



Ancient Wisdom for Our Modern Age



Lama Phurbu Tashi Rinpoche

Ancient Wisdom for our Modern Society

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CENTER

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One

Addicted to Distraction

There's a huge difference between ancient human society and our current modern world. In the old days people had fewer mental afflictions than we do now. There were fewer causes and conditions of mental afflictions in ancient times. Now our society is filled with so much information, competition, fear, obsession, prejudice and so on. These are the causes and conditions of mental afflictions.

It's said that people in the old days were smarter and greater than us. They could achieve great spiritual accomplishment; one person could write hundreds of famous books. While true I can't even imagine how that could be done. Many early scholars as individuals did all sorts of things professionally. They were artists, musicians, poets, translators, physicians, philosophers and highly accomplished yogis and meditators. Good examples are Nagajuna in India, Lodo Thaye in Tibet, and Leonardo da Vinci of Italy.

I don't think these scholars had more ability or were brighter than people now days. The reason for their accomplishments was fewer chaotic preoccupations and mental afflictions. Even these ancient scholars, strongly recommended that people keep away from chaos and distractions to find peace and sanity. This is also important in modern times. The point is to give some time to ourselves. Give ourselves time to be with a sense of wakefulness, mindfulness and awareness of the present moment. We need this time because our heart, brain, and habits are disrupted by tremendous negative emotions, misinformation and harmful addictions. We need time away from distractions.

Distraction is very tricky and controls us so many different ways. Distraction can cause us to be unable to move forward when we have important tasks to accomplish. Let's say for example that as a student we can't focus on our studies. We don't feel joy in our studies. We don't feel studying is important. Things we memorize aren't recalled later. All this

happens because we are not in the present or we are not really alive most of the time.

Distraction has an incredibly powerful control on our mind. The amount of distraction allowed to enter the mind weakens and obstructs that same mind by an equal amount.

When the mind lacks awareness of itself and it becomes fully dependent on objects, this is what we call distraction. But in meditation, distraction is something more or deeper than this. In any situation when our mind lacks self-awareness, it is distracted. In this case, the mind is not only depending on the object but also depending on mental projections such as our thoughts and fantasies. It is said that “non-distraction is the body of meditation.” We train our mind to not be dependent on distractions and being self-aware is itself the meditation. When our mind is free from distractions and aware of itself, this is called the present moment of freedom or being fully alive. At that time whatever things we see, hear, smell, taste,

feel and think are realistic and natural. As long as our minds are not distracted, we become free of dissatisfaction and negative emotions.

We are very rarely aware of ourselves and rarely in the present. Our mind is so easily distracted and gets addicted to distraction. Deep in our heart we know this distractedness is not really the right thing to do, but we repeatedly do it. Finally all this causes fear, anxiety, and destructive emotions, causing the things we want to achieve to remain as dreams. To have a peaceful, happy and successful life depends on us and we should not be controlled by distraction and destructive addictions. This obviously anyone can understand. It's needless to talk at length about what we should not do.

Two

The Magic Word

So, now let's talk about what we should do to get rid of these problems. There is an essential point to change our whole situation in a better way. It is an uncomplicated thing and can be expressed in one or two words. But first thing we should know one thing. The Buddha started all his teachings with this sentence. "Listen well and carefully, hold them in your mind, and I will teach you." There are three verbs "listen well, carefully, and hold." It sounds like repeating the same things over again. But it is not repeating the same thing three times. Each of these three words carries separate profound teachings. Think of the analogy of a teapot. The pot cannot have any defects in order to do its job well. The pot must be right side up for the tea to enter. It must be clean so the tea doesn't become poison. It must have no holes in its body to hold the tea properly. Here is how the Buddha's words correspond to this example. The verb "'listen well'" indicates the mind must have an opening for the dharma to enter. The verb "careful" indicates the mind must be careful to understand well. If we understand the wrong way the teachings

become poisonous. To "hold well" indicates the mind must remember the teachings.

It is same thing with this magic word. Listen well and comprehend it clearly and practice it in your daily life. It will change your whole situation in a better way. It will remove your stress, anxiety, fear, dissatisfaction and give you tremendous strength, exhilaration and inspiration. It will bring you peace sanity and smartness. The magic word is "be present" or "be alive." Try your best to bring yourself into the present; be aware of yourself. Being in very moment now rather than being in the stories of the past or fantasies of the future. Living in future and past is the main source of our emotional, psychological or mental problems.

When you are depressed, unhappy, and discouraged to move forward, most of the time you don't even ask, "Why am I miserable?" You continue forward in your misery and you think you know the reason. For example you may give your personal explanation, "I've failed" or "I am a loser". This is not the main reason. The reason you are not happy is because you are living in

the past. Past is past it never comes back and there's nothing you can do to change it. But it certainly causes you tremendous problems and misery in your mind. Maybe that is the reason you failed or you are a loser!

This misery means you have not been aware of the present. Past thoughts are so distracting that they caused this present misery. Instead of thinking about the past, be present with a sense of awareness of this very moment. Here in this very moment you will find inner peace and encouragement to step forward with a clear view.

Another distraction from the present that causes stress, worry and fear is living in the future. I'm sure you have plenty of reasons to think about the future but none of them are real. They are just your fantasies. Your future fully depends on your present moment. Especially in this case it's so important to focus on the present. You may have wonderful fantasies; "I am going to be a superman", "I will be famous, rich!" and so on. This is also not real and not good. You fool yourself. So many people are having this kind of fantasy and not paying attention to the present moment. In the end people

end up with nothing. It's like smoking marijuana and never getting anything accomplished. To be a great person requires the coming together of causes and conditions. The actions required for this coalescence are up to you and your present moment. You take the continuation of the present moment into the next moment and the next and so on. Not only thoughts and fantasies but any other distractions are also not good.

Not living in the future doesn't mean we can't make any plans. To have a plan for the future is always a good thing and the plan itself doesn't cause a problem. We have to realize that distractions and preoccupations prevent our inner peace and strength. So the point is to familiarize ourselves completely with our own awareness.

When I was young I had a big problem speaking in front of crowds. It made me nervous and shy. Because of my nervousness my heart beat fast and my voice got shaky. This led to embarrassment and then I could not remember what I was going to say correctly. I tried several ways to get rid myself of this problem. I tried to think that everything is emptiness. "All

these people don't truly exist. So why am I afraid of them?" This method didn't work. One day a teacher suggested imagining the audience as donkeys! Donkeys know nothing. This helped a little bit, but did not solve my problem. I was still nervous with public speaking. I continued to try other methods for relief; nothing totally solved my problem. I started to think why are these methods not working? I discovered it was because I was not being present. I was not being aware of the reality of the moment. The fear and worry caused my nervousness. The fear and worry came from living in the future and distractions about what might happen in the future. My thoughts were on how people might laugh at me and how stupid I might sound. That's what made me depressed and discouraged. That's what caused the fear and worry. Now instead of thinking what other people think or what is going to happen I just keep myself in the present. My mind is in a natural way and focused on what I am doing now.

Once in Singapore I was asked to help a woman. She was expecting to receive some helpful advice from me. So she came to see me with her 12 year

old son. She introduced her son and briefly told me about herself. I thought, “She must be happy with her life. She has a nice son, a good job, and looks very healthy.” Then with a long breath she changed the subject of conversation. She said, “Several times I’ve thought about killing myself, but not anymore. I realized that to commit suicide would be a stupid thing. Now I want to drink his blood.” With this she burst into tears. I noticed from her expression that she was holding an extremely strong hatred. There was depression and anger inside of her at the same time. “I just want to drink his blood,” she said again. I asked, “Who is he and why are you so angry with him?” “He’s my ex-boyfriend and for him I left my husband.” She then went on about the multitude of problems in her life.

Now I had to take a long breath as well. I told her, “His Holiness the Dalai Lama said, ‘Pleasure and pain in a general sense do not arise only from external factors but from internal factors as well. In the absence of the internal response no amount of external stimulation can affect pleasure or pain.’ I think it would be helpful if you bring back your mind to yourself and

focus on the present moment. Be alive in the present with a sense of awareness and reality. Focus on what exists in your life: your son, a good job, good health, fantastic weather, and this wonderful day. This is your reality. The past, future and other distractions are merely a creation of your mind to destroy your happy present moment and your life. Today is your life. Today is the whole existence. And this day is the most important. Every one of us has different todays. Your today is totally different than mine. We see differently, we smell differently, we feel differently, we taste differently and we experience differently. That means you live in your world and I live in my world. You don't know my world and I do not know your world. Even when we look at same object at the same time, one of us may see it as attractive and the other may not."

"We make judgments of others all the time. The reality of these judgements is made from our own assumptions and assumptions mostly take us to negative places. My point is that the idea you want to drink your ex-boyfriend's blood is not correct. First he loves you; then he hates you because

he wanted to do this and that and so on. These are your assumptions. His world and your world are totally different. Holding the idea (of drinking his blood) inside of you is punishing yourself. The anger is extremely painful and a disruptive emotion. You carry this anger around with you but the other person may not even know you are angry! On the other hand, with this anger you are supporting your enemy. Your enemy wants you to suffer and you are doing it. No matter how much we think or talk about the past it is only a waste of time. Thinking about the past creates more confusion. Living in the past or future and not being aware of the present moment is like being blind with both eyes working perfectly. You asked me my advice and I'm going to give you my advice briefly."

"Here's that advice. 'Come back to your present. Come back to your existence. Come back to your real life. Maintain the awareness of the present moment. And deal with the reality in front of you.'" When I finished speaking she was weeping with relief. She had an expression of tremendous joy on her face.

Her reply to my advice was, ""Thank you, I had many questions but no more. This answers all my questions, thank you."

Three

What Makes Me Happy

Until our minds are well trained, it is very important to physically keep away from chaotic situations, and mentally keep away from distractions. Well trained individuals can be mindful and take the challenges of distraction. When our minds are well trained they can stay easily in the present moment, and nothing can destroy our inner peace and present moment of freedom. Even when we are facing the worst kind of chaos, we will still have a wonderful inner peace. We realize this inner peace is actually a part of ourselves.

When we are aware of this very moment, we can experience happiness and peace. We can also provide others with happiness and peace. This is because we are closer to our self-nature or true nature, in other words, we are freer of our mental projections. The closer we come to seeing our true nature, the freer we become of mental afflictions. When the mental afflictions are absent, in our mind we will naturally have loving kindness and

compassion. We will care about ourselves and others as well. This sense of caring for ourselves is not the selfish egoistic thing we normally call care of self. This sense of loving oneself and others does not arise from negative emotions. When our mind is occupied by mental afflictions, we become selfish and egoistic; but careless of ourselves and others. For example, when we are angry, we just follow whatever our negative emotions tell us to do. We become careless of ourselves and others. We might just end up wanting to kill both ourselves and others. On the other hand, when we become free of mental afflictions we become more caring of both ourselves and others. We can see how H.H. The Dalai Lama is willing to provide peace and happiness to himself and everybody else; regardless of who loves him or hates him.

Being free of mental affliction is real happiness. Even being away from the source of mental afflictions makes us happy. Sources like unjust laws and traditions or people full of pride, jealousy and anger. These sources can cause mental afflictions and prevent our peace and happiness.

In Indonesia group of Dharma practitioners asked me to lead a five day retreat. The schedule during the retreat was a combination of meditation and chanting mantras. At the end of each day we had a question and answer period. The practitioners would ask questions about different traditions of Buddha Dharma; how to be happier, how to provide long term happiness, and how to obtain unconditional happiness. I answered them according to the sutras and what the previous masters said about this.

On the last day of the retreat we did our final question and answer period. Most people had some questions and I answered.

A girl named Julia raised her hand and said, "I have only one question. I want to know what makes Rinpoche happy."

I said, "Ok, now we will take a break and I will answer your question after the break!"

During the break I thought deeply to see what makes me happy. I observed for a while what makes me happy and realized nothing makes me happier than being independent and having freedom. We got back together

in the temple after the break. Everyone anticipated my answer with excitement.

I said, "My answer to Julia's question is freedom. When I am independent or have my freedom I am happiest."

Julia has a free spirited manner and her reply to my answer reflected this. "I liked so much Rinpoche's answer. I also experience the same thing. When I have more freedom, I become happier."

From the sounds of the crowd it seemed everyone else also liked the answer. But nobody asked me what I meant by freedom. We didn't discuss it any further. I think everybody might understand the significance of freedom in different ways, according to their different inclinations and conditions. What I meant by freedom was a freedom from negative sources of influence and also being free of negative emotions and distractions. I wasn't speaking about philosophical or political freedoms.

Relationships

The connection between the master and disciple is the most beautiful relationship between two persons. It is the purest relationship ever developed in human society. Most of other relationships are somehow involved in negative emotions more or less because the fundamental source of those relationships is the ego grasping.

The master-disciple connection is based on wisdom and compassion, devotion and confidence. In the disciple's vision the master is the embodiment of compassion and wisdom. No matter if the master is male or female, good looking or ugly, far away or close by, it's always the same. The master is the manifestation form of compassion and wisdom.

From the master's vision the disciple is a child of the master's compassion and wisdom. No matter if they are male or female, young or old, poor or rich; he or she is always like a son or daughter of the master's compassion and wisdom.

In other relationships you always have some expectations of return such as love, kindness, respect and so on. These give rise to attachment, grasping, pride, resentment and finally, even are the cause of hatred if things don't work as you expected them to happen.

By contrast, the relationship of master and disciple is free of negative emotions. It is a direct connection from compassion to devotion, wisdom to confidence.

In fact, all relationships are incredibly beautiful things as long as the negative emotions do not develop in the relationship. It is a wonderful way to share personal experiences, giving love and kindness to each other, being close and taking care of each other. But once negative emotions start to increase, it turns into a problem.

It may seem ironic for people to seek advice about intimate relationships from a dharma teacher as many have no experience with this type of intimacy. Others question the efficacy of asking a Buddhist monk advice about relationship problems or broken hearts. Relationship problems

are all based on our fundamental human nature regardless of the type of relationship involved. Relationship problems come from mental afflictions and emotional distress. It doesn't matter what kind of relationship is involved. We can benefit from the advice of a Dharma teacher as long as the advisor has the skill to manage mental afflictions and emotional distress. If the advisor has no knowledge in managing these problems they cannot provide help even if the advisor has direct personal experience with intimate relationships. The same holds true with advice from a psychotherapist. Therapists needn't have personal mental afflictions for them to advise their clients successfully. This is acceptable practice as long as the therapist has knowledge and skill in managing emotional distress. If it is a physical matter or sexual dysfunction then, of course, only a physician can help.

Sometimes relationships don't last very long. This can turn into huge problems or mental sickness. The couple struggles hard to work things out nicely. Then often the relationship gets even worse. At the beginning of a relationship everything is wonderful and fresh. Just hearing the person's

name creates happiness. In the end everything turns into problems. When asked, "So where do all these problems come from?" the answer inevitably is, "'Of course, it is because of the other person not me. He or she is the one who has problems and the one who created the problems.'"

Many times problems begin at the same time the relationship starts. From the beginning we distort the reality by our memories, fantasies, and assumptions. There are so many judgments based on our past memories. These are telling us, 'let's feel this way or that way'. And after that feeling we take some action and that is not realistic behavior. Another common thing that happens between two people when a relationship starts is fantasies; predicting a future that is probably never going to happen. The fantasies/predictions tremendously increase the fear and expectations deeply in our consciousness. Everyone lives their own world; whatever one person thinks may not be the other person's viewpoint. But there are many things we don't want to communicate to each other. Instead, we just assume. All this causes problems.

We have to give up all these superficial judgments, predictions, and assumptions. Come back to present moment of freedom. Be fully aware of the reality in front of us and manage the situation with an awareness of the present moment. When we say ‘don't just assume, communication is important’, that doesn’t mean we should point out the hundred problems the other person has. The reference is meant to remind us not to react based on our assumptions. Training ourselves to be mindful and aware of the present moment is an effective way to maintain a relationship. It will make us peaceful and happier; and of course if we are peaceful and happy, everyone around us certainly will be happier. Not only our partner, but our whole environment will be more at peace.

Come back to the present, come back to your existence, and come back to your real life. Maintain the awareness of the present moment. Deal with the reality in front of you.

Practice Being Aware of the Present Moment

Being mindful and aware of the present moment has two aspects. These two aspects are the meditation level and the post meditation level. The meditation level is our mind resting evenly in single pointed concentration and is practiced when we are walking or sitting. This gradually stabilizes our mind and gains insight wisdom. It is called meditation.

When we are not doing meditation, in our daily life experience, we still carry some kind of impulse of meditation continually in our mind. This impulse keeps us more in mindfulness and awareness in every moment of day to day life. This is called post meditation. In other words we could say, meditating time and not meditating time.

There are two aspects of mediation. The first is as a technique used to train our mind for calm and peace. Once we gain some calm and peace in our mind, the second aspect is a technique to gain insight into our mind so we can obtain unconditional happiness.

Each of these two aspects carries many different means and techniques but one common thing required for all of them is to stabilize our mind in deep concentration. Therefore, it is called meditation. (Tibetan: samten) In order to gain unconditional peace and happiness we have to familiarize our mind to rest in its true nature, therefore it is also called familiarization. (Tibetan: gom)

This meditation system was discovered by the Enlightened One, Buddha, who obtained the most profound insight and unconditional peace and happiness. Ancient yogis and meditators continually practiced this meditation system and it was passed down century by century. These instructions have been taught by master to student, from their own experience, uninterrupted until now.

Even though the instructions are the same, there are some distinctions between how it was practiced in the old days and now. The distinctions are due to different conditions, lifestyle and the way of thinking in modern times. In the old days meditation teachings were not openly available to the public

and those practitioners practiced it more for spiritual achievements, rather than temporary benefits.

Now these meditation instructions are printed in books, published online, and taught by teachers almost everywhere. Many people practice them more for the temporary benefits. Some of the temporary benefits include being happier and not being depressed or anxious or fearful. Nevertheless, we start by seeking temporary benefits for ourselves and in the long term grow to seeking to benefit others. We start by providing peace and happiness to ourselves and from this start the benefits spread profoundly towards all others. This is how meditation works. Otherwise, if we don't have any beneficial experience through meditation for ourselves, how can we possibly we benefit others?

Being Present in Meditation Level

In the meditation room or in a quiet place, be seated on the cushion in the correct meditation posture. Begin your meditation with right intention. This is very important. After sitting in a comfortable meditation posture with the right intention, just be in the present moment of freedom. The meditation is just remaining in mindfulness and awareness of this very moment.

The proper physical posture is very important for meditation. When we sit straight, with our body in a correct posture, the channels in our body are also straight and in a good position for the winds run smoothly through them.

When the channels and the winds in our body are set up in the right position, the mind remains more natural and aware. The mental afflictions vanish all by themselves. The main reason for yoga practice is so we can establish this right position.

The Seven Points of Vairocana comprise the basic physical posture:

1. The legs in lotus posture
2. The hands in the mudra of meditation
3. The shoulders spread in the wings of a vulture
4. The neck slightly bent like a hook
5. The spine straight as an arrow
6. The eyes open resting on a space about four fingers from the tip of the nose
7. The lips and teeth naturally relaxed, tongue loose against the palate

If we cannot use this posture due to a health issue, we still can meditate. The best way to adapt it is to use as many of the seven points as possible and maintain a comfortable position.

It is said that the benefits of being in the correct body posture are:

1. By sitting in the lotus position the downward voiding wind enters into the middle channel and pacifies the mental affliction of jealousy.
2. By the right hand sitting on left; both hands resting on the lap at a distance measuring four fingers under the belly button, the

water wind enters into the middle channel and pacifies resentment.

3. By holding the spine straight up and the shoulders spread, the earth wind enters into the middle channel and pacifies ignorance.
4. By bending the neck a little bit, the fire wind enters into the middle channel and pacifies attachment.
5. By the eyes gazing onto a space four fingers from the tip of the nose and the tongue resting on the upper palate, the wind of wind enters into the middle channel and pacifies pride.
6. The key point is that mind depends on the winds, the winds depend on the channels and the channels depend on the eyes. That is the reason it is important to keep the eyes in the correct position.
7. The correct physical posture is important for mental clarity.

When we are doing meditation we often get trapped into past thoughts, future fantasies, present concepts, destructive emotions and other distractions. Suddenly we realize we are meditating. We're not supposed to get involved in all these distractions. And then we attempt to stop thoughts but thoughts increase. We try not to think. Trying to not think itself is thinking. On the other hand, we are looking for insight, wisdom, realization and the nature of mind. We see none of these. Having heard many times that the nature of mind is emptiness or the ultimate truth is selflessness, we try to empty our mind and be in a state of nothingness, but our minds won't stay there. Finally all these thoughts and ideas vanish and we feel tranquil; then we find ourselves waking up from our short nap.

Glorious Gampopa said, "Meditators desire to be free of thoughts but thoughts cannot be stopped. Meditators must be exhausted. Do not reject or prolong thoughts or mental afflictions. Let the mind be an unaltered natural state of itself. The fire grows bigger when there is more firewood. Nondual wisdom grows greater when there are more thoughts."

The bottom line is we don't have to think or try not to think. Don't expect to be in a wonderful mental state that has never been experienced before. Don't try to see the nature of mind somewhere other than our mind itself, just be in this very moment, fully aware of our mind itself.

Within the context of that physical posture, rest our mind without fabrication or alteration, utterly relaxed. Without fabrication or alteration means that we do not think about the past or prolong the past; we do not think about the future or beckon the future; and we do not conceptualize the present moment of experience. To rest relaxed means to rest in a direct experience of the present moment of cognition without conceptualization. We will realize whatever arises in our mind is just mind itself. And we will realize that the nature of thoughts and mental afflictions are not other than the nature of mind. Milarepa said, "The wave is not other than ocean, it manifests from ocean and dissolves into the ocean. The thoughts are not other than mind; they manifest from mind and dissolve into mind itself".

Once again, when we do meditation, all we do is just be in this very moment and be fully aware of ourselves or our mind, allowing the mind be in its natural state, effortlessly.

The clearness of the sun light is everywhere,

But the blind sees only darkness.

The nature of mind is within everyone,

But it is far for the ignorant beings.

Ignorance is not a closed darkness thing.

It is the thing simply not being aware of the true nature.

The suchness is always there with oneself,

But our mental projection obstructs to see it.

When these three come together; oneself, present moment and awareness,

The true nature reveals itself in nakedness in front of us.

No one could explain it in words or pointed out by the finger;

Nevertheless everyone is seeing it without notice.

Once we have established ourselves in the present moment,

It is like knocking at the true nature door to enter into freedom land.

*Being in the present moment is like embracing the suchness in our
arms.*

It is like all the worries and the fears are being scared and run away.

Walking Meditation

Walking meditation is when we meditate while we are walking. It utilizes a different physical position to practice meditation. Walking meditation is an effective profound technique. Seated meditation can give rise to struggles with hindrances or obstacles like laziness, drowsiness, or dullness and restlessness. A common problem many people have is loss of focus in meditation, there is no mental clarity. Gradually the meditator becomes more and more drowsy, eventually going to sleep.

When this happens, instead of persisting with sitting meditation, do walking meditation. Start your meditation from right intention. Bring yourself into full awareness of the present moment, and think, "To provide myself and all other sentient beings with greater peace and happiness, I am going to do walking meditation."

You can either say the following out loud or think it in your mind. "May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness! May they be free of

suffering and the causes of suffering! May they never be apart from the sacred happiness which is free of suffering! May they dwell in the great equanimity, impartial, free of attachment and aversion.”

As you step forward in a gentle manner, keep yourself in full awareness and mindful of your mind, your body, your experience and your whole existence at this very moment in front of you. Sometimes you can also focus on one particular thing, such as your physical movement and being aware of every single movement and your experience of the movement. If you are a Buddhist practitioner, then it is very good to walk clockwise around a stupa or statue of Buddha. Because it says in sutras that “paying homage to a stupa or statue of the Enlightened One and making circumambulation around it purifies your bad karma and obscurations, and accumulates the causes of happiness and peace.” Whatever your focus, walk gently, having full awareness and mindfulness of the present moment with a sense of awareness of your self-nature or nature of mind. This is walking meditation.

Awareness of ourselves or the self-nature brings us to the natural state of mind. Once we establish ourselves in that state we will realize the ultimate truth, or suchness. The true nature is free of mental afflictions and dissatisfactions. Our achievement of unconditional happiness and peace comes from realizing this true nature, or suchness. Just to focus on anything is not what we mean by a meditation which will provide us inner peace and unconditional happiness. For example, the tiger walking in the jungle is very focused on the hunt, the fishermen is mindful of fishing, the thief is acutely aware of stealing undetected and everyone focuses on what they are doing. But these people never gain unconditional happiness and peace. Their insight wisdom doesn't progress by these methods. Instead, they accumulate great amounts of bad karma, the opposite result of meditation.

I know it will make you feel good and proud of yourself and you will like me and my teachings if I say, "Oh that is wonderful, you are a musician and you are focusing on every single note in your music. That's meditation and your enlightenment will come soon." Or if I say, ""That's great, you walk

with your dog twice a day being mindful of every step. That's meditation and you will achieve unconditional peace and happiness soon." But unfortunately I won't say that because it is not true.

I don't mean that focusing on music and paying attention while on a dog walk are bad things. Of course they are excellent and important things. I just wouldn't call them meditation.

Once in Indonesia I was with a group of Dharma practitioners. We were doing an animal liberation. We released a few thousand fishes and I guided the group through a compassion meditation. A fisherman nearby appeared and said "You guys are doing great. I also like to meditate. I mediate by focusing on fishing and it makes me so restful and not worried." I thought, "How it could be possible, releasing and killing both are meditation?"

Eight

Sleeping Meditation

Sleeping meditation according to Yoga and Tantra instructions includes exercises on the subtle channels and energies, as well as meditation on deities. This practice is not open to the public. Yet there is a way we can achieve the crucial point of an ancient yogi's sleeping meditation. This way is far more effective than all other methods and is so simple that anybody can do it.

As mentioned before, maintain the awareness of mind itself. Be in this very moment during seated and walking meditation. We should do this same thing when we are going to sleep. Many people go to bed and read a book to fall asleep. Some are addicted to having fantasies soon after their head hits the pillow.

However, with sleeping meditation, we practice carrying the sense of self recognition and being aware of the nature of our mind into the sleeping period, instead of being just ignorant in our sleep. But by the time we are in

deep sleep, there is nothing we can do to recognize self-nature or the nature of our mind. Sleeping meditation is contingent on preliminaries to our sleep. It also relies on our daytime practice of being awareness and mindfulness.

The preliminary period to sleep starts when we retire to bed putting our head on the pillow, until we fall asleep or the moment before we fall asleep. For physical position, we can just sleep in our normal manner. There is a better way, though. This is to lay on the right side of your body using the right hand as a pillow under your cheek. This posture is called the "Manner of a Lion's Sleep."

After the preliminaries we simply maintain a sense of bare awareness without thinking about anything or forcing the mind into a concentrated state. We keep our mind aware of mind itself utterly relaxed and let the mind be itself with fully luminous awareness and clarity until the last wakeful moment. That sense of luminous awareness or the recognition of nature of mind itself continues into our sleep. We are in a state of deep sleep but we

still have a sense of knowing ourselves (nature of our mind). That is what we call clear light.

That clear light is the insight wisdom which purifies our ignorance, obscurations and the bad karma we have accumulated in our past. We can find great benefits from this special practice when we are dying. The final phase of everyone's death process reaches to fundamental innate mind of clear light, but because of ignorance we don't recognize it and we take our next rebirth due to our karma. If we are able to recognize the nature of mind, then the clear light of death transforms into a fully qualified spiritual consciousness and we become free of birth and death.

When we are awake, we possess eight forms of consciousness; there are five sense consciousnesses as well as a sixth consciousness, which is the seat of reflexive awareness, the center of our rational thought processes. Then we have a seventh, "egoistic" consciousness, which is the seat of our perception, for whatever we perceive here becomes incorporated into our self-identity. Finally, there is the basic consciousness, which contains traces of all the

memories, habitual tendencies, emotional reactions, self-perceptions, and apperceptions that have been processed by other levels of consciousness.

The five sense consciousnesses are the gross level, the sixth and seventh consciousness are the subtle level and the eighth one, the basic consciousness, is the very subtle level. When we are in deep sleep, (sleep without dreams) the first seven forms of consciousnesses are resting in our basic consciousness and we possess only one consciousness, which is normally in darkness and ignorant. But when our mind successfully recognizes its own face or its nature while we are in deep sleep; that is the clear light.

Recognizing or comprehending the clear light in our sleep is absolutely unpredictable. It depends on our meditation practice. Nevertheless, sleeping meditation makes our sleep smoother. It's beneficial for both our mental and physical health. Once we become well trained, it is not a practice anymore; it's just the way we sleep.

Dreaming Meditation

Dreaming meditation has a few different levels. The first is to comprehend the dream, which means knowing that it is a dream while we are dreaming. Once we comprehend we are dreaming, then we can transform and increase our dreams. Both dreaming and sleeping meditation are done mainly to realize the ultimate nature of our mind. According to secret tantra teachings, there are many different techniques to achieve dream meditation but these are traditionally not taught to the public. Dream meditation techniques require certain prerequisite levels of spiritual practice to be done before starting the dream meditation.

However, the most profound technique used by great ancient yogis to achieve dream meditation is what we are going to discuss here. We previously discussed the eight different consciousnesses we possess when we are awake and the fact that in deep sleep we have only the basic consciousness. Since the basic consciousness contains all the karmic

imprints, traces of all the memories, habitual tendencies, emotional reactions, self-perceptions and apperceptions that have been processed by other levels of consciousness, very subtle parts of the sixth and seventh consciousness arises as a screen that shows the records of basic consciousness. This is what we call a dream.

If the dream is arising from our karmic imprints then it could indicate something about our past or future. We can use it as a sign to understand who we were in the past or what will happen in the future. Dreams arising from our habitual tendencies, emotional reactions and physical matters don't indicate any special meaning or sign.

Dream meditation is not for understanding the meaning of dreams. It is to realize the nature of dreams by being in the present moment and aware of self-nature in the dream state. Dreams themselves are an illusion, because we grasp them as real while we are dreaming. When we realize the dream is unreal while we are in dream state, that is what we call comprehending the dream.

By that all the problems in the dream are solved. There is no difference between good and bad, living and dying, pain and pleasure, everything is just the dream. We can fall off from a hundred story tower without any fear. We can travel thousands of miles in a second. Because we know all these are not real, they are just our dream and manifestations of our own mind.

There are many stories in Tibet about the accomplished practitioners intentionally visiting places in their dream state. There was a Tibetan statue maker who was an accomplished dream meditator. He didn't know how to apply gold to a statue. During his dream he went to Nepal and observed how they applied gold to their statues. And afterwards he was able to use that technique.

After we achieve the first level, we can practice transforming fire in our dream into water and do the same with everything else, we can change anything into something else. We also can practice turning one thing in our dream into many and turning many into one.

The physical position for the dreaming meditation is same as for sleeping meditation. We sleep in the 'Manner of a Lion's Sleep' or in our usual way. The important point is to maintain awareness and mindfulness until we fall asleep. A very important part of the practice is to give strong impetus or motivation to oneself. In the daytime and especially just before going to bed we think; "I am going to recognize my dreams in my dream state. Tonight I will definitely recognize the dream as dream, I will be aware of the nature of dream which is unreal." Then we simply maintain a sense of bare awareness without thinking about anything or forcing the mind into a concentrated state. We keep our mind aware of mind itself utterly relaxed and let the mind itself be fully luminously aware and clear until the last moment before sleep. In other words just be in the present moment until we fall sleep.

About twenty percent of our life is spent dreaming, and during the dream we experience everything in it as real. The happiness, sadness, pleasure, peace and fear in the dream all are real. Dream experiences don't

have much impact on us because we see they are not real to us when we wake up.

Real life experiences are important to us and impact us greatly, because we think they are real. Actually, both experiences are almost the same. Both waking and dreaming we perceive as real when we experience them. Once they pass, both are not real, just like a dream. The only thing left behind from both waking and dreaming are some memories. When we become fully aware of reality in the dream, all the experiences in our dream transform into peace, happiness and fearlessness, and that becomes an ideal for our waking life.

Being Present in the Post-Meditation Level

The momentum of practicing meditation enables us to be comfortable in any situation as we engage in our daily life. When attractive people or desirable things come into our sensory experience, we can enjoy their beauty but not let them control our mind. We won't obsess or lose sleep over it, because our mind can be aware of itself and recognize that attachment is dissatisfactory and unfulfilling. Our mind does not have to be attracted by the superficial appearance of a desirable person or object. It can be aware of its nature of impermanence and interdependence.

We enjoy the senses as normal when we are in the present moment, but do not create so many mental projections. We aren't so easily overpowered by objects. Similarly, when we are in unpleasant situations or meeting a person we dislike, our discomfort diminishes and we don't easily become overpowered by anger or anxiety. In any situation being in the present moment is the greatest gift we can give ourselves. I once explained

about being in the present moment during our Monday meditation class. Dr Jill asked, "How do I bring myself into present moment?" I told her, "Just shake your head! Whenever you are worried, depressed and frustrated, you have been living in the past or future. So just shake your head and bring yourself back into present moment of freedom!" Meditation is not all about sitting quietly but it also many ways benefits in our daily life.

We wake up in the morning like the sunrise. The sun comes up from behind the mountain full of brightness and clarity. We wake up with full awareness and the excitement of starting the day and an appreciation of being alive. We don't have to wake up and fly directly from the land of sleep into the past or future world. Normally in the morning we just jump out of bed and our minds are distracted by our emotions, worries, and fears. I found deep meaning and helpful advice, when I heard this story of my friend. "During the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Uncle Alex survived the sinking of the USS Arizona. From that day forward he woke up every morning whistling! He woke up with no problems, feeling great appreciation for being alive." It's

healthier to start our day by thinking that today we will make our day happy and meaningful.

The important thing is to be happy today. We can never predict the future. What seems good today, tomorrow may turn into problems. We should try to keep our mind in a happy state and not be distracted by negative emotions. If we can be happy today we can probably be happy every day. If we cannot, we may never be happy. If we spend today doing something good for ourselves and others, that will make our day meaningful. Start our day's schedule with this intention and recall this motivation during the day. We continue our day like the sun. The sun shines everywhere and sees everything, but never loses its brightness and clarity.

Our mind should be aware of what we are doing and experiencing but not lose the awareness of mind itself. Always keep the mind in the present moment. When the mind carries a sense of awareness of mind itself, the negative emotions will come to visit us and then leave. They won't stay to control us or our mind. It is like snow on a hot stone. When a snowflake lands

on a hot stone it melts instantly. When negative emotions come into our aware mind they will melt into awareness instantly. If we are not aware of our mind or our mind is not mindful of itself, then the negative emotions will take up permanent residence and control us like we are slaves. They will live rent free in our head.

At the end of the day, before we go to bed, think back on how our day went. Did we carry out the intention we made that morning or not? If we find your day was not happy and meaningful, it is helpful to admit that to ourselves. Think, "Although my day today was not meaningful and happy, tomorrow I will try my best, and I will not let it happen again." If when we look back on our day, we think that our day was spent in a meaningful and happy way, rejoice in that and think that tomorrow we will try to do the same.

To nourish and take care of our minds is just as important as nourishing and taking care of our bodies. Each morning we brush our teeth, take a shower, eat a healthy breakfast, and put on clean clothes. During the day we try to keep ourselves as clean and healthy as possible. If we get dirty,

we will wash and if our clothes get dirty, we will take them off and put on clean ones. At the end of the day, we take off our dirty clothes and take care of our bodies and do our best to make our bodies comfortable.

It is equally important to care for our minds in the same way we take care of our bodies, but usually we don't do this. In the morning we should nourish our minds' clarify and free our minds of the contamination of negative emotions through meditation and recollecting the helpful instructions we have received. We should then maintain mindfulness during the day. If our mind takes up destructive emotions then it's good to bring our mind back by doing a brief meditation to clean up the destructive emotions. At the end of the day we should go to sleep with a clean and healthy mind.

Most of the time we take up our harmful thoughts and emotions when we wake up, continue reflecting on them through the day, and go to sleep with them. It is similar to never cleaning our body and not taking care of it. It is not a healthy way to live.

Another way to look up how to take care of our mind is like how we take care of our computer. We use an antivirus program to make sure our computer does not become infected by viruses. We don't open harmful programs and strange mail attachments and we don't download unknown files. When there is a warning and our computer might be at risk, we find out the problem and clean it up, because unless we do, our computer will soon be unusable. Mindfulness is like an antivirus program that keeps our mind from being infected by the virus of negative emotions. If we are not mindful, a single thought of anger will grow until we become obsessed with it. But with mindfulness, we recognize the harmful emotion and cut it off. This is similar to how an antivirus program warns us of an infected file with a popup message. When we have an infected file, we should delete it. And when a negative emotion arises in our mind, we should not continue it, but cut it off.

When we are not mindful, destructive emotions run free in our mind. If you don't use an antivirus program or neglect to update it your computer will become infected, bog down, and crash. Similarly if we are not mindful,

our mind will become unhealthy. Mindfulness protects us from becoming involved with negative emotions, just like an antivirus warns of infected attachments, so we can delete them and send them to the trash. To have an open mind with mindfulness is like having a good network connection with antivirus. If our mind is closed, it's like not having a network connection, you can't do very much. An open mind connects with everything, but because of mindfulness, it is not harmed by what is negative. It is not harmed by negative emotions, just as an antivirus program keeps our computer from being harmed.

To Have a Peaceful Mind Is Always Possible for Anyone

*When the mind is alert to itself,
Mental projections turn to peace on their own.
Waves and hurricanes stir the ocean,
But the nature of ocean is stillness.
Depressions and conflicts stir the mind,
But the nature of mind is peace.*

To have a peaceful mind is always possible for anyone. It is something we innately possess. We say, "I will be in peace when I get these things done. I will be happy and peaceful when I am rich enough. There is no peace in this place; if I could move somewhere else, I would be at peace." And so forth.

Peace is nonviolent and free of conflicting emotions. We can be violent in different ways: physically, verbally, and emotionally. Physical and verbal violence arise as a result of emotional violence, or conflicting emotions. Actions are motivated by our mind and if we turn our mind to peace then both our emotions and behaviors will become peaceful. When we talk about

inner peace, this does not mean being in a quiet place. Freedom from conflicting emotions and absence of inner conflict is real peace. Any situation can destroy our peace when we don't control our inner conflicts.

Even things and situations we expect to make us happy and peaceful can turn on us and leave us sad and dissatisfied. That's why we often hear people saying, "I used to be a happy and peaceful person before I got this promotion." Or, "We were much happier when we were not rich."

When traveling to different countries I often get invited to visit very wealthy families. There is a sense of irony to these visits. How can I do something for them since they already have everything they want? Typically my visit would begin full of a sense of surprise, wonder and excitement. But by the end I would be depressed and feeling some compassion. Since I wasn't raised in wealth, of course it's eye-opening to see a beautiful family living with wonderful things, living like paradise on earth. Initially I wished that everyone on Earth possessed these same great conditions.

During the visit I'd be excited to understand their feelings and I'd wonder how much happiness and peace they felt. If everything was so wonderful there then there would be no need for my visit. But before offering them dharma teachings and doing recitations and ritual performances for the family they would tell me their family problems. They would tell tales of hard work, competition, paranoia over potential loss of possessions, desire to have more, and so on. Eventually what seemed a paradise turns into an object of compassion. I felt lucky not to be born in a wealthy family.

Of course, that doesn't mean being poor brings peace. Being poor is another problem since our inner world is not in peace. Our mind is a steering wheel we use to turn ourselves onto peaceful or a conflicting way. Sometimes we find our mind is peaceful and happy during difficult situations, at other times we are not happy even when we are in a perfect situation.

We assume peace comes from perfect conditions and seek our happiness from products, positions, and relationships. Again, products are fine when utilized in the proper way. They offer great benefits and comfort

for our life. The problem is we let these things take all our strength away from us. In other words, part of our mind becomes deeply attached to things and this makes us feeble. Once we lose these things (and we will, as they are all subject to change at any time) our strength goes with them. The mind is left injured or in state of hurt and disarray.

It is like putting a bumper sticker on the wall. Both the wall and the sticker are fine as long as they remain together, but remove the sticker, and part of wall comes off. The wall is damaged. Damage to the wall depends on the size and strength of the sticker; the bigger the sticker, the greater the damage to the wall. Now this doesn't mean we should not put images on the wall. Simply use the proper means to hang the image in an appropriate way. Attach the image to the wall in a way that doesn't harm the wall when the image is removed.

This same analogy works with our mind. Our positions, relationships, and material needs are important. We can have them while remaining alert and not allowing them to become fixated in our mind. We should not give all

our strength to unreliable impermanent things. In this way we will be able to enjoy the having them and lessen the pain of losing them. Once we lose them we will still maintain our strength and inner peace. Most of our depression, anxiety, and emotional pain are our own mental creation, but inner peace is not a mental creation, it is the nature of mind and is within us all the time.

Criticism and Confusing Karma

The Buddha's teachings are a message of truth, a message of freedom, and a message of love and compassion. These messages are delivered and taught by countless accomplished masters in different places, at different periods and under different circumstances. Because different people received these teachings they also took different forms to benefit us all. There are different traditions practicing these teachings in different ways, but still the essence of the teachings is the same. They are the path to realize the truth, the way to be free of suffering. They teach us how to cultivate love and compassion.

Now we are in a time when science and technology are developed and the whole world is connected. This may cause us to practice the teachings in a different way to accommodate to our life style. It is important to look at the result; to see if our practice improves our love and compassion; to see if we become freer of negative emotions. To see if our practice leads us to a correct

understanding of true insight. If it does than we are practicing Buddha's teachings.

Milarepa left this statement for us when his disciples asked him for final advice:

If it harms others and increases self-centeredness and negative emotions then you should give it up even if it is a form of virtuous activity. If it prevents the five poisons- greed, hatred, delusion, pride and jealousy and benefits others then it should be practiced even if it is a form of non-virtuous action.

Now days there are different forms of Buddha's teachings in the same town and people argue about whose tradition is superior. There is no such thing as a best or worst part of Buddha's teachings. If there were than why wouldn't Buddha teach the best to everyone? What makes the difference is not the teachings but us. Some of the teachings are suitable for us and it may not be time to practice some others. All the teachings are equally important and meaningful, they don't contradict each other. When we see a

contradiction in Buddha's teachings, it means we need to learn more. We criticize other traditions through misunderstanding.

Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa clarified that:

The genuine Dharma is virtuous in the beginning, virtuous in the middle and virtuous in the end. In the beginning one definitely needs to abandon certain actions. It is not possible that later one would need to practice contrary to that.

In the beginning the compassionate teacher skilled in means taught in a coarse way about action and result, abandoning wrong doing, embracing virtue and presented the result of the peaceful path. Elaborating on these, the teachings gradually become more subtle and profound. Finally, he teaches that all of these completely fall under the nature of emptiness and compassion. Confident faith comes from our knowledge and experiences of practicing these teachings; that is unshakeable faith and devotion. Just saying "I am Buddhist" doesn't make much difference in our life but practicing Buddha's teachings daily really makes our life much easier.

Buddha is not the one in charge of our happiness and problems. It is our own karma which causes all the joyful and painful experiences in our life. We follow the Buddha because he shows us how to create good karma and purify bad karma. Karma is a vast topic in Buddha's doctrine. Knowing the detailed aspects of the workings of karma is said to be limited to an omniscient mind. It is beyond our ordinary perception to fully grasp the subtle mechanics of karma.

When we observe karma, the law of cause and effect working in people's lives it makes sense to us. People reap what they sow. But sometimes results are confusing. For example, when we see a good man suffering extensively and a bad man gaining wealth and power, or when you have struggled to do the right thing but the situation becomes painful and falls apart. These are times that shake our faith in karma. This is because our narrow vision only sees short term effects. The story between karma and us is not something started in this lifetime. It began countless lifetimes ago, and we have accumulated immeasurable good karma and bad karma.

The good man may have accumulated bad karma in his previous life and the bad man may have been a model citizen. Indeed the good man's suffering is more meaningful than the bad man's pleasure. What we fail to understand is how karma works. When you are practicing positive karma, you are concurrently burning away bad karma. The accumulation of your bad karma purifies and ripens quickly to small effect. It is like experiencing a tooth ache instead of dying of cancer. Then in the end you have no negative karma whatsoever. All that's left is completely pure.

The reverse of this is the bad man who spends this life indulging in negative actions and who doesn't practice virtue but experiences a wonderful life. The actual effect is that the bad man's past accumulation of positive karma is burning up in this lifetime. All he is left with at the end is negative karma. This can be very deceiving but it is the truth about the law of karma.

However, we never know, the things we consider as good may not be so and the things we thought as disasters can bring beneficial events. The Mani man's story teaches us an important lesson:

There was an old man in far eastern Kham known as the Mani man because, day and night, he could always be found devotedly spinning his small homemade prayer wheel. The wheel was filled with the mantras of Great Compassion, "Om mani Padme Hung." The Mani Man lived with his son and their one fine horse. The son was the joy of the Mani Man's life, the boy's pride and the joy was the horse.

The man's wife, after long life of virtue and service, had long since departed for more fortunate rebirths. Father and son lived, free from excessive wants or needs, in one of several rough stone houses near a river on the edge of the flat plains.

One day their steed disappeared. The neighbors bewailed the loss of the old man's sole material asset, but the stoic old man just kept turning his prayer wheel, reciting "Om mani Padme Hung," Tibet's national mantra. To whoever inquired or expressed condolences, he simply said, "Give thanks for everything. Who can say what is good or bad? We'll see."

After several days the splendid creature returned, followed by a pair of wild mustangs. These the old man and his son swiftly trained. Then everyone sang songs of celebration and congratulated the old man on his unexpected good fortune. The man simply smiled over his prayer wheel and said, "I am grateful but who knows? We shall see."

Then, while racing one of the mustangs, the boy fell and shattered his leg. Some neighbors carried him home, cursing the wild horse and bemoaning the boy's fate. But the old man, sitting at his beloved son's bedside, just kept turning his prayer wheel around and around while softly muttering gentle Lord Chenrezig's mantra of great compassion. He neither complained nor answered their protestations to fate, but simply nodded his head affably, reiterating what he said before. "The Buddha is beneficent; I am grateful for my son's life. We shall see."

The next week military officers appeared, seeking young conscripts for an ongoing border war. All the local boys were immediately taken away, except for the bedridden son of the Mani man. Then the neighbors

congratulated the old man on his great good fortune, attributing such luck to the good karma accumulated by the old man's incessantly spinning prayer wheel and the constant mantra on his cracked lips. He smiled and said nothing. One day the boy and his father were watching their fine horses graze on the prairie grass, the taciturn old man suddenly began to sing:

*No one knows what karma awaits us,
but what we sow now will be reaped
in lives to come; that is certain.*

*So be kind to one and all
and don't be biased,
based upon illusion regarding gain and loss.*

*Have neither hope nor fear, expectation nor anxiety;
Give thanks for everything whatever your lot may be.*

*Accept everything; accept everyone; and follow the Buddha's
infallible Law.*

Be simple and carefree, remaining naturally at ease and in peace.

You can shoot arrows at the sky if you like,

My son, but they'll inevitably fall back to earth.

As he sang, the prayer flags flittered overhead, and the ancient mani wheel, filled with hundred thousands of handwriting mantras, just kept turning. Then the old man was silent.

Pain Collapsing into Pieces

Excessive concern for the Eight Worldly Dharmas makes things in life more difficult, every small thing turns into a big deal and we become very sensitive and fragile.

The Eight Worldly Dharmas, or the Eight Worldly Concerns, are grouped into four pairs of opposites: pleasure and pain; praise and blame; fame and disgrace; gain and loss. Each pair contains one thing we like and wish to obtain, and it's opposite which we don't like and wish to avoid. The Buddha said the Eight Worldly Dharmas contain all worldly motivations and only lead to further worldly engagement and should be renounced.

Buddha is not saying to rid ourselves of pleasure, praise, fame and gain. He is simply saying, "Don't get yourself trapped by temporary things. Don't discomfort your family and others just because you want more pleasure, praise, fame and wealth. Don't move away from the path to unconditional peace and happiness in order to obtain these fleeting goals. Don't barter

innate happiness for shallow enjoyment. Don't forget to enjoy being in the present moment of freedom by looking for that freedom somewhere else. Buddha is also not saying that we should not avoid pain, blame, disgrace and loss. He clearly teaches us how to decrease problems. He says that the fear and dread of pain itself is another pain, don't create that extra pain. Blame and disgrace are just someone's opinions and words; don't be so sensitive and fragile. Every gain ends with loss; that is the nature of impermanence. Don't lose your strength and inner peace, because that is an additional loss.

There is nothing wrong with having pleasure, praise, fame and gain but too much concern for these things destroys them. There is nothing wrong with avoiding pain, blame, disgrace and loss but too much concern for these things brings them. No matter how wealthy, smart and famous we are there will be no peace and happiness if we are strongly trapped by the Eight Worldly Concerns.

During my escape from Tibet to India there were eleven of us, we walked fifteen days to pass the Himalaya Mountains and had very little food

to eat. All I needed at that moment was food. I thought, ‘I will be the one of happiest people in the world when I reach India and have enough food to eat.’ Once I arrived in India I enjoyed two or three days just having a full stomach, but then I wanted nice clothes, and then nice accommodations, and then grace, respect, fame and so on. I completely forgot about being the happiest person in the world with a full stomach.

Finally, I sometimes get a really deep sense of inner peace from difficult conditions. Let’s say I am stuck in a terrible situation and there is nothing I can do to solve the problems coming at me. Suddenly the situation itself opens my eyes and I can see how the Eight Worldly Concerns govern me and prevent me from seeing reality. I say to Eight Worldly Concerns. “Okay this is enough; I can’t listen to you any more. I don’t care about you. And I quit working with you.” Instantly the difficult conditions and problems lose strength. It doesn’t matter how terrible and painful they are, the problems and pain collapse into pieces and I would see the smiling face of relief looking at me.

We might think that we should somehow abandon the Eight Worldly Dharmas. A more practical way is being aware of them. We should see how deceptive they are, how they govern us and our life, how we get trapped by them. We should notice how they prevent us from remaining within our own nature; which is genuine innate inner peace. Of course, it is a difficult thing to eradicate these concerns but we certainly can diminish them by being aware and mindful of them in our day to day life.

1. Gain—To be attached to having things go your way

Obtaining the things you desire is a wonderful thing,

But understand they do not really belong to you,

Things thought to be yours only stay with you temporarily

Enjoy their benefits, but don't be surprised when you lose them.

2. Loss—To be disturbed by unpleasant things or things not going your way

Be easy about not obtaining what you want.

Often the more you possess the more problems you obtain.

Acquiring happiness from what you already have is important

Be grateful for both having and not having.

3. Pleasure —To be attached to receiving pleasure

Understand that pleasure and pain follows one other

And many things you consider as pleasure can ruin your happiness.

Attachment to pleasure is a great risk like the moth's attachment to flame.

It is important to be aware and not to put yourself at risk.

4. Pain—To be upset at having pain

Every pain is impermanent, and there is the pleasure after it.

When you accept the way it is, it's easier on you

If you don't consider it as a negative

Most likely it will not be a pain any more.

5. Praise—To be attached to having good words said about you or your

actions

Admiration makes no difference in how good or bad you truly are,

But when you are attached to it you become fully dependent on others words.

It's best is not to concern a great deal what others may think or say,

But be aware of your ego and not increase your troubles.

6. Blame —To be displeased when you are blamed or slandered

Aggressive people are addicted to blaming others all the time,

If you take them seriously they can harm you as they wish.

Blame sometime can teach you beneficial things,

Only your hatred and anger can hurt you but not the blame.

7. Fame— To be attached to having fame

Even though each person more than the next are

Busy striving for wealth and celebrity

Once achieved they desire still more and more,

Finally the departure comes and they leave with nothing.

8. Obscurity— To be displeased about being not well known

Fame can be beneficial in some ways,

But it also carries tremendous handicaps.

However fame and reputation are not the purpose of your life,

To learn how to be happy wherever you are is the Great Life.

The classic Buddhist teachings say, “Renunciation of the Eight Worldly Dharmas is an extremely important part of the path to enlightenment.” When we concentrate entirely on the Eight Worldly Dharmas we don’t have any time for our spiritual practice. Even if we devote some time and effort to our spiritual practice it becomes only a superficial thing. It is superficial because we are doing practice for the sake of fame, praise, competition and temporary pleasure. That is part of our ego grasping not Dharma practice.

Once a monk was circumambulating the Peltring monastery, Geshe Tonpa, a distinguished old teacher, came upon him and said, "It is nice to circle holy places, but it is much better to practice the sublime Dharma." Humbly, the monk began to study, memorize, and recite the Buddhist sutras. One day Geshe Tonpa came across him in the middle of his studies and devotions. The old abbot told him, "It is worthwhile to study scriptures and accomplish virtuous acts, but far better to practice the noble Dharma." After serious thought, the monk decided that intensive meditation was the best thing for him to do, and he began to meditate in earnest. Inevitably, Geshe

Tonpa found him sitting in a corner with a fixed, concentrated stare, "Meditation is fine," commented erudite abbot, "but genuine Dharma practice would be even better."

By now, the monk was totally confused. There was nothing he had not tried. Still the venerable teacher disapproved of his efforts. "Most venerable sir, what should I do?" he pleaded "Simply give up all clinging to worldly concerns," Geshe Tonpa replied. Then he quietly continued on his way.

The Secret Protection

Because the world is filled with evil and dangers, we need protection from these dangers. How we can protect ourselves? We can be very careful in every situation to try to escape them. Or keep to a safe place, and employ all kinds of protections: airbags, medicines, a private doctor, or even spiritual protections. All these are good ideas, but unfortunately it still doesn't make much difference. Sometimes the things we take as protection can themselves cause problems.

Just recently, a close friend of my friend had heart surgery. She had good medical insurance and the surgery was done in the best hospital. Unfortunately, the surgery didn't go well and she died. She might have lived a few years more if she hadn't taken that good care. I wonder if thing might have been different if she engaged the in protection that I am going to describe.

Many rich people have good medical care, private security, and all kinds of other protection, yet still have obstacles, disease, and death, often more than those who don't possess those things. Your doctor may kill you, your medicine may act as poison, your weapons may be used your enemies, or your food may sicken you. And most of the time when things go wrong, they happen without any expectation. Whatever we lack, even God or the Buddha can't supply, because if they could, they would have already done it.

So then, what is the best protection from all dangers? It is a secret, because it is not something that others can see and it functions in a secret way. And it is secret because anyone may have it, but most people don't know that it is the best protection from all dangers.

You might assume that the way to protect yourself and others lies in in defeating something or someone out there. But there is a far more effective way to deal with this problem that avoids the dangers of objectifying and demonizing those that you view as the sources of danger for yourself and others, It is called the armor of love and compassion that protects from all

dangers, the profound means for protecting and turning back disasters through the power of your soft gentle awaking mind which wishes for the well-being of others.

No matter if you believe it or not, there is a law of nature where you are judged according to your thoughts and actions, there is a reservoir of all our experiences, whether they are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. It is called karma, the law of nature, God's will, and so on. Whatever you may call it, it still functions the same way: causes and conditions give rise to effects. All of existence works this way, when causes and conditions are complete, the result will appear.

Although usually we work with conditions to achieve happiness and avoid suffering, the most important thing to achieve our happiness is to cultivate the cause. An analogy is a flower, which is produced from its set of causes and conditions: the seed, earth, appropriate temperature, and water. In the same way happiness arises when the cause, positive actions, are performed either physically or mentally, and the proper conditions are

present. All great wise beings have found that the compassion is the most profound cause of happiness and at the same time purifies the causes of obstacles and suffering. If two persons are in same dangerous situation and one is a very egoistic, selfish person who has taken all kinds of protections and the other is one who has a great compassion, but doesn't possess any other protection, I would say the one has compassion will pass through the danger.

In the Buddhist scriptures it says that practicing loving kindness and compassion is the supreme protection. Once Prince Mahadatta went out with his friends and saw the suffering of the beggars and herders. When he returned home, he said to his father, I saw that people are suffering from poverty and acting unvirtuously, which will cause them even more suffering in the future. May I practice generosity from your great store of treasure?

Because his son was so dear to him, his father could not refuse. After Prince Mahadatta gave away most of the kingdom's treasure, he thought that it was not right for him to completely deplete his father's store of treasure.

He decided to make an effort to collect wealth to fulfill the wishes of the poor people and thought that sailing across the sea and bringing back the wish fulfilling jewel was the most effective way to accumulate enough wealth to give to all the poor people. He sailed across the sea and endured all of its hardships. Eventually he reached the abandoned building where the wish fulfilling jewel was found, but the jewel was surrounded by poisonous snakes. He thought that this must indicate it was once the property of a great being. Mahadatta thought that these poisonous snakes had been born this way from the karma of hatred and jealousy in previous lifetimes. With that thought, he cultivated great compassion for them, sat down in the posture of equipoise and meditated on loving kindness and compassion with one pointed concentration. As a result, all their harmful thoughts and poison were pacified. Then he walked through the snakes and entered the building. So he got the wish fulfilling jewel and returned to his country and saved all the people suffering from poverty.

The power of practicing compassion can benefit others, as in the story of Prince Mahadatta. Because of his compassion, he established great peace and happiness for all the people in his country. But it also benefits oneself. The Precious Jewel Garland Sutra says one will receive these benefits from the practice of loving kindness:

One will be loved and protected by gods and humans.

One will achieve mental peace and deep happiness.

One will not be harmed by poison or weapons.

One will achieve his wishes without effort.

And one will be born in the pleasant world.

Even one who is not liberated from samsara will obtain these qualities of loving kindness.

Love and compassion are natural, gentle, and peaceful, but also very powerful. Feeling compassion for even a moment can clear up the darkness of thousands of negative emotions and will lead you to a state of lasting peace and comfort, as in this story:

In a previous life the Buddha was the son of a widowed mother. His father had been a merchant sailor and had been lost at sea. Because the mother feared her son would also be lost, she concealed his occupation from him and told him he was firewood collector instead. So each day he would collect the wood, sell it, and give the two small coins to his mother. One day the other firewood collectors told him, this is not your caste, you should not be doing this work. So the son asked his mother what his occupation really was, and she told him that he was a porter. So he hired himself out as a porter and each day gave the five small coins he earned as wages to his mother. Then the other porters shunned him, saying this is not your caste. So the son went back to his mother and asked what his occupation really was. His mother told him the truth: that he was the son of a sea merchant, but that she had lied to keep from losing him as well. The son signed up on a ship bound for the Jewel Islands, thinking he would become a rich merchant. He told his mother that he was leaving to make his fortune, and she fell to the ground and grabbed

hold of his legs, begging him not to go. He kicked her in the head to get her to let go, and left for the ship, which sailed that day.

During the voyage a huge storm came up and the ship capsized. He grabbed hold of a barrel and floated to the nearest island. Really, he had drowned, but he imagined that he was still alive. When he arrived on the island, he came to a house with two women. The women took him in and fed him and clothed him, and became his partners as well. After a while he became restless and wanted to see what else was on the island. So he left the two women and traveled on. After some days his provisions had run out. He saw a house with five women, who took him in and fed him, and he became partners with the five of them. But he didn't want to settle down, so he continued his wandering.

One day he came to a black iron fortress with large, fierce guards at the ramparts. He asked to be let in so he could refresh himself and sleep indoors for the night. The guards opened the doors, but when he came in the guards grabbed him and pulled him along to a prison cell. Inside the cell was a man

with an iron band circling his head so tightly that his brains gushed out. The son asked the man what he was being punished for. The man said that in his previous life he had kicked his mother in the head. A loud voice then said, "Let him who is bound be freed and him who is free be bound." So the guards took the iron band and put it on the son's head. The pain was excruciating. But instead of feeling anger or fear, the son, who was the future Buddha, felt great compassion for everyone who suffered and for everyone whose actions would lead to similar punishments in the future. As a result of this sincere compassion, he died in that realm and was reborn in the realm of the gods.

Compassion is an extremely powerful medicine for eliminating all kinds of mental illness and the negative emotions which cause you problems. H. H. The Dalai Lama says that from the least of the most important event, the affection and respect of others are vital for our happiness. Recently I met a group of scientists in America who said that the rate of mental illness in their country was quite high, around twelve percent of the population. It

became clear during our discussion that the main cause of depression was not a lack of material necessities, but a deprivation of the affection of others.

When we practice love and compassion, we see the world more clearly. It is an authentic vision: we are more aware of things, both far and close, out and in, right and wrong, future and present, and oneself and others.

On the other hand, when we are angry or have other negative emotions, we become nearly blind, our blind spot is very big and we see things from only one side. Two people, one who is angry and the other who is compassionate, will see things totally differently. An angry person has a very closed mind and narrow vision, he or she doesn't see very far, and whatever judgments arise from that anger are assumed to be the right thing to do. He or she will not think about the long term or others. A compassionate person will act the opposite of that, be open minded, and have a clear vision of the reality. So he or she will find the best solution for both oneself and the others. Many wise people have said that even when warriors have great anger, it is easier for their enemies to attack them.

There are two possible causes of upheaval or negative conditions, Karma Chagme says that they can be the result of our previous actions, which is your karma, or they can just happen in the course of circumstances, in which case they are the result of temporary conditions. In the case of upheavals that result from temporary conditions alone, many means of protection may be effective. If you are trying to get out of the rain all you have to do is go into a building and that will suffice. It is taught that this will work unless the upheaval is caused by your previous actions, your previous karma.

The ripening of actions is of three types. The first type refers to actions that are so extreme, either extremely virtuous or extremely negative, that the result ripens in the same life. These are actions of manifest or evident ripening, because you can actually see the ripening of the action in the same life. There is no way to stop or to avert them. There are ways to avert the next two types. The second are actions they are strong and intense enough that they will definitely ripen in the next life. The third are actions that will ripen at an uncertain time. Unless they are counteracted they will certainly ripen,

but they can ripen after a hundred lives, after a thousand lives, and so on. Those are called results that will be experienced at some future time or after an unspecified number of lifetimes.

When conditions combine to provide an opportunity for karmic traces to ripen, they will ripen. When temporary conditions occur or surround you so that your previous negative karma can ripen, it will tend to do so. You will experience various things throughout this life that are the result of actions in previous lives. When your upheaval is caused by the coming together of the karmic cause and the force of circumstances around you, these things cannot be dispelled or averted by mundane methods.

The most profound method for avert this problem is the armor of love and compassion. In recent years there have been many studies that support the idea that developing compassion and altruism has a positive impact on our physical and emotional health. There are numerous scholars, medical doctors, psychiatrists, and scientists who have discovered the very real and practical value of compassion. Although we may talk about compassion and

know the great benefits of it, unless we are a compassionate person and carry it out in our daily life, it won't make any difference.

How to Practice the Armor of Love and Compassion

All sentient beings desire to be happy and free from suffering, just like yourself. Every single one of their actions is only for that purpose, to be happy. You start generating compassion by recognizing that you do not want to suffer and have a right to have happiness. This can be verified in your own experience. You then recognize that other people, just like yourself, do not want to suffer and also have a right to happiness. This becomes the basis of your generation of compassion.

I had a discussion with my friends. They were talking about whether a mosquito is a sentient being or not. I said that it is very simple matter. The mosquito is just like yourself. It desires to be happy and that's why it sucks your blood and enjoys it. When you try to kill it, it will fly away and that is a sign of it wanting to be free from suffering. So if you call yourself is a sentient being, then definitely the mosquito is also a sentient being.

Think about others suffering and feel sorry for that and wholeheartedly wish for them to be free from suffering. Think about others happiness and comfort and sincerely rejoice for them and wish for them that their pleasant conditions will last long.

Say these words: "May all beings have happiness, and the causes of happiness. May they be free of suffering and the causes of suffering. May they never be apart from the sacred happiness which is free of suffering. May they dwell in great equanimity, impartial, free of attachment and aversion."

Say this once every morning. Start your day with this constructive altruistic thought. It will make your day easier and protect you. And before go to sleep, end your day with compassion. Especially whenever you feel any kind of fear, put all your energy, attention. and mindfulness into your compassion practice. Carry out this practice in your daily life and you will find every circumstance is a great lesson.

Compassion starts with being grateful to everyone and understanding others suffering. No matter how strong or intelligent we are, without the

support of others we wouldn't be able to survive for a single day. We only survive because other people help to maintain our world and countless animals, insects, and other beings sacrifice their lives for us. For example, the food we eat is available to us because many thousands of people are involved in producing, packaging and distributing it and countless animals and insects gave up their home and life for our food. The same applies to the water we drink, the clothes we buy, the electricity and gas we use, and any number of other things. Our parents and teachers educated us, and doctors help in our health care. We must rely on others if we are to have any quality of life. Therefore, being grateful to everyone is an authentic technique to enhance our compassion. It is not a difficult thing to have compassion when you see someone is suffering who has been so kind to you. Compassion will arise by itself quite naturally. But if the person is someone you don't know or has been not good to you, then you won't have any compassion. The difference is if you have been grateful to the person or not.

We some time understand the word compassion to mean something like suffering with others or something that merely benefits others, but that is not correct understanding. The aim of compassion is for the well being for others, but the immediate benefit is mainly to oneself and only subsequently to others as well. When one desires others to be free from suffering and the cause of suffering, the benefit actually comes to oneself.

H.H. The Dalai Lama said, "From my own limited experience I have found that the greatest degree of inner tranquility comes from the development of love and compassion." "The more we care about the happiness of others, the greater our own sense of well-being becomes. Cultivating a close, warm-hearted feeling for others automatically puts the mind at ease. This helps remove whatever fears or insecurities we may have and gives us the strength to cope with any obstacles we encounter. It is the ultimate source of success in life.

H.H. The Dalai Lama also said, "So far I have been discussing mainly the mental benefits of compassion, but it contributes to good physical health

as well, According to my personal experience, mental stability and physical well-being are directly related. Without question, anger and agitation make us more susceptible to illness. On the other hand, if the mind is tranquil and occupied with positive thoughts, the body will not easily fall prey to disease."

Compassion is the meeting point of all religions, traditions, and societies. They all agree on the need for it. The best way to communicate with the entire world is compassion. When different religions discuss their belief systems and their profound viewpoints, they are just totally different, there is no way to compromise, but once they start to talk about compassion, everything seems simple and understandable. Everyone feels close and happy about sharing the same goal and purpose and soon they admire each other's religion.

The mind is powerful and all happiness and suffering is the creation of the mind. Especially these days, people's emotions are increasing faster than ever. Many times our problems do not exist as we thought, they are merely our imaginings and assumptions. If you ask yourself, "Who cares about my

suffering and problems? Who created them? Who possesses actual methods for diminish and eradicate them?” The correct answer for all these questions is mind. Therefore, training the mind in the correct way is a tremendously important thing in our lives. In the other words, your mind should be protected by the armor of love and compassion.

Meditators Are Fearless Warriors

The two most important things a warrior must do are securing their own protection and train to defeat their enemies. Likewise, a meditator cultivates mindfulness (shamatha) and wisdom awareness (vipasanna) in order to train to pacify afflictions and difficulties. Stabilizing our mindfulness and wisdom awareness and remaining within it whether we are sitting or walking is what we call meditation. By meditating in this way, we come closer and closer to our awakened mind. We become aware of our mind's nature and recognize it. That is really knowing who we are. From then on we will always have a secure place of refuge. Our meditation practice will, over time, give rise to awakened mind, providing us rest and security from mental afflictions. In our daily life experience, from getting up in the morning until going to bed, the time we are with our family, at work, on the streets, or any other occasions are all great opportunities to train our mind to deal with afflictions and difficulties.

If you want to meditate, you should also aspire to be a fearless warrior. However, just imagining the result and maintaining a meditation posture is not sufficient to achieve the desired outcome. You must practice mindfulness and wisdom awareness and take advantage of every opportunity for mind training until you reach a point where no further training is needed. The greatest opportunity to practice occurs when mental afflictions arise within your mind or you are facing difficulties in life.

To become a warrior depends totally on your training. Warriors can fight their enemies only after they are well trained. You cannot become a warrior without developing your physical prowess and practicing weapons skills. To gain proficiency initially, you require a trainer, instruction, and weapons. But even more important is the object to train with. If you practice shooting guns, you practice with a target. If you are learning martial arts you learn and improve your skills with a sparring partner. If you want to be a football player then you must practice against an opposing team. Without a

target, sparring partner, or opponents you cannot fully achieve the results you seek.

It is same with the meditation and mind training. We must train our mind while our minds are under the influence of mental afflictions and when difficult circumstances are turned against us. That is the best opportunity to train our minds. Start training with the easier ones and gradually train with stronger afflictive emotions.

Think that the affliction arising in your mind is like a target and train your mind to destroy the target. Our own afflictions are the real enemies to fight as they overpower our calmness, happiness, and freedom. Whenever they arise in our mind, we should train our mind to fight and destroy them. For example, when you are angry with another person, first recognize the anger through your mindfulness practice and then fight the anger and destroy it and not the person you are angry with. The person who made you angry gave you a great opportunity to train your mind.

Once I had a difficult time on a long distance flight from New York to Singapore. I was almost onboard; just a few steps more and I would be on the plane. I was walking through the boarding tunnel and a couple of police, a man and woman, stopped me and said something about ten thousand dollars not being allowed. I thought oh, that is a disaster if they are asking me to prove that I have more than ten thousand dollars in my pocket. I said "I beg your pardon" and the police said "you are not allowed to carry more than ten thousand dollars. Where do you carry your money?" I showed them my wallet and said, "I don't have even close to that much money." They asked me to lean against the wall, with my hands up and not moving. They checked all over my body. They even pulled up my robe and removed my socks. Eventually a flight attendant came and said, "Are you done? We've been waiting for you." They then let me go.

On the plane I kept thinking how stupid the New York airport police are, how rude and what jerks they are. Why did they only stop me among hundreds of passengers. I couldn't sleep easily; after sleeping I woke up with

the same disturbing emotions. Then I realized this was anger and kept thinking this is really disturbing. I suddenly thought, "I am a Dharma practitioner and I am supposed to train my mind. This is the perfect opportunity to train it." My calmness and freedom returned at that instant.

As a warrior needs weapons and martial skills to defeat their enemies, the meditation practitioner also need weapons and skills to fight and defeat their afflictive emotions. These weapons are our practices of mindfulness, wisdom awareness, and love and compassion. These skills have no limitations. The first very important thing is to recognize afflictions as afflictions, to see them as negative as they actually are. They are afflictions to the mindstream, causing it to be unsettled and uncomfortable. Certain kinds of negative emotions not only cause temporary discomfort but they cause problems for us directly or indirectly for a long time. For example, fear is an uncomfortable feeling but not an affliction or negative emotion. Attachment is not a really uncomfortable feeling much of the time, but it causes problems, so it is an affliction.

If the meditator is a foe destroyer, then who are the enemies? The enemies are the five poisons or kleshas; attachment, anger, ignorance, pride and envy. As the Buddha discovered, they are the causes of our suffering. These are what the afflictions or negative emotions are, according to Buddha's teachings. There is no accurate word in English for klesha in Sanskrit and Nyon mong in Tibetan. It is usually translated as affliction or negative emotions but not all of the five poisons are emotions. Ignorance is one of them but, it is not an emotion. But whether we call them afflictions or negative emotions, it is important for a meditator to be aware of these five poisons.

Attachment is our mind not letting go of thoughts and objects, leading to the experience of dissatisfaction as we grasp onto impermanent things that our minds mistakenly perceive to be permanent. It is easier to understand what attachment is when you practice nonattachment. There are many skills to practice nonattachment but one of the most effective skills is to contemplate the nature of impermanence. It is not enough to just understand

the concept of impermanence. We have to meditate on it, so our mind becomes always aware of it.

Anger is a very destructive, uncomfortable emotion. It is easy to understand why it is negative or a cause of suffering. In this case, anger includes resentment and hatred. To get rid of anger or the feeling of being angry, you need to practice love and compassion while you are not angry. It is difficult to feel love and compassion by the time the anger is burning in your mind. The moment when anger arises in your mind is your greatest opportunity to practice patience, forgiveness, and tolerance. You have to remember that this is the only time you can practice them.

Ignorance refers to our mental obscurations. Ignorance in a worldly sense means a lack of education or being close-minded. This definition of ignorance is not how it is defined in the Buddhist teachings. The Buddhist view of ignorance refers to an active quality of not seeing reality. For example, because of our ignorance we don't see that everything that exists arises through interdependent origination. We don't see the essence of our

own mind as pure awakened enlightened mind as it is. We don't understand the workings of the law of cause and effect, known as karma. We don't see anything correctly as it actually is, not even ourselves. This is what is meant by ignorance. Maybe we can understand some of these things intellectually through science or philosophy, but we do not perceive reality as it really is. It is only an intellectual understanding and not something we see directly.

There are many skills to eliminate our mental obscurations or ignorance. One of the most profound ways is practice mindfulness and wisdom awareness meditation (shamatha and vipasanna). These practices help your mind become freer of mental projections. Each time you practice meditation, you take off layers and layers of your mental obscurations.

Pride is quite straightforward; thinking oneself is superior to the others and treating them as being inferior. Pride is unlike anger and is hard to recognize. Sometimes you don't notice that you have pride but others see it and become dislike you. The Buddhist tradition believes and logically proves that all the living beings have Buddha nature; that is all beings have

the seed of enlightenment. All sentient beings possess this nature which gives them the potential to become Buddhas. This means that while our appearances may be different from one another, but we are all equally valuable. Practicing being a humble person is the entirety of a wise man or woman's life. The practice of exchanging oneself for others is called Tonglen. This sending and taking meditation is generally helpful and is especially good for ridding oneself of envy, jealousy and pride.

Jealousy is clearly a conflicting emotion and there is no way to be happy and peaceful while experiencing it. When you are jealous the happiness of others becomes a punishment to you. You become unhappy at others happiness and that is the ignorance which we mentioned earlier. If you learn to be happy for others happiness, then you are actually getting a portion of their happiness. Some people think jealousy motivates your business and study. That is again what we call ignorance and it is a very wrong approach. Being diligent certainly makes a difference, but not

jealousy. The practice of equalizing yourself with others is the remedy for jealousy.

These five are what we call afflictions or negative emotions and they cause us problems both directly and indirectly. These are the root causes of all other emotional problems and mental afflictions. We are lucky in these days, there are plenty of people everywhere we go to help us train our mind. This cute little nasty guy is here to help you destroy your anger. That attractive person there is helping you to get rid of attachment and perhaps somebody else is here to help you subdue your pride. In other words, you can use the adversity you encounter in life to further your practice.

Atisha, one of the greatest Kadampa masters, was invited to Tibet at the beginning of the second propagation of Buddhism in the Eleventh Century. A story tells how Atisha brought a very difficult Bengali attendant to be the object of his mind training, because he had heard that the Tibetans were extremely nice people. However, it wasn't long before he sent the attendant home. When asked why, he replied, "I don't need him any more. I

have you Tibetans." Such stories are common in the Kadampa tradition because they demonstrate that mind training practice is about strengthening the mind, instead of giving in to despair in the face of adversity.

We grow more quickly if we are open to working with difficulties rather than constantly running away from them. If we could be more serious about our mind training, a mountain of problems would be just a tiny issue that could be resolved instantly. Once, Karen, a student of mine, had a rough day. She had some problems with her property and would have to spend twenty thousand dollars. She told me about her problem and how even though she practiced meditation it didn't help. I suggested her that she should apply mind training practice and that maybe sitting meditation alone would not help unless her sitting meditation was fortified. After she applied the mind training practice I recommended, she said that she could easily let go of her mental turmoil and her peaceful mind returned.

For a dharma practitioner, difficulties and unfavorable circumstances are a great opportunity to train our fragile ego grasping narrow vision mind

to cultivate compassion and wisdom, and respond with fortitude, understanding, and openness to ameliorate the situation rather than constantly focusing on our problems and struggling. Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche said, "The great strength of the mind training teaching is the idea that we can train our minds to turn these unfavorable circumstances around and make them work to our advantage. The main criterion is that we never give up in the face of adversity, no matter what kind of world we are confronted with at the personal or political level. When we think there is nothing we can do, we realize there is something we can do, and we see that this 'something' is actually quite tremendous."

Mysteries of Tonglen

Tonglen practice is like a medicine which cures a hundred diseases. This one practice solves a great number of problems in our life if we do it the precise and proper way.

We all know most of our problems arise from our mental afflictions. And the absence of mental afflictions is happiness. Although it is difficult to not have mental afflictions, we don't have the remote controller to control them. But the mental afflictions have the remote controller to control us; afflictions such as resentment, attachment etc.

No one wants to have resentments. Nobody makes a plan or schedules to create resentments, they come effortlessly. They are so powerful they create our endless dissatisfactory unfulfilling conditions. There's one thing that possesses a power strong enough to control them, eliminate them and frighten them. It is Tonglen practice.

We do the actual practice by visualization. We visualize that we are taking all the problems and suffering others have, we bring them on us while we are breathing in and feel happy that they are free of problems and suffering. Then we breathe out and visualize that we are sending out all the goodness and happiness we possess to others providing them happiness and peace.

Sending cuts off dissatisfaction and attachment. Taking cuts off resentment and fear. Sending trains your mind not to hold back, not to grasp on. Taking trains your mind to accept easily and fearlessly. We practice it with the breath while we are sitting on our meditation cushion. That is the training in meditation level and very important.

But even more important is carrying the Tonglen practice into our day to day life. We can call it post meditation level. In post meditation level we don't practice with visualizing and the breath. We practice it with the actual experience. We send whatever we can provide for others comfort and happiness.

It doesn't mean you have to give everything away and remain poor. Of course, being wealthy is a very good thing. If you are wealthy you can give more. But don't wait until you feel wealthy enough to give. If you wait for that, it probably will never happen.

Sending is not only giving material comforts to others. You can give or share your wisdom to comfort others. You can give respect to comfort others. You can even help the old man to cross the street to comfort him. There are countless opportunities to practice sending in post meditation level.

Taking is another way to provide comfort and help others and eliminate the root of mental afflictions which we call ego grasping. There are so many different ways to practice taking in post meditation level. You can take on others bad reputations, criticisms, blame and causes of problems. You can even take the uncomfortable seat on bus.

This sending and taking benefits yourself in many ways, as we mentioned before. It has benefits in the present moment and in the future. And it benefits others because we are practicing to benefit others.

The main goal of Tonglen practice is to improve our awakened mind and decrease our ego grasping. Once our improvement of awakened mind is completed and we get free of ego grasping, then we will be in a state where everything is perfect. The nature of that state is unconditional happiness and peace. That is what we call enlightenment.

Awakened mind is the main path to get enlightenment, and Tonglen practice is one of the most profound dynamic techniques to improve our awakened mind. When our egoistic ignorant mind transforms into love, compassion and wisdom, these three fine qualities are the awakened mind.

Wanting others to be happy is love, and wanting others to be free of suffering is compassion. The mind which understands true nature is wisdom. Love, compassion and wisdom are not three separate entities; together they are our awakened mind which is the union form of love, compassion and wisdom. This is what we mean by bodhicitta or awakened mind and it turns all our actions and experiences into virtues and the path to enlightenment.

One of the most accomplished meditation masters, Bokar Rinpoche, said: "Without bodhicitta, (that is without love and compassion) every other practice, no matter how deep it may appear, is not a path to awakening: neither mental calming nor meditation on deities nor exercise on subtle channels and energies."

"Westerners today have many techniques that allow them to do wonderful things. Humans can fly in space, move under the sea, reproduce and transmit pictures and words, go long distances in a short time, and do more than one could imagine in the past. But no one could have invented and made use of these things if electricity had not been discovered and used. Without electricity every thing would stop; machines would become immobile and useless objects.

"Bodhicitta is the electricity of spiritual practice. If it is cut, nothing works anymore. On the other hand, with bodhicitta, the phases of creation and completion of deities becomes a true path to awakening; meditation on emptiness becomes a path to awakening; and concentration on the subtle

winds and channels becomes a path to awakening. Animated with bodhicitta, all ordinary activity, all works in the world become a path to awakening."

"Someone who has all the intelligence and science of the world but lacks of love and compassion can never truly accomplish anything beneficial for others. But one who has love and compassion deeply within himself will accomplish benefit for others in everything he does."

Bokar Rinpoche is my teacher. The first time I saw him in my life was in a tiny bamboo hut where a poor old lady had died. In Tibetan tradition, after a person passes away we do many different Buddhist spiritual ceremonies for the deceased. These ceremonies insure the deceased's peace and provide a good journey for next life. We also invite holy spiritual teachers to transfer the dead person's consciousness to the Pure Land or a good rebirth.

I was a student in Rumtek Monastery College. The monastery sent students whenever people requested ceremony services for their deceased. One day the monastery asked me to go to do the ceremony after a death. I

went, upon arrival I realized why they sent me instead of somebody else. There is a poor single old lady dead in her stinky tiny hut; nobody else was willing to go.

However I tried my best to be patient and do my prayers next to a stinky corpse in that small room. About midnight, Bokar Rinpoche arrived with a few of his disciples. He did a long period of meditation and performed a transfer of consciousness ceremony. I was really astonished to see a highly respected holy person visit a place nobody else was willing to go. I could see his expression of love and compassion towards the dead old lady. I got tremendous encouragement from his action of compassion.

Since then I see him as an extraordinary human being. A few years later upon finishing my studies at Rumtek I went to practice meditation in Bokar Rinpoche's three year retreat center. After five years with him in my vision that extraordinary human being is transformed into an embodiment of a complete awakened mind. Even the footprints he left on the ground along his walking meditation route expressed his compassion and wisdom. I used to

touch my forehead on the ground where he walked. I'd get blessed by his awakened mind instantly. My mind would become more natural, clear, peaceful and with fewer negative emotions.

One of my friends asked Bokar Rinpoche, "When we visualize with the breath bringing other's negativities to ourselves, do they really come?" Rinpoche smiled and said, "If you could bring other's negativities on you for real; that means you are highly accomplished. You will get enlightenment in this lifetime, but unfortunately we beginners don't have to worry about that."

In my understanding, Rinpoche is saying that advanced accomplished practitioners have the power to take another's pain and suffering in some cases, but beginners don't have this ability and it's needless to worry about it.

Technically according to the law of karma, the person from whom we take negativities may or may not be free of those negativities even after our Tonglen practice. The person has to experience his own individual karma. On the other hand, we may have a special karmic connection to make it happen, or the power of strong altruistic intention may allow it to happen.

But for the person who is practicing Tonglen, taking the negativities certainly gets them. In other words, yes they do really come to us. The amazing thing is the negativities we take from others are not negativities when they reach us. By the power of loving compassion these negativities spontaneously transform into positive beneficial things. For example when we take others negative emotions it lessens our own. We take others bad karma it purifies our bad karma. We take another's disease it weakens or eliminates our own disease. The more we take others bad karma, disease and negative emotions the more we gain good karma, good health and constructive emotions. This is how it works not how we meditate.

We don't meditate visualizing that the bad things don't "really" come or that somehow they "transform into goodness." We simply meditate with the focus on compassion and the focus to take others suffering fearlessly without any hesitation. If we do feel like it comes through us, be happy, what a great accomplishment! It's the same with sending. We may think if we send all our goodness to others then we will be poor and weak, but actually we gain

riches and strength. The more we send our goodness to others the more goodness we gain. This is how it works, not how we meditate.

We don't meditate visualizing sending our goodness to others to gain more goodness for ourselves. That is a trading business rather than Tonglen practice. We simply meditate with the focus on compassion and send our goodness to others to help them. If we feel they really get our help, we feel happy about that and determine to send even more. This is the answer to the mystery in Tonglen practice when we question, "Do the negativities really come to us?"

A friend said to me, "The way you teach Tonglen is not very comfortable and it scares me. I prefer to do it as my other teacher taught me. He gives an excellent instruction. You visualize others suffering coming towards you, at the same time your suffering is going out towards others. And both meet in space and explode there!" I thought, this is not even close to mind training practice. From this friend I learned the importance of having a teacher who has pure lineage and experience of mind training instructions.

To practice in meditation level, we make a meditation posture and then meditate on love and compassion for a while. We start our Tonglen practice with the person closest to us and then extend it to all beings.

Traditional authentic teachings say, "Meditate that all the sufferings and negativities of others come to us and foster a strong feeling of joy at the same time. Without regret, we sent all our virtuous activity and happiness to all sentient beings. Think that each individual receives all this happiness and cultivate a strong feeling of joy in each one's receiving it."

In order to make this imagined exchange clear; as you breathe in, imagine black tar collecting all the suffering, obscurations and evil of all sentient beings enters your own nostrils and is absorbed into your heart. Think that all sentient beings are forever free of misery and evil.

As you breathe out, imagine that all your happiness and virtue pour out in the form of rays of moonlight from your nostrils and are absorbed by every sentient being. With great joy, think that all of them immediately attain Buddhahood.

To train the mind, use this practice of taking and sending with the breath as the actual practice for the period of meditation. Subsequently, always maintain the practice through mindfulness and continue to work with it.

Another way to do the Tonglen practice according to the authentic traditions is to combine it with Compassion Buddha (Chenrezig) practice. Compassion Buddha is a deity who is an embodiment of all Buddha's compassion and allows us to enhance an infinite compassion towards all beings. We visualize ourselves as Chenrezig; we see ourselves as the body of compassion and wisdom, not as our composite body. Since this wisdom body is not a composite entity, nothing can destroy and harm it. Therefore we can take the negativities of the entire universe without any fear. We can also send out limitless peace and happiness to all sentient beings, because this wisdom body possesses limitless peace and happiness.

At the end of our three year meditation training program, Rinpoche interviewed each of us. He asked me which among the dharma practices we

had done during the long retreat was my favorite. Suddenly I saw I had two answers, one came from my brain and the other from my heart. My brain said, of course one of the top advanced dharma practices should be my favorite. My heart told me the only practice to strongly affect me was Tonglen practice. Tonglen practice impartially affected my intention, behaviors, habitual tendencies, emotional reactions and powerful ego grasping. I especially liked it when it scared the ego. Ego, the trouble maker, doesn't like Tonglen practice.

I answered, "The Tonglen practice is an immediately effective and profound practice to me, and I do the practice more in post meditation level than the meditation level." This practice also tremendously helps me deal with difficult conditions. It makes everything much easier living in modern society.

Eighteen

Freedom of Belief

*Don't hesitate to believe,
If you wish to believe,
Don't be fearful of not believing,
If not believing is your wish.*

*Regardless of belief or not,
What matters is what you do.
Abandon harm to others,
Keep yourself happy and peaceful.*

*Every one has the same goal,
And desires one thing,
The purpose of each being's life,
Is simply to be happy.*

*Every single movement you take,
Is for one purpose only.
To comfort yourself,
Looking forward to happiness.*

I have a friend who goes to the Unitarian church; which historically is based on Christian belief but open to all spiritual believers. She asked me if I believed in God or not. I said, "I've never thought about that." She couldn't imagine how that could be possible. I think many of us have the problem whether to believe or not believe. The problem arises because our experiences, understanding, and inclinations lead us in one direction; tradition and society point us in a different direction.

It is a very difficult decision when we have to choose between two ways when these contradict one another. If we find ourselves in such a situation, we should believe whatever our experiences, life situation, and inclination tell us to believe. The belief system of tradition and society is of secondary consideration. It is important to respect those belief systems but we should not be bound by the ideas of tradition and society. There is nothing more realistic and true than our own experiences, life situation, and inclinations.

We all believe something. It doesn't matter if you are religious or not religious. Belief in something or belief in nothing are both beliefs. However,

we often find ourselves trapped in the conceptual schemes of tradition and society. Traditions were established by our ancestors for various reasons. They are absolutely beautiful heirlooms. We should maintain them for our own benefit and pass them on to the next generation.

Although our personal beliefs are utterly our free choice, we may not feel comfortable with what our tradition tells us to believe. We may hold to our tradition out of a sense of stubbornness even when we are uncomfortable with it. We may maintain that our tradition is the only truth because we belong to it. This behavior could cause us to miss a great opportunity to find genuine wisdom. It might even end up creating tremendous chaos on our planet. For example, some have fought and quarreled to advance our belief system. Others have sacrificed animals to deities they had no proof existed, and so forth. History books are full of stories of people using force to make others believe what they did, thus turning their belief system into a river of blood. Tradition is important and we must respect it, but our personal beliefs should not be solely based on custom and tradition.

The society into which we are born is not a reliable basis for choosing a belief system. What society views as true depends on consensus. If we are leaders in society, it pays attention to what we think, but if we are not, society disregards us and our beliefs.

Society's view of truth fundamentally arises from power, politics and self-interest. Since what we choose to believe is something extremely significant and precious, we should make it our own choice. Every one of us has a different experience and life situation. Our life style is unlike another's. We each have different problems, fears, hopes, interests and inclinations. Therefore, one belief system is not sufficient for everyone. That is the reason why there are so many different belief systems.

Even if we are not interested or do not understand what others believe, we don't have to contradict and criticize their beliefs. We don't have to judge whether they are right or wrong. We can always leave it as an unanswered question.

Recently I had a lunch with my friends, yoga teacher Sharon, Father Joe, and Sister Patty. Obviously we all had different philosophical views and practices. I was amazed how each of us was able to express our different ways of belief, and at the same time appreciate the basic human values of loving kindness and compassion. We showed mutual respect to each other. I felt like we were on different boats crossing the same river. Each of us will reach the same happy and peaceful land.

Father Joe and Sister Patty were interested to know what Buddhists think about God. I told them Buddhist doesn't say there is a Creator God other than the law of cause and effect, our own karma, which is called by different names: karma, God's will, the law of nature, and so on. However loving kindness, compassion and being a good person are equally important.

This seemed a good opportunity to learn something more about God from a theologian and priest. I asked to Father Joe, "What do you think about God?" "I believe God is real", he said. Sharon wondered what "real" meant. I interrupted her question to Father and said, "Probably we shouldn't ask

many questions. I heard that some religion consider questioning and doubt are obstacles." Father Joe said, "An unanswered question is good and not a problem; but how question is answered could create a problem. And having a question doesn't matter but having that question answered can be a problem."