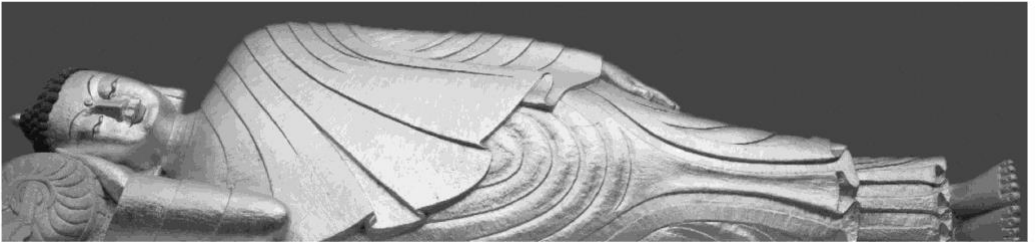


**HOW TO FACE
DEATH WITHOUT
FEAR LAND OF
JOY HEXHAM**



**ENGLAND MARCH
9–13, 2021 WITH
VEN ROBINA
COURTIN**

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COVER

Shakyamuni Buddha passing away in the lion position; statue in the courtyard at FPMT's Jamyang Buddhist Centre in London. Sculptor Nick Durnan; photo Natascha Sturny.

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1. HOW TO LIVE LIFE IN THE CONTEXT OF DEATH

VEN ROBINA COURTIN

Lama Atisha, in his *Lamp on the Path*, takes from all the extensive teachings of the Buddha on impermanence and gets us to contemplate the grosser level of how things change, in particular our own death. And coming organically and naturally from the previous contemplation, which is to think about the preciousness of this life and the wish not to waste it, his reasoning is to increase our wish not to waste it by realizing that it will end, and could end at any moment.

So let's look at the framework Atisha would recommend that we use to contemplate death, my own death.

1. DEATH IS DEFINITE

The first point is that death is definite. Intellectually, we know it, but emotionally we cling instinctively to a strong sense of being permanent, unchanging. Intellectually it's clear to us; emotionally we're living in denial of it. And remember across the board, what Buddha is saying is, we have within our mind a whole series of misconceptions about how we *think* things are, but in fact we're not in touch with *how* they are.

Everything is impermanent. There's not a single thing in the existence of the universe that is a product of cause and effect that doesn't change. The very nature of cause and effect is that things change. In fact the subtle level of impermanence is the very coming into being of something, inherent in *that* is the passing away of it. You can't have one without the other. You can't have anything that exists that is within the process of cause and effect that doesn't change, that doesn't come and go. Come and go. Come and go.

So okay, death is definite. How you contemplate this, how you think about this. . . When you hear about somebody dying, your first response is, “Oh!” We’re so shocked. “But I just talked to them yesterday!” So that thought is coming from the misconception that somehow instinctively we thought that they were permanently alive, you know. Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, we think, “I am a living person, I’m a living person. And Mary, I talked to her yesterday! She was a living person, how could she have died?” We’re shocked.

When we think of someone who is sick, however, we think “Oh, she’s a dying person”. Look how we talk about dying people, in hushed tones. We look at them sadly, “Oh, how are you?” We talk about Aunt Mary only in relationship to her dyingness, the sickness; she’s no longer a real person, is she? She’s a dying person. You don’t even want to include her in parties. And this is because we have this misconception that somehow this dyingness is something that defines her, whereas livingness defines me. As Lama Zopa says: “Living people die before dying people every day”.

Look at the silly way we talk, an indicator of our misconceptions. “Oh I feel so alive”, we’ll say. Meaning we feel very good. Well excuse me, happy people die. You understand? Healthy people die. Young people die. We might think, “Well, I’m not going to die yet. I’m not old”. And you keep adjusting that, don’t you? I mean, when I was 40, 61 was old. Now, 80 is old. Where is Betty? Betty is old, she is 75. Aren’t you?

Betty I’m 74! Unless you add a year for the Tibetan calendar then I’m 75.

Okay, Betty is old, she’s 74. But she doesn’t think she is old. She probably thinks her grandmother is old or somebody who is 85 is old. So we all just keep adjusting because we don’t like to put ourselves into that category. Dying people are over there, old people are over there, because we have this deep instinct of grasping at permanent me, a living me.

So we’ve got to face reality. “What do you mean: ‘Face reality?’” We think fantasies are nice. Well, Buddha says fantasies have got us

into big trouble. It's a fantasy to think I won't die. Not because he's trying to be cruel and sort of rub our noses in death. But he is saying that given our consciousness is a continuity that didn't begin at the time of conception, and given that it will continue, and given that everything we say, do and think will leave seeds in the mind that will bring future results that will be my experiences – this is the view of karma – then it just makes a lot of sense that death is an extremely important moment in your life. Because it's going to be a transition from this body to another body. It's a bit of a scary transition. We should be used to it, we've done it a million times, the Buddha says. But we're not mentally used to it because we're clinging so powerfully to this one.

And we cling to everything so mightily – Grandma's cup: it's so precious, you've got insurance on it and it's up there and so dear to you and you look at it every day. But its nature is to break, you can't avoid that. But we live in denial of that because we've imposed all of this beauty and marvelousness and value onto it. And so look what happens when it does break. You have a mental breakdown. You live in denial and you start freaking out. You've got to blame, you've got to sue somebody and it's so painful. And then we think we're suffering because the cup broke.

We think we suffer because the person died. It's not true. We suffer – and this is Buddha's point – because we have a fantasy that it won't break, because we have a fantasy that she shouldn't die. In other words, we're not seeing reality. Across the board this is how Buddha is talking. We are not facing reality. We don't see things as they are. We live in denial of things. We are not only not seeing how things are, we're imposing a fantasy onto it.

So this simple meditation here we are trying to do: using Buddha's view of what's real, we're giving it a go, we're thinking about how he says things are and attempting to make that the way we think, in order to argue with ego's entrenched mistaken views. So it's a practical reason.

I mean even when we think of a person who's dying, we think *that's* permanent. A friend of mine and her husband, they split up, and then he was diagnosed with some virulent cancer and was going to be dead in a couple of months, she went back to him to help him die. Well excuse me, he didn't die! She kept waiting! Two months later, three months later, then six months later he's still alive. So she had to leave him again. He was a dying person and he didn't die. And now two years later he's totally alive, he's a living person again.

So death is definite and it's something that is just natural. When we hear that Mary died, it reminds us; surprise is not relevant. That's the way to think about it. "Wow, Buddha is right. Death is definite, there's nothing certain. Wow, look at that". Everything that comes into being necessarily dies. But because of the ego-grasping, this primordial misconception, because of massive attachment, the main voice of the ego, we frantically don't want to disappear. We want to be me. So we can't bear to think that I will change, that I will die. So we have this big fantasy.

Intellectually it would be silly to argue with it: "Oh of course I'm not going to die!" We know we will. But emotionally it's like that. We might as well say we're not going to. That's why we're shocked. Death is definite.

A simple way to bring this into our lives is every time we see or hear about someone dying – a person, an ant, our pets – remember that it's natural: death is definite. And the real way to make it tasty is to think, "That'll be me one day. I will die too".

2. THE TIME OF DEATH IS UNCERTAIN

The second point, getting closer to home now, is the time of death is not certain. So even though we do factor in death to some extent – we have insurance policies and pensions, we organize our funeral, we make our will – still, even if we're old, we haven't scheduled death in, have we? "Well next week is the dentist, and the week after that is death". Or even five years' time. We can plan vacations even in five years, but we don't schedule death. No way, because even though we

do know we will die, that death is definite, we don't like to think that the time of death is uncertain. Why? Because I still feel like a living person. How can I be dying next week? Not possible. I feel alive.

So the time of death is obviously uncertain. We all know we're going to die. But then if I ask each one of us, "Okay, stick it into your schedule. Come on, do a ten-year schedule now, work out your schedule for your life, your plan. Now factor death in please" we'll think it's a joke.

And, of course, we don't know when we will die. That's the point. We vaguely know it'll be some time in the future. It's a logical fact that if I know I will die and I don't know when, then I could die today, couldn't I? But we laugh if we say that. It's an instinctive belief. "Of course I won't die today. Tomorrow? Of course not. Next week? No, come on, don't be ridiculous!" There is a story about a Tibetan astrologer, who had done his own chart, and according to the chart he was going to die today. His own chart. He sat there thinking about it, "Where did I make a mistake?" He was totally convinced he was wrong. And what happened was, while he was trying to work out where he had made the mistake, convinced that he was wrong, the story is that he had this pokey thing and he was playing with it in his ear while he was thinking. And the window shutter blew open and it hit him and he pierced his ear and he died. He died that moment. But the immediate impulse was, "Of course it's a mistake. How can I die today?"

And any one of us if we dared to think that thought and really go into it and make a meditation out of it, to use our creative imagination, it's too scary to us, we don't want to go there, because we can't bear the thought that we could die. And then to do the processing we'd have to do, like the people up on the hundredth floor of the World Trade Center, think of the vivid stories, and the wives and husbands talking to each other, and "I love you, I love you", before they were burned alive in that building. I mean you've really got to speed up the process of giving up attachment and recognizing impermanence when you've only got a few minutes. So what Buddha

is saying is, we can have the luxury while we've got this precious life to contemplate these things. To recognize the reality that the time of death really is uncertain.

Most of us, probably Betty can speculate, being 74, that it's possible that she could probably die sooner than a 20-year-old. But there is no certainty. I read about a footballer who died, a 17-year old. Whatever the reason was, he died. Now, believe me, he didn't expect to die. "No way, I'm young. No way, I'm healthy. No way, I'm happy". Fantasy, fantasy, fantasy.

Lama Zopa says, "Best to think, 'I will die today.'" If you really want to practice, best to think, "I will die today". Because then you won't waste your life. That's the point Atisha wants from us by contemplating these things right here, because it will energize us not to waste this precious life, not to waste this opportunity.

And, you think about it: what's the name of the day you'll die? It's "today", isn't it! So we might as well get used to thinking it!

3. WHAT IS IMPORTANT AT THE TIME OF DEATH?

And that brings us to the third point, the crux of it. At the time of death, at the moment when this consciousness leaves this body, what is important? What is useful to me in that moment? What will be useful to the consciousness that will leave this body and take another body. What will be useful?

That's not the way we think of death. We think of death as the end, and we see a big black hole that we'll sort of go into that no one knows about. We think of death from the point of view of the observer. We should think about death from the point of view of this consciousness moving forward to another body, another house, you've got to go to another house soon. So it's a bit of a difficult transition, and clearly, the more attached you are to this house, the more painful it is to move.

If we never confronted impermanence, our own, and never thought about death, the definiteness of it, the uncertainty of the

time of it, well then that's how death will be, death will be a very scary time.

I remember a friend of mine, Lenny, who worked for years as a hospice worker, she said it's a given that most people die with fear. She said the ones who didn't die with fear were those who had some kind of spiritual path. My feeling is it's not because they're such high practitioners but because the only people who think about death are spiritual people, Christians, say, because they talk about God or heaven. Materialists, why would we think about death? Because as far as the materialist's view is concerned you disappear when you die, there's nothing left. So there's no reason to think about death. There's no reason to prepare yourself for that event.

If you're a Buddhist you prepare for that event because you're going to move from this body to another one. So it's an important event, it's a very important event that's going to happen in your life: your death. Like moving from your house, you prepare an awful lot for that. Look at the simple things we do that will happen in the future that we have to prepare for. We don't just say, "Oh, when it happens I'll deal with it". That's how we think about death.

We prepare in the most elaborate ways for the smallest things that are going to happen in the future. Especially if you don't know how to do it. Like your driving test. You don't just say, "Oh, when I get to the driving test I'll manage it then". Don't be ridiculous! You've got to train now, you know, it's obvious. It's such a simple point. So if you think of death in this sense, not as some black hole that I will fall into, but as simply a transition. This is the Buddhist approach. From this body to the next. Clearly a very important event to prepare for. And I'm not talking about having your nice coffin, the way people prepare, and the nice plot, out there. We're not discussing that. That's just for your body. By the time your consciousness leaves your body it's just a piece of ka-ka, so don't worry about the body; other people can take care of that. The main point from Buddha's point of view is to prepare internally, to think about your mind.

And how do you prepare for death? It doesn't mean you've got to imagine when you're dying, although that's helpful. You're not preparing for death by thinking about death. You're preparing for death by knowing about impermanence *now*. How do you prepare for your driving test? By driving a car *now*. It's obvious. How do you prepare for death: by facing the reality of it. And you prepare for death by living our lives in a way that prepares us for death.

The conclusion from this is it's a wakeup call. And that's the point that Atisha's stressing here: to prepare ourselves. In other words change the way we think now and therefore change the way we live our lives, because that's how you prepare for death, that's how you prepare for this event. You put all the steps in place. Like you prepare for the wedding, you prepare for the driving test. You do the steps now and so when the day comes it'll just happen in a natural way.

So this third point is, at the time of death what is it useful to me? Well, there's a few givens here: let's look at them.

Given Buddha's assertion that this consciousness of mine didn't begin at conception and goes back and back and back, and that it will not end at death, will continue just into the future – it's indestructible this consciousness of ours; and **given** that whatever I have said, done, and thought in this life, and in infinite previous ones, necessarily leaves a seed in my mind that just doesn't disappear; and given that seeds ripen in the future as one's own experiences: negative actions of body, speech and mind necessarily leave seeds in my mind that will ripen as suffering and positive actions leave a seed in my mind that will ripen as my happiness in the future; and **given** that I don't want suffering and do want happiness – **given** all this, then it follows logically that at the time of death the only thing that is of any use to me is the positive seeds in my mind. That's it.

The body is useless, it can't help. Princess Diana died at 36. I always think of her. This gorgeous aerobiced body, totally in love, everything is perfect, blissful, blah, blah, blah. She died. So at that moment, the only thing that was any benefit to her were the seeds in

her mind from the virtue she had done in her life. All the rest was worse than useless.

The things that I now see as most important in life, Buddha would say – and you analyze it according to his view and it's clear – they are totally essenceless. The things we do take as the purpose of life, you ask most people, it's almost like a mantra: health and family are the main point of our life. Everyone will say that's the point of life. Well, the Buddha would say we are missing the point because at the time of death if they were so crucial they would be a benefit to us, but they are useless. Your family, your husband, your children, your possessions, your nice house, your nice body, your health, your reputation, money in the bank, all the things we spend all our time worrying about and putting into place because we believe in the propaganda that that's the security we are need, that that's what life is all about; we believe in the materialists' propaganda, which we are part of, we buy into it.

But at the time of death all the things you spend your life thinking are important are of no use. They crumble. There's nothing. We all say at the time of death you can't take it with you, but we treat it like a joke. It's very profound when you really get an experience of its truth.

So if this is true, then I had better prepare now by living my life in a reasonable way now: by trying to remove the negative seeds that I have already planted and by trying to develop the positive ones. This is reasonable, based on these assumptions. So at the time of death, when it comes, I must be ready, I have to be prepared. And the way to be prepared is by having thought about it, therefore, when it comes I'm not shocked because I know it's natural that I die. And I'm prepared because I've lived my life by practicing morality, goodness, by not harming others – at the very least, this.

We don't have to be fundamentalist about it and chuck out the husband, and chuck out the kids, and chuck out the reputation, and chuck out our money, no. Just change the way you see them. Change your attitude towards them. That's the real point. Give up attachment

to the house, the family, the body; give up the jealousy, the fear, the neurosis, the blaming. Because those imprints in your mind will be there when you die and you do not want those. But you do want your virtue and your kindness and your generosity and your patience and your non-attachment seeds to ripen.

So you don't wait until death to do it, it's too late then. Start sowing seeds now. That's how you lead your life. By recognizing that it's going to change, that death is definite, the time of death is completely uncertain, you might as well be ready when it does come unexpectedly. It won't give a warning: "You've got ten more breaths left Robina, you'd better get ready". We might have; we'd be lucky. It's actually very fortunate if you get sick before you die, because you've got time to prepare. That's actually really the Buddhist approach. My Buddhist friends on death row have been forced to confront the reality of death, so they can prepare for it. How fortunate.

From teachings in the FPMT's Discovering Buddhism Module 3, Practicing the Path.

2. WE MUST PREPARE FOR DEATH

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

OUR GREATEST GIFT TO OTHERS

When suddenly one day one of your loved ones dies and you don't know what to do to help, you'll feel so confused, so lost. Recently a Buddhist student of mine told me that this is what happened for her when her father died unexpectedly. That made me think that knowing how to help others at the time of death is such important education to have.

As you get older, you'll definitely hear about people dying – your family will die, your friends will die (your enemies too!) – so you will need to be prepared to help. This doesn't just apply to people who work with the dying; everyone should learn to know how to help.

Helping our loved ones at the time of death is the best service we can offer them, our greatest gift. Why? Because death is the most important time of life: it's at death that the next rebirth is determined. By providing the right support, the right environment, you can help your loved one die peacefully, with virtuous thoughts, and thus have a good rebirth.

BEFORE YOU HELP OTHERS AT DEATH, YOU NEED TO PREPARE FOR YOUR OWN DEATH

Before you can help someone else you need to learn how to prepare for your own death. If you look at your mind and how much attachment you have, I think you will see that there is a lot of work to be done before you face death, and this is true of almost everybody. Have you freed yourself from attachment to your possessions? To your loved one and friends? To your career and reputation? Could you separate from your body happily tomorrow?

But preparing for a happy death depends not just on practices at

the time of death; a happy death depends upon how we live our life every day, every moment. Practicing patience when someone is angry with us or provokes us or disrespects us, for example, is practical preparation for death. Practicing like this every day protects us from creating negative karma, and that makes death lighter, less fearful. The future depends on the present.

Practicing every day and preparing for the time of your death is far more important than going to the hospital to check the body, because death can happen at any time – even for healthy people. Today, many people have died, healthy as well as unhealthy.

When you know how to die with full confidence that you won't be reborn in the lower realms, that definitely you will have a good rebirth, a good future; that death is just change, that you're leaving this old, sick body for a new, healthy one – then you are qualified to help others who are dying. You will be able to explain things skillfully, according to their minds. You will create the right conditions so that it's easy for their minds to be transformed into virtue at the time of death. You will know how to help them die with a happy mind.

And not only that: once you're familiar with what to do you can tell others what they can do to help you at the time of your own death.

DEATH IS EASY WHEN WE'VE GIVEN UP ATTACHMENT

Death itself is not what causes fear. It is simply the consciousness leaving the body; one labels death on that event. There is no terrifying death from its own side; the terrifying death is made up by our own mind. We have made death terrifying.

What causes the worry and fear, what makes death so difficult is attachment, desire, clinging: to this life, to the body, possessions, family, friends and so forth. This clinging makes death difficult, bringing so much worry and fear. And we cause this ourselves.

ATTACHMENT IS THE MAIN PUSH BEHIND SAMBARA

In relation to taking refuge in the Dharma, the Refuge prayer mentions “the supreme cessation of attachment” when it talks about the cessation of suffering and its causes – it doesn’t say cessation of anger, it doesn’t say cessation of ignorance, it doesn’t say cessation of pride, and so forth (there are many delusions). Why specifically attachment?

Because it’s the main push behind samsara, this cycle of death and rebirth; the main cause.

There is attachment that motivates negative actions, which cause rebirth in the lower realms. Then there is attachment to wanting to be reborn in the human realm, for example, as a result of which we create virtuous karma, which causes that rebirth. And then, as described in the twelve links of dependent arising, at the time of death the eighth and ninth links, craving and grasping – strong attachment, in other words – arise and nourish the seed that was left on the mental continuum by the past karma (the second link) because of the root ignorance (the first), making it ready to produce the next life.

So you can see that even the nearest cause of the next rebirth in samsara is this attachment at the time of death. It is what ties us to samsara continuously, has been tying us to samsara continuously, and will continue to tie us to samara, because our consciousness has existed since beginningless time and will continue to exist forever. Until we have cut the causes of samsara, body after body will keep coming, like the assembly line in a car factory.

COLOPHON

From Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s How to Enjoy Death, Wisdom Publications.

3. WHAT HAPPENS AT DEATH?

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

WHEN DOES DEATH OCCUR?

Death occurs when the consciousness, the mind, separates from the body. Even when the breath has stopped – this is what is called the “outer breath” – or the brain doesn’t function, or the heart doesn’t beat, the person is not dead until the mind, the consciousness, leaves the body. There is still the “inner breath”, and for this to stop and the consciousness to leave the body can take anywhere from a few seconds to three days after the outer breath has ceased (or even longer for experienced meditators).

Dr. Adrian Feldmann, an Australian medical doctor who’s one of the most senior FPMT monks, explained how he saw a person whose heart had stopped, who was clinically dead, but who started to function again.

There are many, many stories like this. These things happen because it’s hard to tell when a person has died if you go by just the heart or the breath or brain activity.

THE COMPONENTS OF A PERSON

In order to better understand the process of death, it’s helpful to understand what makes up a person, the one who dies.

FIVE AGGREGATES

Buddha explained that a person is made up of five “aggregates”: form, feeling, discrimination, compounding aggregates, and consciousness.

Form refers to our body. Feeling and discrimination are two of the mental factors that we experience day to day; all the rest, such as jealousy, patience, and love, etc., are included in compounding

aggregates. Consciousness refers to the six consciousnesses: the five senses and mental consciousness.

FOUR ELEMENTS

Our body is made up of the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind.

GROSS, SUBTLE, AND EXTREMELY SUBTLE BODY AND MIND, OR CONSCIOUSNESS

According to the explanations in highest tantra, there is gross body, subtle body, and extremely subtle, or very subtle, body conjoined respectively with gross consciousness, subtle consciousness, and extremely subtle, or very subtle, consciousness.

The gross body is this one that we can see; the subtle one is made up of channels, winds, and drops; the extremely subtle body is subtle wind.

The sense consciousnesses are gross consciousness. Subtle consciousness includes the various conceptual states of mind called the eighty superstitions, as well as the minds of white appearance, red appearance or increase, and black, or dark, appearance. Finally, there is extremely subtle consciousness, or the mind of clear light.

CHANNELS, WINDS, AND CHAKRAS

The wind energies of the subtle body – more subtle than the air we breathe – carry our mind through a system of 72,000 channels throughout the body. It is said that our consciousness, our mind, “rides” on these winds.

The main channels are the central channel and the right and left channels. They are in the centre of the body, measuring between the two breasts, and a little closer to the back. At various points along these channels there are chakras, the main ones being at the crown, the throat, the heart, the navel and the tip of the sex organ. The two side channels do not run straight down either side of the central channel but wrap around it at the chakras, forming “knots”.

RED AND WHITE DROPS

At the moment of conception in our mother's womb, our consciousness mixed with the red drop, or bodhichitta, from the mother and the white drop from the father. The essence of this conjoined white and red bodhichitta – known as the indestructible drop, with its red and white halves, the size of a tiny bean – abides in the very centre of our heart chakra.

Part of the white bodhichitta also abides at the crown chakra and part of the red at the navel chakra. Our extremely subtle consciousness resides in the indestructible drop.

THE CLEAR LIGHT MIND OF DEATH

While we are alive, the knots at the chakras prevent the winds from entering into and flowing in the central channel. Otherwise these various winds and the states of mind associated with them would all dissolve into the indestructible drop at the heart chakra, at which point our extremely subtle consciousness, the mind of clear light, would manifest and with it we could meditate on emptiness and thus free ourselves from all delusions, eventually becoming enlightened.

Throughout their lives the great meditators train their minds to do this. Lama Yeshe, for example, in his daily tantric practice was able to experience the various visions of the dissolution process that occur naturally at death; in other words, he didn't need to wait until death to experience them. Lama was able to open the chakras, causing the winds to enter into and flow in the central channel and dissolve at the heart chakra, and thus could meditate in the clear light. Therefore, at the time of death the great yogis can remain in meditation in the clear light for as long as they like, which is what happened with Lama. .

DEATH, INTERMEDIATE STATE, AND REBIRTH

The process of death occurs in eight stages, and is experienced by those who have bodies constituted from the sperm of the father and the egg of the mother: human beings and some animals.

During the first four stages we experience the gradual dissolution of twenty-two of twenty-five components: four of the five aggregates, four of the five types of wisdom – the base-time wisdoms, not the resulttime – the four elements, five of the six sense bases, and the five inner sense objects.

The breath has stopped by the end of the fourth stage, and by then the gross consciousnesses have ceased.

During the final four stages, the remaining three of the twenty-five components gradually cease: the fifth aggregate, the fifth wisdom, and the sixth sense base.

During the fifth, sixth, and seventh stages subtle consciousness gradually dissolves: the eighty superstitions, bringing, in order, the white, red, and dark appearances.

By the eighth stage, all that is left is the extremely subtle wind conjoined with the extremely subtle consciousness, the mind of clear light, at the indestructible drop at the heart. Death occurs when the indestructible drop splits open and the conjoined extremely subtle wind and mind leaves the body.

However, for ordinary people the mind can stay in the body for up to three days after the breath stops, although they are not aware. The great yogis, as I mentioned, can meditate in the clear light for as long as they like.

As soon as the mind leaves the body we take a “life” between this life and the next called the intermediate state, and up to forty-nine days later will take a new rebirth.

COLOPHON

From Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s How to Enjoy Death, Wisdom Publications.

4. THE TWELVE LINKS OF DEPENDENT ARISING AT THE TIME OF DEATH LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

Cyclic existence operates through the twelve links of dependent arising. From **(1) the ignorance** that believes in inherent existence we create **(2) compounded action**, or **karma**, the imprints of which are left on our **(3) consciousness**. (Some authors of the scriptures also count the result consciousness that enters the fertilized egg.) Next is **(4) name and form**, “name” referring to the four mental aggregates and “form” to the physical, the egg and sperm, when the five come together in the womb.

When they begin to develop as the fetus they are known as **(5) the six sense bases**. Then comes **(6) contact**, when the mind connects with external objects through the sense bases of the eyes, ears, and so forth, followed by **(7) feeling** in relation to those objects, either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, which gives rise to **(8) craving** and **(9) grasping**, then **(10) becoming**. Next is **(11) birth**, and finally there is **(12) old age and death**.

THE TWELVE LINKS OF THIS PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH

Let us discuss the twelve links in relation to this human body that we have now. What caused our consciousness to join the egg and sperm in our mother’s body? What made it go there?

In past lives, because of **ignorance** we created both non-virtuous and virtuous karma, which planted seeds, left potentials, in the field of our **consciousness**. At the time of death of our life before this one, whether we were a human or an elephant or a kangaroo, **craving** arose – craving to not separate from that body. Then fear arose, because of the attachment to not wanting to leave the body:

that's what causes fear at the time of death. After that, **grasping** arose, a stronger form of attachment, this time – in our case – attachment to receiving a human body.

Now, in the case of someone who is going to be reborn in the hot hells the craving is the same – not wanting to separate from their body – but the grasping is to heat because they feel very cold. Many times dying people say they feel cold and beg for blankets, but even if you give them two or three it won't be enough: their grasping at heat is so strong. (This could also happen because the fire element is dissolving at that point.) The grasping at heat activates a negative karmic seed, the second link, which causes their mind to migrate to a hell being's body right after death. The grasping is the very close condition; there were, of course, the previously-created causes: the first link, ignorance, and the second, karma.

GRASPING AT A HUMAN REBIRTH AT THE TIME OF DEATH IS A CAUSE FOR ACHIEVING ONE

In our case, as humans, the very close condition at the time of our past death, just before the gross consciousness ceased, was the grasping at, the wish to receive, a human body. In other words, in order to receive this perfect human rebirth that we have now, we must have had not only the karma of perfect morality and great generosity but also the strong desire – grasping, the ninth link – to have a human body.

When we understand that attachment to this life is never virtuous but attachment at the time of death to either a human life or rebirth in a pure land is virtuous, then we can understand the function of this link of grasping.

In other words, whereas craving and grasping are certainly operating in our daily life in the form of attachment, in the context of the twelve links they are more to do with the connection of one life to the next.

The karmic seed that gives rise to the new rebirth is there on our mind, the second link, but it is grasping at the time of death that activates its ripening.

FIVE CAUSES FROM PAST LIVES, SEVEN RESULTS IN THIS LIFE

To summarize: five of the links are causes from past lives: three delusions – the three links of **ignorance**, **craving**, and **grasping**; and two karmas – the two links of **compounded action** and **becoming**.

First there was the delusion **ignorance**, the first link, then the delusions arising at the time of death, the eighth link, **craving**, and ninth, **grasping**. Then there were the two karmas – the second link, in our case a virtuous **karma** (which could have been created thousands, even millions, of lives ago), and the second karma, **becoming**, the tenth link: the previously created karmic seed made ready by craving and grasping at death: that is what is called becoming.

It is these five that formed these aggregates, this body and mind, this samsara.

Of the seven results that manifest in this life, the eleventh link, **birth**, started at the moment our consciousness joined the fertilized egg. **Old age**, the beginning of the twelfth, **old age and death**, started the next moment in the womb – “old age” is not just what is known in the world: the wrinkles, the white hair, and so forth.

Now, all there is left is **death**.

COLOPHON

From Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s How to Enjoy Death, Wisdom Publications.

5. THE EIGHT STAGES OF DEATH

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

Even though we all go through the eight stages at the time of death, what I describe here is a gradual death. Those who die violently or suddenly go through the stages very quickly. And sometimes in a violent death the mind could leave the body immediately and go straight to the intermediate state.

As I mentioned, the great meditators, those who have deeply familiarized themselves with these stages in meditation during their lives, can recognize the stages of death as they occur and can meditate on emptiness throughout. But ordinary people don't recognize them. (We go through these stages every time we sleep too, but we don't recognize them then, either.) It's like when you're looking at a person, let's say, but your mind is concentrating on another object, a sound for example, or you're thinking of something else, and even though the person is in front of you, you simply don't see them.

It's the same at death. We don't recognize the visions that occur at each stage of this evolution – first this, then that, then that; now the clear light, now the intermediate state, etc. – because of the pollution of our ignorance and our uncontrolled mind. Even though we might know these stages intellectually, not having trained our minds in the meditation techniques during our lifetime and not having created enough virtuous karma or purified our minds, we can't recognize these experiences as they occur. But it's possible.

It's good to help your loved one meditate on these stages during the months and weeks before death. They can also become familiar with these stages as they go to sleep.

And if they have a highest tantra practice you can guide them through the stages of meditation, which I discuss in chapter 10, when you help them with their daily practices.

GROSS CONSCIOUSNESS

(1) THE VISION OF A MIRAGE

As the aggregate of form dissolves your body becomes thinner and your limbs become loose and unmanageable.

As the mirror-like wisdom dissolves – these and the other four wisdoms are labeled according to the function of the senses – your ability to see many objects at the same time, as a mirror reflects many objects together, ceases; and you cannot see the forms of people and objects clearly.

As the earth element dissolves you feel as if you are sinking; you might even reach up as if to hold on to something.

As the eye sense base dissolves you can no longer open or close your eyes. If your eyes are open they will remain like that without blinking; this is a sign that you will die within one or two hours. In fact, this is the nearest sign of death.

This is what happened with Lama Yeshe during the last couple of hours before he passed away: he was unable to close his eyes. And I've seen it in other dying people.

As the inner subtle form dissolves your body loses its strength completely, and it loses its radiance.

You will have a vision of a mirage, an inner vision, like water shimmering in the heat. Your vision blurs; everything seems watery and wavy, like a mirage in the distance.

(2) THE VISION OF SMOKE

As the aggregate of feeling dissolves you can no longer experience the three kinds of feelings: pleasure, pain, and indifference; you're indifferent to suffering and happiness.

The wisdom of equanimity, which sees these three together, as having the same nature, dissolves.

As the water element dissolves the liquids of your body dry up; your mouth feels very dry: this too is a sign that death could be within one or two hours.

As the ear sense base dissolves you can no longer distinguish sounds.

As the inner sound dissolves you can no longer even hear the buzzing in your ears.

You will have a vision of smoke, like a room filled with incense, or smoke from burning green wood swirling about.

YOUR DYING THOUGHTS ACTIVATE THE KARMIC SEED THAT DETERMINES YOUR NEXT REBIRTH

As Pabongka Rinpoche says in *Liberation In the Palm of Your Hand*, your dying thoughts activate the karma that will be the cause of your next rebirth, and the activators of this “throwing karma” are the eighth and ninth links, craving and grasping, as discussed in the twelve links of dependent arising in chapter 4. Rinpoche says that this takes place while the mind is still active and you can still recall virtue or be reminded of it by other people, which is now.

At this point it is so important to be able to control the arising of the disturbing thoughts by remembering the guru, the teachings – renunciation of samsara, karma, emptiness, loving kindness and great compassion, and the rest – which gives us the chance to be born in a buddha’s pure land or to take a perfect human rebirth.

If our last gross thoughts are virtuous the throwing karma will be virtuous; if the last gross thoughts are non-virtuous the throwing karma will be non-virtuous. The karmic seed that ripens is whichever is heavier, the stronger habit – which, as I mentioned, could have been planted hundreds, even millions, of lifetimes ago; if they’re equal, the seed that was planted first will be the one that ripens.

If we die with anger, say, or strong attachment to our life, our loved ones, etc., our birth will be only in the lower realms, nowhere else. Generally, attachment causes rebirth as a hungry ghost; ignorance causes rebirth as an animal, and anger as a hell being. In

these lower realms we will experience unimaginable sufferings for an incredible length of time. The suffering in the human realm is nothing in comparison – in fact, it's like great pleasure in comparison.

At this point, when dying with non-virtuous thoughts five things can occur, although not necessarily all five. They include soiling ourselves, our arms and legs thrashing about, screaming, blood coming from the ears, nose and mouth, and our eyes rolling up. If we have created very heavy negative karma, all five will happen and as we are dying we will have terrible visions of our future life. We will feel that we are moving from light into darkness.

On the other hand, dying with a virtuous state of mind causes us to have a peaceful and happy death. In fact, if we're like the best spiritual practitioners we will be joyful at the time of death and will have a sense of passing from darkness into light.

(3) THE VISION OF FIRE SPARKS

As the aggregate of discrimination dissolves you can no longer recognize your friends and relatives.

As the wisdom of discriminating awareness, or discernment, dissolves you cannot remember anyone's names; the people around you become blurs.

As the fire element dissolves the body's heat gradually ceases; the capacity to digest food ceases.

As the nose sense base dissolves, breathing in becomes difficult and weaker and breathing out becomes stronger and longer.

As the inner sense of smell dissolves you can no longer smell anything.

You will have a vision of fire sparks, like the sparks that come when you burn dry grass, or like starlight, or a sky filled with fireflies.

HOW THE HEAT LEAVES THE BODY

You can judge the type of rebirth you will take by where the heat in your body begins to cease. If you are dying with a positive attitude,

which causes a happy rebirth, your feet will get cold first and the heat will eventually only be at the heart.

If you are dying with fear or anger or attachment, for example, which causes a suffering rebirth, the head will get cold first and, again, the heat will eventually only be at the heart.

(4) THE VISION OF A FLAME

As your aggregate of compounding aggregates dissolves you can no longer move your body, and your awareness of worldly activities and worldly success and their necessity cease.

As your all-accomplishing, or completion, wisdom dissolves, even if you could hear a name you cannot remember its meaning. In our daily life we normally remember the meaning of something and then decide to do it; now you can't think of the meaning of anything.

As your wind element dissolves your breathing stops.

As your tongue sense base dissolves your tongue becomes short and thick and turns blue at the root: this, too, is a sign of imminent death.

As your body sense base dissolves you can no longer experience soft or rough sensations.

As your inner taste dissolves you can no longer taste anything.

You will see a vision of a flame – actually, according to Song Rinpoche, it is more like the light around the flame, a dim red-blue light.

THE OUTER BREATH HAS NOW STOPPED

During the final four stages of death, the last three of the twenty-five components gradually dissolve – the aggregate of consciousness, the wisdom of the sphere of phenomena, and the mental sense base.

SUBTLE CONSCIOUSNESS

During the next three stages, the eighty superstitions – the various delusions; the dualistic, wrong conceptions – gradually dissolve.

(5) THE WHITE VISION

The first thirty-three of the eighty superstitions cease.

The winds in the right and left channels move up and open the head chakra, loosening the knots there, and enter the central channel.

This causes the white bodhichitta at the crown to melt and flow down the central channel to the heart, touching the central channel as it goes.

Now you experience the white vision, the mind of white appearance, like very bright moonlight in autumn, or like the almost-white sky caused by the light of the rising moon when everything is covered with snow.

Whereas the previous inner visions had some movement to them, this and the following ones are perfectly still.

(6) THE RED VISION

The next forty of the eighty superstitions dissolve.

The winds in the right and left channels move down and open the sex and navel chakras, loosening the knots there, and enter the central channel.

This causes the red bodhichitta at the navel to shoot up the central channel to the heart chakra, touching the central channel as it goes.

Now you experience the red vision, the mind of red increase. It's like the clear red sky, just before the dawn breaks; or like a copper-red reflection in the sky, and it's perfectly still.

(7) THE DARK VISION

The final seven of the eighty superstitions dissolve.

The red and white bodhichitta meet at the heart chakra, in the indestructible drop in the central channel, with its red and white halves.

Now you experience the dark vision, the mind of dark appearance; it's as if you're falling into darkness. Or it's like a dark and empty sky or being in a dark room. At the beginning of this vision you have

some awareness and recognize an appearance of darkness, but then you become unconscious.

EXTREMELY SUBTLE CONSCIOUSNESS

(8) THE CLEAR LIGHT VISION

Now the clear light vision appears. This is the subtlest level of mind, occurring only after all the grosser consciousnesses have ceased. It's like an autumn dawn, when the sky is so clear, no clouds, no dust. It is not bright like at noon, not red, and not dark. Nothing else appears.

The yogis continue to meditate at this point and can stay as long as they like. For ordinary people, who have no awareness of what is happening, it could be three days before the mind leaves the body.

HOW THE MIND LEAVES THE BODY AT THE TIME OF DEATH

Death occurs when the indestructible drop splits open and the extremely subtle mind and wind leave your heart chakra in the central channel and, depending on which rebirth you will take, exit the gross body at one point or another.

If you will be reborn in a pure land of a buddha (or the formless realm), your mind leaves from the crown; if you will be reborn as a human being, your mind leaves from the eyes; as a hell being, from the anus; as an animal, from the sex organ; as a hungry ghost, from the mouth.

The consciousness can also leave from the navel, ears, nose, and, I think, from midway between the eyebrows – perhaps this would be the case for someone who will be reborn in the form realm.

SIGNS OF DEATH

When the mind leaves the body of a man, the white bodhichitta continues down the central channel and leaves through the sex organ and the red continues up and leaves through the nostrils; in a woman the white bodhichitta goes up and leaves through the nostrils and the

red bodhichitta goes down and leaves through the organ.

This is the final sign that the mind has left the body, the actual death.

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

The moment the indestructible drop splits open, your extremely subtle consciousness leaves from the heart chakra and becomes the intermediate state being's mind, even before it leaves the gross body. The extremely subtle wind that is the vehicle of the extremely subtle consciousness becomes the condition for the intermediate state being's mind and the very subtle consciousness becomes the condition for the intermediate stage being's body.

You can see the world you just left, your relatives, and your dead body, but the karma is finished so you do not recognize any of it and have no desire to go back.

You then go through the eight stages in reverse order: the dark vision, the red vision, the white vision, the eighty superstitions, etc., then take the body of the intermediate state being. This body, which is subtle and has no resistance to matter, is similar in appearance to the body of the next life.

The longest time spent in the intermediate state is forty-nine days, but if after seven days rebirth hasn't happened yet you will experience what is called a small death, again taking a body in the intermediate state for a further seven days until another small death occurs or a new rebirth is found.

If your mind is not clouded by delusions the intermediate state is a wonderful experience. It is even possible to attain enlightenment in the intermediate state, like Lama Tsongkhapa did.

For a mind clouded by negativity the intermediate state is terrible. There is much fear as you experience karmically-created visions such as feeling pressed down by the earth, stuck in big cracks, being taken by a sea wave, or being in a whirlpool or in a great fire. You suffer because of not recognizing these as visions, the projections of your deluded mind. If you could recognize this there would be less fear.

You believe them to be true so there is extreme suffering.

However, even if you have created much negative karma and are destined for the lower realms, there are special practices that can be done by lamas that can influence you in the intermediate state and cause you to take a favorable rebirth such as in a pure land of the buddhas: phowa and jangwa. Of course, success very much depends on your connection with the lama doing the practice, on their skill, and on the heaviness of your obscurations.

REBIRTH AS A HUMAN

As I mentioned, the experience of being reborn is similar to the experience of waking up – but whether we wake up to a pleasant day or a violent storm is another matter! If we are reborn in the lower realms the awakening will be a terrible one.

If from the intermediate state you will take rebirth as a human you will see your future parents in sexual union. If you are to be born as a male you will be attracted to the mother and will have aversion for the father, and if as a female you will be attracted to the father and have aversion for the mother.

Because of the habit, the karmic imprint, of attachment to sexual union, the intermediate state being will want to embrace, have sexual intercourse with, the one it's attracted to. But as it approaches it doesn't see the body of the parent, only the sexual organs, which causes anger to arise. This anger becomes the condition for the intermediate state being to die and its mind to enter the mother's womb.

It is easy to see how ordinary birth is caused by delusions and karma.

COLOPHON

From Lama Zopa Rinpoche's How to Enjoy Death, Wisdom Publications.

6. HELPING OTHERS AT THE TIME OF DEATH IS A BIG RESPONSIBILITY

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

As we've discussed, a good rebirth – a perfect human rebirth or birth in a buddha's pure land such as Amitabha's Blissful Realm, where there's no suffering and where we can achieve enlightenment quickly – depends upon dying peacefully, with virtuous thoughts. If we die with anger or strong attachment or fear our birth will be only in the lower realms.

Therefore, the people surrounding the person who is dying – friends, family, professional carers – have a big responsibility. I will put it this way: Whatever arises in your loved one's mind, whether their thoughts are virtuous or nonvirtuous, very much depends upon you and other helpers, how you behave towards them. It is a great responsibility. If you are not careful, if you do not have this education – that the way you behave affects the mind of the person and therefore their future life – you will only harm them, not help them.

Chöden Rinpoche says that even if you cannot help the person become virtuous, at least help them become neutral – not nonvirtuous, not virtuous. Best, of course, is to help them become virtuous.

HELPERS SHOULD BE CLOSE TO THE DYING PERSON

Rinpoche says that the people who help, who give advice and support, and especially the one who speaks the name of the person's guru in their ear when their breath stops, shouldn't be someone they dislike; in fact, there should be pure samaya between them, a pure spiritual relationship.

Also, in order to ensure that attachment doesn't arise in your loved one's mind – especially when the time of death is close –

Rinpoche advises that it's best not to allow anyone for whom they have strong attachment to be in their presence; ideally, you shouldn't even mention their name. Of course, if that person can help your loved one, help them solve their problems or alleviate their fears, then that's okay.

But if their presence simply increases their attachment, their fears of separation, then it's very harmful, making it difficult for your loved one to let go.

A PRAYER FOR HELPERS

May whoever
Sees me,
Touches me,
Remembers me,
Thinks about me,
Talks about me,
Praises me,
Even criticizes me –
May they immediately be free from all spirit harms
And negative karma,
And may they complete the path,
And achieve full enlightenment as soon as possible.

In this way you become wish-fulfilling for your loved ones – for all sentient beings. As soon as they see you, hear your voice, touch you, or even remember you, they will immediately be free of the fear of death and their mind will be filled with great joy. Then they will be able to go to a pure land, where they can get enlightened.

USE YOUR WISDOM

And remember, as I mentioned at the beginning, your ability to help your loved one depends on what you have practiced throughout your life. The more you understand what you are supposed to do for your own death, the more you will know how to help your loved one. The

less you know, the less wisdom you will have. When you know how to die with a peaceful mind, then you can confidently help your loved one. You will be able to create the right conditions so that it's easy for their minds to be transformed into virtue.

You need to be skillful in advising your loved one according to their state of mind, their background, their life; whether they are a non-believer or have a religion, and if they have a religion what their level of understanding is.

We're not clairvoyant, so we won't know exactly what fits the mind of the person or when the right time is to explain it to them, or even whether they have the karma to listen to the advice or to understand it. Check, analyze how to present the advice: the right time, the right mood, and then educate them however you can, with as much compassion as possible and as much wisdom, with skillful means.

MERELY HEARING SOME OF THE PRACTICES CAN HELP

But remember, as I mentioned and as Rinpoche has advised, even if the dying person doesn't have faith in Buddha's teachings it's still good for them to hear the practices; that receiving the benefits of reciting or hearing them doesn't require devotion.

CREATE A CONDUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT

MAKE THE PLACE BEAUTIFUL

You should make the room as beautiful as possible: a calm, peaceful, serene, holy environment is so important. There should be beautiful views, beautiful art, flowers – flowers give a very special spiritual feeling.

The point is to help put positive imprints on your loved one's mind. If their mind is elevated they will not be afraid of dying.

DISPLAY HOLY OBJECTS SUCH AS STATUES, IMAGES,

STUPAS, TEXTS, PRAYER WHEELS

Display images of the buddhas and your loved one's gurus. If they're not Buddhist you could have images from their own religion, such as Mary or Jesus or Shiva. Also display stupas, prayers wheels, texts, etc., ready to use for blessings. Put things around nicely.

THE POSITION OF THE BED

If possible, your loved one should be lying with their head pointing towards the north, which means they are facing the west, which is where Amitabha Buddha's pure land is.

This prepares them for the practice of going to sleep in the lion posture, which in turn prepares them for dying in this position, which is how Buddha himself passed away. Lying like this reminds them of the Buddha, that they're following in his footsteps.

NO TOBACCO

Do not allow anyone to smoke anywhere near the dying person. Besides causing physical problems, without question smoking is harmful spiritually. It pollutes the subtle nervous system, the channels, etc.

According to the great lama, Panchen Lama Chökyi Gyaltzen – who composed the incredible teaching, *Guru Puja*, as well as many other teachings, including a text on mahamudra – when someone asked him to perform *phowa* at the time of death the first thing he would ask is whether the person smoked, and if they did he wouldn't do the practice. It seems that smoking makes it difficult to transfer the consciousness to a pure land.

NO PETS, ANIMAL SKINS

You should not allow any cats and dogs in the room with your loved one, especially cats – it's said that their hair is polluted. Here in *Tibetan Ceremonies of the Dead* the author says that if the person who is dying is lying on an animal skin you should remove it before they die; the same if they're wearing an animal skin or are covered by

one. It says that being around animal skins at the time of death makes transference of consciousness to a pure land more difficult, even if it's a lama who is performing phowa. I haven't heard this said in other teachings, but it says it here. Also, it is said that the skins make the body smelly.

A CALM AND PEACEFUL ENVIRONMENT

You must not create a situation that disturbs your loved one's mind, makes them angry or upset. Don't have anyone emotional in the room, especially when death is close. It is best that people don't cry within hearing distance of your loved one as this creates clinging in their mind.

And you should not hold on to them. Crying and pleading with them not to die won't keep them alive and will only agitate them and make their death more difficult.

In other words, you should create an environment that is calm and peaceful. This cannot be stressed enough.

COLOPHON

From Lama Zopa Rinpoche's How to Enjoy Death, Wisdom Publications.

7. LIVE A GOOD LIFE AND PREPARE FOR DEATH BY ABIDING BY THE LAWS OF KARMA

VEN ROBINA COURTIN

KARMA: FUNDAMENTAL TO BUDDHISM

If we're saying we're a Buddhist and we're attempting to practice Buddhism, if we're not applying the laws of karma, if we're not taking that as our hypothesis, if we're not applying that in our daily life, we're not really being a Buddhist. This is fundamental to Buddhist teachings – his view about the world, how it comes into being, what our mind is, what causes happiness, what causes suffering, etc..

So, this law applies – runs – in the mind. So the mind, for the Buddha, is where things happen. The mind is where the workshop is. The mind is where everything happens. The mind is where the source of suffering is. The mind is where the source of happiness is. The mind is the point.

WHERE DO I COME FROM?

According to Buddha we're not created by anyone, either a superior being or our parents. Instead, we're the product of our own past. In a simple sense, you could say you come from previous moments of yourself. Think of your mind as a river of mental moments – your thoughts and feelings of *now*, in the simplest linear sense of cause and effect, your thoughts and feelings of *now* come from the previous moment of your thoughts and feelings. And your thoughts and feelings of the previous moment come from – guess what? – the previous moment of your thoughts and feelings. You track it back to ten years ago, twenty years ago, in your mothers' womb. "Well, maybe I began a month before conception". Well, no. If my mind existed then, it must have come from a previous moment of my mind. Then clearly you get back to the first moment of conception, when we

all assume we began. If you're Christian, God put a soul there, in the egg and sperm; and if you're a materialist, you are only the egg and sperm.

Well, the Buddha has this third option. The first second of conception in our mother's womb is the entry of our own consciousness into the egg and sperm. So you can track your consciousness right in this continuity of mental moments going right back to that first moment of conception. "Well, I must have begun then". Well, yes, relatively speaking, this package called "Robina" began then, but where did the body come from? Mummy and Daddy. Where did your mind come from? Previous moment of itself. So your mind is its own continuity of mental moments.

It's a very simple concept, actually. Not difficult for us to intellectualize, to theorize about. Your mind is its own continuity. And obviously, to assume this, you have to assume it's not physical. Because, clearly, if you think your mind is your brain, then you did come from your parents, which is the materialist view, that they "made" you, you know?

YOUR MIND IS YOURS

And so the experiential implication of this is that your mind is *yours*. And that means the contents of it are yours. And so what are the contents of your mind? All the love and the kindness and compassion and wisdom and contentment and anger and jealousy and fear and paranoia and rage – all of this. This is the contents of your mind. So all of these, being contents of your mind, they too come from previous moments of that particular quality in your mind.

So this is a simple idea that implies reincarnation, isn't it? It's a simple concept. Not a difficult concept intellectually. But we're so familiar with the view that I come from mother and father and my anger comes from mother and father and my jealousy and my depression and my all the rest come from the DNA and the egg and the sperm and all the rest, you know. They play a role, no argument. But they're not the main thing. For the Buddha, the main things are

your mind, your thoughts, your feelings, your emotions, your unconscious. Your tendencies, your feelings. All of this. This is yours. This is *yours*.

We come into this life fully programmed with all of our tendencies, with all of our characteristics. It's a big surprise to us. I mean, we accept we come fully programmed, but we think the programming comes from mother and father. It doesn't, Buddha says. Tendencies in the mind are mental and mind is not physical and it comes from previous moments of itself, not from the external condition, which is called the brain.

One can see indicators in the brain of certain things, no argument with this. So this fundamental point of Buddhism is that your mind is yours. And whatever's in it is simply from you having put it there in the past. Hardly surprising concept – cause and effect.

KARMA MEANS INTENTION

This is the essential idea of karma. Karma is a Sanskrit word, that is translated as “action”, really simply. Which implies reaction. Action-reaction, in this meaning: cause and effect. Seed-fruit, you know.

It's also, more fundamentally, translated as intention, will, volition. Every microsecond of everything we say, everything we think and feel, and indeed do and say, with our body and speech on the basis of what's in the mind, is a karma. An intentional action that necessarily will leave an imprint, or a tendency or a seed in your consciousness and will ripen in the future in that consciousness as your experiences.

What goes on in our mind, in other words, is the main cause of our future experiences. This is what Buddha says.

This is a simple concept. Not a difficult idea. It's just a question of being able to say it and get our heads around it. It isn't complicated. We think it's complicated, but it's just because we haven't got the right words, you know. It's not a complicated concept at all.

Of course, it's not evident to us. So we take it as our working hypothesis. Buddha's saying basically: we are the creators of

ourselves. It's a very simple point. Whatever's in your mind is there because you put it there, not because Mummy and Daddy did something to you. This flies in the face of the assumption that we all have that's the basis of our lives, and is, as Buddha would say, a misconception. That, you know, I am angry because my father was angry. I am jealous because my mother was jealous. I am depressed because I have certain hormones. We always put an external reason to it, you know. Which sort of, for us, is a way of saying, "It's not my fault".

We've got this dualistic view. We assume we're made by mother and father. We assume the anger and the jealousy and the depression are either there because of the genes or the DNA or they're there because I've got a mean boyfriend, or because I had a lousy mother or a horrible husband or a bad kid or a horrible boss. This is the typical way we talk. And this is, in fact, the view of the materialist world. This is the philosophy of the materialist world that is backed up by the view that your mother and father made you, that you're only physical.

ACCOUNTABILITY

One has to know one's mind, because that's what we need to change. Yes, certain people's external conditions make it quite tough – if you're in a prison and you can't open that door; you can say "Well, I can't help being angry, I'm surrounded by mean people". You might say that. But the ones who are really practicing don't say that. They know that this is their physical condition, and this is indeed the result of their karma (and we'll talk more about that in a minute), and so they will adapt themselves to that condition and still work on their minds.

The person who's got the chemicals that aren't working, that seem to be the trigger for depression, yes, you recognize that you've got those particular chemicals, but the depression is your mind, it's your viewpoint.

You might be around people who are mean and ugly who hit you all the time, and if you've got an angry tendency it'll make it easy for you to get angry, it's true. But if you're really being accountable, you'll recognize the anger's yours.

This is what we have to do. This is the toughest part. This is the part that's massive for us. So difficult because we're so used to this dualistic way of talking. It's always like, "It's not my fault. It's not my fault".

And that's the view of the materialist world, you look. It's an assumption of ego. "I didn't ask to get born, did I? It's not my fault. My mother made me. My father made me". So, the whole way ego works, Buddha says, is in its nature dualistic. It's always, "Poor me, the victim". Lama Yeshe would call ego the "self-pity me". We're always trying to defend ourselves, "It's not fair", "It's not my fault", "It's his fault", "I didn't mean to". Everything to try to deny accountability. It's so painful for us to be accountable. This is how ego is, this is its nature. This is the way it is.

By listening to and thinking about the Buddha's views of karma – that your consciousness, your tendencies, your experiences, come from our own past actions, not your parents; my mind is mine, I came fully programmed into this life.

And, of course, this includes our good tendencies and experiences as well, but we forget about those. We agonize, "Why do bad things happen to me?" We never agonize, "Why do good things happen to me?" We don't care why, just give me more! But we have all the good things for the same reason: I created the cause to have them.

FOUR WAYS THAT KARMA RIPENS

There are four ways in which our actions from the past lives – you know, before we even entered into this present womb of our mother – there are four ways those past actions ripen in the present. Or indeed, there are four ways in which our present actions leave seeds in the mind that will ripen in the future as one's experiences. It's a constant process, ongoing. Every microsecond of everything that goes

on in our mind, and the things we do on the basis of those thoughts with our body and speech, this is the karmic process. This is constantly occurring. This is the natural process of cause and effect, constantly in play.

1. FULLY RIPENED RESULT: A REBIRTH

The first, main one – they call it Fully Ripened Result – is the type of rebirth we get born into. So, you know, if we're materialists, or if we're Christians, for example, we both agree on one thing at least – that someone else made us. I was made by God. I was made by Mummy and Daddy. They're the same principle, aren't they? That you're made by someone else. Which means it's got nothing to do with you.

Whereas the Buddha says, "Everything to do with me". Our past actions are the main cause of why my mind found its way to my present mother's human womb. Why blame your parents? They're just lying there having fun and you come along. So Buddha puts us right in the centre of responsibility of even why we're human in the first place. Which is kind of an interesting concept – who would have thought that you were the main cause of who you are? Big surprise!

Not more than a few weeks before conception in your mother's womb, your consciousness was in another form, another life. And at the time of that death, before you stopped breathing, very simply speaking, a very strong seed from having practiced morality – in the context of keeping vows of morality according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche – was activated that basically programmed your mind after it left that body to find its way to your present mother's human womb.

Your father and mother having sex is just a co-operative cause. They did not make you, they did not create you. Your consciousness had very strong karmic connection with them from past history with those particular parents.

One lama said that at the time of a male and female human having sex, billions of consciousnesses that are recently passed away (and

that's obviously not just from the human realm; Buddha would assert a whole spectrum of possibilities of types of consciousnesses existing in different realms) are all hovering around trying to get in. Well, we got in! From Buddha's point of view, we should be weeping in delight every day at how fortunate we are, getting such an extraordinarily fortunate life.

Clearly it's easier to get a mosquito birth, dog birth, a fish birth: we can see there are billions and trillions of other sentient beings, we can see this. But we got the human one. Amazing.

That's the first way our karma ripened – the type of rebirth we born into.

But, you know, Mother Teresa and Hitler both got one of those, so what causes the differences?

2. ACTIONS SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE: OUR TENDENCIES

That gets us to the second way in which our past actions ripened in the present. And this is our tendencies, our characteristics, our personality; our depression, our kindness, our wish to kill, our wish to lie, our being good at piano, our being good at math; whatever it might be.

And that's an interesting point, psychologically speaking. In Buddhist terms, we give equal status to whether you're good at love, good at anger or good at music. It's just a tendency.

But we see our artistic tendencies and our emotional ones in a very different light in our contemporary world, don't we?

For example, we're honoured to own responsibility for our being good at music.

“Why are you good at piano, Robina?”

“Well, I have musical tendencies and I practiced really hard: *that's why I'm good at it*”.

“Why are you good at anger, Robina?”

“Oh, that's my father's fault! Nothing to do with me!” No accountability whatsoever! We love being accountable for our being good at music, or maths, or being a gymnast, you know, but not

emotional stuff. We have this different set of laws when it comes to emotional stuff, which I find most fascinating – no logic at all.

The Buddha says, those tendencies – whether you're angry, jealous or just being good at music – are just tendencies. Why do we have a tendency? From having done it before. Quite simple. Mozart clearly had musical tendencies. Hitler clearly had other tendencies, and he expressed them, didn't he, in his actions.

Our mothers and fathers – this is a big shock to us – they're not the main cause of this. The absolute default explanation in the materialist world is it's all in the DNA and the genes, etc. That's why we always look into the past, to our parents, for the causes of why I am what I am.

Yes, Buddha agrees: look into the past, but not to your parents; look into your past lives.

Alternatively we see it all as conditioning. My mother was a musician, and everyone would say, "Yeah, Robina's good at music because her mother was good at music". Buddha would say, "No – Robina's good at music because she practiced it before. My mother had also practiced it before, and then she encouraged my music by teaching me. A simple point, but shocking to us.

So, your tendencies – they call this Actions Similar to the Cause. They're yours. You're fully programmed with every one of these from the first second of conception. Millions of these different imprints. Millions of these different tendencies. They're your own past habits.

3. EXPERIENCES SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE: HOW PEOPLE TREAT US, ETC.

The third way that your karma ripens is called Experiences Similar to the Cause, and that's all the stuff that happens to you. The people and creatures you meet, the parents you get, the teachers, the abusers, the ones who are loving to you, the ones who rape you, the ones who give you a million dollars, the ones who are kind to you, the ones who steal from you, whatever it might be. The way you're treated and seen in the world. The main cause? Your past actions.

So Buddha puts every sentient in the very centre of our experiences. He says our actions are the main cause of why we are who we are and why what happens to us. All the good and all the bad. This applies to giraffes, dogs, ants, fish, humans – all “*sem-chens*”, the term in Tibetan for “sentient being”: “mind-possessor”. We’re all mind-possessors.

Buddha says that there’s not an atom of space where you won’t find mind-possessors. Trillions of them.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL KARMA

And fourth, they call it Environmental Karma. Environmental karma, which is the very way the physical world impacts upon us. For example, here we are sitting in this room. It’s quite pleasant, isn’t it? It’s quite peaceful, pleasant view out there, it’s quiet, you know – the walls aren’t dripping with mould. It’s pleasantly painted. It smells nice. No-one’s threatening us.

We take this for granted – we never ask, “Why are we having a pleasant experience?” For the Buddha there are very real causes created by us: this pleasant environmental experience is the result of our collective virtue.

If suddenly the building explodes, or a gunman comes in, *then* we’d ask, “Why is this happening?” This would be due to our collective non-virtuous karma.

Basically, Buddha’s point about karma is that suffering, which is when everything goes wrong – it could be externally, could be the people, could be the environment, could be in your own mind; when everything’s out of whack, out of balance, disharmonious, when the elements are all crazy, when people are all fighting, when people are mean to you, when your own mind’s berserk – all this is necessarily the result of negativity.

And happiness: same: the result of positive karma, virtuous actions.

I'M THE BOSS

The four ways our past karma ripens in the present – the very fact that you're this human being, with this very particular family and friends and people who harm us and people who help us; all our tendencies; and even the way the physical world impacts upon us – are all the result of our own actions. Necessarily. It's just the way it is. It's a natural law. It's not blame, it's not punishment. There's no concept of punishment or reward in Buddhism – that implies someone punishing and rewarding, doesn't it? And for the Buddha there's no one pulling the strings, no one running things.

Buddha says each one of us in charge. "We are the boss"! Big surprise! So if I am the boss of my own present experiences, if I am the cause of it, then indeed I can be the cause of my future experiences – which is why we should then check up: Do I like this life, do I like people punching me in the nose? Do I like having people being angry at me? Do I like being depressed and angry and jealous and poor and living in an ugly environment? No, I don't. Then, okay, there must be causes of this; what were they? Buddha lays it all out, all from his own observation, his own experience.

This is Buddhist practice.

FOUR WAYS THAT KILLING, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD RIPEN

Let me give one example of one action and the four different ways it ripens; let's say "killing". If we look at the world, one of the most harmful things we do with our bodies is to kill other beings, wouldn't you agree? It's quite an intense way to harm any sentient being.

So, if as a result of the habit of killing in the past a strong seed of it is activated at the time of your death, it programs your consciousness to be reborn in a very suffering type of life such an animal or a spirit, for example.

Okay. So we can deduce in our case, it was morality that ripened because we got a human life, which as we discussed is the fruit of non-harming, in particular non-killing.

But look at the human realm: most humans kill something, don't they? Can you see that? Due to past killing, therefore, they're born with the tendency to keep killing. This is the worst one.

The third way killing ripens is as an experience: you get killed or you die young, or you get sick.

The fourth way, environmental karma, would be the very environment itself, the food, the water, etc., harms us. For some people just eating peanuts can kill them – that's a particular environmental karmic result for a person from past killing.

And we have the collective karma now to have poisoned water, polluted air, haven't we? The very elements themselves are harmful to us. That's the result of killing.

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF THIS HUMAN REBIRTH

Q: I can't see how being born as a dog is necessarily lower.

A: I understand. I understand. Okay. Where that fits is this. As nice as dogs are, would you agree they're not very bright? I mean, you talk to them about developing compassion, they don't really get it. You try to explain emptiness to them, they're a bit thick.

Let me put it this way. If you want a really long neck, best to be a giraffe. Guaranteed. If you want to fly, be a bird. But, honey, if you want to work with your mind, make changes to yourself, quit the causes of suffering, etc., etc., probably best to be a human.

So, it's a contextual thing. It's not high or low or some kind of hierarchy – it's a question of what you want to achieve. Lama Zopa Rinpoche said one time, if just for a couple of minutes you could have a direct experience of the mind of your little cute dog, the suffering, the mental suffering of the most profound ignorance of that mind would be so intense, you'd never want to waste another second of your precious human life. That's the ordinary ignorance of an animal's mind.

Now, we don't think this way in our culture, I agree. But just think about it – it's a different way to look at what ignorance is. We all have ignorance. Ignorance is the term for this ego-grasping that's this

panic state that rises as soon as we're attacked or insulted or hurt or don't get what we want. Well, animals live in that one. Your dog has been living in your house for years, and it barks every time it hears the gate squeak. By now you'd think he would have learned that it's the gate squeaking. But he doesn't, the poor thing, because he's paranoid. His big eyes are round, he's barking like crazy; his unhappy mind, honey, is called deep, deep ignorance, and fear: fear is a function of ego-grasping, of ignorance.

Buddhist psychology, remember, refers to all living beings, not just humans.

KARMA IS RIPENING AND WE'RE CREATING IT EVERY MICRO-SECOND

Q: Does the consciousness that moves from lifetime to lifetime – is that a ...collection of seeds or is it –

A: It's a collection of seeds or a bunch of programming.

Q: So, what happens, say for example in this life, like if a karmic seed has ripened, or a number of karmic seeds have ripened over a lifetime, that consciousness that moves on, it is based on those seeds that are left in the consciousness....

A: Every microsecond that you're existing – so, what's your name?

Q: Helen.

A: Okay. So here we have Helen. So your consciousness, every microsecond right now it's working. Every second, you're doing something, thinking something, feeling something, assuming something. Each second, you're programming your mind, aren't you? Every second, you're sowing a karmic seed. This is a way of saying it, for whatever we do, say and think that leaves imprints in the mind. So this is your consciousness. If you tracked it back, just logically going back, each second, each second, you get back to the first moment of conception, wouldn't you? Then you have to go back to a moment before that. And it's the same continuity of mind. And then a previous life, and a previous life and you go back a million lives.

So we can deduce that there's this particular tracking of consciousness that at this moment in time is labeled "Helen" on the basis of this particular human form. So that consciousness will continue to program it, program it, program it, and it leaves this body, and program, program, and takes another body, program, program – so it just keeps going.

The Buddha says we're usually not in charge of this process, because we think everybody else does it to us, it's not my fault, and how dare? and all this business. But if you're really in charge of this business, you're cleaning up your act. You're stopping programming your mind – as best you can – with more negativity. You're trying to program your mind with positivity, and you're purifying the seeds you've already grown – hopefully this is your spiritual procedure – until eventually you've cleaned up your mind completely and now you're an enlightened being. Do you see what I'm saying? This is a way of saying it.

Q: So, it is a collection that keeps on going from lifetime to lifetime until you...

A: ...cleaned up all the rubbish and grown up all the good. That's it. Precisely. That's it. That's what the process of becoming enlightened is all about. That's the Buddhist way of putting it. You understand. We're communicating, right?

Q: And every microsecond, we're experiencing the ripening of karma, and creating more.

A: Precisely. That's exactly right. That's exactly right. That's exactly the point. Every microsecond is the fruit of a past one, and on the basis of this we do more. So that's why we've got to get ahead of the game. Stop creating the negative ones, clean up our act, control body and speech, clean up the mind, rip out the negative ones from the mind so we quit that, and then grow the positive ones, and that finally eventually will be a mind that's now completely what they call "enlightened" – fully developed in goodness and completely rid of badness. That's what it is and that's where we're heading. So it's not a random thing... if one is in charge of the process, it's not a random

thing at all. You're really on track with it and you know what you're doing. You know what to do, what to say, what to think, what not to do, what not to say, what not to think, what seeds to sow, and you just keep on bopping.

Teachings given at Osel Shen Phen Ling in Missoula, Montana, in 2011.

8. WE NEED BODHICHITTA!

LAMA YESHE

I think it is absolutely essential for us to have loving kindness towards others. There is no doubt about this. Loving kindness is the essence of bodhichitta, the attitude of the bodhisattva. Bodhichitta: literally “enlightened attitude.” It’s the culmination of practicing love and compassion; it’s an attitude of putting others first, wanting others to be happy, wanting to help others.

It is the most comfortable path, the most comfortable meditation. There can be no philosophical, scientific or psychological disagreement with this. With bodhichitta, there’s no East-West conflict. This path is the most comfortable, most perfect, one hundred percent uncomplicated one, free of any danger of leading people to extremes. Without bodhichitta, nothing works. And most of all, your meditation doesn’t work, and realizations don’t come.

Why is bodhichitta necessary for success in meditation? Because of selfish grasping. If you have a good meditation but don’t have bodhichitta, you will grasp at any little experience of bliss: “Me, me; I want more, I want more”. Then the good experience disappears completely. Grasping is the greatest distraction to experiencing single-pointed intensive awareness in meditation. And with it, we are always dedicated to our own happiness: “Me, me I’m miserable, I want to be happy. Therefore I’ll meditate”. It doesn’t work that way. For some reason good meditation and its results – peacefulness, satisfaction and bliss – just don’t come.

Also, without bodhichitta it is very difficult to collect merits. You create them and immediately destroy them; by afternoon, the morning’s merits have gone. It’s like cleaning a room and an hour later making it dirty again. You make your mind clean, then right away you mess it up – not a very profitable business. If you want to

succeed in the business of collecting merits, you must have bodhichitta. With bodhichitta you become so precious – like gold, like diamonds; you become the most perfect object in the world, beyond compare with any material things.

From the Western, materialistic point of view, we'd think it was great if a rich person said, "I want to make charity. I'm going to offer \$100 to everybody in the entire world". Even if that person gave with great sincerity, his or her merit would be nothing compared with just the thought, "I wish to actualize bodhichitta for the sake of sentient beings, and I'll practice the six perfections as much as I can". That's why I always say, actualization of bodhichitta is the most perfect path you can take. The best Dharma practice, the most perfect, most substantial, is without doubt the practice of bodhichitta.

Remember the story of the Kadampa geshe who saw a man circumambulating a stupa? He said, "What are you doing?" and the man answered, "Circumambulating". So the geshe said, "Wouldn't it be better if you practiced dharma?" Next time the geshe saw the man he was prostrating, and when he again asked what he was doing, the man replied, "One hundred thousand prostrations". "Wouldn't it be better if you practiced dharma?" asked the geshe. Anyway, the story goes on, but the point is that just doing religious-looking actions like circumambulation and prostration isn't necessarily practicing dharma. What we have to do is transform our attachment and self-cherishing, and if we haven't changed our mind in this way, none of the other practices work; doing them is just a joke. Even if you try to practice tantric meditations, unless you've changed within, you won't succeed. Dharma means a complete change of attitude – that's what really brings you inner happiness, that is the true Dharma, not the words you say.

Bodhichitta is not the culture of ego, not the culture of attachment, not the culture of samsara. It is an unbelievable transformation, the most comfortable path, the most substantial path – definite, not wishy-washy. Sometimes your meditation is not solid; you just space out. Bodhichitta meditation means you really want to

change your mind and actions and transform your whole life.

We are all involved in human relationships with each other. Why do we sometimes say, “I love you”, and sometimes, “I hate you?” Where does this up-and-down mind come from? From the self-cherishing thought – a complete lack of bodhichitta. What we are saying is, “I hate you because I’m not getting any satisfaction from you. You hurt me; you don’t give me pleasure. That’s the whole thing: I – my ego, my attachment – am not getting satisfaction from you, therefore I hate you. What a joke! All the difficulties in inter-personal relationships come from not having bodhichitta, from not having changed our minds.

So, you see, just meditating is not enough. If that Kadampa geshe saw you sitting in meditation he’d say, “What are you doing? Wouldn’t it be better if you practiced dharma?” Circumambulating isn’t dharma, prostrating isn’t dharma, meditating isn’t dharma. My goodness, what is dharma, then? This is what happened to the man in the story. He couldn’t think of anything else to do. Well, the best dharma practice, the most perfect, most substantial, is without doubt the practice of bodhichitta.

You can prove scientifically that bodhichitta is the best practice to do. Our self-cherishing thought is the root of all human problems. It makes our lives difficult and miserable. The solution to self-cherishing, its antidote, is the mind that is its complete opposite – bodhichitta. The self-cherishing mind is worried about only me, me – the self-existent I. Bodhichitta substitutes others for self.

It creates space in your mind. Then even if your dearest friend forgets to give you a Christmas present, you don’t mind. “Ah, well. This year she didn’t give me my chocolate. It doesn’t matter.” Anyway, your human relationships are not for chocolate, not for sensory pleasures. Something much deeper can come from our being together, working together.

**With bodhichitta you become so precious – like gold,
like diamonds. You become the most perfect object in**

the world, beyond compare with any material things.

If you want to be really, really happy, it isn't enough just to space out in meditation. Many people who have spent years alone in meditation have finished up the worse for it. Coming back into society, they have freaked out. They haven't been able to take contact with other people again, because the peaceful environment they created was an artificial condition, still a relative phenomenon without solidity. With bodhichitta, no matter where you go, you will never freak out. The more you are involved with people the more pleasure you get. People become the resource of your pleasure. You are living for people. Even though some still try to take advantage of you, you understand: "Well, in the past I took advantage of them many times too". So it doesn't bother you.

Thus bodhichitta is the most perfect way to practice dharma, especially in our twentieth-century Western society. It is very, very worthwhile. With the foundation of bodhichitta you will definitely grow.

If you take a proper look deep into your heart you will see that one of the main causes of your dissatisfaction is the fact that you are not helping others as best you can. When you realize this you'll be able to say to yourself, "I must develop myself so that I can help others satisfactorily. By improving myself I can definitely help". Thus you have more strength and energy to meditate, to keep pure morality and do other good things. You have energy, "Because I want to help others". That is why Lama Tsongkhapa said that bodhichitta is the foundation of all enlightened realizations.

Also, bodhichitta energy is alchemical. It transforms all your ordinary actions of body, speech and mind – your entire life into positivity and benefit for others, like iron transmuted into gold. I think this is definitely true. You can see, it's not difficult. For example look at other people's faces. Some people, no matter what problems and suffering they are enduring, when they go out they always try to appear happy and show a positive aspect to others. Have you noticed

this or not? But other people always go about miserable, and angry. What do you think about that? I honestly think that it indicates a fundamental difference in the way these two kinds of people think. Human beings are actually very simple. Some are a disaster within and it shows on their faces and makes those whom they meet feel sick. Others, even though they are suffering intensely, always put on a brave face because they are considerate of the way others feel.

I believe this is very important. What's the use of putting out a miserable vibration? Just because you feel miserable, why make others unhappy too? It doesn't help. You should try to control your emotions, speak evenly and so forth. Sometimes when people are suffering they close off from others, but you can still feel their miserable vibration. This doesn't help – others with even momentary happiness forget about leading them to enlightenment. To help the people around you, you have to maintain a happy, peaceful vibration. This is very practical, very worthwhile. Sometimes we talk too much about enlightenment and things like that. We have a long way to go to such realizations. Forget about enlightenment, I don't care about buddhahood – just be practical. If you can't help others, at least don't give them any harm, stay neutral.

Anyway, what I'm supposed to be telling you here is that bodhichitta is like atomic energy to transform your mind. This is absolutely, scientifically true, and not something that you have to believe with blind religious faith. Everybody nowadays is afraid of nuclear war, but if we all had bodhichitta, wouldn't we all be completely secure? Of course we would. With bodhichitta you control all desire to defeat or kill others. And, as Lama Je Tsongkhapa said, when you have bodhichitta all the good things in life are magnetically attracted to you and pour down upon you like rain. At present all we attract is misfortune because all we have is the self-cherishing thought. But with bodhichitta we'll attract good friends, good food, good everything.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama said recently, if you're going to be selfish, do it on a grand scale; wide selfishness is better than narrow!

What did His Holiness mean? He was saying that, in a way, bodhichitta is like a huge selfish attitude because when you dedicate yourself to others with loving kindness you get a lot more pleasure than you would otherwise. With our present, usual selfish attitude we experience very little pleasure, and what we have is easily lost. With “great selfishness” you help others and you help yourself; with small it’s always me, me, me and it is easy to lose everything.

Remember, Atisha had over 150 teachers? He respected them all, but when he heard the name of one – Lama Dharmarakshita – he would come out in goose-bumps. He explained this by saying, “I received many teachings from many, many great gurus, but for me, Lama Dharmarakshita, who gave me the bodhichitta ordination and teachings on the method and wisdom of bodhichitta and the six paramitas, was the most helpful for my life”. This is very true. Sometimes techniques of deity meditation are extremely difficult, but bodhichitta meditation is so simple, so incredibly profound and real. That’s why Atisha would shake when he heard the name of his main teacher of bodhichitta.

The main point, then, is that when you contact Buddhadharma you should conquer the mad elephant of your self-cherishing mind. If the dharma you hear helps you diminish your self-cherishing even a little, it has been worthwhile. But if the teachings you have taken have had no effect on your selfishness, then from the Mahayana point of view, even if you can talk intellectually on the entire lam-rim, they have not been must use at all.

Do you recall the story of Shantideva and how people used to put him down? They used to call him *Du-she-sum-pa*, which means one who knows how to do only three things: eating, sleeping and excreting. This was a very bad thing to call someone, especially a monk. But that’s all that people could see him doing. However, he had bodhichitta, so whatever he did, even ordinary things, was of greatest benefit to others. Lying down, peacefully, he would meditate with great concern for the welfare of all living beings, and many times, out of compassion, he would cry for them. Westerners need

that kind of practice. Fundamentally we are lazy. Well, maybe not lazy, but when we finish work we are tired and don't have much energy left. So, when you come home from work, lie down comfortably and meditate on bodhichitta. This is most worthwhile. Much better than rushing in speedily, throwing down a coffee and dropping onto your meditation cushion to try to meditate. It doesn't work that way; your nervous system needs time and space. You can't be rushing through traffic one minute and sitting quietly meditating the next. Everything takes time and space. It is much better to have a quiet, blissful cup of coffee, and don't pressure yourself either; that too is very bad. Don't punish yourself when you are too tired to meditate: "I should be meditating; I am very bad". You destroy yourself like this. Be wise. Treat yourself, your mind, sympathetically, with loving kindness. If you are gentle with yourself you will become gentle with others so don't push. Pushing doesn't work for me, that's why I tell others not to force themselves. We are dealing with the mind, not rocks and concrete; it is something organic.

In a way, bodhichitta is like a huge selfish attitude because when you dedicate yourself to others with loving kindness you get a lot more pleasure than you would otherwise.

The Western environment offers lots of suffering conditions that act as causes for our actualizing bodhichitta, so life there can be very worthwhile. For example, it is much better to subdue an adversary with bodhichitta than with a knife or gun. When attacked, you can practice loving kindness. We could also do this in the monasteries of Tibet, where there were often horrible monks. Don't think that Tibet was full of only holy people – we had unbelievably wild monks there that nobody in authority could subdue! If you would try to control them wrathfully they would get only more aggressive. But arya bodhisattva monks, people who had completely given themselves up for others, would treat them with loving kindness, and the wild

monks would calm down completely. They would feel, “This man loves me; he has great compassion. He has given up everything for others and has nothing to lose”. In that way aggressive people would be subdued, without authority but with bodhichitta. There are many stories about this kind of thing, but I’m not going to tell them now. Perhaps you think they’re funny, but it’s true – you can conquer your enemies, both internal and external, with loving kindness and bodhichitta. It is most worthwhile and there’s no contradiction bodhichitta is the totally comfortable path to liberation and enlightenment.

In his text Lama Choepa, the Panchen Lama says, “Self-cherishing is the cause of all misery and dissatisfaction, and holding all mother sentient beings dearer than oneself is the foundation of all realizations and knowledge. Therefore bless me to change self-cherishing into concern for all others”. This is not some deep philosophical theory but a very simple statement. You know from your own life’s experiences without needing a Tibetan text’s explanations that your self-cherishing thought is the cause of all your confusion and frustration. This evolution of suffering is found not only in Tibetan culture but in yours as well.

And the Panchen Lama goes on to say that we should look at what the Buddha did. He gave up his self-attachment and attained all the sublime realizations. But look at us we are obsessed with me, me, me and have realized nothing but unending misery. This is very clear isn’t it? Therefore you should know clean clear how this works. Get rid of the false concept of self-cherishing and you’ll be free of all misery and dissatisfaction. Concern yourself for the welfare of all others and wish for them to attain the highest realizations such as bodhichitta and you’ll find all happiness and satisfaction.

Bodhichitta is the most perfect way to practice dharma, especially in our twentieth century Western society. It is very, very worthwhile. With the foundation of bodhichitta you will definitely grow.

You people are young, intelligent and not satisfied with what you have in your own countries. That's why you are seeking further afield. And now you have found that most worthwhile of all things, bodhichitta.

But it is not an easy thing. Easy things bore you quickly. It is quite difficult, but there's no way you'll get bored practicing it. People need to be most intelligent to actualize bodhichitta, some, though, have no room for it. "Forget about yourself and have a little concern for others?" they'll ask. "That's not my culture". It is very difficult to change holding yourself dear into holding others dear instead – the most difficult task you can undertake. But it is the most worthwhile and brings the greatest satisfaction.

After practicing some meditations, such as impermanence and death, for a month you'll say, "I'm tired of that meditation". But you'll never get tired of meditating on bodhichitta. It is so deep; a universal meditation. You'll never get tired of bodhichitta.

You have heard of many deities that you can meditate on, many deities to be initiated into – Chenrezig and the rest. What are they all for? I'll tell you – for gaining bodhichitta. As a matter of fact, all tantric meditations are for the development of strong bodhichitta. That is the purpose of your consciousness manifesting as a being with 1000 arms so that you can lend a hand to a thousand suffering beings. If you don't like to manifest yourself this way you can relate the meditation to your own culture and see yourself as Jesus. Avalokiteshvara and Jesus are the same: completely selfless and completely devoted to serving others.

Remember what happened the first time that Avalokiteshvara took the bodhisattva ordination? He vowed to guide all universal living beings to enlightenment from behind, like a shepherd. "I do not want to realize enlightenment until first I have led all mother sentient beings there first. That will be my satisfaction". He worked for years and years, leading thousands of beings to enlightenment, but when he checked to see what was happening he found there were

still countless more. So again he worked for years and years and again when he checked there were still so many left, and this cycle was repeated until finally he was fed up and thought to himself, “For aeons and aeons I have struggled to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment but there are still so many left. I think it is impossible to fulfil my vow”. And because of the intensity of his emotion his head split into eleven pieces. Then Amitabha Buddha came and offered to help, and blessed him to be successful.

So I’m sure some of you people can be like Chenrezig. The main thing is to have strong motivation. Even if it comes strongly only once, it is extremely powerful. It is very rare to have this kind of thought. A mere flash is so worthwhile; to have it for a minute for a day...

9. SEARCHING FOR THE I LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

We ordinary beings who haven't realized emptiness don't see things as similar to illusions. We don't realize that things are merely labelled by mind and exist by mere name. Generally speaking, we don't see the mere appearance of the I until we become enlightened, because whenever our mind merely imputes something, the next second the negative imprint left on the mental continuum by previous ignorance projects true existence. In the first moment, the I is imputed; in the next it appears back to us as real, as truly existent, as not merely labelled by mind. Until we achieve enlightenment we have this appearance of true existence.

Except for the meditative equipoise on emptiness of an arya, all other consciousnesses of sentient beings have the appearance of true existence. During an arya's meditative equipoise on emptiness things don't appear truly existent. It is without the dualistic view (in two senses, first) not only is there no appearance of true existence, but there is no appearance of subject and object. This wisdom mind and its object are inseparable, like water put in water. The arya's meditative equipoise on emptiness hasn't completely eliminated the dualistic view from the person's mindstream forever, but it has absorbed it temporarily. That is how the wisdom meditates on emptiness. It realizes emptiness directly, becoming inseparable from emptiness.

After arising from meditative equipoise on emptiness, everything appears truly existent again, even though the meditator no longer believes that this appearance is true. In this way, the meditator sees things as like an illusion in that they appear one way (truly existent) but exist in another (dependent, merely labeled). These post-meditation times are called subsequent attainment, or *rjes-thob* in

Tibetan. So the appearance of true existence is there until we attain enlightenment.

ALL SAMARIC STATES OF MIND ARE HALLUCINATIONS

That's why it is said that every consciousness of sentient beings except an arya's meditative equipoise on emptiness is a hallucinating mind—everything that appears to it appears truly existent. So whatever appears and whenever there is the thought “I,” aryas have the appearance of a truly existent I during the time of subsequent attainment. If this is the case for aryas, there is no question that ordinary bodhisattvas on the path of accumulation and the path of preparation, who have not realized emptiness directly³, have a hallucinating mind. Everything that appears to them appears truly existent. Needless to say, whenever we common people, who haven't realized emptiness, think “I,” we don't think of a merely labeled I.

Generally speaking, when we common people talk about I, it's the real I, the I existing from its own side. During our conversations every day, we don't talk about some other I; we're always thinking and speaking about a truly existent I. That is how we see and think of things. Ordinarily people do not question that appearance. Nor are they aware that they assent to that appearance, grasping it as real and true. So when we think “I” or point to I, naturally we think it's truly existent. We don't have any appearance other than that of true existence. Then we believe that appearance to be the way things actually exist. So when we say “I,” we're automatically pointing to and thinking about a truly existent I because the merely labeled I is not 1/12 appearing any more.

EMPTINESS IS AN ATOM BOMB

But the I that appears to us is false; it doesn't truly exist. When we meditate on emptiness, we drop an atom bomb on this truly existent I. The atom bomb is the reason of dependent arising—the I is not truly existent because it is a dependent arising. It's not true. What

appears true, what appears to exist from its own side, isn't true. Thus it is empty of true existence.

But its being empty doesn't mean the I doesn't exist. The real I, the truly existent I, the I that exists by its own nature, the I that exists from its own side, is not true. It doesn't exist. However, the conventional I, the I that exists by being merely labeled, the I that is a dependent arising, that I exists. In *The Heart Sutra*, Avalokiteshvara says no form, no feeling, and so on. This is like throwing an atom bomb on the appearance of truly existent things. That appearance is not true. Those truly existent things that appear to us do not exist. Then what comes in our heart is that they're empty. It's not that they don't exist. They exist, but they're empty. Why? Because they're dependent arisings. Because they are dependent arisings, they are empty of true existence; because they are dependent arisings, they exist (conventionally).

DEPENDENT ARISING PROVES EMPTINESS

Use the reason "It's not true because it's a dependent arising." Do analytical meditation to search for the I, then do stabilizing meditation when you see its emptiness. For us ordinary beings, whatever we contact, talk about, or think about—everything—appears truly existent and we believe in that appearance. We grasp things as truly existent. However, when you realize the emptiness of the I or any other phenomenon and train your mind in that realization, you see that this phenomenon is merely labeled by mind. Even though true existence still appears to you, you don't assent to that appearance; you don't believe that phenomena truly exist. You know they exist by being merely labeled by mind, even though they appear truly existent. You have discovered that they're not true, that they exist in mere name. Someone whose mind has realized emptiness in the meditation session sees things as like an illusion in the subsequent attainment time. He knows they exist by being merely labeled by mind. So even though that meditator has the realization that everything is a dependent arising and is merely labelled by mind

dependent on the base, he still has the appearance of true existence. But now he points at that and say to himself, “This appearance isn’t true because it’s a dependent arising.” There is nothing contradictory in this—things are both empty and arise dependently. Because this meditator has realized the emptiness of I, he has also realized that the I exists by mere name and is merely imputed by mind in dependence on the aggregates—this is the Prasangika view. The I is there. It exists, but you don’t grasp it as truly existent, even though it still appears to be.

For example, let’s say you see a mirage and have the vision that water is there. But since you just came from that place, you know that only sand is there, so you don’t believe that it’s water. You think, “That water is not true. It doesn’t exist as it appears because there’s no water there. There’s the appearance of water—that appearance of water exists. But there is no water.” Many things are like that. Once when I was in Italy I saw a lady in a store but she turned out to be a mannequin. Then there was another figure that I thought was a mannequin but it was a lady. So this is similar: the appearance is false, it appears one way but exists in another.

THE LOGIC TO PROVE EMPTINESS

It’s like this. Being merely labeled by mind indicates how things come into existence. At this moment, this is not something you know through analytical meditation, not something you know by realizing emptiness. Usually in the philosophical teachings, it says that whatever appears appears truly existent. That’s what normally happens due to the hallucinating mind. The only time true existence doesn’t appear to sentient beings is during the meditative equipoise on emptiness of an arya.

But in Pabongka’s text it says there is mere appearance of the object for a brief moment. Through analysis you can get the idea. For example, when you see a drum, analyze it at the same time. Be aware that your mind is labeling “drum” by seeing that base. Be aware at the same time as you’re labeling.

Analyze: to be able to label drum you have to see a specific phenomenon. Even though the table is round like a drum, you won't label "drum" on the base you label "table." It has to be a specific base that performs the function of making sound and that has material to produce sound when hit. You have to see that base first. Then because of the function it performs—what it's used for—the mind merely labels drum. Seeing that base—its shape, color, etc.—and knowing it has that function become the reason to label "drum."

When you are aware and analyze at the same time as the labeling process is occurring—that is, you're analyzing while you're labeling drum—then, at that time, at the beginning there is a mere appearance. If you're aware of the brief instant the mind initially sees that base, the instant you're starting to label drum, there is a mere appearance.

When you're aware the instant you begin to label drum, you'll be aware that there's no real drum existing from its own side. You'll be aware that drum is merely imputed by seeing that base—that which performs the function of making sound when struck. At that moment, there's just the mere appearance of a drum. That awareness of the mere appearance of a drum lasts a very short second. It doesn't last because you don't continue that awareness or mindfulness and because you don't yet have the realization that it exists in mere name, merely labeled by mind. And because the negative imprint left by the past ignorance is there, it projects a truly existent appearance on the drum and you see a real drum that exists from its own side. That's the *gag-cha*, the object of negation.

THE PROCESS OF LABELLING

I told Chöden Rinpoche that I agree with what Pabongka said. Why? For example, let's say you have a child and you want to give it a name. While you're thinking of the name—the minute you decide "George" or "Chödrön," for example—you don't see George or Chödrön right in that second while you're labeling. If you're aware that you're labeling, at that instant you don't immediately see George

or Chödrön as totally existent from their own side. So I agree with what Pabongka said—that this mere appearance is very short, just a brief moment. Here we’re talking about actual reality; that’s actually how things come into existence, merely labeled by mind.

However, since you don’t continue that awareness or you lack realization, in the next moment you see the object of negation that was projected by the imprint of ignorance. George or Chödrön appear as if existing from their own side. Except for the arya in meditative equipoise on emptiness, everything that appears to us sentient beings appears to be truly existent.

At this time, the appearance of true existence is temporarily absorbed. Only emptiness appears; it doesn’t appear truly existent to this direct perceiver. This is what is usually said in the texts. Also, it is normally said that as soon as you label something, it appears back to you as truly existent and you believe it exists in the way it appears to you.

For example, suppose you are a parent with a new child and it’s time to give it a name. The thought “Döndrub” comes in your mind and you label “Döndrub.” Of course, the correct way would be for Döndrub to appear merely labeled by mind. However, due to the negative imprint or predisposition [Skt: *vasana*; Tib: *bag-chag*] left by past ignorance on your mind, the moment after you label the child “Döndrub,” Döndrub appears back to you as not merely labeled by mind but as existing from its own side.

But Pabongka says—and I think I agree with him—that doesn’t need to happen all the time. I think that sometimes if you’re analyzing and watching closely, there is a brief moment when the mere object appears without the appearance of true existence. Sometimes in the moment after the mind labels “Döndrub” there’s not the appearance of a real (i.e., inherently existent) Döndrub. Instead there is Döndrub but not real in the sense of existing from its own side. There’s the appearance of mere Döndrub, for a very short time. Then, due to the imprint of the ignorance that grasps at

inherent existence, the mind goes into hallucination, believing that Döndrub exists from his own side, not merely labeled by mind.

This is a unique explanation. It's not common and comes due to personal experience. I think I agree with what Pabongka said about this. I showed the text to Chöden Rinpoche and consulted him about it. I said I didn't think that it would immediately appear truly existent. You need to watch your perception when you're labeling. You usually don't notice because the mind is not aware. Probably mere Döndrub appears for a split second and then real Döndrub appears. There is an evolutionary process: mere Döndrub; then Döndrub existing from its own side—a real Döndrub appearing more and more, that appearance becoming stronger and stronger.

Check with your own experience, especially when you're labeling something for the very first time. I think you will understand this if you examine your mind when it's happening. For something to exist there must not only be the mind conceiving it and the label but also a valid base. You can't just make up a label and think that therefore the object exists and functions according to the label you gave it.

For example, let's say before they have a baby a couple decides to name it "Tashi." At that time, there are no aggregates—no body and mind. Remember the lam-rim story about the man who got excited and labeled a child he dreamed of having in the future "Dawa Dragpa"?

It's similar here, where the couple thinks of the name "Tashi." At that time Tashi doesn't exist. Why? Because there's no base. Whether Tashi exists or not mainly depends on the existence of the aggregates, the existence of the base of the label. It depends on whether there is a valid base⁴. In this case, since a valid base which could be labeled "Tashi" doesn't yet exist, Tashi doesn't exist at that time. In another scenario, let's say a baby is born—so the mental and physical aggregates are present—but the name "Tashi" hasn't been given yet. So at that time, Tashi also doesn't exist because the parents haven't labeled "Tashi." They could label "Peter." They could label anything.

So even though the aggregates are there at that time, Tashi doesn't exist because the parents haven't named the child. When does Tashi come into existence? It's only when there is a valid base. When a valid base is present, then the mind sees that base and makes up the name "Tashi." After making up the name and labeling it in dependence on the aggregates, then we believe Tashi is there. Therefore, what Tashi is is nothing. Nothing. Tashi is nothing other than what is merely imputed by mind. That's all. There's not the slightest Tashi that exists other than what is merely labeled by mind. The Tashi or the I appearing to you that you believe is something even slightly more than what is merely labeled by mind is a hallucination. That is the object of negation. Anything that is slightly more than what is merely labeled by mind doesn't exist at all. It is the object of negation.

WHAT DOES EXIST IS EXTREMELY SUBTLE

Therefore what Tashi is in reality is extremely subtle. What Tashi really is is not what you've believed up to now. The Tashi you believed existed for so many years is a total hallucination. There's no such thing. It doesn't exist. The Tashi that does exist is what is merely labeled by mind. Nothing other than that. So what Tashi is is extremely fine, unbelievably subtle. The borderline of Tashi existing or not existing is extremely subtle. It's not that Tashi doesn't exist. Tashi exists but it's like Tashi doesn't exist. When you examine, you discover that it's not that things don't exist. They exist. There are the aggregates. Then the mind sees those aggregates and makes up the label "Tashi." Tashi exists by being merely imputed.

This is how all phenomena exist and function, including the hells, karma, all the sufferings of samsara, the path, and enlightenment—everything. All phenomena exist by being merely labeled, as in the example of Tashi.

The I is similar. What the I is is extremely subtle. The borderline between its existing and not existing is extremely subtle. Compared to how you previously believed things exist, it's like it doesn't exist.

But it's not totally non-existent. The I exists but how it exists is unbelievably subtle. Because the conventional I is subtle, gaining the correct view is difficult.

Thus before Lama Tsongkhapa there were many great meditators in Tibet who fell into the extreme of nihilism, thinking that nothing existed at all. It's difficult to realize the view of the Middle View devoid of eternalism—grasping at true existence—and nihilism—believing that the I doesn't exist at all. The Middle Way view is free from holding things to exist from their own side and holding that they don't exist at all.

As with the example of Tashi, things are empty of true existence—they do not exist without being merely labeled in dependence on a valid base—but they are not non-existent. They exist ever so subtly, almost as if they didn't exist. But you can't say they don't exist. There's a big difference between the I that exists by being merely labeled in dependence on a base and a rabbit's horn. Similarly, there's a big difference between this nominally, or conventionally, existent I and an inherently existent I. While the I and all phenomena are empty of existing from their own side, at the same time the I and all phenomena exist. They exist in mere name, merely imputed by mind.

The I is the unification of emptiness and dependent arising. It is empty of inherent existence and arises dependently. This point is unique to the Prasangika Madhyamikas.

BRINGING EMPTINESS INTO DAILY LIFE

By practicing mindfulness of emptiness in our daily life, as I mentioned before, when our mind is totally aware there's no I on these aggregates, then whether somebody praises us or puts us down, it doesn't affect us, it doesn't bring our life up or down. There's continual inner peace, happiness and tranquility. We don't suffer due to the external conditions, we don't create negative karma by delusions arising and we don't create the cause of suffering.

Also I mentioned practicing mindfulness, so even if we're thinking

of the I, if we see that the I is merely imputed by the mind, when we've discovered *that*, or when we are in mindful meditation of *that*, then receiving material things or not, receiving presents or not, like birthday presents, or receiving praise, criticism or a bad reputation—none of these things bother us. They don't make us suffer, so then we can overcome that. We don't create negative karma, we don't get angry or get attached to things, and so we don't create the cause of samsara.

Whatever activity we are doing in our daily life, practice mindfulness of the merely labeled I, the merely labeled action and the merely labeled object. Practice mindfulness of this, how everything is merely labeled by mind. So whatever activity we are doing, practice mindfulness of this, then during that time the delusions—anger, attachment, ignorance—do not arise. Then that brings us to liberation and it becomes the antidote to samsara. So, whatever we're doing becomes the antidote to samsara. It eliminates ignorance, the root of suffering, so like that, we recognize the hallucination as a hallucination. This real I is not there; it is a hallucination which is not there.

Just as this truly existent I is not there, it is a hallucination, it is false, whatever action we're doing, this real action, this truly existent action, is false. For example, if we're walking—real walking as a truly existent action—*that* is totally false. The real I or the real walking is totally false. In the same way, the real I looking at it is false, and the real action of walking is a hallucination, it's false.

And then the road we're walking on, the real road is not there. If we look, if we search for where the real road is, we can't find it. It's exactly the same. Just as we can't find the I on these aggregates, we can't find the real road if we look for it. When we don't examine the road, it looks as if there's a real road there, but if we look for it, it's not there. So, we can look at the real road as false, as a hallucination. We can look at the hallucination as a hallucination. So, whatever activity we are doing, we can look at it as a hallucination or like a dream.

A dream is a very good example. A dream is an excellent example. The I is a dream, the action is a dream, and the object is a dream. We can look at everything as a dream, as a continuation of last night's dream. Looking at everything as a dream is *very* effective; it's a *very* good meditation.

In a dream, whatever we're doing—walking, sitting or eating food—is all labeled by our mind. It's all labeled by our mind, but it's not there, it doesn't exist at all. We can dream of winning a billion dollars in a lottery, so we go there, we get a billion dollars, we put it in our bag and the bag becomes very heavy. But when we wake up, it's not there. It's like that. All this—the real I, the real action, the real road, the real eating, the real food—everything is false. So, we can look at it like a dream.

Seeing everything as a dream is another good meditation. Whatever we're doing—I, action, object—whatever appears as not merely labeled by the mind or existing from its own side, we can look at it all as a dream. Keeping mindfulness like this as much as possible is very powerful, very effective. That's a very good meditation; it's very powerful. I'm not going to use other quotations.

Another meditation technique on emptiness is seeing our ignorance as a magician. The magician uses mantra or some substances or whatever, to hallucinate the audience's senses. Then the ignorance leaves a negative imprint on the mind.

Like a magician, our ignorance projects the hallucination of true existence onto everything that is merely labeled by our mind—the I, the action, the object, hell, enlightenment, samsara and nirvana. It projects the hallucination of true existence on the merely labeled I, the merely labeled action, the merely labeled object, the merely labeled hell, the merely labeled enlightenment, the merely labeled samsara, the merely labeled nirvana, the merely labeled happiness, the merely labeled problem. It decorates this hallucination of true existence on *every* merely labeled thing—the merely labeled I, the merely labeled action, the merely labeled object. It totally creates illusions for us; it completely creates illusions for us.

This ignorance is like the magician and we are like the audience. The magician creates illusions for the senses of the audience so they see all things totally wrongly. Nothing is true. Ignorance totally creates illusions for us like a magician, it totally creates illusions for our *whole* life. So that's another practice of mindfulness in our busy lives. That's how to meditate on emptiness in our daily lives, in our busy lives. Part of our mind should always be in this meditation, whether we're talking, driving a car or shopping.

The heart of Buddhism is the three principal aspects of the path to enlightenment, so emptiness, the right view, is a very important practice.