

KHENPO NGAWANG DHAMCHOE

The Four Common Foundations



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Preface



The Four Common Foundations 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 Four Common Foundations are the foundations of meditation that help us to turn our minds away from samsara so that we can instead turn towards appreciating and practising the Dharma.

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 Four Common Foundations* was prepared over two years and with many hours of work by both transcribers and editors. *The Four Common Foundations* was transcribed by Danielle Hart and Carole Kayrooz and edited by 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.

THE FOUR COMMON FOUNDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

When students first hear of Buddhism, they are often encouraged to turn their thoughts to the Four Common Foundations. These Four Common Foundations are the foundations of meditation that help us to turn our minds away from samsara so that we can instead turn towards appreciating and practising the Dharma. The Four Common Foundations recognise:

- the difficulty in obtaining a precious human rebirth
- the impermanence of all phenomena
- the infallibility of cause and effect
- the suffering nature of cyclic existence

The Four Common Foundations are the first steps on the long path to enlightenment. These first steps are taken when we recognise that we have a faulty or 'impure' view of reality. Virupa in *The Root Treatise of the Vajra Verses* said that in this impure vision, sentient beings must endure various types of suffering. Suffering occurs within the six realms of worldly existence, from those of the hell realms up to the sufferings of the celestial states. Yet, once we have gained this precious human body and practised the Dharma, we have such a wonderful opportunity to make this life worthwhile. Death comes quickly so we must work diligently to make the most use of this precious life. Sadly, instead of turning towards the Dharma, sentient beings under the

influence of the afflictions of desire, hatred and ignorance act in a way that binds them to this samsaric world.

We explore each Common Foundation in turn, to see the ways in which they bind us to samsara or liberate us to follow the Dharma. We conclude the booklet with a short meditation guide on the Four Common Foundations.

PRECIOUS HUMAN REBIRTH

Our precious human rebirth is the first Common Foundation and recognising its importance helps to cultivate our motivation to study the Dharma. Reflecting on this verse from Shantideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, we will realise the difficulties of regaining human rebirth

*These freedoms and endowments, so extremely difficult to find,
Having obtained human life
With the potential to fulfil all wishes,
If one does not accomplish benefit from this,
Then how could one regain this sublime form next time?*

It is so difficult to be born as a human so that we can be free to practise the Dharma. We just take it for granted that we can freely practise but there are eighteen conditions or prerequisites that have to be satisfied before we can gain a human birth to even hope to practise the Dharma.

These eighteen prerequisites are divided into

- eight states that cause the lack of freedom to practise the Dharma and
- ten causes or endowments to gain a precious human rebirth.

The eight prerequisites are divided into four non-human states and four human states where it is not possible to practise the Dharma. The first four are the non-human lack of freedoms and the second four are the human lack of freedoms or restless states. We need to avoid these eight lack of freedom or restless states. The freedom from these eight restless states comprise the prerequisites necessary for a life in which it is possible to practise the Dharma. The eight states that we must be clear of are

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1. being born in the hell realms whose nature is suffering
2. being reborn as a preta or hungry ghost whose nature is experiencing continual hunger and thirst
3. being reborn as an animal whose nature is ignorance and to be manipulated
4. being reborn in a barbaric land where one cannot receive teaching and negative deeds are considered virtuous
5. to be reborn as a long-lived god whose nature is pride and wrong views
6. being reborn in a land where wrong views are upheld, where they do not believe in the existence of the Buddha and in the existence of cause, condition and result
7. being reborn in an aeon where Buddha and his teachings has not appeared
8. being reborn without all one's faculties functioning normally as they are unable to perceive or comprehend the teachings.

The ten endowments necessary for a human life in which one can practise the Dharma are broken down into two sets of five. The first set of five is acquired by oneself and the second set of five is acquired from others.

The five causes acquired by oneself are

1. being born as a human being where Dharma exists
2. being born where Dharma exists in a land central to the Buddha and the Dharma
3. being born with five sound sense faculties to receive, analyse and meditate on the teachings
4. not having committed any of the heinous crimes (killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an arhat, maliciously causing a Tathagata to bleed and causing dissension in the sangha.
5. with sincere faith in the Buddha's teachings.

The five causes acquired from others are

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1. birth at a time that the Buddha has come into this world
2. that a Buddha has bestowed the teachings
3. that his teachings continue to be upheld as a living tradition
4. that followers of the teachings still remain as examples of how to practise the Dharma correctly
5. that sponsors are generous benefactors who support the Dharma through right livelihood.

In addition to these eighteen prerequisites, there are four conditions that show someone has spiritual propensity to Buddhahood. To have these four conditions within oneself to practise Dharma is very hard to attain. They involve

1. a spontaneously born or naturally arising compassion.
2. having faith in the Three Jewels and a deep interest to hear the Dharma.
3. tolerance in always being patient towards those who do you or others harm.
4. a natural inclination to perform virtuous deeds more than non-virtuous deeds.

These marks of spiritual potential are stated in Maitreya's *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras* or *Mahayana-sutra-alamkara-karika*:

*Before you have set out, to have compassion,
To have appreciation and patience
And to practise virtue – these are specified
As signs of spiritual potential.*

However, there are four impediments to that spiritual potential of your own Buddha nature

1. where your actions are driven by afflictive emotions and therefore you are under the power of those defilements.
2. having bad friends especially wrong teachers who do not encourage you in the Dharma
3. lacking material wealth – you do not have enough to support yourself or your Dharma practice

4. controlled by others, by parents, partners or children so that there is no freedom for the self.

Maitreya in the *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras* states

Habituation to the afflictions, having harmful friends,

Living in poverty, and being dominated by others_

In brief, know the impediments

To the spiritual potential as fourfold.

Reflecting on these eighteen prerequisites to gain a precious human rebirth and the four marks and four impediments to spiritual potential shows how precious and rare a human birth is. It is said to be more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel. As His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin says, using our precious human rebirth, we can reach a higher rebirth; we can reach personal liberation; and we can even reach enlightenment, Buddhahood. Reflecting on our precious human rebirth is much more valuable than doing shamatha to gain a peaceful state of mind. Doing shamatha may gain relaxation but it does not bring about realisation at the depth needed for liberation. When you meditate on each of these eighteen pre-requisites and four marks and impediments to Buddha nature, you will experience realisations. You will realise that your life is extremely precious. Just finding these conditions for a precious life is very precious and purposeful in that you have the possibility to fulfil your own and others' wishes. Finding these conditions for a precious human life is greater than anything you can find in this world. Nothing can substitute for your own realisation of this precious life. It is important to develop the conviction for this precious life. If you do not develop this realisation in this life, you are not likely to have confidence in future lives. This is a wonderful opportunity to develop yourself. You never know when you are going to find this opportunity again. It's not just an intellectual exercise; you really need to feel this as a reality.

To become a better person in this life, to make your life meaningful, you need the Dharma. The Dharma is the only thing that can make your life meaningful and fulfil your wishes. In this way you practise the Dharma, not to please your teacher, not as something to please the Buddha but rather to

transform yourself from an ordinary person to an extraordinary person, from an ignorant person to an enlightened person. When you have the opportunity of a precious life in your hand, it is not sensible to squander it. In this way, the more you think of the difficulties of finding the time and conditions to practise the Dharma, it really makes you recognise the reality of who we are, that we are free of the restless states and we have the conditions to practise the Dharma. Not like a poor person thinking they are rich or an ordinary person thinking they are great but rather as a great person recognising the reality of who they are.

Whether Dharma is easy or difficult depends on the way we think. Shantideva said that Dharma is not manipulative, greedy or dishonest like politics. Why do we think Dharma practice is so hard? When we are in samsara, we think it is easy. Desire, anger, attachment, ignorance are manipulative, political, dishonest, chaotic and messy. Lack of awareness of their true nature creates the difficulties experienced by the defiled mind. Contrast this with the ease of life created by the undefiled mind. In samsara, we often see the difficult challenges as easy, the easy ones we see as difficult. Actions we need to adopt, we abandon, and actions we need to abandon, we adopt. Life becomes chaotic and messy. In essence, we approach life's challenges in the hardest way, making life unnecessarily difficult for ourselves. It's a little like walking on our head rather than on our feet. We need to change the way we think about Dharma so that we can walk on our feet rather than our head.

IMPERMANENCE

The realisation of the impermanence of all life is an important Common Foundation because it cultivates the motivation to study and practise the Dharma. Conventional time exists but it is limited. We do not have a guarantee of extended time in this life. Every moment has the potential to be both an optimistic and pessimistic opportunity. Every moment has the potential to create good or bad so you need to think am I using this moment for a good purpose or a bad purpose or am I wasting the moment

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by doing nothing. If you really contemplate how you are spending each and every moment, it is easy to be depressed. Perhaps ninety per cent of the time we create negative karma. Nine persons out of ten waste their precious opportunity to use the Dharma to create a positive life. You could say that, from the dharmic perspective, we have very bad economic policies. We spend so much on samsaric items that we actually try to bankrupt ourselves.

When you realise how much you are focused on negativity, it is important to remember the Seven Point Mind Training. The Seven Point Mind Training is a mind training practice in Mahayana Buddhism. It is a set of antidotes for undesired mental habits that cause suffering. The main practice is training in bodhicitta or the spontaneous wish to attain enlightenment motivated by great compassion for all sentient beings. The main practice is also the gradual diminishment of the attachment to the illusion of an inherently existing self. Even if you are the most negative person in the world, this is the perfect path for exchanging self with others.

Another main point of Seven Point Mind Training is to transform all bad circumstances into the path to enlightenment. Even if you are at rock bottom and feel you are a hopeless person, realise that there are so many people feeling this way and exchange “May their feelings come to me”. “May they be free from that feeling”. Use your depressed situation as a path to gain bodhicitta. It is not a bad state to be depressed; sometimes it is better than experiencing divine joy because it enables bodhicitta. Dharma is so beautiful; when you have good things happening in your life, you can enjoy them and make them even better. When you experience bad things in your life, there is no need to feel miserable or depressed, you can transform them into a positive experience.

We experience good or bad things in our life but the reality is that these things do not exist as good or bad. It all depends how they are used in your life. This way we need to be aware of the value of each and every moment. Many great Kadampa masters who meditated in a cave had to leave their caves to cook or go to the toilet. Each time they did, they reminded themselves that they might not have the opportunity to go back into the cave. Then when they come back inside the cave they realised there may be no opportunity to go out

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of the cave again. They are always living in the moment, in impermanence. Impermanence was not a construction in their minds; impermanence was the reality of their lives.

Dharma is not something you are creating; Dharma is about living the reality. At the moment, most of us do not go with reality; we create false constructions about reality. These false constructions appear as reality and we deceive ourselves. We deceive ourselves, we deceive each other. This is not Dharma. Dharma does not involve believing in others without investigating for yourself. Dharma understands the true nature of everything and trains our mind to enter that state. If you think falseness is the reality and you do everything in a state of falseness, then it is non-Dharma. It is so important to differentiate between Dharma and non-Dharma.

People can deceive themselves with regard to their Dharma practice. For instance, someone who thinks they have been practising the Dharma for twenty years, yet may not understand the truth, is not a dharmic practitioner. Yet another person who has never heard of the Dharma, who lives honestly and realistically, is more practising the Dharma than the person who is erroneously practising Dharma for decades by deceiving themselves. Dharma is nothing to do with belonging to a Buddhist group. Dharma is your mind seeing the truth and living according to this truth. Value each moment as precious because if you lose that moment you cannot bring it back.

Practising according to the Dharma is to design your life in the best possible way. Aim for a mind free from ignorance, one focused on true liberation. Great practitioners can gain liberation before they die. The intermediate practitioner is looking forward to their next reincarnation at the time of death. The least practitioner has nothing to be regretted and no fear at the time of their death. The sooner you free your mind from ignorance the sooner you will gain liberation. What kind of life you look forward to in the future depends on your present state of mind. If you manage to develop the right mind in this very life, then instead of fearing death, you are looking forward to death. Death is just an event. It should not be the cause of suffering. Death is when your body separates from your mind. There is no independent death that causes suffering or pain.

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Use the opportunity provided by this precious life whilst you have it. We are on a treasure island filled with gold and have the opportunity to collect as much treasure as we can. Then one day you have the opportunity to leave the treasure island, you will not regret anything because you have collected enough treasure. Instead if you haven't collected the treasure, putting it off one day after another, then at the time of having to leave then you panic. Many of us have a habit of delaying the Dharma and pursuing our samsaric defilements but we need to change tactics. We should delay our defilements rather than the Dharma and establish the Dharma as our habit.

Only the Dharma will help you at the time of death. Your family want to take your pain but, at death, they cannot. No matter how much wealth you have, at death it is useless. It's like you are walking in the desert dying of thirst with one kilo of diamond in your hand but the diamond is useless at such a time. At that time, a glass of water is more helpful than one kilo of diamond. In exactly the same way, at the time of death, the most helpful is the Dharma you practise because nothing else will help you. From the perspective of the time before death, at the point of death and afterwards, the Dharma is the true wealth that will always be with you. You will not find anything equal in value as the Dharma.

The more you are aware, the more you will realise the preciousness of the Dharma. Your realisation will not come about because the Buddha said it is precious, or your teacher explains that it is precious or the Dharma text says it is precious. It is not good enough. It is essential that you realise the preciousness of the Dharma. Of course, you can get help with the Dharma texts and Buddha's teachings but it is most important that you realise for yourself the preciousness of the Dharma. When you realise for yourself the preciousness of the Dharma you will never ever give up the Dharma. But if you do not realise for yourself the preciousness of the Dharma, you just believe what the Buddha said, what your teacher says and what the book states. This belief will change. One day you might see your teacher doing the wrong things and you give up the Dharma as a result. It is so important that you realise for yourself the importance of the Dharma.

KARMA

Now we turn to a consideration of karma, the purpose of which is to understand specifically what we should adopt and what we should abandon. Karma is related to samsaric rules; it's a direct relationship with the causes you create and the effects that result. Indirectly, karma explains everything. Everything depends on causes. Without causes, no effects will occur.

Karma is an extremely vast topic. A good place to start is to learn to be measured and wise by analysing all that you think and do. It may be that you think you need more and more to practise the Dharma. But this attitude needs analysis. Some of us think that in order to practise Dharma I need a certain amount of material wealth therefore I need to give a certain amount of time to gaining the finances for Dharma. If you are not careful, you will think I need many things before I practise the Dharma. Your intention may be good but it may not be necessary. Some monasteries want to build majestic temples, golden statues, beautiful bowls, and expensive accommodation but no matter how much they build these things, it can be rare to practise Dharma there. If you become distracted by the material and majestic then the danger is to show off. It is necessary to realise that you may be deceiving ourselves. If really necessary, then do it. It is similar to the prerequisites to practise the Dharma; you do need some security to practise Dharma, some money to feel comfortable and a place to live to feel comfortable. However, it is important to examine what you think you really need to practise the Dharma 'do I really need these things or not?'. Mind can be sneaky trying to justify in the name of Dharma unnecessary conditions for practising the Dharma.

You do not need to be smart for others, you need to be smart for your own mind. At the end of the day, your own mind has the most potential to deceive you, no one else has greater potential to deceive you. Many teachers say that Dharma practitioners cannot lose focus otherwise they will not be Dharma practitioners. The focus should be on examining your mind whether it is telling you the truth. The mind has a long history of telling you lies. In fact, mind has a reputation of lying to us. If you think of someone who lies to you constantly, how much do you trust that person? Why don't we

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have the same attitude to our own mind which tells us lies all the time. This kind of practitioner who watches the mind, analyses and changes the mind is undertaking practice. The sooner you change, the better for you; the sooner you throw out the fire that you hold in your hand, the less you get burned. This is what Buddhists call liberation. Your mind transforms your defiled mind. Your mind is not controlled by your husband, wife, kids, or teacher. Your defilement controls your mind. We need to be free of this defilement and transforming your mind in this way is Dharma practice.

When you make wealth for the sake of the Dharma you need to wisely examine whether this is really required. If you have nothing to eat then it is right to get money to buy food. However, when you focus on making wealth there are many opportunities for negative thoughts, speech and action. It is hard to make wealth out of the virtuous things. Most wealth is made on the basis of non-virtuous things. On the one hand, you are creating this wealth for Dharma and, on the other, you create so much non-virtuous karma. Monasteries and nunneries need donations but if too much then the institutions become rich. If addicted to donations you can become almost like a professional beggar. You have the appearance of Dharma but it becomes a profession in which to make money.

At the end of the day, it is only you who will experience the result of created karma. For example, when you eat poison food you must experience the consequences. No one else can experience that poison except yourself. The same thing applies for your karma. If you do the wrong thing you cannot share the consequences with others. When you collect donations, you need to think do I really need this? Can I use it purposefully for the benefit of others? If monasteries and nunneries utilise the money for the benefit of others, it is good for them to receive the donation. If you use for the wrong purpose then it is harmful and causes samsaric defilements. We need to take responsibility for all our actions.

By contrast, some say that when we practise Dharma, we don't need money that much. We can give up everything. This is also not a practical position. When you give up everything without realising the Dharma then one day you will struggle. Once you begin to struggle, you become angry and ask yourself

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- why did I give up everything? Now I am poor and can't do anything. Then lots of negativity comes from that. When you give wealth or give to others in any way make sure it is for a good purpose. It is really important to have right management. The best management is to have wisdom. If we have good management we should not suffer physically, mentally or emotionally. We do not need to determine whether we have good management; it is there in the quality of our lives. If you have comfort, joy, happiness then these prove your life is under good management.

In order to turn your mind to the Dharma, we need to understand this cause and effect. All joy exists because of specific reasons. It is created by a virtuous life. Contrary to popular opinion in the west, discomfort arises not due to bad luck but a non-virtuous life. Sooner or later we will die. This is the reality. When death comes, whatever you have put effort into – material, wealth, friends -nothing will go with you. Even your most cherished body will not go with you. We wish we can leave all the bad karma behind and take all our material wealth with us. The opposite happens. We take all our bad karma with us and have to leave behind our material wealth.

From the *Rajahvavadaka Sutra*, one contemplates cause and effect.

At the end of the day, even the Emperor has to depart.

All his belongings, friends and relatives do not follow him.

*This person, wherever he might go,
his karma will follow him like a shadow.*

When the time comes, no matter how much wealth you may have or subjects and followers that you have, no matter how many relatives or family you have, none of them are going to follow you into death. You will need to die by yourself. This is the reality. Wherever you go, karma will follow you like a shadow. Just like the shadow that always follows your physical body in strong light. If you are really smart, you will look after your life by taking care of your mind. If you take care of your mind then you take care of everything. If you don't take care of your mind, no matter how hard you work in all other areas, you will end up doing nothing for yourself.

All sentient beings in all their individual variety and in all the six realms they occupy, all have different experiences. Who created them? Different

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religions provide different answers. Some religions say they are created by god, some say created by elements. The Buddha said all causes and conditions come together and the result ripens in dependent origination. It is your mind and karma that creates all these different individuals and their experiences. Karma creates all these different sentient beings and all the unique aspects of their different personalities. Everything we experience is based on whatever karma we have created. We have good karma and, therefore, a good life or we have bad karma and, therefore, a miserable life. Besides karma there is no joyful life or miserable life.

Karma is like our money that we amass and use in our life. You own your karma from previous lives and it will come to fruition in the future. We humans have this desire to be smart. In order to be smart, we take advantage of others, we hide our mistakes. While we do this, we are creating more karma. You can't hide from the karma. It belongs to you and is your identity. This very identity that you have created will be experienced in the future. If you really acknowledge karma, you have no need to discipline yourself. You will be honest with yourself. You won't use karma as intellectual property where you do not understand how it works. Karma is used as the instructions for your life. What kind of life you will have is not up to how much money you have, where you live, what kind of job you have, or what kind of family you have. Of course, these things will make a tiny difference in your life but the prime contributor to your identity is your own karma. Karma is the creator of your own unique identity. We are not dependent on others for this, only on ourselves.

It is important to develop that sense of the value of karma and, for this, we need to examine the karma that the Buddha described for its accuracy and credibility. Karma may not come to fruition immediately but it will come. We have an expectation that if we don't get what we want immediately then we have wasted our time. We want to see the result right now. When we don't see the result straight away, we are unsure whether we are doing the right thing. We lose confidence and feel less motivated as a result. But we need to know that, with karma, nothing we do is going to be wasted. Sooner or later when the condition comes, our karma will ripen, if not now, then

later. If we don't create bad things, we won't need to be concerned that bad things will happen. We will only experience what we ourselves have created.

The law of karma says that everything we create will come to fruition. Higher realms experience their karma just as lower realms experience their karma. A person in the west has so many years of their life in good conditions but they are not happier than a poor person in India who lives a shorter life in poor circumstances but who is so happy. The mind, karma and impure perception make all the difference to our experience. One person sees everything as positive enough to make him or her happy. The other person sees everything as negative to make him or her miserable. Perceptions are created by defilements and karma. Besides karma, there are no created perceptions.

Samsaric goals do not bring happiness. The world tells us you will be happy if you are successful, if you have a good job, lots of money, and a beautiful house but how many miserable people are there with all these things. Worldly success does not work. The Buddha said that if your mind is happy, even if you have nothing, you will still be a happy person. This approach works. We need to recognise the differences in these approaches. If we keep trying to make an approach work that ultimately cannot work for us, then we are ignorant. Karma is the most valuable wealth that has the potential to make a joyful life. The most miserable experience is also created by karma. Karma is the only thing that makes a difference to your life. For this reason, we need to be really truthful with our actions- mentally, physically and emotionally.

The *Rajahvavadaka Sutra* states that the karma of all beings will never be wasted even in a hundred aeons. When all the causes and conditions meet together, this will bring their own result. When the condition comes, the karma will ripen again. When you research the origins of a bush, seeds can sprout from last season or from a hundred years back. When the right condition comes, whether the seed is old or new, it germinates. Karma is similar. Some karma is new or recently acquired and some comes from thousands of years ago but both ripen according to the conditions. This does not mean that karma is unfixed or unchangeable. Karma is purifiable and changeable but if you do not purify or change it, it will not change by itself. It

will stay there forever. We cannot escape from karma if you do not purify it. We have a saying that time is the great healer but here time is not an antidote to purify the karma. Nagarjuna said it is not worth making bad karma with your teacher, family, your parents, your children. In the end, you alone will suffer as you cannot share the bad karma. "I made all this karma for you, now I'm suffering, you need to share some of the bad karma." No one can share your karma. In this way, you need to be fully in charge of your karma, taking full responsibility.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF KARMA

The basic level of understanding about karma is what karma will make you happy and what karma will make you suffer so that you know what actions to adopt and what to abandon. The second and deeper level of understanding of karma is that, even though you adopt good karma, you may not find that is good enough because although you are creating virtue and therefore a higher rebirth, without renunciation and bodhicitta mind, you will still cause yourself to be reborn in samsara.

At the basic level, it is better to sort out what is helpful and what is harmful. In that way, you end up with helpful karma but at the deeper level, it is better to have karma that helps you to be liberated. For this, we need to understand the different types of suffering – the suffering of change, the suffering of suffering and pervasive suffering:

- The suffering of change means that, due to the impermanence of all things, no matter what we have and where we find ourselves, our situation is bound to change. When it does change, it will become a source of suffering.
- The suffering of suffering refers to all the miseries of the lower realms as well as our suffering of birth, death, old age and sickness. We will eventually have to be separated from all those we hold dear and encounter what is unpleasant and not achieve what we want.
- Pervasive suffering means the suffering arising from the conditional

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nature of all phenomena. All our present experiences are in some way the cause of suffering for us later. It may not be apparent to us now but every aspect of our existence brings with it the potential for future suffering. The entirety of samsara is nothing but suffering.

While the god and demigod realms do not experience the suffering of suffering that is in the lower realms, they do experience the suffering of change and pervasive suffering. In the absence of renunciation and bodhicitta, the karma you create is the cause of the suffering of change, the suffering of suffering and pervasive suffering. Renunciation mind is needed to alleviate the karma that feeds these three sufferings. Whenever you act, it needs to be with a renunciation mind. 'I'm not doing this virtuous action for a higher rebirth, I'm doing this karma to gain liberation, to attain Buddhahood'. From the perspective of the effort required, whether you are acting for your own samsaric purpose or for liberation, for Buddhahood, it may take exactly the same effort but the intention makes for a vast difference.

For this reason, it is important to be intelligent in the way that you expend karma. One Indian king had three sons. He was not sure which son should be his successor. He needed a smart son. The king asked one of the astrologers to help him choose one of his sons to be his successor. The astrologer advised the king to test his sons' intelligence. The astrologer said to give the sons one hundred rupees each and buy something to fill their own room. The first son went out and thought one hundred rupees won't allow me to buy anything to fill my room. He thought he should gamble to make money so that he can buy something substantial to fill his room. So he gambled and lost money. The second son thought one hundred rupees was not enough to buy anything. 'The only thing I can buy is garbage'. So he spent money on garbage and filled his room. The third son wondered how to fill his room with one hundred rupees. He went out and bought one stick of incense which was less than one rupee. He burnt this and the smoke and smell from the incense went everywhere in the room. If you are smart, just one rupee is enough to fill your room.

One single virtue is enough seed to plant and gain Buddhahood if you have

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a smart mind. If you haven't got a smart mind, from beginningless time to now, you might work so hard for your own purpose but still create misery. In this sense, we are gambling but we lose all the time. It is not about hard work, it is actually about smartness. This kind of smartness does not deceive anyone else. One cause, one seed is enough to change your own life; it is enough, too, to change many others' lives. Think of one great person and the power they have to change many others lives. Whenever you practise Dharma make sure your actions are to gain one's own liberation or to attain Buddhahood. It's important to design your actions this way, otherwise change will not happen. This is the Dharma.

First, we listen to the Dharma then we contemplate, then we try to put it into action. Every one of us has Buddha nature. We all have the seed but we don't know how to germinate that seed. Wisdom germinates the seed and takes you to that liberation state. Great masters all give you heart advice. They say that karma makes you who you are, creating your identity. Besides karma, there is nothing else. Your parents don't make your identity. Your job doesn't make your identity. Your wealth does not make your identity. If they were your identity then if you lost them you would lose your identity. What happens is you don't lose your identity, you are still there. One thing that never takes away your identity is karma. If you want a beautiful identity and to be a beautiful person then you must respect, create and develop good karma. Only this karma can promote and upgrade you. Nothing else can promote you or upgrade you. It's totally up to you and not someone else.

In our culture, we often think someone else is going to make me great. We look for that person. When we come from this kind of culture then in the Dharma we look for the famous teacher who can make me a great student. The teacher will come with the right conditions but no one has the power to make you great apart from yourself.

The impure vision of the world is created by our own defilements and karma. If you look at it from the dualistic point of view then all sentient beings, from hell beings up to before you enter the first spiritual Path of Accumulation, are the same but what makes the difference is karma. The six realms of existence- the gods, demigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts

and hells- are the same but if each sentient being in these realms looks at the same object, they will see that object in different ways. It is good to listen to the word of the Dharma but we need to go beyond this to use our mind to contemplate the concepts. It gives us a much deeper awareness of reality.

Shantideva on the Perfection of Wisdom in the *Bodhicaryavatara* says that it's important to realise the illusion and therefore not be attached to it yet why does the magician still get attached when performing magic. The magician knows it is illusion but still he gets attached. Likewise, many of us when dreaming know this is an illusion but we still get attached. None of us think the dream is real. We think it is real while we are dreaming but, in the morning, everyone knows this is illusion. We get attached because our concept of illusion is very big but not enough to stop us from being attached. The great magician has the power to stop the illusion because he or she trains in that way. Realising illusion itself does not have the power to stop the attachment. You need much more to habitualise that experience.

First you need to be aware that objects do not exist although we think that they do exist. Most fail to realise they are mentally created rather than externally existent. In the *Prajnaparamita*, it is stated that

Phenomena are like magical illusions.

They are not born;

they do not cease.

They do not come;

they do not go.

The point is not to think that Buddhists say this object is created by the mind. Simply believing that the object does not exist because you have read it or your teacher has told you, does not mean that you own it for yourself. If you do not investigate the belief for yourself, it is someone else's property. If you believe for yourself, it becomes your own property. To make it your own property, you need to use a method to analyse it for yourself. When you analyse, you will find it is true for yourself. "I used to think all objects were existent but now I realise it is an illusion which is created by my mind". Only at that time does this awareness belong to you. You own it. Your ownership of the path will give you liberation. No one else's liberation can give you

liberation. That realisation is the cause. The teacher is the condition. When that realisation and the teacher come together then you develop this wisdom. Because we have this habit of thinking all objects are real, you need to make the habit of seeing it this way weak and maintain this habit of the mind realising it is illusion. This is the role of meditation which realises illusion, maintains it, grows it then eventually changes your old habits. The moment your old habits are gone, there is nothing there. That moment you are liberated. Liberation is nothing other than growing this habit of recognising illusion. If you look at it from this point of view, you really can see the possibility to gain liberation.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

If we really see the Dharma as precious and want to practise it, the best way to start is to think of the suffering of all realms. This is so important because it is the reason why we practise the Dharma. It is more important than visualising the deities. When you really think about the suffering of samsara, this is what informs the Four Noble Truths. When we reflect on ourselves we all know we have some degree of suffering. Then you listen to the suffering of hell beings and hungry ghosts, there is infinite suffering. If you are an intelligent and sensitive person, you are really going to wonder where this suffering is coming from. How did it originate? No one can answer you accurately besides the Lord Buddha.

The Lord Buddha said all suffering comes from causes and conditions. If suffering did not manifest from causes and conditions then there would be nothing you could do to alleviate, prevent or eradicate suffering. If suffering did not manifest from causes and conditions, then no one could attain Buddhahood. It must be possible. This suffering is created by causes and conditions. Some think if you don't serve the temple of the church, Buddha will punish you. It is almost like they think Buddha created suffering but this is a mistake. He is not the creator or cause of suffering. We need to understand what causes suffering then we will have an idea what to plant. If you do not know, you may think you are planting an apple but, in the end, you will get a strawberry. Each fruit has its own unique seed. Similarly, every

single suffering must have its own cause.

Buddha is the only person who can really explain accurately the cause. He explained that the root cause of suffering is the grasping of self. From that arises defilement and this creates karma. These three are the origin of the suffering, nothing else. Without knowing that there is suffering and the origin of suffering, then there is no reason to practise Dharma. Ultimate peace and happiness is the mere absence of suffering and the origin of suffering. This is the truth of cessation. We often say that at the end of the tunnel we see the light. It is the same with the end of suffering and the origin of suffering, at the end of this you see peace. Just seeing peace is not good enough. Now we need to see the path to get there. Without the path to see peace, we will not get there.

Whether you are a Theravadan practitioner, Mahayana practitioner or Vajrayana practitioner, you need to recognise the true path. Only that path can end the origin of suffering. For this reason, we need to study authentic teachings by the Lord Buddha and the recognised authentic Indian and Tibetan pandits, who are yogis blessed by the dakinis. These pandits are qualified to create the shastras or commentaries on the Buddha's sutras. Whatever you realise from those teachings, you transform your inner state of defilements and self-grasping to an undefiled or non-defiled state of mind. That very mind is the path. The path does not exist without your mind. There's no need to examine 'Am I on the right path?' by reciting the mantra or sitting on the cushion. Rather you need to check the state of your mind for defilements and self-grasping.

The path is common sense. It is represented in the Eight Noble Paths. The Eight Noble Paths are the means to attain liberation by ending suffering. They comprise eight practices: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Meditation. All human behaviour can be placed into one of the eight paths. They are not simple but profound yet our mind is very mundane and only understands a very superficial level of these Eight Noble Paths. But when you investigate the Eight Noble Paths, it is so deep, it is bottomless.

EIGHT NOBLE PATHS

RIGHT VIEW

The Right View can be considered from the conventional aspect and from the absolute aspect. First, we must understand the conventional aspect of the Right View. This is the law of karma or causality. Whatever I am experiencing in my life is not due to chance. It does not simply happen by itself. It's created by its own unique cause, whether good or bad. We have the opportunity to end the suffering when we end the cause of suffering. We have the opportunity to create happiness when we create the cause of happiness. Knowing this gives you lots of hope, inspiration and a clear direction. We don't need to doubt or hesitate or guess what might help.

The absolute Right View is based on self and phenomena. In the absolute View, we are not negating the existence of a self and different phenomena. Everything exists but it does not exist as we think it does. It exists in the perception of the mind. The reality is that you cannot objectively find self and phenomena. There is nothing to grasp. Once you truly realise this, it will not be a matter of forcing yourself not to grasp at self or phenomena. It is simply that the moment you are aware of the selflessness of persons and phenomena, the grasping self is not there. If you realise there is nothing to hold onto, then you will not hold onto that object. It is hard work if we try to force ourselves not to grasp. In fact, it's unachievable. When we realise it at the deepest level, you will not need to force yourself at all. We call it the Right View because that realisation cannot be defeated. No logic, reason or intelligence can break that View. If the view is defeatable, it's not the Right View.

This Right View is the path that includes the result or Lam Dre. The realisation of the path and then the resultant realisation is liberation. You realise that you are free from self and other phenomena. They are not separate; the result is your mind and the path is your mind. If you study all these concepts in the View, it is so profound and vast. There seems not enough knowledge and time to discuss them fully. Every day if you can hold the

View and do according to the View, you will not make any mistake. You will always be safe. If we look into our life and actions now, we are completely outside of this View. The more you do, the more it becomes habit. The more habitualised you become, the harder it is to break the habit.

The only method to dismantle this habit is meditation. Once you are aware of the View, then you try to bring that as often as possible into your mind. As long as you are holding that View in your mind, then you are meditating, whether you are walking, eating or talking to someone. There is no need to sit on the cushion, particularly if your mind is somewhere else and you are simply not meditating. You may think you are meditating because you are sitting on the cushion but you are not meditating because your mind is everywhere else.

Study is not just for learning different ideas, or methods or concepts. Study means trying to search for what is accurate. It's not that what I say is accurate. I am doing my best to present what is accurate and hopefully it will help you to choose a tool to discover what is the Right View. Before we meditate or practise we should try to find out the correct View. This is searching for the Truth, for reality.

RIGHT INTENTION

At the lowest level, Right Intention is the intention and resolve to give up the causes of suffering, to give up ill will and to adopt harmlessness. At the highest level, Right Intention is to live according to, and dwell in the state of, the Right View. If you really check your intention, it can be dodgy! You need to keep asking yourself and checking "Am I speaking and doing according to what I realise?"

RIGHT SPEECH

From a karmic point of view, Right Speech involves telling the truth, pleasant speech, meaningful talk, and helping to resolve differences for others. Even more profound than that, is speaking about the value of loving kindness,

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the value of compassion and emptiness, because the more you talk on this the more it imprints wisdom in your mind. Right speech changes the habitualised mind and changes your personality from a samsaric personality to an enlightened personality, from a selfish personality to one focused on others, and from an unkind personality to a kind personality. Speech is powerful to change yourself and others. As you have heard many times from other teachers, Buddha has performed infinite kindness to all sentient beings - mentally, physically and emotionally. Speech or vocal activity was the most powerful of all Buddha's activities. Without his turning the wheel of Dharma, none of us know the right method. It would be impossible to attain the state of liberation. Speech is a most powerful thing from both the positive point of view and the negative point of view. If I say something negative, it has the power to change someone's mind or make them hesitate the whole day. This way we have to recognise the power of speech and try to be mindful.

RIGHT ACTIONS

Karmically how you act will determine whatever result comes to you. If you act negatively, do not expect something good to come out of it. If you act positively, there is no need to be concerned that something bad will come out of it. Good actions bring good results and bad actions bring bad results. It is up to me what I will experience, not someone else. If you take charge of your own actions, you perform the Right Actions – protecting others' lives, practising generosity, truthfulness, speech that brings people together, kind words, meaningful talk, non-attachment and being grateful for what one has, loving kindness and goodwill towards others, and the right understanding of phenomena.

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

Buddha never said you could not be rich or famous or powerful. We have a right to be rich, famous and powerful but we need to gain these ethically. Ethically you can be rich. In this way, you live ethically then whatever brings

you wealth does not make you feel bad. There is a right way to make wealth and use fame and power. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has power but his power is kindness and compassion. He does not show dictatorial behaviour. Whatever the Dalai Lama says is believed. His power comes from ethical behaviour, not dictatorship. People often think if I am a follower of the Dharma, I need to be poor, less famous. If you practise Dharma in the right way you can still be rich, famous and powerful. This we call the Right Livelihood. In Vajrayana, a Buddha has three kayas or bodies, one of which is the samboghakaya or enjoyment body. The samboghakaya of the Buddha is a very joyful body! We can enjoy all the expensive things that are worn if all these good things are earned ethically.

RIGHT EFFORT

We are such hard workers, particularly in the developed world, but when we look back in the evening to the morning, your body feels so dead tired. If you examine whether your effort is directed to a good cause or a bad cause, mostly we can see our effort is directed towards harmful ends. This is wrong effort. We need Right Effort which means that every action is beneficial for tomorrow or the life after this. This action really changes others' lives. You can do tremendous things in this very short time. You can do so much. You need to be aware of all the opportunities to do good things and cultivate that in everyday life. This we call the Right Effort that brings Right Action, Right Speech, and Right Livelihood. This makes you a perfect person. A person does not exist besides the mind, body and speech. Changing these three – mind, body and speech – makes for a good person.

RIGHT MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness means remembering (Tibetan *trinpa*). It can be right or wrong mindfulness. Often when we look into the mind we only remember bad things. Hardly we remember the good things. We are often miserable thinking of bad things but negative thinking can destroy you. The best medicine is not

a tablet you can get from the chemist. It is not an herb you can get from the bush. No one can give you magic medicine to defeat this mind but we need to change this mind ourselves by remembering positive things.

Nagarjuna stated in a 'Letter to a Friend' that there were six reminders for the positive- remember the Buddha, remember the Dharma, remember the sangha, remember generosity, ethics and the enlightenment mind...

Bring to mind the six recollections taught by the Conqueror

The triple gem- the Buddha, his teachings, and community

Generosity, ethics and the enlightenment mind

Contemplate the qualities of the six for inspiration on the path.

Remember all these good things everyday as much as you can. It really cleans your mind, and, by itself, will fix your mind. Remember the good things- they are not expensive, in fact, they cost nothing.

RIGHT MEDITATION

Meditation can be right or wrong. If you meditate in the wrong way, it can destroy your view and it is very hard to deconstruct your mind so that it pursues the right path and becomes a healthy mind. Wrong meditation is where one meditates on ignorance. The consequence is that we stay in samsara longer where there is more chance to be reborn in the lower realms. It is so important to study and contemplate, then you will know what you need to meditate on. This becomes Right Meditation.

Vasubandhu said in the *Abidharmakosha* that to enter the path, first you must dwell in an ethical life. Then you listen to the authentic Dharma taught by the Buddha which is commented on by the great pandits then taught by a qualified teacher to explain the authentic Dharma. Then you need to analyse and not take the Buddha's words for truth but examine yourself. When you find this truth accurate for yourself, then you take it for yourself. Give power to yourself to make the decision about what you believe rather than someone making decisions for you.

If you are lucky enough to find the Perfect Teacher then every decision they make will be great for you but if you found the wrong teacher then

every decision they make will take advantage of you. It's so important to have a mind that knows what is right, then you make a decision to do the meditation. If you do the Right Meditation, it will detoxify your mind. The more you meditate, the more it detoxes. The toxic aspect of the mind is not the permanent nature of the mind. It is a temporary obscuration of the mind. The purpose of meditation is to detoxify the obscuration of the mind.

These Eight Noble Paths free us from self-grasping and defilement. With the absence of self-grasping and defilement mind, karma does not exist. With the absence of karma, the suffering of change, the suffering of suffering and pervasive suffering do not exist. The absence of these three sufferings is peace, nirvana. Reflection of the suffering of all sentient beings is at the root of suffering. Awareness of the intensity of suffering is a true blessing. You will not want to have a self-grasping and defiled mind when you realise this suffering. This is a benefit of reflecting on the difficulties of samsara.

SUFFERING: THE NATURE OF SAMBARA

The Four Common Foundations expose samsara as an impure vision. We are unable to see reality as it is because we are under the influence of the addictions of desire, hatred and ignorance. Under these addictions, we continue to be bound to this world of existence. From the *Rajahvavadaka Sutra* one contemplates the faults of samsara

*By the force of ignorance,
clinging to this samsara,
humans, devas and the three lower realms,
lacking discernment,
these five are trapped in samsara,
Like a potter spinning his wheel.*

If we recognise the illusory nature of the impure vision, we come to see how samsara has fooled us. A sense of sadness ensues, and eventually we develop a giving up or letting go of the world that, in Buddhism, is called renunciation. These difficulties of samsara in our everyday life become clearer to see, but the antidote to the difficulties is hard to act upon.

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It is unpleasant to reflect on the difficulties of samsara. Consider the suffering of each of the realms of sentient beings: such as the extreme experience of hot and cold for the hell beings; the hunger and thirst of the hungry ghosts; the anxiety of the animal world where killing is constant; the pervasive dissatisfaction of human beings; the fact that the demi gods are always jealous of the gods; and the god beings are completely distracted exhausting their karma.

Human beings' goodness and demigods' goodness is almost like a gold-plated garbage can. It looks so beautiful on the outside but when you open it, there is rubbish inside. On the outside, we so easily deceive ourselves and others but when you look inside it is unattractive. When we consume too much, there is a cause for making too much rubbish. Similarly, when we create karma through our defilements, we make so much suffering. Why are we so addicted to creating our karma and to this defilement mind? Why are we not learning to let it go? You need to have a scientific mind to systematically examine your desire mind so that you can understand the reasons for the addiction and the blockages to learning. This defilement mind gives me a purpose, satisfaction and a job, but where is it going to take me at the end of the day? What will be the result at the end of the tunnel, of your life? The result is likely to be one that you do not want.

Acting upon the difficulties of samsara requires careful and systematic self-examination. First, we need to realise the difficulties of samsara and then put that realisation into practice. Putting into practice does not mean you should not have desire. It means that you need to examine for yourself the nature of your desire. Many think I should not be angry as the Dharma says it is bad. The real meaning of 'putting the realisation into practice' is to listen to your own mind. When you listen to your own mind, you realise that samsara is not the way to make you happy. When people say this is the way to be happy, unfortunately you immaturely go with them. Then you study the Dharma and become more mature. You realise that you need to be more self-guided and wise in the right direction. With this point of view, you remind yourself that whenever desire arises, I am giving poison to myself. This poison gives you only short-term pleasure but, in the long term, it gives

you pain. Putting the realisation of the difficulties of samsara into practice means that the moment desire arises, you need to recognise it and change it. This is the practice. The same way you practise with desire, you can practise with anger. The moment anger arises, you need to recognise it and change it, for example, if someone is manipulating you, you may feel angry. This person makes you upset but once you realise that this anger is not giving you protection, it is not beneficial, you will begin to change it. You know that, ultimately, you will actually get more disadvantage from the anger.

Changing long standing habits will require persistent effort on your part. In western culture, there is an unhealthy fear of failure but Buddhism says it does not matter if you fail. Indeed, before you succeed, you need to fail many times. If you have a fear of failure, you give up on trying and this is disadvantageous. We need to be aware that we are dealing with long established habits of our lives that have been there since beginningless time. Changing long standing habits is like trying to melt the ice in Antarctica. If you go to Antarctica the snow is very hard to melt because it has turned to ice over a long time. Compare this to the snow in the snowy mountains in more temperate zones. Why is one not easy to melt but the other is? The snow and ice in Antarctica have been there for centuries. Very tough ice is very hard to melt but the snow that has fallen in the recent winter in snowy mountains doesn't take that long to melt down. We are not trying to melt the soft snow in our mind from the snowy mountains; we are trying to melt the hard compacted ice from Antarctica. It's not an easy job but, there is hope. No matter how old it is, it still can be melted.

Shantideva in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* said that your enemy is your greatest treasure.

*Like a treasure found at home,
Enriching me without fatigue,
Enemies are helpers in the bodhisattva life,
I should take delight in them.*

The Dharma says that the person who causes you to have a desire mind is so valuable because they can help you to overcome that desire mind. The person who causes you to have an angry mind is valuable to help you overcome

that anger mind. The person who causes you to have a negative thought, who causes you trouble, is actually your best friend who can help you to transform that negative mind. Dharma practice is not like hard work that you do as in some religious practices where one tries a new way and often fails. Dharma practice is a series of realisations that come naturally in their own time without effort because of causes and conditions. All negative states of mind and all others who may try to harm you can be transformed into the means to help you progress along the path. Dharma practice is thinking this person is helping me to correct my desire mind. I know the danger of the desire mind, so I can recognise it, catch it and change it.

When you know the true cause of suffering, then you naturally develop a sense of sorrow and a desire for renunciation. Stinginess mind is the cause of the suffering of the hungry ghosts. Anger is the cause of the suffering of the hell beings. The six defilements of stinginess, anger, ignorance, desire, jealousy and arrogance will not help you at all; they hurt and destroy you. When you really see how they cause suffering, you naturally want to avoid them. You naturally want to go on a mental diet. You naturally want to give up killing. Renunciation is like a mental diet. It is not just because you are Buddhist that you should restrict your diet to vegetarianism or veganism. It is for the sake of protecting yourself. In this way, the Buddha talked about the difficulties of samsara so that we could develop this renunciation mind.

Renunciation is easier if you see the results of unhealthy habits on your mind, body and speech. In a health campaign, advertising shows the results of poor health practices, for example, you see diseased tongues, as a result of the damage caused by smoking. When you see these images, it is easier to renounce the toxins that you are addicted to in your precious body. This motivates you so that eventually you can overcome your smoking. It is the same thing when we talk about the suffering of the six realms of existence – the god realm, the demi god realm, the human and animal realms and the hungry ghost and hell realms. Each realm is created by one of six negative emotions – pride, jealousy, desire, ignorance, greed and anger. When you honestly and genuinely try to free yourself of these six emotions, then you have renunciation mind. It is very important to reflect and act upon this

foundation of awareness of samsara as suffering.

SUMMARY

To practise Dharma, you need a right condition of the mind, which is to be free from all obstacles. That kind of mind can only exist when one has a precious human rebirth. To have a precious human rebirth, the mind must be free from the restless states and have the ten endowments. Having eighteen prerequisites means that you can practise the Dharma. That is miraculous within itself. The benefit or purpose of the precious human rebirth means that it will fulfil everything you want for this life. If you use this life in the right way, it will give you what you want in the next life. If it leads you to self-liberation and Buddhahood, it is such a meaningful life. This meaningful life is not easy to get. We need to cherish it very much. It teaches you to recognise that you have so fortunate a life. If you look at all other non-human beings, they are handicapped. They experience difficulty but there is nothing they can do about it. They want to be happy but it is very limited. You need to think again and again how fortunate you are to have this opportunity of a precious human life. Then you won't waste your life and your time. It will make your life more purposeful and meaningful.

To know what to adopt and what to abandon, we need to understand karma. When you practise Dharma, you need to have finance, a comfortable place to stay, nothing to concern you. It is easy to practise Dharma under these conditions. Even if you don't have the facility to practise Dharma still sometimes you can do so. Even when you have nothing and are in a miserable state, you can use the Seven Point Mind Training to transform that miserable state as the path. Then you can practise. You can feel what it is like in that state, to know that others are also in that state and to feel compassion towards them. Practically you are miserable, but it gives you the opportunity to develop compassion towards others. Do not be fixated that you need to have comfortable circumstances in this precious life. It is good to have the good circumstances but, even if you do not have it, you can practise the Dharma.

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As human beings, a very important concern is for the security of our life. If your life is not secure then it is very hard to practise Dharma. If you think you need certain security to practise the Dharma then you will work very hard to secure our lives. Whilst saying this, it is important to remember to be balanced. We should not be too materialistic. Even though you have enough to secure your life, your mind might still think it is not enough. If you think you need more then you become distracted. This kind of mind is never going to be satisfied. Desire mind is like salty water, the more you drink the more you get thirsty. Instead of being held captive by your desire mind, ask yourself do you really have enough or not. If you genuinely don't have enough, then of course you need to work hard. If you have enough, your desire mind is tricking you and the important point is not to believe it.

We have such a negative mind - vocally we are coveting, telling lies, and physically we are stealing. Pursuing the non-virtuous is not the cause of happiness but rather the cause of unhappiness. When you create this negative karma, even if you follow the Dharma, you won't even have the chance to be reborn in a higher rebirth. The desire mind is the creator of the lower realms- hungry ghosts, hell realms, and animal realms. Once we are in the lower realms, our path to liberation sinks to the bottom.

Some might react by saying Dharma is so precious, I'm going to be very poor, not look after myself. This is also not the right method. When you are so poor and in difficulty, you don't have much energy – emotionally or mentally. You may be reborn in higher rebirth but you miss the ultimate aspiration. Khechen Appey Rinpoche said, Dharma practitioners should be very comfortable. You are then not falling into the extremes of having everything which is a 'greedy mind' or having nothing which is a 'poverty mind'. With both extremes, the danger is that you waste this opportunity provided by this precious human rebirth.

To turn everything into the Dharma, and before you attempt any high practice, you must develop the belief for yourself of cause and effect. You need to respect the law of karma. If the law of karma is not respected, all other practices are meaningless, pointless, useless. Make sure you do everything according to the right cause and effect. If you don't understand

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cause and effect, we cannot achieve great things. We often think of karma as an independent process that makes decisions to cause unhappiness. Karma is the creator of the state of the mind. It's none other than mind. However you have designed your mind, according to this you will experience life. You alone have the power to design it and influence it. At the end of the day, your mind is your karma. Your mind is both the protection of the karma and creator of the karma. The present mind protects my previous karma. The present in my mind is the creator of my future karma. Besides this present mind there is no past result, there is no future creator. Present mind is both father and child.

If karma is the design of the mind, then you have understood. If you think karma is independent from the mind then you have not understood. It's like some other main religion where there is a single creator for everyone—there is nothing else but your mind. Karma is your mind. Be honest to your mind, then you will have the quality and the condition to aim for big things. Without having this cause and effect, you need faith in the law of karma.

One day we need to depart. We are travellers and will need to depart (Tibetan drolwas) from this life but there is a lack of deep awareness of this on the part of most. Still we hang on. You can make wealth, power and fame ethically and then one day you die. You will lose the substance of these things but the essence of ethics will go with you. You will lose nothing. If you live unethically on the other hand, because unethically you value this material wealth more, your mind then is less valuable. When you depart, you cannot take your valuables with you. But those things you don't want – your negative karma – have to go with you like a shadow. There is no choice.

From the *Lalitavistara Sutra*, one contemplates the shortcomings of impermanence.

*The three realms are as impermanent as autumn clouds,
Beings' birth and death is like watching a drama,
beings' life spans are like a flash of lightning,
As fast as a waterfall down a steep cliff.*

In the sutra, a king was told that when death comes, none of his subjects, army, or wealth will follow him. Wherever he went, the karma he created

would go with him. The karma he created to make this power, weapons, wealth may all be negative karma and would go with him. Like the king, mentally you may have harmful thoughts, you covet, vocally you tell lies, gossip, harsh words, idle talk. Physically you steal, kill or sexually misbehave. All this will be taken with you. The most fearful time of the death such as Yama or the hell guards are manifestations of one's own non-virtuous mind.

Shantideva said very clearly in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* that hell does not exist, no hell guards exist, no weapons exist that cut pieces of your body. All these are creations of your own non-virtuous mind. We are so scared of the hell realms and the suffering of death but we are not scared of the creator of these. If we are scared of these hell realms then we must be scared of the creator of these. The more you are aware of the non-virtuous mind as the creator of the hell realms, the more you feel encouraged not to commit non-virtues. The more you are aware of the seriousness of the non-virtues the less you want to do these non-virtuous acts. We panic when we see death but we do not panic when we do non-virtuous actions. We need to be careful and mindful while we are alive, of the way we think, speak or act.

Another sutra says that whatever life style you have according to your education, wealth, family life and upbringing, the real cause of your lifestyle is karma. Our ordinary mind cannot recognise this. We see only superficially into the causes. If someone has a beautiful house or good job, we see it as a good lifestyle. The real creator though is your karma. The manufacturer of everything we experience is mind so we need to be very mindful of the karma we create.

The only person who will experience your karma is you. If karma was physical, you could ask someone to help you but because it is a mental phenomenon we are the owner of the karma and need to take full responsibility. Whilst you care for others, someone else's negative karma is not going to bring you suffering. If someone else's negative karma brings you suffering then there is not much point for you to try to create good karma. Others' negative karma is not going to make you suffer. When someone is dishonest or manipulates you, you may think this person is making me unhappy. From the karmic point of view if you do not have the negative

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action, nothing will affect you. The condition is there but the cause is not there so no harm will come to you. Others' negative karma is not the cause of your suffering. The cause of your suffering is your own negative karma. Others positive karma is not the cause of your happiness. Your parents, partner or children may do good things for you but that does not necessarily make you happy if you have not got the cause to be happy yourself.

It is so easy to be deceived by our ignorance mind to think that someone else will make me happy, someone else will make me suffer, but the truth is that they are only the condition. The cause is your own mind. The moment your mind is positive, it makes you happy. The moment your mind is negative. It makes you suffer. The root cause of your happiness or suffering is your own mind. Whatever karma you create, your bad karma is worse than a bad partner. It never leaves you alone. They are always checking on you. With a normal partner, you can run away, and not give your address or phone number. They don't know where you are. But the negative karma partner is very smart. They know exactly where you are, and can find you. You can cheat your partner but you cannot cheat your karma. Your negative karma will catch you no matter where you are.

You need to be really mindful of what you do. It's not a good idea to do good things simply because you are Buddhist. It's best to do good things because you don't want to suffer; you want to be happy. In the sutras, it says that whatever karma we commit, even if it be aeons ago, it will ripen. Whatever karma we commit, it's not going to ripen on the soil or rock, it's only going to ripen on the person who created it. This is the reason we need to be very mindful.

Similarly, Nagarjuna also stated in A Letter to a Friend that it is not worth creating negative karma for the sake of your teacher, your friend, your family because negative karma is not helpful to you or your loved ones. On the surface, it may look helpful such as lying or stealing for the sake of your loved ones. You may think you are doing something good for them. But the reality is that it does not do any good for your loved ones or you. We are not doing logical things when we do these things. It is not worth it to do wrong things for the sake of others.

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Eventually you will understand the value of the karma that makes you happy or that gives you suffering. Then you decide to adopt virtuous karma and abandon the non-virtuous karma but, even if you do this, there is more that needs to be done. There are two types of karma- one karma that takes you to higher rebirth and the other that takes you to liberation. First, it's important to create the karma to have a higher rebirth which will give you a platform to take a breath to gain some relief. Then you need to do the more important project. Aryadeva stated in the Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way 'before you attempt to do any self-liberation or bodhisattva state or Buddha state, you must commit virtues to try to be born in the human realms. Without that opportunity, to be born in the human realms there is no opportunity to gain self-liberation or bodhisattva state. Aryadeva advises to commit virtues to escape from the lower realms. So once we are in the higher realm as a human, we are in a position to construct the higher path to gain liberation. It's important not to be complacent and think now I'm adopting virtues and abandoning non-virtue, you will need to do greater than this.

Now you need to seek the path to liberation. To liberate, we need to distinguish between the act and the intention. Take three persons all telling the truth. It may look like there is no difference between them- but their intention makes their actions vastly different. Telling the truth for one may signify they don't want to be disturbed, they want peace. Telling the truth will help me to a higher rebirth in a future life. This is a samsaric motivation. The second person realises lying is the cause of suffering so I need to renounce this to gain my own liberation. This truth has the power to be gain liberation, much better than being reborn in samsara. The third person sees telling lies as hurting all beings. It is against compassion and is the obstacle to gaining Buddhahood. Therefore, I must stop lying, and tell the truth to benefit all sentient beings. The motivation then for telling the truth becomes for the sake of all sentient beings. The merit arising from this for the third person is infinite. No one can measure this because sentient beings are limitless.

Your intention, if you are smart, can make such a huge difference. If you aren't smart about it, then you may do a lot but have little return. For example, one person wants to make lots of money for the temple. He or she offers

it for her own good health and happiness, a limited goal. Another person offers one candle to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Not much effort but from the perspective of merit, this one candle is much more powerful than a wealthy offering. If you are in the right state of mind, then great wealth is offered and the result will be greater. We must commit virtues based on renunciation mind or bodhicitta mind. This kind of mind will take you beyond samsara. Absence of these two - renunciation mind or bodhicitta mind- even if you commit virtues, will still cause samsara. It may free you from the suffering of suffering but it doesn't free you from the suffering of change or from the suffering of pervasive. The only thing that truly frees you from samsara is renunciation mind and the bodhicitta mind.

MEDITATION ON THE FOUR COMMON FOUNDATIONS

The four common foundations are - recognising the difficulty in obtaining human rebirth; the impermanence of all phenomena; the infallibility of cause and effect; and the suffering nature of cyclic existence. These are the foundations of meditation that help us to turn our minds towards practising the Dharma.

First, it is especially important to sit in the right meditation posture, in a comfortable position. Try to relax your mind and free your mind from all daily activities. This is now the time to relax and focus on the practice of the precious Dharma.

Once the mind is relaxed, it is important to look into oneself to see if all the difficulties, whatever we face in this life, are caused by external phenomena or internal states of mind. Whenever we feel our difficulties are caused by external phenomena, this is just mistaken. The true cause of one's difficulty is not coming from external things. The true or real cause of suffering is coming from one's own state of mind.

In the relative, the mind is the creator, creating all our experience of happiness and suffering. Other than in the mind, feelings of good, bad or positive and negative experiences do not exist. When we don't realise

everything is created by the mind, we are always looking outwards to try to fix our problems. No matter how much time and energy we spend, there is nothing to fix, there is no end to our problems. If we try to fix one problem, another arises. For this reason, it is very important, if we really want to be free from suffering or difficulties, to free our own delusion mind.

Like the great master Shantideva mentioned in Bodhicaryāvatāra, just imagine this world is full of thorns and that to walk on it causes our feet much pain and discomfort. To protect our feet, we need to cover the whole world with leather, but we cannot find a piece of leather big enough to cover the whole planet. If, however, we wear leather shoes, this will be enough to cover to walk the whole planet with our protected feet. In the same way, if we protect our own mind we protect everything. If we don't know how to protect our mind, we are not safe, we are very insecure. That is the nature of samsara.

All our fears, insecurities, hopes - they are caused by the delusion mind. So, the reason we practise the Dharma is to free this delusion mind, that's the most important thing. In order to free this illusion or delusion mind, it is very important to find the true teaching of the Buddha. Like Buddha, many other enlightened ones followed this path and obtained lasting peace and happiness. Some of us, too, want to follow in his steps.

Just to be born as a sentient being is not good enough to practise this precious Dharma. We need special qualities, the qualities that allow us to understand the meaning of the Dharma. All sentient beings don't have this kind of opportunity to meet the Dharma and understand the Dharma. In this way, it is very important to realise that we are very, very fortunate to have obtained this precious human life.

In this life, we have so much power and opportunity to liberate ourselves. If we use this opportunity in the right way, as human beings we have the potential to achieve the highest result in this existent world. Other than Dharma practice, no matter what worldly things we do, nothing ends. Just like a wave - if we sit in front of the ocean looking at a wave, we may ask when it is going to end. But there is no end - one wave comes after another, and so on. Our mundane activities are like a wave. With this realisation, it is very

important that whenever we have the opportunity to focus on the Dharma we must never delay. Sometimes we say, “I will do my practice after I have finished my work.” When our mind thinks, “I am going to do my practice when I have finished my work, or sport or whatever”, this is creating a big delusion, deceiving oneself.

Again, practice does not mean just sitting down reciting. Practice means always creating a kind heart, being honest to oneself and others. Try to bring your mind into peace rather than let it be dominated by greed and other defilements. The only way we can liberate ourselves from this samsara is to have the right practice of loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta. These are the true causes to attain the state of liberation.

Even when we achieve this precious human life, it isn't going to last forever. We all know that life is impermanent. We even know from our own experience that we are not born at the age we are now, we were born as a baby. Reflect on how much we have changed, mentally, physically, since that time. Just imagine how much we could have achieved by now if we had started this practice at a young age. Even starting at a later age, there is no need to worry, as we are still very fortunate.

We have so much time to practise the Dharma. Dharma is not just worshipping the Buddha. Dharma is the true medicine to overcome one's samsaric sickness. Whether we want to practise Dharma or not, we are always trying so many different things to overcome our suffering, pain or difficulties. But if we don't have the right wisdom, we may continually be doing the wrong things. This can lead us to experience more suffering and difficulty than happiness and peace. For this reason, it is important to have the right wisdom to know what to adopt and what to abandon.

True happiness comes from within one's mind, not from outside. Sometimes when we are not happy, we may go shopping or to a nice restaurant or we may go to see a movie. These are only short-term solutions - they are not going to bring lasting peace and happiness. Instead of spending all this energy on this short-term happiness, we could spend time for the longer term benefit for ourselves and others by gaining the right wisdom. This is very wise. It is very important to have confidence and belief in the teachings of the

Dharma. Dharma has the qualities of peace and positivity. If our mind is full of positive, virtuous merit, then even if we try to find suffering or difficulty, we cannot. With a positive mind, nothing exists that will be the cause of suffering.

If we are always doing negative deeds mentally, physically and vocally, then no matter how hard we try, we cannot find any peace or happiness. This is because the causes and conditions of peace and happiness do not exist. So, practising the Dharma spontaneously achieves the result. We don't have to wait for a long time to gain the result of happiness. While we practise the Dharma, our mind is totally engaged in positive deeds. These positive deeds abandon all the causes and results of suffering. For this reason, many people, both during or after meditation, find so much peace because the mind is engaged in a positive direction.

Again, it is very important to remind oneself, not just once or twice but many times, that this sickness or samsaric suffering is not just a short-term problem. It is a very serious sickness, as we have had this pain and suffering for many lifetimes. So, we need to take regular medicine to fix this ongoing suffering. For this reason, it is very important, on a daily basis, to discipline ourselves and take on the responsibility of treating our sickness.

The suffering or happiness, whatever we are experiencing, is not up to somebody else like Buddha or other spiritual beings. It is entirely up to us. If we really want to be happy, it is our responsibility to accumulate the cause of happiness. If we wish to avoid all the suffering, it is our responsibility to avoid all the causes and conditions of suffering. Without our own practice, there is no one who can give us lasting peace and happiness.

Even though we realise this, we might think, "I can't do that by myself". This is why it is very important to have a teacher. A teacher is like Buddha, protecting us. It is important also to have a path, the Dharma, and a community for support, the sangha. If we have these three most precious objects, we will never feel lonely. We will always have support, nourishing our mind, to be able to develop a more positive mind. In this way, we will find more peace in our mind and peace surrounding wherever we live.

Most human beings have the power to change the environment. If one

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person has a negative mind, this can totally pollute that environment and create great difficulties. If someone has a very positive mind, this can also greatly contribute to changing the environment to the positive. Like when the sun rises, light issues from it and illuminates all the darkness. So, too, a kind heart is like the sun, illuminating all the ignorance and bringing all the peace and happiness.

This is why it is very important to reflect on the Dharma on a daily basis. The reason we are doing this is for peace and happiness. There is nothing more important than practising the Dharma. No matter what important project we take on, the reason we are taking it on is that we think it is going to benefit ourselves and others, but there is no guarantee that mundane activities are going to bring peace. More than likely, they are going to bring more suffering, more worry, more stress.

I am not saying that we should totally renounce all mundane activities because we do live in the ordinary world. We need a job, we need these activities. What I am saying is don't rely on them for the ultimate cause of happiness. These mundane activities are only for a temporary benefit, to help us to live day to day. They are not going to bring final, lasting peace and happiness. Only the Dharma can be guaranteed to bring lasting peace and happiness.