as Cittamatrins do with respect to the mind, we have failed to realise the emptiness of all phenomena. This is not the right view.

The concept of everything is mind is the right one in that it is the mind which conventionally investigates everything. If there is no mind, then we would not see two different things and be able to say I like it, you dislike it.

TAKING REFUGE

Things that I enjoy, others do not, how can you say with the same object some enjoy it, and others do not? One mind sees one thing, which brings enjoyment and the other person does not see things the same way and does not enjoy it. We can only conclude that the mind is making the enjoyment and non-enjoyment; it is not the actual phenomena or object itself. However, when we investigate the mind itself, we cannot find anything that is permanent or substantial. We cannot find its location. Madhyamika says that your mind sees and believes what really exists in conventional reality, but beyond that, in absolute reality, the mind is not existent. Sometimes it is said that, within Mahayana, the fastest way to attain Buddhahood is that your way of thinking should be like the Cittamatrin's but your view must be like Madhyamika. We can proceed provisionally through our lives thinking that the mind is everything but ultimately we know that even the mind is non-existent. Combining the two great traditional ways of thinking in this way is the fastest way to reach full enlightenment.

BODHICITTA

Bodhicitta, also known as the Thought of Awakening, is the wish to attain enlightenment, motivated by great compassion for all sentient beings. It means thought directed at, or focused on, awakening and it involves a resolution to attain this awakening for the sake of all sentient beings. Bodhicitta can be fostered and cultivated to develop a mental state that brings about enlightenment. Bodhicitta is known in the Hinayana tradition, but it is central to the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions. Indeed, bodhicitta is said to be the starting practice for Mahayana Buddhism. Bodhicitta is a precondition for Buddha nature and it is the motivating thought behind the spiritual practice of the bodhisattvas who delay their liberation out of compassion for all other sentient beings.

It is important to have the right motivation for the study of bodhicitta and we can do so by thinking about all sentient beings. All sentient beings live under the law of karma with its suffering and difficulties. Karma includes the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change and the all-pervasive suffering of conditioned existence. The suffering of suffering comprises all the miseries of the lower realms, as well as the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death in the higher realms. It also includes separation from what we hold dear, including not having what we do want and having what we don't want. The suffering of change means that no matter what we might possess in personal attributes, relationships, possessions, wealth or status, even if we find ourselves in the higher realms, our favourable situation cannot possibly remain as it is. It is bound to change and when it does, what was pleasurable will inevitably turn into a source of suffering. The all-pervasive suffering

of conditioned existence means that if we don't break the past and present tendencies brought about by our previous karma, these tendencies once again become the habits of the future, setting us up for even further suffering. This means that all our present experiences, in some way, create the cause for further suffering later on, whether in this life or in future lives.

It is very important to acknowledge these types of suffering, to search for a way out of them and to feel that every other being is going through different stages of these types of suffering. These beings are not separate from us, we are connected either by this life, and by past lives or we will be connected to them in future lives. Once we realise we are connected spiritually, when others suffer, it will cause us to suffer as well; when they are happy, it will cause us to be happy. We will not be able to avoid our happiness and difficulties being reliant very much on others. Once we have this awareness of the interconnectedness of self and others, we will feel the emotion of whatever others are going through. Buddha taught that the best and greatest way to feel happiness is to wish others to have happiness. The most effective way to release or minimise our suffering is to wish all beings to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. The perfect path and most powerful technique to reach Buddhahood is not to consider just oneself by simply meditating, rather, it is to say 'I am doing this practice to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings'. Thinking of other beings helps us to cultivate loving-kindness, compassion and bodhicitta. Without sentient beings, it is impossible to follow any form of the Mahayana path, so sentient beings are the most precious and priceless object.

We are here to learn this precious Buddhadharma so each and every word that we hear contains wisdom that can eliminate our ignorance. Every small piece of a diamond is a complete diamond; every word that we hear that the Lord Buddha taught is a diamond. Usually it is defilements that bring us to the Dharma. It is joyous that every defilement is an opportunity to hear the Buddha's teaching. How fortunate it is to be born human to have this opportunity to hear this precious Buddhadharma. The Dharma is the only path that can free us from samsara, for the Dharma is the path to lead us to attain Buddhahood. The Dharma is the medicine that can free us from all

sorts of disease, and the Dharma is the only hope that we can attain lasting happiness. It is important to reflect on the importance of the Dharma.

The lineage of bodhicitta we follow, the Madhyamika tradition, comes from Manjushri to Nagarjuna to other great scholars such as Shantideva. Within this tradition, there are two types of bodhicitta. The first is Conventional Bodhicitta and, the second, Absolute Bodhicitta.

Conventional Bodhicitta is the state of mind where the practitioner works for the good of all beings in exactly the same way as he or she would work for their own good. In Conventional Bodhicitta there is Wishing and Engaging Bodhicitta. Wishing Bodhicitta is aspirational in that the person is not ready to engage in the practices necessary to work for all others but can be resolved to attain the state of Buddhahood. Engaging Bodhicitta indicates a person who actually undertakes the practices necessary to bring all others to enlightenment. Some Bodhicitta practices emphasise the conventional such as loving kindness or compassion found in lojong or tonglen. These two aspects, Conventional and Absolute Bodhicitta correspond with the first two paths on the bodhisattva's journey to enlightenment- the path of joining and accumulation, where the bodhisattva puts into practice the six perfections of generosity, discipline, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom.

Both Wishing and Engaging Bodhicitta are conventional but, as Patrul Rinpoche says in 'Words of My Perfect Teacher', through training for a long time in Conventional Bodhicitta, the bodhisattva has the real experience of seeing ... of thusness, the natural state of things.

This is the wisdom beyond all elaboration, the truth of emptiness'.

Absolute Bodhicitta is the wisdom of emptiness. It implies freedom from attachments and fixed ideas about how the world should be. Absolute Bodhicitta is the non-conceptual wisdom of the bodhisattvas' path of seeing. This path of seeing corresponds with the first bhumi Bodhisattva where bodhisattvas realise the truth of the reality of things, the emptiness of all phenomena. Here, some bodhicitta practices emphasise the absolute such as in vipassana meditation.

To receive Conventional Bodhicitta, one must have a teacher to bestow the bodhisattva vow. The bodhisattva vow to attain enlightenment for the

BODHICITTA

sake of all sentient beings promises to venerate the Buddha and cultivates moral and spiritual perfection particularly in practising the six perfections—generosity, discipline, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom.

For the lay person, it includes the five Upasaka vows but adds onto these with three other vows

- no eating at inappropriate times
- no ornaments dancing or singing and
- no luxurious beds or seats higher than the guru.

It is important to note that a bodhisattva can be a householder, an ordinary person, and does not have to be a monk or nun.

For the monastics, there are eighteen root vows and forty-six branch vows. While the forty-six branch vows are beyond the scope of this booklet, the eighteen root monastic vows are

1. not to praise ourselves and/or belittling others
2. not sharing Dharma teachings or wealth
3. not listening to others' apologies or striking others
4. discarding the Mahayana teachings and propounding made-up ones
5. taking offerings intended for the Triple Gem
6. forsaking the holy Dharma
7. disrobing monastics or committing such acts as stealing their robes
8. committing any of the five heinous crimes: (a) killing our fathers, (b) mothers, or (c) an arhat (a liberated being), (d) with bad intentions drawing blood from a Buddha, or (e) causing a split in the monastic community.
9. holding a distorted, antagonistic outlook
10. destroying places such as towns
11. teaching voidness to those whose minds are untrained
12. turning others away from full enlightenment
13. turning others away from their pratimoksha vows
14. belittling the shravaka vehicle

15. proclaiming a false realization of voidness
16. accepting what has been stolen from the Triple Gem
17. establishing unfair policies
18. giving up bodhicitta

One must have a ritual to undertake the Bodhicitta Vow, and after receiving this vow a person makes a commitment of bodhicitta. The teaching, ritual and commitment means that the pratimoksha vow, Conventional Bodhicitta, some of the mantrayana empowerments comes from the ritual ceremony. Through the ceremony, we receive the bodhisattva vow, through the ceremony we receive the pratimoksha vow, lastly through the ceremony we receive the mantrayana vow. The mantrayana vow is only Conventional Bodhicitta not Absolute Bodhicitta. Absolute or uncontaminated Bodhicitta can only be received through one's own meditation practice. It cannot be received from the masters; in other words, you must gain it by yourself. Some schools say that both Conventional and Absolute Bodhicitta can arise from a ritual ceremony, other schools say that only Conventional Bodhicitta can be attained through the ritual ceremony. All the schools state that Conventional Bodhicitta has a ritual ceremony, and due to this, one can attain the Bodhicitta Vow, but our tradition through Sakya Pandita says it is not possible to attain Absolute Bodhicitta in this way, only through meditation can Absolute Bodhicitta be attained.

Sakya Pandita himself stated that both the Madyamika view as well as the Cittamatrin view agree that in all of the sutras Absolute Bodhicitta cannot come through a ritual ceremony, only conventionally. Sakya Pandita says that some people only see things as existent, others see things as existent that are non-existent. Take the example of those with cataracts who cannot see what is right in front of them. They might see a hair dropping in front of them which is actually non-existent. Similarly, some religions do not see the reality, they see non-real things as reality, which is a great mistake. In this way, Sakya Pandita states that the ritual ceremony helps us to attain Conventional Bodhicitta, but Absolute Bodhicitta cannot be attained in the same way. Absolute Bodhicitta can only be attained through meditation.

ABSOLUTE BODHICITTA

The first method to gain Absolute Bodhicitta is to please the Buddhas. However, the Buddha is free from expectations, and is not concerned whether we please him or not. If the Buddha was still unenlightened like us, he would expect devotion from his students or followers. If this were the case, he would not be completely free from all the subtle defilements. But the Buddha has totally exhausted the entirety of his obscurations and their residues. There is nothing left whatsoever. This is the quality of the Buddha.

We often feel proud when we make an offering, or pay our respect, or circumambulate. We think to ourselves that we are honourable. It is true that these types of virtuous activities will gradually free us from defiled conceptual thoughts. The more one frees oneself from defilements, the more the mind is ready to realise the absolute reality. At the moment, most people's minds are so preoccupied with normal conceptual thought, that even though the absolute is right in front of them, they do not recognise it. While it is important to continue to go to the temple, the monastery, or the stupa, doing so will not totally eradicate the negative thoughts. Doing so certainly will be more virtuous than the other mundane activities that we take part in on normal days. Pleasing the Buddha in this way can help to create within our mind the cause for realising absolute truth, to help develop Absolute Bodhicitta.

The second method to gain Absolute Bodhicitta is to accumulate merit and wisdom. There are the Six Paramitas for accumulating merit. These are Six Perfections that characterise enlightened beings- generosity, ethical discipline, patience, joyful effort, contemplation and wisdom. The Six Paramitas are concerned with living our lives in a selfless way. They are divided into three aspects: accumulating merit; accumulating merit and wisdom; and accumulating wisdom. The first three Perfections—generosity, ethical discipline and patience - accumulate merit. For example, generosity purifies our stinginess mind and our desire mind, ethical discipline purifies non-virtuous thoughts, speech and actions and patience purifies the self-cherishing mind and the anger mind, and so forth. In this way,

we accumulate merit. The fourth perfection of joyful effort, or sometimes referred as virtuous effort, accumulates merit and wisdom. The fifth and sixth perfections of contemplation and wisdom accumulate wisdom.

In sum,

- generosity, ethical discipline and patience accumulate merit
- joyful effort accumulates merit and wisdom
- contemplation and wisdom accumulate wisdom.

In Buddhism, contemplation is enacted through vipassana. In vipassana meditation, the meditator uses their concentration and contemplation to cut through the wall of illusion. It is a direct and gradual process of increasing awareness and mindfulness. In essence, vipassana is a means to approach the wisdom of Absolute Bodhicitta. Vipassana is the mind that can cognise the wisdom of the absolute truth of selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena. Sometimes vipassana and Absolute Bodhicitta can be the same yet at other times they are separate. This vipassana can be developed through the mere renunciation mind but it is not Absolute Bodhicitta. The vipassana developed out of bodhicitta mind is Absolute Bodhicitta.

In 'The Stages of Meditation', Kamalashila stated that to develop vipassana we must hear the Dharma quite often, because each and every time we listen, it will take us closer to understanding the reality of the conventional and the absolute. Mere shamatha or loving kindness meditation, for example, are not sufficient to understand absolute truth. You must have a clear idea what are you meditating on, and in order to have this clear idea you need to hear the Dharma and to study as much as possible. If you do not have a clear idea, then when you meditate, you may have a feeling of calmness and relaxation, but when coming out of the meditation there is no clarity or wisdom arising from that meditation.

If meditation is just for relaxation then sleeping would be a meditation, *but the truth is that* when one wakes up there is no wisdom gained from sleeping. In fact, general meditation is likened to laziness, as you do not gain any wisdom from it. Within Buddhist meditation, each meditation is not just

about calming the mind, some kind of realisation needs to be gained when coming out of the meditation. The meditator needs to develop some kind of awareness and wisdom. This is the difference between general meditation and specific Buddhist meditation. Buddhist meditation helps us to understand whatever one is meditating on, such as impermanence, you will have a clearer understanding of impermanence at the end. Or if you meditate and practise loving-kindness, at the end of your meditation, you will feel stronger.

With vipassana, one must understand the reality of the conventional and absolute. To develop and cultivate vipassana, we need to use these methods *in accompaniment* with whatever we can manage to practice of the six perfections. Do whatever you can to give things, look at how you interact with others – ‘should I say it this way or that way to keep within ethical discipline’. From time to time, if people disrupt or disturb you, then you should try not to over-react or let it disturb your mind. In this way, from a samsaric point of view, it is a disadvantage if someone in the world tries to disturb you, yet from a dharmic point of view it is an advantage because this person is giving you the opportunity to train your mind. Use the disturbance to practice patience. With joyful effort, think about the value of each and every word of the Dharma you hear.

This is what is needed to have awareness, for when you are aware then generosity brings joy. For example, if you take enormous effort to go to a treasure island, and pick up treasure no matter how small, this brings one tremendous joy. Similarly, we are on a treasure island when we listen to the Dharma; each word has the power to burn out many lives that we have accumulated negative karma or ignorance. In this way, we need to identify the gratitude; this then brings one joy to do these things. When we have this kind of joy, one will never be tired, when we are tired it is not a matter of doing too many things or being restless. Joy is recognising how we value what we are doing which makes us feel good – when you feel good you will not get tired. This is joyful effort.

If we consider the nature of the defiled mind, it is restlessness, an untrained mind, a monkey mind jumping everywhere. This type of mind is unpleasant - no matter how much you provide to rest this mind it is never satisfied.

Whether you buy a new house, new car and new clothing to try to rest your mind; no matter how much you feed it, it is not rested. It is so important to rest the mind. Think about how many times from beginningless time up to today you have bought things to rest the mind samsarically. If all the things we've bought in an effort to rid the mind of the restlessness were together in physical form, the planet would not be big enough to hold it all. Even if we provide all these things to try to rest our mind still there will not be any changes. The result is all the same, and we are back to square one.

The only way and the best medicine to stabilise one's mind is to meditate on a particular object. At that moment, your mind is free from the three poison minds. When these three poison minds are lessened, your mind will be more restful. We usually try to satisfy our restless mind with things. We are always going for something that we think is restful for our mind but perversely it agitates the mind. For this reason, we are fortunate to have encountered the Dharma in this life. This is not wasting our time. We are always very hard working at our job to make us a happy and stable person, yet we haven't found the right solution. Actually, we destabilise ourselves.

We have wasted much time in the past, but now we have an opportunity to act on our minds, to stabilise the mind. Just having this knowledge even if we are not ready in this life, just hearing Dharma knowledge may be preparing you for the next life. When we are reading the biographies of the great Rinpoches and great masters, we are influenced by their qualities, great realisations and experiences. We want to be like them but we want this in a short period of time. We have only read about their experiences but not about the enormous effort they have put into reaching this state, some taking hundreds of lifetimes to reach realisations. So with just a few hours meditating, we are not going to reach these realisations. It is not going to happen just like that.

Hearing Dharma is like taking a one millimetre step towards the result of helping the mind to stabilise and to have realisations. This is where we need to accumulate minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, and month by month. Once we have accumulated enough, we will get the result. Because the Buddhist ultimate view is interdependent origination, when you

attain all the causes and conditions, you really get the result. Interdependent origination means that all Dharmas arise in dependence upon other Dharmas. People ask how long will it take me to stabilise my mind or how long will it take me to reach enlightenment. This depends fully on causes and conditions, for if you can learn everything in a single day then tomorrow you will be enlightened. If you cannot accumulate the causes and conditions in a hundred lifetimes, then you are not enlightened yet. It is dependent on causes, not dependant on good luck or bad luck. If you have all the right causes and conditions, you will get the result.

To develop Ultimate Bodhicitta we need to train the mind to contemplate. When one learns to contemplate, it frees the desire mind, the anger mind and the ignorant mind. In the absence of these three afflictions, your mind is clear. What you see with this clear mind is very different from what you see normally. However, if two people see with a clear mind, there are no differences, it all becomes the same. But when we look through our desire mind, we will not see the same – my desire mind will see one thing and will be totally different from your desire mind. For example, if we look at a cup or a flower, we are all looking at the same object but we have a different perception, seeing it through our own desire minds. Some say it is a beautiful colour, some say it is not a beautiful colour. We do not see it in the same way. What is separating our self from others is our afflictive mind. Once this afflictive mind is removed then we are the same, we all see the same thing and we all think the same thing. There are no differences. This is called Absolute Bodhicitta or vipassana – this is where the wisdom comes from.

Recently I was teaching shamatha meditation and some students said – ‘Oh this shamatha meditation is very basic, we are senior practitioners’. It’s useful to remind ourselves that shamatha is not basic, if it is basic you would be capable of meditating ten minutes single pointedly. Anyone can sit for ten minutes, but to sit for ten minutes without any distractions and concentrate on the object for the entire time, is an advanced practice. People underestimate shamatha, for if shamatha is a basic practice then why does Shantideva and other great masters put it fifth in order of difficulty within the Six Perfections, why not put it first? Shamatha can only be done if someone

has practiced the first four practices, such as generosity, ethical discipline, patience and joyful effort, only then comes the shamatha. This is a very advanced practice. Shamatha is the direct cause to develop the vipassana. Shamatha is the direct cause of developing the wisdom and bodhicitta; this is the direct method.

Through this practice, you please the Buddhas and accumulate merit and wisdom. You accumulate the virtuous. However, one must understand the difference between a generous action, and the generosity which accumulates merit. This depends on the motivation. Out of good intention, one person wants to help someone who is experiencing poverty. This is generous and virtuous, but it does not accumulate merit. Another person wants to help because they wish to sincerely attain Buddhahood. They know we are all interconnected, and this is their way to help other beings. The best way to help other beings is for one to attain Buddhahood, then I can manage to bring countless other beings to that state. With confidence, this is achievable. With this assumption, I need to do what the Buddha taught - practice generosity, patience and so forth - with the understanding that I am doing this to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. The generous act is the same as the person who gave money to the poor person with a good heart, but our intention is far bigger than that person. This is called accumulating merit. Any virtuous deed that one commits with the intention of attaining Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings is called accumulating merit. Anything virtuous that we do may help others, but not necessarily accumulate merit. If you truly know the meaning of these things, then it helps you. It is worthwhile to ask oneself: Am I just doing mere virtuous practice or am I accumulating merit?

This is all mind training and it is very important. If you are not trained in generating bodhicitta automatically, bodhicitta will not come to your mind. If we keep thinking of sentient beings, of our interconnectedness, we will then avoid separating from others. Think about the best thing you can do for others, for the more you genuinely develop love and compassion for others, the more it brings you tremendous joy. The more one grows up within this state, the more responsibility arises within. By taking charge of oneself to

do whatever you can, the better you can free others and minimise suffering. When one takes more responsibility to train to help others, then one more seriously trains to become a Buddha. This is the best way to help others. Just thinking about this idea will not bring much progress. It will help improve your mind, but we must listen, contemplate and experiment. When one goes out into the world and meets others, do what you can to remember the Dharma. See if it works for you when you have genuine love for someone. When you continually apply compassion towards others, you will see what it brings back to you. Imagine if you reach Buddhahood what will come back.

Experiencing the results of showing loving kindness and compassion to others gives you strong confidence. There are no words to express the kind of joy it will bring. Once you have this kind of joy, there are no difficulties, no hardship, no exhaustion, you are full of energy, and the joy is never exhausted. This is mind training. Keep thinking, keep experimenting, keep your inspiration then eventually, one day, you will be this embodiment. This is how you can develop into a good practitioner. This will not happen just sitting on a cushion. There is no yogi who just sits on a cushion and becomes enlightened. This simply does not happen. Although sitting on the cushion is one of the main and important techniques to develop realisations, the most effective technique is to go out and meet with sentient beings and to show loving kindness and compassion to them.

One day we will have enough accumulations and go beyond the excellent Dharma, which relates to the five paths – the first is the path of accumulation which has three stages (small, medium and large). When you go beyond this path, it is the path of application which has four stages (heat, peak, patience and excellent worldly Dharma). At the end of this excellent Dharma, we are at the border of samsara. The moment you cross this border, you are in the path of seeing which is the path of the first bhumi. Bhumi is a Sanskrit word meaning level or ground or support for enlightenment where the mind has many levels of reaching enlightenment before attaining Buddhahood.

The first bhumi or path of seeing is where you reach the first uncontaminated platform. In the meditative state, the bodhisattva experiences Absolute Bodhicitta and, in the post-meditative state, they experience conventional

Bodhicitta. Both states are experienced alternatively. In Buddhism, we draw a distinction between the principal mind and the secondary mind - this helps us understand the workings of the mind on the path. The principal mind knows the fundamental presence of the object and the secondary mind cognises a particular quality of the object. The principal mind cognises the essential nature of an object, for example an eye cognises a sight as merely a sight. The secondary mind interpolates and interprets on top of that mere cognition, for example, by experiencing an emotional reaction in relation to the object. For ordinary beings, we apprehend objects with our secondary mind but a bodhisattva begins to apprehend with the principal mind.

In the first bhumi, the different minds, as in the principal mind, secondary mind and everything in the meditative state - all become Absolute Bodhicitta. This bodhisattva, however, does not always reside in that meditative state. When they come out of the meditative state, it is referred to as post-meditative state. In this post-meditative state, this bodhisattva's mind is not Absolute Bodhicitta, it is Conventional Bodhicitta. Again, with regard to Refuge, this bodhicitta has the mind of truth of the path having the realisation of emptiness but it is still not completely non-dual with Dharmadhatu. Therefore, this wisdom that realises absolute truth is still compounded phenomena, anything that is compounded phenomena is created phenomena, anything that is created is impermanent, therefore this wisdom is not the absolute object of Refuge; *it is only the* temporary object of Refuge. The wisdom is the Dharma.

This is the first time directly that one is not imagining what emptiness is. You neither intellectually learn it nor have some idea. You are completely free. It is like someone explaining or describing a place to you, you will have some idea about it, but not necessarily the right one. What the picture is in your mind and the actual place will have vast differences. When someone shows you a picture of this place, it is much clearer. Yet still this picture doesn't fully represent the real place. However, if you are physically there, then you know exactly what this place looks like.

Similarly, when we study about emptiness it is like someone is describing the place, we have some idea but not as if we are there in person. Then when

we go into meditation, we have a picture in our mind about emptiness much clearer than someone explaining it, yet it is still not necessarily the right one. Through practice, one day you will have freed the obscurations such as the defilements and can see the Absolute Truth. Now there is no ignorance; one knows exactly what emptiness is. We are there. The only way we know exactly what emptiness is, is when we reach the first bhumi. It may not be a complete idea but yet it is some idea. It is called the Seeing Path because we are seeing for ourselves the nature of reality for the first time.

Absolute Bodhicitta does not arise from ritual ceremony. It can only be gained through listening, contemplation and meditation that one can attain Absolute Bodhicitta. No one can offer this to you. You must know it for yourself.

Once one knows the difference between the Conventional and Absolute Bodhicitta, now one needs to train in Conventional Bodhicitta. Here we will discuss the Madhyamika training in bodhicitta. There are three paths in the Madhyamika tradition: brief training, more elaborate training and detailed training.

PRECEPTS IN CONVENTIONAL BODHICITTA: WISHING BODHICITTA

BRIEF PRECEPTS

Wishing Bodhicitta is the wish to gain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Brief precepts in Wishing Bodhicitta are to bring this thought as much as possible: 'I must attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings'. We must remind ourselves constantly of this idea. This trains the mind, makes it a habit, almost like a mental mantra residing in your mind, in every circumstance. Right now, we have an unceasingly samsaric agenda, the thoughts proceed unceasingly one after another. We must break this consistent habit by remembering: I must attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. The moment this thought interrupts the samsaric thoughts, it breaks the habit. Gradually it changes the habit, such that, instead

of thinking of some samsaric idea, we think we must attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings - even in dreamtime.

Wishing Bodhicitta will not come naturally, it comes out of effort; for everything is effort. Every Buddha put enormous effort to reach this state of Buddhahood. Every daily activity is an occasion for Wishing Bodhicitta. Even when one is drinking a cup of tea, think 'I am drinking this cup of tea for the sake of all sentient beings'; when washing clothes think 'I am washing these clothes to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings'. One should not avoid any daily activity, keep doing what you are doing but change the thoughts - 'I am doing this to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings'. In this way, you are not missing anything, you are not missing mundane activities and you are not missing the Dharma activities. This is mind training and it is achievable. It isn't difficult if you apply a bit of extra effort. When driving on a hill you need to accelerate. Similarly, we need to mentally accelerate, sometimes to overcome our laziness. It is important to recognise our own laziness there is no point in hiding from it. We should acknowledge our own laziness. This is the brief training of the mind.

INTERMEDIATE PRECEPTS IN WISHING BODHICITTA

The intermediate precepts are the next path of Wishing Bodhicitta. Khenchen Appey Rinpoche refers to these as 'the precepts of the aspiring (wishing) enlightenment thought'. These 'middle length precepts' overcome discouragement at the beginning, and later, they overcome the wish to abandon (the path) due to fear of worldly existence'. It is important to know why we give up Wishing Bodhicitta because then we can meditate on and cultivate the antidotes to these causes.

First obstacle to attaining bodhicitta: overcoming discouragement at the beginning

The first obstacle to attaining bodhicitta is that we give up hope. It is common for many of us to give up bodhicitta for we feel we cannot do it. We need to recognise that lacking confidence is the biggest obstacle to making the bodhicitta mind. In the mundane sense, if you think you cannot do

it, you will never be successful. It is the same in the Dharma sense. The Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra talks about the antidote to this impulse. People may think ‘when I listen to the whole vastness of the Dharma and when I hear of the accumulation of merit and wisdom requirements, I think this vastness is way too hard and too difficult’. These are samsaric thoughts that the mind reinforces, supporting these thoughts that you are right and that you cannot do this. Then when you are on the wrong path, the samsaric mind wants to control you. Your mind becomes like a bad partner who wants to control you. This is how our defiled mind controls us from beginningless time up until today and why nothing has been achieved because of it.

Think about the past history of a defilement like anger, attachment, ignorance. It is always good to think of the past history of the defilement, from the perspective of the present experience, and to think of what you would like to happen in the future. If you investigate the past, present and future you may have some kind of complete picture, and conclude from this picture, that it is not worth sticking with this defilement. It can be discouraging to think about the history of the defilement. To overcome this discouragement, the Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra states

*the universe is so vast, inconceivably so,
as is the inconceivability of number of sentient beings,
each second there are countless beings attaining enlightenment / Buddhahood, not
just one. In every second there are countless beings.*

Within the Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra, it is said definitively that every minute many beings are reaching enlightenment. This is not a matter for interpretation but it is like genuine Buddhist statistics to help you visualise countless beings in countless universes. Think ‘I am one of them so why would I not be able to attain enlightenment?’ We all have a reason to have this confidence, we all have the Buddha Nature. If we did not have Buddha Nature, then there would be no hope. We all have this Buddha Nature- this Buddha seed. If I manage to create the right causes and conditions why can I not then attain Buddhahood.

Think about the potential that you have for Buddha nature, rather than the hardship and difficulties one may be facing. Buddhism is skilful. When

someone develops arrogance saying ‘I am such a good practitioner’, subdue them by saying ‘the Dharma is not so easy; it has so much hardship in subduing the ego mind’. Conversely, when one has low self-confidence ‘I can’t do this, there is so much to do’, then encourage them to think of their own Buddha nature, help them to realise that there are hope and opportunities. Being in the middle is a much safer place. Learning to do so is part of the training in knowing oneself – if I feel low do not investigate the difficulty aspect, look at the potential aspect. If you are too high, do not look at what you are doing, find the humility to look at the challenges you have to reach Buddhahood. This is training the mind.

Shantideva in Bodhicaryāvatāra stated:

*Even the smallest of insects or bees or any creature
if they endeavour in the right joyful effort
can attain Buddhahood
because they have Buddha Nature.*

We have all the potential and the conditions to reach Buddhahood so it’s important to be inspirational and encouraging towards oneself. Confidence will come when you begin to get results. It is like the confidence that comes when you get a job. Even if you only have a high school certificate, and have not been to university, you got the job. The only situation with no hope for Buddhahood is found in the moment when you give up bodhicitta. Then you are a person who is going to miss out on a great opportunity. As long as one does not give up bodhicitta, sooner or later you will have a chance to attain Buddhahood.

There is a story in ancient times that tells of seven worms that land on a leaf in the wind. The leaf is in the middle of the ocean where there is a huge Buddha Vairocana statue submerged on the bottom of the ocean. The seven worms on this leaf circumambulate the statue, as a result of which they die and are reborn as seven daughters in a low caste family somewhere in India. They were all sad being born in this lower caste family, thinking ‘we are so poor, we feel so down’. Due to their poverty, they had nothing to offer the Buddha except for pieces of wood. In their next lives, due to their sincere offerings, they were born into a kingdom of a royal family as seven princesses.

They then had a lot of wealth to offer to Buddha Krishnapa (the previous Buddha to Buddha Shakyamuni). Buddha Krishnapa prophesised that in the future these seven princesses would attain Buddhahood.

These worms landed on the leaf in the ocean, circumambulated the Buddha Vairocana statue and by doing so planted a seed in their mind streams. The cause for their progress towards enlightenment is that you will not be able to find any being who does not have some virtuous qualities. This accidental condition opened their virtuous seed to be reborn human, and as a human one can do great things. They were then born in a higher rebirth, made offerings and the Buddha Krishnapa prophesised the enlightenment of these seven Buddhas. If even this accident can be helpful to attain Buddhahood, then when we consider consciously carry out good things, we can see how we can achieve enlightenment. We do not accidentally come to this place and meditate, we have consciously come here, consciously we are listening, consciously we are doing whatever we can. In this view, we have a far greater opportunity to reach Buddhahood.

There is another story in the Vinaya which tells of a dog who chased a pig around a Krishnapa stupa. Through this circumambulation, the seed of enlightenment was sown in both the dog and the pig and, in the next life, they were born human, met the Buddha and attained arhatship. Just seeing the stupa and chasing around it, can purify the results of lifetimes of mistakes. A link can be made with the Buddha, even if very tenuous, and a seed planted for liberation which, in the end, will lead to the state beyond suffering.

There is another story of someone born human who was a criminal. The criminal had deep regret about his misdeeds and wanted to become a monk. He went to many monasteries and asked them to ordain him but they all refused saying he was a criminal and therefore wasn't worthy. In the end, he went to the Buddha, hoping this would plant a seed so that he could attain arhatship in this very life. The Buddha gave him a Bhikkshu ordination and in that very life he attained arhatship. Just hearing one word of the Dharma is enough seed to gain different levels of enlightenment. This should give us confidence in our efforts.

There is yet another story of our potential for Buddha Nature. During the

time of the Buddha a woman offered the Buddha a bowl of rice. The Buddha prophesied that because of this merit she would attain enlightenment. She was so happy to hear this from the Buddha that she went home and told her husband. This husband disliked the Buddha. He said the Buddha was a liar, 'how can you attain enlightenment by just offering a bowl of rice?' The husband sought out the Buddha to argue with him and to accuse him of lying to his wife 'How can a lady offer you a bowl of rice and then reach enlightenment?' The Buddha had a skilful answer. He said, 'In your backyard there is a huge tree, where did this originate, from a big or a small seed?' The husband responded that the tree originated from a very small seed, as small as a sesame seed. The Buddha said 'If a small seed can grow into a huge tree then why can't this small offering of a bowl of rice be the cause of attaining enlightenment?' The husband could not fault the Buddha's logic and this answer freed him of his doubt, and opened his Buddha Nature.

So, no matter how hard you may think that Dharma practice is, if you create the right circumstances, the right conditions, everything becomes possible. This is the most important point to remember, that everything is possible. If you carry this thought in your mind you will never be discouraged.

Second obstacle to attaining the bodhicitta mind: Overcoming discouragement later

The second obstacle to attaining the bodhicitta mind is laziness. Some beings become discouraged after putting so much effort into study or meditation or practice. They do not see the result as they expected and begin to feel discouraged. They make so much effort yet do not have much of a result. For example, compare someone who is genuinely trying to make their business work with another person who has greedy and unrealistic expectations of profits. The greedy person expects to earn a \$1,000 a day but they are only making \$500. Making \$500 is good enough but due to their high expectations, everything less than the expected amount is bad.

Similarly, in the Dharma if one is aiming too high but is unaware of the causes they are creating, they may not attain what they want because the result depends on the cause. If you are creating a 100% cause, then you have the right to expect the complete result but if you practice 20% and expect a

100% result, it is not going to happen, it is not logical. The Dharma says if you practice generosity you will become richer, however, you might find that since you have practised generosity, you have become poorer. As a result, you begin to distrust the Dharma.

Some people decide to live ethically and think that they will become healthier, but they get sick, and develop disbelief. Generosity will not result instantly in becoming rich; in the same way that practising ethical discipline may not mean you will instantly become healthier. When we practice generosity, it will purify our stinginess; when we practise ethically, it will purify all negativity. When negativity emerges, it can feel like it is worse than a battle for a while. It's a bit like a medicine for a certain disease. Due to the treatment, sometimes it will get worse before it improves. We only see the getting worse part, not the getting better part later. We often do not have enough patience to wait to see this. As soon as you feel bad, you assume that this is not making you well, and you decide 'I am going to stop. I can't see what can possibly change'. Similarly, when someone goes to see the doctor and takes the medicine prescribed, it can make things worse for a while but eventually it makes them feel better. Due to not seeing the eventual effect, one stops taking the medicine and goes to see someone else. This confuses you.

Spiritually the same thing can happen. It is like the case of the person who does not see that the medicine needs time to take effect. You may think that 'this is not working' and then you change to another kind of spirituality. Already there is one doubt, then a second doubt, then you move onto a third. This kind of spiritual doubt becomes one mess after another. A few things are important here. One must be close to their teacher, although not from a religious point of view. A teacher is someone who can clarify any doubt within one's mind, for without the teacher, if you simply rely on yourself, it is almost impossible to get the right answer. If you ask your Dharma friend, they may give you the best answer. But it will not necessarily be the right answer. Sometimes their answer can bring more confusion. If you are experiencing hardship in your spiritual path, it is good to come to your teacher to bring you clarity. The teacher, like a doctor, will know what is happening, why this

is happening, and how it can change. They know what to look for in order to help you.

After consulting with the teacher then you must follow their instructions. Most people, after they have a consultation with the teacher, continue to go their own way with their practice and find that their way doesn't work. You must follow the teacher's advice correctly according to the instructions. It is the same when you see the doctor. The doctor gives you all the right instructions, but you don't follow them, you go your own way, then things get worse rather than better. Thus, one must make the right choice according to the instructions.

No matter how difficult it becomes, you need to vow you will never ever give up the Dharma. Once a king was imprisoned and told that if he did not give up the Dharma he would not be freed. He said, 'I will never give up the Dharma, because this life lasts only a short time whereas the mind is continuous. The long term is more important than the short'. In this way, many great masters sacrifice their lives for the Dharma. Unlike wearing clothing, our body is with us until death, so the body is more important than the clothes. Some people do not think in this way, they believe their clothing is more valuable than their body. Similarly, the body is less important than the mind. The body is only for this life; it cannot follow you to the next life. Most important is our mind. We must make sure we do not lose the Dharma, for Dharma is the wisdom of the mind, Dharma is the compassion of the mind, Dharma is the loving-kindness of the mind. We must never lose these things. For these reasons, do not be discouraged.

Shantideva in Bodhicaryāvatāra stated:

*Riding upon the horse of bodhicitta
That dispels all weariness and fatigue,
Who could ever feel depressed,
While travelling from joy to joy?*

VII, 30

Bodhicitta is like a very comfortable horse; if you ride this horse it will take you to a very comfortable place. As long as you are riding this bodhicitta mind life after life it will take you to joyful places. In Seven Point Mind Training, it is

stated that before you die, give up everything, do not be attached to anything. The only wish you should have is never to part from the true bodhicitta. As long as you do this at the time of death you will be protected and guided. No matter how much wealth you have at the time of death, this will not help you. No matter how many relatives you have, they will not help you. The only thing that will help you at the time of death is your virtuous mind. In this way, a Dharma practitioner must have long-term vision, not short term vision. It's important to recognise that feelings last for only a short time – 'I feel this, I feel that'. This morning's feelings are completely different from this afternoon's feelings. Even a few hours later, the feelings are different again, so why do we rely so heavily on feelings? Feelings come and go and are extremely untrustworthy. This is where we must trust our long-term vision. This is much more important.

Otherwise you will continue to have ups and downs. Because feelings come and go like the wind, there is no need to worry about them but once you lose this priceless mind it is almost like spiritual bankruptcy. Shantideva sees bodhicitta like a horse, that this horse will take you to the right and joyful place. As long as you are riding the bodhicitta mind you are guaranteed to be on the right path.

Once we are born, we must die. We are attached to this life, everything that we do is for this life, but this life is not forever. Sooner or later, we must leave it. Many teachings say that this life lasts a very short distance, and the short journey beyond this life is a longer journey, so it is important to plan for this longer journey not the short journey. Life does not last forever; it only lasts for a short time. The cause of death is due to three things: running out of life force; running out of karma; and running out of the merits one acquired through virtuous acts. Lots of people die when losing only one of these three, but this can be prevented.

You can increase the life force to prolong your life by receiving long-life initiations such as the Amitayus initiation, White Tara, Amitabha, or Ushnisha-Vijaya initiations. If you are just running out of life force and not karma or merit, these initiations can help you to live longer. If you run out of karma, then to increase your karma you must buy live animals such as in

fish, sheep, birds, and chickens that are going to be killed and release them alive. If your karma says you are going to die tomorrow or next month, due to your killing in the past and in this life, you can change this if you release some beings that would have been killed. If your merit runs out, then you must accumulate merit by making offerings to Buddhas, to Sangha, giving things to poor people or feeding animals. This will allow you to accumulate merit. This can extend your life span.

If you run out two of these three elements, for example, if you run out of life force and run out of karma but you still have some kind of accumulated merit, there is hope. You will need to use those two methods to extend life. Once you run out of all three, there is nothing you can do even if the Buddha is right in front of you. There is nothing that can change the fact of death, even if you are offered the best medical treatment. There is nothing that can help. Once the oil and the wick have run out, the lamp will go out. There will be no fuel so there is nothing to burn, there is nothing you can do about it. It is the same with life force, once you have run out of all three elements, there is nothing to do about it. The point here is that when you practice Dharma when you get sick and unwell, there is no point to blame the Dharma, just accept that this is the reality and this will help you avoid being discouraged.

Third obstacle to attaining bodhicitta mind: Overcoming the wish to abandon bodhicitta through fear of samsara

The third obstacle to attaining bodhicitta mind is when we abandon bodhicitta because we fear cyclic existence. We often lament how long it is going to take to attain Buddhahood. One Sutra says it may take three countless aeons. When we think of this, and that some people experience so much suffering in this life, we may become very discouraged. You may also be discouraged by the suffering of birth, aging, sickness and death, as well as trying to please everyone throughout life. If you think of all the challenges of life you may think that you cannot practise bodhicitta, particularly as throughout all these aeons you will have to endure samsara.

We often remember the bad experiences of life but we are not very good at remembering the good things. When we are growing up with our parents they do so many good things for us, but we find it hard to remember those

good things for us. Then one day we are treated badly and for the rest of your life we remember that bad thing. The nature of this depends on the individual. It depends on how much negativity is in your mind and how much positivity is in your mind. The person with more positivity in their minds will remember more of the positive than negative in their lives. The person with more negativity in their mind will remember more of the negative than positive.

Reflecting on our tendency to remember more bad things than good can be very useful. As the result of that reflection you can conclude that you are more negative than positive. This is not to put ourselves down, but to realise this tendency, and resolve to be more careful. Sometimes you can feel so much negativity that it is discouraging yet, at other times, you can be encouraged by recognising your negativity because it makes you resolve to be serious in your efforts to get rid of the negativity. The result will depend on the individual's ability to use the realisation as a mind training – if you use the realisation in the right way your negativity actually makes your Dharma practice stronger and ultimately, the result will be less negativity in your mind.

Think of Angulimala or Milarepa or Ashoka all of whom transformed their completely negative minds. They were criminals, killing many hundreds of people. Then they found the right teacher and realised they had created immense negativity, and now they needed to do good things. From that time forward they transformed their negative mind into powerful positive thoughts and, within a very short time, due to these powerful changes of mind, these beings accomplished great realisations. If you know how to use your negative mind in a positive way, you can reach realisations much faster than someone who has a positive mind. If you do not use it in that way, your negative mind can take you down and down, eventually you will find yourself in the hell realms. To be successful is up to the conditions you meet, if you meet a dharmic condition, this strong negativity constantly becomes a favourable condition of the Dharma. If you haven't met the Dharma, these obstacles are favourable conditions to be born in the lower realms. In this way, feeling good and bad does not necessarily mean that you will feel good

or bad, it is how you use these mind states that is important.

When you are feeling bad, it is good to think of your Guru, and of the Triple Gem. This will help to change and transform your mind. There is a story here of a great practitioner almost giving up bodhicitta, until Manjushri came and blessed the practitioner and changed his mind to continue with his practice. Another story concerns Āryadeva. A demon came to disturb his practice asking for his right hand. Āryadeva was a great Bodhisattva willing to give his body to other beings. He gave the demon his left hand but the demon was not happy and complained 'you are giving me your left hand but I want your right hand'. This shows that you can give anything to someone but if the person is in a negative state, nothing will make them happy or satisfy them. So thinking 'if I cannot please just one person, how can I have bodhicitta for all beings?', might mean that you become very discouraged. In the story, a deity came and rescued the situation, so Āryadeva was eventually encouraged. Bodhicitta sounds big but really it is not that difficult if you can think of your Guru and the Triple Gem. We need to know that it is very hard to fulfil people's wishes. It is said that human beings especially are never satisfied, no matter how hard you try to please them.

Shantideva said that if one thinks of samsara, that we are born over and over again for extensive periods of time with much suffering. Therefore, we must investigate the effects of the samsaric activities that we do each and every time, to fully appreciate which path is easier, that of samsaric activity or dharmic activity. One may think that samsara is easier, but when you investigate samsaric activity in this way, you will find that it never ends no matter how much you have done – samsara is never going to end, more and more keeps coming. In samsara, we are destined to do something that never ends. In the Dharma, each time that you are dealing with your mind, the defilement will lessen and, one day, it will be completely exhausted. It may seem good to devote yourself to samsara you invoke something that will never ever end, but if you devote yourself to the Dharma, there is a chance to completely exhaust defilements. Which is easier?

It is good to consider this when one feels discouraged. When one meditates or practises, it is not straight forward, we haven't reached the highway yet. We

try to get to the highway but there are road blocks. This is the time to think I will not go back, and to think how can I clear this path. This will happen over and over again. Each time, try to work out how I can clear this path. If your meditation is clear, there is success, but there are many things required to be successful in reaching enlightenment, not just one thing. The moment you feel defeated by a roadblock, you will feel like a failure and that you will never experience knowledge. So, the next time you hit a roadblock, think how can you can clear the blockage away. Right in the beginning you must be resolved and prepared to get to the highway – you may need to take a side road; one has lots of time to work their way around to get to the highway. Never ever give up, no matter how many challenges you face. One must have confidence and a positive pride in oneself to overcome obstacles and to recognise what is achievable.

The Mahayana path can take you on a long journey to reach Buddhahood. It can take three countless aeons. During this journey, one will be faced with many challenges. When we are faced with challenges, sometimes we may feel the journey is too long. We may feel we cannot cope with continuing our practice. Some may give up, whether in the beginning, in the middle or before the end. When this negativity arises, how can one overcome it, what approach can we apply?

The Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra states that we need to learn to treat others as we treat an only child that we love greatly. No matter how many headaches they cause us, we will never give them up, we will take care of the child. In this way, we must train ourselves to see each being as ‘my’ only child, and we make whatever effort is needed to help them. This is training the mind to develop a good relationship, then whatever problems arise, one will be able to handle them with ease.

Think about the three countless aeons it takes. On the one hand, it may take an enormous amount of time to achieve enlightenment but, on the other hand, time is a mere concept. For example, when you are having a great time, a few hours feel like a few seconds, but when one is having a difficult time, a minute can feel like a life time. Time does not exist outside the mind. Reflect that three countless aeons is no different from three minutes. If you try to

estimate how many aeons have been, from beginningless time up until today, there are far more than the three countless aeons. So much time has been wasted. Had we practiced Dharma from the beginning, we would already have reached Buddhahood.

Buddha Sakyamuni reached Buddhahood over 2,500 years ago. Where his mind began, ours also began. We have not arrived later. When he was in the hell realm, when he was an ordinary human being, we were a human being. Out of his diligence and motivation he completed the stages towards Buddhahood faster than us, but his mind did not begin before ours, it was there at the same time. Similarly, a great master who trained on this path is the same mind that started in beginningless time as we did. After a few lifetimes on this path, he will gain enlightenment. From the point of view of beginningless time, we have not arrived later, we are all from the same time, but due to our laziness, or the lack of right conditions or even discouragement, we remain in samsara, where there is no end. Whenever we are going through difficulties, our problems will go with us and our conditions will be worse in the next life. The point of view that time is just a mere concept, that it does not truly exist, shows that there is no need to worry about the three countless aeons it takes to achieve enlightenment.

Talk of the past, present and future is mere illusion. It does not truly exist. This is a concept only of human beings as all other beings have no concept of past, present and future. It is created only by the human mind, and other than this creation, it does not exist. So, you need not be concerned about the past or the future.

To progress and have a smooth practice, it is very important to constantly remember the Guru who offered us the blessings, to remember the deity and to request blessings from them. As long as we have these blessing from our Guru in our mind, and all the yidams and the Triple Gem, our path will be that much smoother, and our practice will be much easier. Before one goes to sleep, reflect that since morning until now whatever merit we have accumulated bring that all together and dedicate these virtuous actions for the welfare of all sentient beings – ‘May I attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings’. Imagine you make this dedication once a day - as the

year passes you will have dedicated it over 365 times.

There is no great need to put so much effort into formal practice. It's more important to deal with everyday life, to become aware of the way you think, what you are saying, what are you doing, and to cooperate with the Dharma. Practising the Dharma then becomes effortless. It becomes very hard when we think we need to have separate time to practice Dharma. You may have so many commitments to family. You may think, 'I don't have much time to give to the Dharma', and consequently you are always juggling. There is no need to do this because the Dharma is not other than your mind. Whatever you do in your everyday life bring your mind to a virtuous state, then you are practising Dharma and, at the same time, you are completing your daily tasks. This will only happen if you train and practice, if you separate the two, they will not come together.

This is like a social skill, we learn how to deal with one another, how to develop friendships with one another and how to make connections with each other. This makes it easier to make friends, easier to communicate with others, easier to do things together. In Dharma practice, first, you must establish a relationship with yourself, you must work out how to have a relationship with your mind in everyday life. We have to become a master of this. If you have mastered the relationship with your mind in everyday life, then you can share this skill you have with others. When we get discouraged, we must always think of the Guru and the Triple Gem. This is always a blessing.

ELABORATE AND DETAILED PRECEPTS IN WISHING BODHICITTA

The elaborate and detailed precepts for Wishing Bodhicitta has three parts. The first is the cause of cultivating bodhicitta, second is the method to increase bodhicitta and third is the method to not degenerate or impair bodhicitta.

CAUSE TO CULTIVATE BODHICITTA

There are two causes that cultivate bodhicitta: Great Compassion, and Loving-Kindness.

Great Compassion

Here the object of compassion is oneself and all sentient beings without any exception. The goal is to free or to part the self and others from suffering and the causes of suffering. If you can maintain that in everyday life, it is particularly useful. When you suffer, you can think to yourself, 'I really want to be free from this suffering' or when you realise you are creating a cause to this suffering, you can think 'I want to not create the cause for this suffering'. On the one hand, it is unfortunate to experience suffering, one is experiencing negativities, yet, on the other hand, this is fortunate because it allows one to develop compassion.

Similarly, when you see someone suffering, it is best not to feel sorry for them for that doesn't ease their suffering. Rather it is best to think 'How can I help this person to ease their suffering, how can I help this person to be free from suffering.' Even though right now, you may not be in the position to free them from suffering, just to have that idea is especially important. One day it may be possible to help them achieve this. Someone may be doing wrong and harmful things, but it is important not to gossip about or criticise them because that will not help them, rather you will create more negativity for that person. This is totally against Buddhist compassion.

Buddhist compassion occurs when somebody makes a mistake, you understand that the consequences will be suffering. As a Buddhist and, in particular, as a Mahayana practitioner one cannot bear to see this person creating suffering. Knowing what can happen, you then think 'May I have the opportunity to help this person to stop and apply the right method in a skilful way towards this negative karma or negatives causes'. This helps you develop compassion, and helps this person because you are motivating them to do the right thing. It is a win-win situation. Not to cultivate these aspiring thoughts is a mistake.

While we are listening to the Dharma we are Buddhist, when we meditate

we are Buddhist but when we come to everyday situations, we often are not Buddhist. If we are criticising or gossiping about each other, Buddhism is not even in our mind. The most important time to practise Dharma is when you see someone suffering, or if you see someone creating the causes of suffering. At this time, it is extremely useful to remember the Dharma in general and, in particular, the Mahayana teachings. It can create a space in your mind; it can give you some skills to help all other sentient beings. Training in this way you may eventually have a bodhicitta mind. This is the first cause of cultivating bodhicitta.

Loving Kindness

Second, there is the wish for oneself and others to be happy. In Buddhism, happiness is clear cut. If one asks what happiness is, we will all say different things. Most people say whatever they love brings happiness, but, in the Buddhist sense, real happiness means maintaining your mind in a virtuous state. This brings genuine happiness. Other types of happiness are not great happiness. They do not last long, like a dewdrop on a blade of grass. In the short term whilst you are doing what you like, you may be happy, but it will not last. If you have a virtuous mind, happiness can last for a long time.

Generally speaking, there are three types of happiness:

- happiness for this and future lives (small happiness),
- to remain in this life and in future lives as virtuous (medium happiness),
- through the practice of Dharma to gain self-liberation (this is uncontaminated happiness) to attain Buddhahood (the greatest happiness).

We wish for others to have these three types of happiness. We do not wish for them to have short-term happiness - a big house, a big car or other mundane things because we know that these are guaranteed not to last. We wish for others to have real happiness and we know that this comes from the virtuous quality of the mind, body, and speech. When we see someone, who is unhappy, we should try not to let this affect our heart. 'Oh, I feel so sad because this person is so unhappy'. We have a sincere thought and feeling towards that person, but it is unskillful and of no help. Instead, wish for this

person to be virtuous, for the lack of virtuous qualities causes this person to be unhappy. Wish for this person to accumulate more virtuous qualities that can help to overcome their unhappiness. In these modern times, we have so many opportunities to develop loving-kindness, because looking everywhere, people are so sad and unhappy - from those who are homeless to the most successful. Use them in your practice of loving-kindness.

In this way, keep training in compassion and loving-kindness; this is the direct cause to cultivate bodhicitta. Without these two, even if you wish to be a bodhisattva, it will not happen, it is impossible. The only way to be a bodhisattva, one must have bodhicitta; to have bodhicitta, one must have love and compassion; without love and compassion you will never have a bodhicitta mind.

METHODS FOR INCREASING BODHICITTA

First, as often as possible, be close to the spiritual teacher: to hear about and to value loving-kindness, to hear more of the value of the Dharma, to hear more of the value of compassion, and to hear more of the value of bodhicitta. We must hear these things often. The more we hear, the more we will gradually be inspired. 'I really want to do this, I really want to come to retreat, I really wish to practice and to be inspired.' Then when we finish retreat, it stays for a few days, but a week later it is all gone. Therefore, it is important to have the right environment; this is one method of developing bodhicitta.

Second, to have trusting faith in the Triple Gem will cause the aspiring bodhicitta to grow. If there is no teacher close by, always think about the value of the bodhicitta and how easy it is to lose. In order not to lose it, always remember 'May the Guru and the Triple Gem bless me so that I never lose my bodhicitta but rather increase my bodhicitta.' You need to think that you want this, and think of the Triple Gem as it will help you to constantly develop bodhicitta.

I would like to share Sachen Kunga Nyingpo's story here: At one point, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo was poisoned and forgot all the teachings he had received. He felt very badly that he had lost everything. After this, he

constantly prayed to the Guru from his heart. Due to this, his memory gradually returned, and, in the end, he remembered everything that he had lost. The Guru is not different from Buddha. The Guru is not higher than the Buddha, but from an individual student/practitioner point of view, the Guru is more kind than the Buddha. As defiled beings, we do not have the mind to recognise the Buddha. We can only see the Buddha in human form as our Guru. This Guru introduces us to the Buddha, so you will not find a greater person than your Guru in all your lifetimes. Usually the Guru needs to have a lot of qualifications, but they do not necessarily go out and get many initiations. The Guru is a being living according to what the Tantrayana taught about the qualities of the Guru, that is, someone who holds all three vows - pratimoksha, bodhicitta, and mantrayana vows - in an unbroken continuum. If they have broken their vows, they are not the person to offer the vows to someone else. A Guru who holds all three vows unbroken is extremely hard to find, yet we are so fortunate to have our gurus in the Sakya School as, indeed, every school is fortunate.

In the Sakyapa school, we have His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin and the well trained 42nd Sakya Trizin, His Eminence Luding Khenchen Rinpoche (Senior), His Eminence Luding Khen Rinpoche (Junior) and Her Eminence Sakya Jetsun Chimey Luding Rinpoche. These are the finest gurus and they act like the Buddha. The Guru is a great master, not a teacher such as myself. Think of them as deep in your heart and mind to generate inspiration. Keeping them close in your mind is particularly important. Vajrayana Buddhism states that if you have devotion, then there is no distance involved, the Guru is always with you. If you do not have this devotion, the Guru can be in the same room and there will still be distance. This is not a physical distance; it is an emotionally close distance. This is another method to increase the bodhicitta.

Third, it is good to think of the ten directional buddhas and bodhisattvas in this way – ‘May you bless me to overcome my defiled thoughts and may you bless me to increase my bodhicitta mind’. Destructive activities are anything you do out of anger mind, desire mind or ignorance mind. You need to ask what are the effects of these destructive actions on oneself? We need to

ask ourselves if anything we do out of anger mind, selfish desire mind or ignorance mind is destructive. We will find that anything we do out of these defilement minds is destructive because it only harms us and is never helpful. The anger mind, selfish desire mind and ignorance mind are referred to as the 'three poison minds'. Everything these poison minds touch is poisoned and will bring harm. In this way, we request the buddhas and bodhisattvas in the ten directions 'May you bless me to overcome these three poison minds'. The only thing to stop our progress are the three poison minds. If you can manage to reduce these three poison minds, there is no stopping your progress.

Fourth, it is good to think about how to increase bodhicitta and to know the benefits. Here we are referring to the first two chapters of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, which speaks of the benefits of bodhicitta. If you do not have time, it is not necessary to read the full chapter, you can gain real protection and keep your mind close to the bodhicitta mind if you read one verse and recite it as often as possible and reflect on its meaning.

Shantideva says that when you travel in a danger zone there is no need to escape if you have a powerful bodyguard. You can feel comfortable even in a danger zone. Similarly, traveling through samsara, if you hold this bodhicitta mind, then there is no need to worry. The moment the bodhicitta is not there, your own mind will be the cause of danger. For this reason, we must never distance ourselves from the bodhicitta mind, we should always keep it as close as possible.

Fifth, just as important as having bodhicitta mind is to always reduce the three poison minds. To distance ourselves from the three poison minds, we think of the difficulties of samsara. Samsara is full of suffering. If you think of the three unfortunate realms where there is the suffering of suffering – there is no time to rest. Then think of human beings who are always controlled by the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change and the suffering of conditions. All of this is not just happening to us, it is created by our own poison mind, it is created by our own defiled mind and our own karma. It is important to look at these disadvantages. The more we look at the disadvantages of our samsaric thoughts and actions, the more we can distance ourselves from samsara. When you do this, you are closer to bodhicitta mind,

which, in turn, helps to develop the bodhicitta mind. We must think this through in our meditation and familiarise ourselves with the disadvantages as often as possible. This is an important mind training practice for developing bodhicitta.

One great Tibetan master mentions that if we look at our mind, we will find many mistakes within, such as jealousy, anger, arrogance, and ignorance. It is almost as if our mind is a container for rubbish. But the one good thing about the mind is that when you train the mind, it will improve and become positive. If you train your mind in loving-kindness, then this very being-bin can become a loving-kindness being. It is changeable. It is like a piece of metal which can be made into a beautiful ornament, until eventually if one trains this very samsaric mind, it can become the Buddha's mind. Beside this bodhicitta mind, one will not find Buddhahood.

Sixth, think about all the great qualities of the buddhas and bodhisattvas; think about the Buddha performing miracles. The Buddha can fly or walk through walls. These are miraculous for us because we cannot do them. But the real miracle is in our mind. We see the wall as solid; we think the wall is not broken and no one can pass through the wall with their bodies but our perception is broken because we believe the wall is solid. Once we realise it is emptiness, in that moment solidity does not exist, so the wall cannot stop that person. It is the same wall but when you reach enlightenment and that concept does not exist, the wall will not stop you. The mind is blocking us, not the physical object. This is what is miraculous. When one realises Absolute Truth, nothing can stop you. Only your own mind stops you, not outer things. For this reason, Buddhist practice does not train you for external things such as how to build a temple, Buddhist practice is the training of one's mind to be a Buddha. Mind is everything.

Remembering the qualities of the Buddha inspires us to think 'I have the same mind that can attain these qualities if I train in the right way'. If we do not understand that we have the same mind as the Buddha, then thinking of the qualities of the Buddha will not bring any benefit to oneself. Instead, recognise that our mind can achieve the same as the Buddha did, and that our mind can achieve what a bodhisattva achieves. For this reason, we conclude

that we have the same mind, but it needs to be developed. We should not be lazy. It is important to think about the miracles of the buddhas and the bodhisattvas.

Seventh, we can also increase our Wishing Bodhicitta if we generate joyful enthusiasm for accomplishing the well-being of ourselves and others. Only when we attain Buddhahood can we fulfil our own and others' wishes. This is the greatest result we can achieve, for we are then completely free of all kinds of suffering. We can also fulfil others' wishes, because when we free ourselves, we have the power and skill to bring others to this state. There is nothing else greater that we can achieve than Buddhahood, and we need to remember it is achievable. Contemplating this helps to achieve a bodhicitta mind.

METHOD FOR NOT DEGENERATING BODHICITTA MIND

First, we should not degenerate one's bodhicitta mind through our own anger, jealousy, arrogance, and so forth. We need to prevent these sorts of defilements by applying the antidote of paying sincere respect to the Guru and the Triple Gem, rather than expressing anger towards others or disturbing one's own and others' mind. Jealousy of others' successes can also degenerate our own bodhicitta. The important point is that to overcome these afflictions and replace with the antidote of deeply respecting your own Guru and the Triple Gem.

The second cause of degeneration of the bodhicitta mind is becoming jealous of others success or worldly goods or general prosperity, even being jealous of their Dharma progress. To counter this degeneration, we need to generate thoughts of great joy about their prosperity and be pleased they have attained what we wish for them.

The third cause of degeneration of the bodhicitta mind is having interest only in your own purpose. This can happen when you have no interest in helping other sentient beings; you are interested only in yourself, not others. To counter this degeneration, the antidote is to go out and help others. If we

are not able, we need to always think that whatever we do ‘May it be helpful to other sentient beings’. Keep this wish alive! If you keep this wish alive, there will be a day when it is possible to go out and help others.

We need to cherish others more than we cherish ourselves. Again, this will not progress without training. We can make an effort ‘How can I serve someone?’ If we serve a cup of tea or food to ten people, these ten people will eventually serve us. Working as a team is much easier and faster than just looking out for ourselves. When we practice cherishing others more than ourselves, we will see the benefit. When we cherish ourselves, we need to recognise the disadvantages. If we try to experiment with these ideas, we will find that the Buddha was right to support others. This brings the greatest happiness, whilst cherishing ourselves causes the greatest misery.

Shantideva states that sentient beings experience difficulties due to their self-cherishing minds. All the enlightened beings have tremendous joy which comes from cherishing others.

‘All the joy the world contains has come through wishing happiness for others.

All the misery the world contains has come through wanting pleasure for oneself.

All the great masters have quotations reinforcing this view.

The fourth cause of degeneration of the bodhicitta mind comes from the view that there is no need to do more than meditate. This is not correct. We need to continue training to gain more skill to help all sentient beings. It is not enough to achieve calmness and peace in meditation. It is far better not to be satisfied with what we have attained in meditation. We need to be always thinking – ‘What can I do to help all other sentient beings?’

The fifth cause of degeneration of the bodhicitta mind can occur in those who do not have much knowledge of the qualities of the Buddha and bodhisattvas and who, therefore, have no idea what to look for. It is especially important to read about these qualities or to discuss them with other sangha members. What are the qualities of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas? When we recognise these qualities, we will be motivated to want to know more of these things. We will find that we want to have these qualities. It is so important to explore how you can learn of these unique qualities. These are the methods of not degenerating the Wishing Bodhicitta but increasing it. This completes

the training of the Wishing Bodhicitta.

PRECEPTS IN ENGAGING BODHICITTA

Engaging Bodhicitta involves precepts in not just thinking about or aspiring to develop bodhicitta but actively doing something, putting effort into developing bodhicitta. You are putting some action into it, physically, mentally, and verbally.

There are three precepts to develop Engaging Bodhicitta: briefly, in medium detail, and in elaborate detail.

BRIEF PRECEPTS IN ENGAGING BODHICITTA

The brief way to develop Engaging Bodhicitta is to reduce negative thoughts and to increase virtuousness. You can start to minimise non-virtuous deeds according to your own strength in whatever way possible. It is impossible to immediately give up all ten non-virtuous deeds, but much more possible to minimise them, to train in the virtuous as much as possible, even to carry out one virtuous deed a day. This is good enough in the beginning. Then if you cannot do one virtuous deed a day, to even have the desire to carry out virtuous deeds is good enough in the beginning. Even if the idea arises – ‘I want to do virtuous actions’, this is good enough. Then if you continue with this idea, one day after thinking this for so long, ‘I can actually do it’, and the nature of bodhicitta arises. If you do not train to think in this way, it will not just pop up out of nowhere. First, we must program the mind to think of virtuous actions as often as possible. When this is strong in your mind then automatically the action will come.

Sometimes if we are aware that we have committed non-virtuous deeds, which lead to suffering by their very nature, the result will bring us even more suffering. In this awareness, we can abandon them as best as possible, but if we cannot abandon them, at least there is the idea – ‘I should not do these things, I should discourage others from doing wrong things’. Bring these positive ideas into our mind as often as possible by identifying that these are

wrong actions and will lead to harm for oneself and others. These positive ideas may help us to prevent committing non-virtuous deeds in the future.

Engaging Bodhicitta can occupy twenty-four hours of practice, from the moment you wake up, get on with your everyday life and carry out normal activities, to just before bedtime. It involves not just jumping into bed and going to sleep immediately and mindlessly like an animal but reflecting on what you did since that morning up until the present moment. Not to reflect on every single moment, but briefly on what you did today. If you do good things, it is important to rejoice at the end of the day - 'I am very happy, at least I did some virtuous things, and to say tomorrow I can do a bit more on top of that if possible'. This then encourages and motivates you to go further. If you reflect on your day and find a mistake, you must confess this before you go to bed. Tomorrow you can make a commitment to have more mindfulness, to do a bit less non-virtuous activity. In this way, each day, the non-virtuous actions can be reduced. Anything committed during the daytime, you can purify before going to bed and anything committed wrongly during the night-time can be purified in the morning. This method does not give much room to accumulate non-virtuous deeds. The more we are aware to not commit or give any room for non-virtuous deeds, years will go by and the accumulation of non-virtuous deeds will lessen.

These methods show us different ways to lessen and eliminate non-virtuous deeds, without creating burden to oneself. Think about our non-virtuous actions as garbage, and try to find the best way to dispose of this rubbish. We will not stop producing the garbage even if we manage it well, but we can skilfully recycle it. In the end, as there will not be any damage to the environment from the garbage. It is the same with our non-virtuous deeds. There will not be any burden to oneself from the non-virtuous if we find skilful ways to lessen and eliminate them. We can use this idea of recycling to become better at managing our mental garbage and ultimately, changing our non-virtuous deeds. Mental garbage is a different, but the skill to manage it is the same. To think - 'I use so much energy to engage out there, now I can change the object to turn my focus inwards.' This is the training of the brief aspect of Engaging Bodhicitta, we are not just thinking of it here as in

Wishing Bodhicitta, we are engaging and doing something to establish it.

MEDIUM PRECEPTS IN ENGAGING BODHICITTA

The medium detailed way to train yourself in Engaging Bodhicitta is to avoid the four negative factors and adopt the four positive factors. These are explained in the collection of the Heap of Jewels Sutras.

The four negative factors ('black Dharmas') to avoid are:

- to deceive the teacher and others.
- to cause others to regret deeds that really are not worthy of regret.
- to disparage and criticise others on the path.
- and to not have an altruistic motivation but rather to deceive and pretend towards all others.

The four positive factors ('white Dharmas') to adopt are:

- always being truthful.
- maintaining an altruistic attitude toward all others without deceit or pretence.
- praising all bodhisattvas.
- and encouraging others on the right vehicle to awakening.

ELABORATE PRECEPTS IN ENGAGING BODHICITTA

The great detail of the elaborate precepts in Engaging Bodhicitta has three main parts. The first is the cause of Engaging Bodhicitta to arise, second is the method to increase Engaging Bodhicitta, and third the methods to not degenerate bodhicitta.

i) The first is a description of the cause for the engaging thought of awakening to arise. The cause for the engaging thought of awakening is a strong Wishing Bodhicitta, so this means that we keep developing that by practising the thought of awakening, trying to increase this thought, and

overcoming obstacles to it. Then we need to reflect again and again on the suffering of samsara and faults of nirvana.

ii) The second is to increase the conditions for the engaging thought of awakening. Three times daily and three times at night - once in the morning, once at midday and once in the evening, and then at night just before going to bed, once at midnight and once before you get up in the morning, recollect or call to mind the buddhas of the ten directions, seeking their blessings and also the bodhisattvas together with your teacher and recite the seven branches of worship.

The Seven Limb Prayer

The seven branches of worship also known as the Seven Limb practice involves prostrations (mental, physical and vocal), offerings (mental, physical emotional), confession, rejoicing in your own and others' virtues, requesting all the buddhas and gurus to turn the Wheel of Dharma, asking that all the enlightened beings remain in this world as long as possible, and dedicating everything so that you can attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

Shantideva in "Engaging in Bodhisattva Behaviour" (sPyod-'jug, Skt. Bodhisattvacharya-avatara) translated by Alexander Berzin wrote,

I take safe direction, till my purified state, from the Buddhas, the Dharma, and the Highest Assembly. By the positive force of my giving and so on, may I actualize Buddhahood to help those who wander. May the surface of the land in every direction be pure, without even a pebble, as smooth as the palm of a child's hand, naturally polished, as is a beryl gem. May divine and human objects of offering, actually arrayed and those envisioned as peerless clouds of Samantabhadra offerings, completely fill the sphere of space.

(1) *I prostrate to all you Buddhas who have graced the three times, to the Dharma and to the Highest Assembly, bowing down with bodies as numerous as all the atoms of the world.*

(2) *Just as Manjushri and others have made offerings to you, the Triumphant, so do I, too, make offerings to you, my Thusly Gone Guardians, and to your spiritual offspring.*

(3) *Throughout my beginningless samsaric existence, in this and other lives, I've*

unwittingly committed negative acts, or caused others to commit them, and further, oppressed by the confusion of naivety, I've rejoiced in them – whatever I've done, I see them as mistakes and openly declare them to you, my Guardians, from the depths of my heart.

(4) With pleasure, I rejoice in the ocean of positive force from your having developed Bodhicitta aims to bring every limited being joy and in your deeds that have aided limited beings.

(5) With palms pressed together, I beseech you Buddhas of all directions: please shine Dharma's lamp for limited beings suffering and groping in darkness.

(6) With palms pressed together, I beseech you Triumphant who would pass beyond sorrow: I beg you, remain for countless eons so as not to leave in their blindness these wandering beings.

(7) By whatever positive force I've built up through all of these that I've done like that, may I remove every suffering of all limited beings.

By directing and offering to the Buddha-fields this base, anointed with fragrant waters, strewn with flowers, and decked with Mount Meru, four islands, a sun, and a moon, may all those who wander be led to pure lands.

Om yidam guru ratna mandala-kam nir-yatayami. I send forth this mandala to you precious gurus.

It is good to observe your own state of mind whilst you are thinking about the buddhas and bodhisattvas. You will see that in these moments your mind is so virtuous, so positive, so serene. As soon as you leave these thoughts, you start thinking about my job, my family, my car. This brings so much stress and worry, that nothing will protect you at all. This will help you to see the value of doing this and when you see the value, it will become joyful to think of the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

iii) The third main detailed point to not degenerate bodhicitta is to keep the engaging thought of awakening from declining. We need to prevent the root infractions from arising that are mentioned in the Sky Essence Sutra and in such sutras as the Heap of Jewels Collection. We can generate their opposite. Also, the aspirant needs to train in various methods of purification such as the Hundred Syllable Mantra. The Hundred Syllable Mantra is a powerful purification practice, a supplication to Vajrasattva, to purify obscurations

and any broken samaya vows.

Based on this there is a brief story of a Hindu scholar Dignāga. Dignāga was a great logician living on top of a mountain in a cave, he was composing a small piece of logic text. One day, he felt encouraged and motivated to compose a larger logic text. It came into his mind to announce this and he wrote it on the front of his cave in big letters – ‘I am going to write a great logic text’. He then started to wander around because, in this time, all the monks would come out at lunchtime to beg for their food. He was not near his cave at one time, and someone wiped out his writing. He was not sure why this happened, so he wrote it again outside of his cave. Once again someone wiped out his writing. The third time he wrote a message saying – ‘Anyone who comes here playing a joke on me by wiping out my writing please do not do it anymore. It has an important meaning. If you are not happy with my message and want to debate with me, just wait and I will come’.

At this time, there was one great Hindu scholar who had clairvoyance, and realised that the composing of this text by this great Buddhist master would be very harmful to Hindu views, so he interrupted Dignāga. When Dignāga’s message was left, the Hindu scholar waited for the Buddhist master, and when he returned, they had a debate. One of the main topics was started by the Hindu master that some beings already have omniscient inherent qualities right from the beginning, so through practicing, there is no need to gain new qualities, as in permanent qualities. Of course, this great Buddhist scholar defeated him. According to the convention of the time, the one who was defeated in debate must then follow the other. However, although Dignāga defeated this Hindu scholar, the Hindu scholar would not follow him. He thought if he were to follow Buddhism then Buddhism will be more powerful, so being the top Hindu scholar, he refused to follow the Buddhist scholar. Due to the Hindu scholar’s immense power, he created a huge flame coming out of his mouth, burning the entire forest.

Due to the power of Dignāga’s bodhicitta his body was not burnt, not even his beard or moustache. Dignāga thought if I cannot help one single person then how will I be able to help all sentient beings, and he felt so discouraged he was then going to give up bodhicitta. He simply could not hold onto to it

anymore. When this arose in his mind, he threw a clear bowl that holds paint up into the sky and was determined that when it landed on the ground, he was going to give up this bodhicitta. However, when he threw the bowl into space, it did not return. He waited for some time, feeling doubt in his mind. When he looked up into the sky, there was Manjushri holding the bowl. He spoke to Manjushri 'If you do not give me a blessing, I will give up bodhicitta.' Manjushri responded 'From now on, I am your spiritual guide, so you won't give up the bodhicitta. Compose the mission you set out to do which will be of huge benefit for the Dharma in the future.' Manjushri gave him blessings stating that, from now onwards, I will be your teacher and keep doing what you were doing. His confidence then returned and he kept his bodhicitta.

This story shows that sometimes we will try to develop bodhicitta by helping others, but then there are some people who, no matter how much you try, seem to always be against you, making more trouble. At these times, we get discouraged that we are trying so hard, yet they are not pleased with what we are doing. As a result, we may want to give it up. When this thought comes, it is a good time to think of the Guru, the Triple Gem, or especially Manjushri. This good thought can come to you directly, or in a dream and it can come in your feelings, but this thought will always help you. If you genuinely wish to practice, always think of Guru, Triple Gem or your yidam to protect you.

BODHICITTA SUMMARY

This bodhicitta mind will not develop by itself because it depends on certain causes and conditions. The cause of the bodhicitta mind is great compassion and the cause of the compassion is loving-kindness. If you research loving-kindness, compassion and bodhicitta they are all one mind, but the bodhicitta mind requires more courage than the others because it requires loving all sentient beings. Bodhicitta is a challenging goal and we may think that at this moment we are weak and fragile - just one unkind word will often make us fearful. Even though bodhicitta is the most challenging goal, loving-kindness is a great strength. People often think that loving-kindness is a weakness,

but it is really a sign of strength when you have the courage to be kind to everyone. This is what we call 'the hero' when someone has genuine love for all sentient beings.

How many of the seven billion human beings on this planet truly have this love of all sentient beings? Less than you can see stars in the daytime. But is this love possible? Yes, it is, you can love all sentient beings. I can, and you can do it. It is not something you cannot do. You can become the strongest person within this field of seven billion people just by having loving-kindness for all sentient beings. Then even stronger than that is to promise to protect all beings from suffering, that is the Great Compassion. In this way, loving-kindness becomes stronger when it becomes compassion.

These different stages of loving-kindness and compassion are not separate entities. Loving-kindness and compassion are the same mind. We call them stages – the baby stage, the teenage stage, and the adult stage. They are just names; you are still the same person, but you are growing and developing. In the same way, we attend to different stages of growth, different stages of the mind, different states, but all are the same person, you are simply changing. Then some grow stronger to be kind to others. Then others become stronger to protect others from suffering. This is where compassion gets stronger than loving-kindness.

It is possible to reach Buddhahood with the bodhicitta mind by fostering a loving-kindness and a compassionate mind. In this way, we talk about bodhicitta as the king of the mind, being the secondary mind, not the principal mind. The bodhicitta mind and the principal mind do not dwell separately, yet they are concomitant, which is naturally accompanying or associated together. When the secondary mind has a bodhicitta mind, it is proof of the mind in that state and for this reason, the biggest fruits of the mind are the secondary mind.

If two different people's eye consciousness look at the same object, they will see no differences. They will see the same thing, no difference whatever. But the secondary mind influences us to see that same object differently. The secondary mind says – 'I like it' or 'I do not like it'. So, the secondary mind is kind of tricking our eye consciousness. It judges the object to be good or bad

and from that we say we like it or not. However, if you investigate that feeling towards the object, you can see that all feelings are created by the secondary mind. The secondary mind is the essence, a state of feeling, these feelings are created by the secondary mind.

When practicing Dharma, you must feel it. If you do not feel it in the practice, then practice can become a dry intellectual process. If you practice Dharma as a dry intellectual process only, you may still get arrogant or jealous. You are a good human when you feel for others. For this reason, practice must be into the feeling, to care for others with feeling. This is particularly important. For this reason, loving-kindness talks about feelings, and care for others with our feelings. Loving-kindness talks about compassion, talks about feeling consciousness. Without feeling consciousness, you cannot develop on the path. So, for this reason when you meditate, check 'Am I feeling? Do I feel happiness?' If you feel, then it really makes you want to care for that state and then it makes you feel good. Therefore, you must think about your different kinds of study, meditation, and contemplation practices from that perspective.

It is important to put Dharma into practice. When someone is describing food that is very yummy and delicious, you become aware of that food, and think that you should have it. It sounds delicious, but it is still only someone's description. It does not make you attached because you have only listened to their description. Then, one day, someone cooks it for you or takes you to a restaurant, then you experience it and you know it for yourself. It is so yummy. Once you find that out then you are going to continue to eat it for yourself. So many of us are finding it hard to practice because we do not view it or taste it for ourselves. We only listen, we look at pictures, but we do not taste it. Once you taste the Dharma, you cannot stop. When you feel the Dharma, it is quite different than what you have heard.

LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION

Loving-kindness meditation is to help progress our mind. We must learn about the three different stages of this meditation. First, the meditation on close loved ones, then meditation on difficult ones and then meditation on all sentient beings.

For meditation on close loved ones, we traditionally use the mother for she is the person who gave us our body, loved us and wanted the best for us. When you develop an object of meditation remember the mother's kindness and how to repay the kindness that you have received from her then you will know you are doing loving-kindness meditation.

Loving-kindness meditation is one cause of bodhicitta. It is the cause of bodhicitta, but it needs to be a moist seed. If it is a dry seed, it will not be moist enough to germinate. We need to moisturize this, or it won't germinate. Loving-kindness moisturises the seed.

There are three stages to the loving-kindness meditation

- to visualise your mother in front of you, think how she looks normally.
- remember all the many kindnesses you received from her - we talk mainly about the infinite kindness, giving you all her support.
- remember all the sacrifices she made.

Our mother gave us life in her body. She carries us for nine to ten months from the moment we are conceived in the mother's womb until she gives birth. For all this time, she may feel uncomfortable, but she never complains. Anything which is bad for the baby she will give up for the sake of their safety.

Anything that the doctor says is good for the baby, she will try it. She will give things up not just for one week, one month but for nine months - she gives up her comforts. When you really think about the emotion she invests in us and the time that she invests in us, it is impossible to repay her kindness. Even if you have a wish to repay her, it is never enough. If not for one's mother, you would not be here today, and you would not have a way to meet the Dharma. If you think deeply about being caught up in selfishness, thinking that she didn't keep you well, didn't give you what you wanted, or didn't give you something she didn't have and you think of her negatively, just think of the future that she did give to us. Then after she gives birth, she devotes herself to our care. We have no way to find food, we have no idea how to keep warm or keep cold when it is hot, the mother acts as our servant. We are the king or queen and our mother never minds because she cannot do enough for us. So, while she does these things for us, she only thinks of you and nothing else. Even when she is not with you she thinks of you, she thinks of you for the rest of her life.

It is so hard to concentrate when we do shamata. We do not even last a minute, but our mother thinks of us until she dies. Then vocally she calls us in the sweetest way, with the nicest words. She cares when we are babies being so gentle, so respectful, and always considering what is best for our body. She uses a soft cloth, soft food, the best drink. Just imagine that it is not just for one day but her child is the centre of her life. Think when someone minds your child for you, how grateful you are, you pay for it, but think about how she cares for us always. When you think genuinely about these things, it is impossible to repay her. You cannot find any person to match your mother if you think about it deeply. Just think in this way - who can match her as a good person, how much she has sacrificed in this way. She gives up everything, her needs, even though she is so busy she gives up time to provide for our needs. Think about her as our first teacher in our life. She taught us how to speak, not only just speak but to have good speech with respect, then she taught us how to walk. In this way, she brought us up to be good human beings. If every one of us really thought about the guidance of the mother, we would all be better people. The mother taught us to be a

good person, to be kind to others, she does not teach us to be a bad person, to go and steal things, or to go bash someone up. No one ever says to be bad, she teaches us to be friendly, to be kind to one another, but often we do not listen.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says he has studied most of the BuddhaDharma but the way that he is able to give so much love to people is due to his mother, and in this way he is able to bring this love to other sentient beings. When we think of all these things, we can then develop this kind of love and want to repay this invaluable kindness.

Some of us may have had mothers who did not have much time for us. We know some mothers may have had difficulty with us, but again whether they had time or not, it was their karma. If she did not have time maybe someone did not have time for her. If one's mother has difficulty with you and she harms you Shantideva says the mother herself may be in a very difficult position. If someone can't help her, she can't help others, this being in a difficult position, she is not able to help herself. We have a complete lack of awareness of her and we are upset she is not as nice as other mothers, yet we forget her unfortunate situation. In this way, you will not find any other person in your life as kind as your mother. This person is usually much easier to use as a subject to practice loving-kindness more than anyone else. However, if you are uncomfortable with thinking about your mother in this way, the Dharma is very skilful as it gives everyone equal opportunity to practice loving-kindness. Find someone else to practice this loving-kindness method, pick someone who is important to you and lay the foundation for loving-kindness, this is what is important.

Our mothers really want happiness, but what she does is the cause of her unhappiness. Just think of her past and how many non-virtuous actions she has committed in the past. Whatever non-virtue she committed in the past she cannot share with us, we are unable to take it from her, she must experience this all for herself. No one is so kind, for when we are a child, she brings us up even as she sacrifices for us, even if she goes into debt for us and the karma she must pay back in many lifetimes. There is no reason not to practice loving kindness for her but these things you must feel.

What really helps her is to focus on her need for happiness. We know about normal mundane happiness, as in wishing we could give her a nice house, to wish to give her a brand-new car, but these are mundane forms of happiness. There is no guarantee that they will give her happiness, but what will give her real happiness is to make sure her body, mind and speech become virtuous. If her body, speech, and mind are virtuous she will be comfortable. What causes happiness is this abiding virtuousness in body, speech, and mind, this is what you wish for her. If your mother is still alive, you can always skilfully instruct her into a virtuous life. Once you give her the gift of the Dharma in her life that is truly the only way to repay her kindness, when one does this, she may not benefit in this life, but when she takes future lives, eventually she can attain Buddhahood, this being the best way you can repay her kindness.

Dharma is talking about true wisdom. What truly makes happiness is a virtuous life, renunciation and bodhicitta. The best gift you can give is to encourage her in these things. This is the first practice of loving-kindness meditation. It will eventually cause her to invest in her future happiness even if it takes a long period of time. You are not wasting your time because you are investing energy and adding purpose to her life. You receive more than when you give when you practice loving-kindness. If we look at our mother's loving-kindness and send her love you are receiving more than you are giving to her.

Everything is possible in a close group. Many of us in the beginning are strangers to one another, and never imagined as a child when we are young, that we would meet at some point. Then after months and years we become close, so in this practice of loving-kindness we are training our mind to bring everyone close to each other. Similarly, now if you practice this loving-kindness meditation, it makes others close to you and you know all of them, it is the greatness aspect of the mind, everything is possible, but if you don't make it possible through practice, nothing will happen.

Then we can contemplate difficult people. It is good to read Shantideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* on this topic. We need to realise that the difficult person in a previous life was once your mother, once your father. When this person was a parent, that person gave us just the same as what a mother gives us, but

now due to his or her negative mind perceives us as a difficult person. Due to our own defiled mind, we see them as a difficult person. The difficulties we experience with each other man that we have not finished with each other. The issue is we both have defilements. In this way, this is an opportunity not just to be kind to this enemy, it is an opportunity to detox my difficult anger mind. This is medicine.

We should remember Milarepa's story when he was young, he was hurt so much by his family and became angry, but then he grew in understanding and practice he became well liked and he attained enlightenment. When a person hurts you, you need to think that he is more kind than one's loved ones, because he gives you the chance to practice patience. He gives you the chance to practice, to forgive and to forget.

Shantideva says that we need to appreciate that instead of going somewhere and finding a treasure, sometimes the treasure comes to your doorstep. In this way, everything is an opportunity. When these things come to you, think about them as the opportunity to practice loving kindness, and an opportunity to practice patience.

There is another story about a man, so selfish and attached to his belongings that when someone came begging and asked him for his belongings, he became upset. Then one day an enlightened being approached him to train his mind and he managed to change his mind and give something to the beggar. When asked once more, it gave him tremendous joy that only comes from giving. It made him feel happy. In the beginning, he felt upset when he heard of this begging, but now he is looking forward to hearing about it. The mind is like that. When we are a samsaric person we do not want to hear about a person's difficulties, we don't want to see that person's difficulties, we avoid it, then when one trains the mind, and you are looking for that person - for they give you more than your loved ones. Finally, you can develop compassion towards all, even to strangers.

All the strangers are in the six realms. It is good to think about the purpose and the difficulties of the hell beings, the hungry ghost beings, and animal beings, and to bring this into your meditation. Think about the difficulties of the hell realms and bring this into your meditation, bring their suffering

into your sitting, feel them, feel their suffering; it is not just this poor person, it is not just due to their karma. Think this person is my mother and I can't bear what they are going through, then in that way you sincerely wish them to have a virtuous life, to sincerely wish that they can one day commit to a virtuous life. When you feel these things, when you feel that virtuousness, in that very moment is when you become a Dharma practitioner and have a glimpse, an opportunity to become a serious Dharma practitioner.

Shantideva says that we have the chance to see clarity more in darkness than in other times. Most times our practice is dodgy, but sometimes we have clarity and that is good enough to give one a taste. When you taste the experience of meditation then you always come back to it. When you are not attached, when you do not feel it, it does not become a habit. Once you know the taste of the Dharma no one can stop you. In this way practice loving-kindness. Now just imagine when you are spending that moment in time with loving-kindness for all sentient beings, how beautiful it is. The reason being is that, in that moment, you feel most comfortable and happy in all your body, speech, and mind, one cannot get this feeling from anywhere else, no one can give you this feeling, only you can produce it. This is the best way to cleanse your mind, purify your mind, because it changes your selfish mind, and changes others.

This is the bodhisattva way to purify your mind. If our intention is selfish, that selfish mind is not going to purify. We think we are purifying our mind but we are like kids who think they are cleaning the house; we are making it messier. Similarly, the whole idea is to purify our renunciation and to help change others. Without this, there is nothing to purify. There are many beneficial levels to the practice of loving-kindness from a joyful point of view, purification point of view, in terms of eventually completely exhausting all circumstances on the path to Buddhahood. If you see this value, then you will find it in your heart to develop loving-kindness.

How do we extend loving-kindness in meditation? By this time, you are practicing the complete practice as in the preliminaries, main and conclusion parts. In the preliminaries, it is always good to do Refuge, to supplicate, develop bodhicitta, then gently think of the mother, then to think of the

difficult person, then the stranger - and then in the end all sentient beings. Due to circumstances and conditions some do not find this opportunity to study and practice the Dharma, so it's important to find compassion for them, then to dedicate whatever merit you have accumulated through body, speech, and mind, becoming the cause to dedicate.

If you do not create the cause and condition and expect results, it is not going to happen. If you are not deceiving yourself, you will get the right result. That is the natural law. Dharma practitioners follow nature's law, not laws made by men. As a Dharma practitioner one is aware of how things work, this being the difference between a religious person and a Dharma practitioner. The religious person goes after man-made laws. If you chant in a particular way some religious people may say why are you chanting the wrong way, but that is the man-made law. We follow the profound teachings of the Buddha. Buddha did not think this up as a rule. Buddha did not make this natural law up; he followed the rule of nature. This is Dharma practice. Some crazy yogis follow what they see as a natural rule, not human made rule. False practitioners follow the human rule not nature's rule, this being the difference.

COMPASSION MEDITATION

Briefly, we can develop compassion by focusing on our mother again, then by focusing on others with whom we have difficulties, finally focusing on complete strangers. Here one needs an understanding of how loving-kindness that is in our mind works. This loving-kindness has no sides. It is vast. It is much bigger than the entire planet, for this planet cannot possibly hold all sentient beings, not even part of all sentient beings, yet with loving-kindness there is no limit to hold all mother sentient beings, it is as limitless as space. When we say sentient beings, we are talking about beings who have found a form and beings who have not. The teachings say beings who have not found a form are far greater in number than those who have found a form. Try to imagine how many that is. The greatest number are the hell beings, the second largest number are the hungry ghosts and lastly the largest number are the animal beings. It is impossible to count these mother sentient beings who are non-virtuous. What is most important is to feel loving kindness; this is something only you can do.

Compassion is the root of bodhicitta. All the great masters, bodhisattvas and buddhas have infinite great qualities that are produced by compassion. This is the logic, for if you are truly a compassionate person, you must have beautiful qualities. A person who has no compassion is a dictator. A dictator can be incredibly smart, highly intelligent yet lack compassion. Even those who have compassion can still do no good as well as cause harm. So, in this way, many of us are quite good and intelligent people but without compassion, we can harm others and do not help others. Intelligence can be like a weapon, a knife. If you use it the right way it helps you do what you want, if you use it

the wrong way it can take others' lives, cause great harm, and injure others. Using a knife, we need to handle it the right way, similarly, our intelligent mind must be handled with compassion. If we handle it with compassion it is intelligent, profound, and effective. Compassion is not only a cause to develop bodhicitta, it can also change our personality, as many good things can come of it.

To summarise, the definition of loving-kindness is wishing others happiness and the causes of happiness. When we wish others happiness we don't wish them the mundane experience of happiness. The kind of happiness we are referring to is when one has a virtuous body, virtuous mind, and virtuous speech, with these three types of happiness then one is truly happy. When we combine a virtuous mind, body, and speech, this creates the cause of happiness. This is guaranteed to make one happy, the mundane will not. As with money, we think this is the cause of happiness, but we know differently. The same with possessions, we think this causes happiness, but there is no guarantee - the one guarantee for happiness is virtuous actions, virtuous mind, and virtuous speech.

The definition of compassion is wishing others to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. This does not mean you wish others to be free from poverty because this is not the right compassion, one can give money and those you give to will still suffer. Compassion in this way means to understand the cause of suffering is non-virtuousness. When they are dwelling in a non-virtuous state, they are suffering, so you free them from that state. The cause of suffering is constantly creating non-virtuousness. In the normal sense, we think of suffering and the causes of suffering, but the Dharma sees suffering in a different way. It is a different shape. You need to know it has this different shape. If one is unaware of these differences between suffering and non-suffering, then compassion will not be the right compassion. One needs to know the difference between the causes of suffering and non-suffering and having already understood the suffering of suffering, one can then develop the right compassion.

