

THE FOUR DHARMAS
OF
GAMPOPA



Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

The Four Dharmas of Gampopa

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of

Gampopa

As taught by

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

Translated by

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The Four Dharmas of Gampopa

Grant your blessing so that my mind may be one with the dharma.

Grant your blessing so that the dharma may go along the path.

Grant your blessing so that the path may clarify confusion.

Grant your blessing so that confusion may dawn as wisdom.

Chapter 1: The Lineage of the Four Dharmas of Gampopa

IT IS SAID that the teachings of the Kagyu¹ lineage originated with the dharmakaya² Buddha Vajradhara. One might think, “Wait a minute. I thought that the Buddhist teachings originated with the Shakyamuni Buddha.” However, the mind of the Buddha is referred to as the dharmakaya, and the body of the Shakyamuni Buddha is the emanation body or the nirmanakaya. Thus the dharmakaya manifested in our world as the Shakyamuni Buddha in a nirmanakaya emanation. So there is no difference between the dharmakaya and the Buddha Shakyamuni who was born in India 2,500 years ago.

The dharmakaya is not something that is born and dies, nor is it something that needs to pass beyond samsara. The dharmakaya has the three outstanding qualities of knowledge, compassion, and skillful means. These three qualities are not just qualities of the Buddha, but are the very nature of wisdom (Skt. *jnana*).

The wisdom of the dharmakaya appears to students in two ways. The first is in the form of the sambhogakaya to highly realized students in pure realms. For example, these pure students would visit the pure realms and see Vajradhara and other bodhisattvas as they are depicted in a *thangka* with various ornaments and so on. The second is the appearance to ordinary beings of the nirmanakaya, such as the Shakyamuni Buddha’s appearance in India many centuries ago. However, these two forms are not fundamentally different from each other, because Vajradhara is the mind of both the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya. The sambhogakaya Vajradhara can only be met by the great bodhisattvas and siddhas, and it is possible for them to meet face to face.

THE STORY OF TILOPA

For example, the great siddha Tilopa met directly with the sambhogakaya Vajradhara. When Tilopa met with the sambhogakaya Vajradhara in the tenth century, the nirmanakaya Shakyamuni Buddha was no longer in the world. However, meeting with the sambhogakaya Vajradhara was no different from meeting with the nirmanakaya Shakyamuni Buddha. The reason for this is that both are emanations of the mind of the dharmakaya.

The great *pandita* Naropa was a student of Tilopa. At that time, Naropa was abbot of Nalanda Monastic University, which was a major place of study of the dharma in India. One day Naropa was studying the tantric text known as the *Guhyasamaja*. A wisdom dakini appeared in the room where he was studying this tantra. While Naropa was looking at the book, he had the feeling that a shadow or a stain had suddenly appeared on the book that he was reading. He said, "What is this?" and looking up, he saw a hideous old woman in the room. She asked him, "Do you understand the words or do you understand the meaning of this text?" He replied, "I know the words." This made the woman extremely happy and she began to smile and then laugh. So Naropa thought, "Well, if she was so happy at hearing that I know the words, she'll be even more tickled to know that I understand the meaning as well." So he added, "I also know the meaning." At that point the woman's face turned black; she became very sad and was completely crestfallen. Seeing this, Naropa thought, "Well, this is very strange. When I said that I knew the words she was happy. Now when I say I know the meaning, she is very sad. I'll have to ask her why." So he asked her and she replied, "You are indeed a very learned person and you do understand the words; that is true and made me glad. However, you don't know the meaning of the words. So when you said that you knew the meaning, that wasn't true and made me very sad." Hearing this, Naropa said to the old woman, "Well then, who does know the meaning of these words?" and she replied, "In eastern India, there is a *mahasiddha*, a greatly accomplished person, named Tilopa. He knows the meaning of these words." Just hearing

the name “Tilopa” gave Naropa a tremendous feeling of faith and confidence. He thought, “I must do everything possible to meet with this person.”

Since Naropa was a great teacher, he had many students at Nalanda University and many responsibilities there. When he proposed that he go find the great siddha Tilopa, the students and the other teachers said to him, “You just can’t go. Please remain here because we need you.” Naropa thought about it and came to the conclusion that if he knew only the words without the meaning, then there would be no real benefit in his being there, so he must indeed go and find Tilopa.

To find Tilopa, Naropa underwent many hardships travelling to where Tilopa was reported to be and also endured many hardships training under Tilopa after he found him. Eventually, Tilopa gave him the instructions of pointing out the nature of mind and the oral instructions on how to practice the understanding of true nature of mind. Naropa practiced these instructions and was able to generate profound realization in the continuum of his being.

The Tibetan translator Marpa requested instructions from the great teacher Naropa and became his student. Naropa appointed Marpa as his regent in Tibet and made the prediction that just as the children of a *garuda* become stronger and more powerful than the mother to whom they are born, so each generation of Marpa’s students in Tibet would be more accomplished than their own gurus.

To see if this prophecy is true, we could look at the generations that followed Marpa. Marpa passed these teachings to his student Milarepa, and Milarepa passed them to his student Gampopa. By the time the teachings had reached Gampopa, he had not only received the instructions on Mahamudra known as the *Six Yogas of Naropa* that were passed down from Marpa and Milarepa, but he had also received the oral instructions on training the mind from the Kadampa masters, originating from the great Indian master Atisha, and he combined these two streams.

The instructions on Mahamudra that Gampopa received from

Milarepa are extremely profound. They show how to practice the path of the Vajrayana. The instructions from the great master Atisha explained the way in which all beginners can enter the Buddhist path and establish the very pure motivation to practice dharma that enables one to become accomplished. These instructions of Atisha are very subtle and carefully guide the training of one's mind.

THE STORY OF ATISHA

The Buddhist dharma was originally transmitted to Tibet from India by Shantarakshita (Khenpo Bodhisattva) and by the great guru Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) in the eighth century CE and began to flourish in Tibet based on their teachings. However, in 905 CE, King Langdarma persecuted practitioners of the dharma in Tibet and as a result it almost vanished. People had to flee to high mountain regions of the country, and because of these conditions the great Indian teachers no longer came to Tibet. This meant that the people who were in Tibet had books and teachings on Buddhism, but they had to speculate on what these teachings meant. One person would say, "Well, I think it means this," and another would say, "No, I think it means this." They would discuss this way and as a result, the dharma became corrupted and no one really knew what the genuine dharma was. After Langdarma had ruled, a King whose name was Yeshe Ö of Guge thought that it was necessary to purify the dharma. So he invited one of the foremost of Indian teachers, Atisha, to come and clarify the dharma in Tibet.

How had the dharma become degraded? The teachings that had proliferated in Tibet were of a very advanced, profound, and subtle view that ordinary people could not practice immediately. To achieve this advanced view, it is necessary for people to first train in more basic teachings. The practitioners needed to arouse themselves first with the determination to achieve freedom from samsara. This is done by taking refuge in the three jewels of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. So they needed to arouse *bodhichitta*, or the heart of

enlightenment, before doing advanced practice. Raising bodhichitta is the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment oneself for the purpose of bringing about the welfare of others. They also needed to practice sending and taking (Tib. *tong len*) meditation, which involves the exchange of self and others. If one trains one's mind in the above practices, then when one combines these teachings with the teachings on the profound view of Mahamudra, one's practice will progress very well along the path. So it was these teachings on bodhichitta and mind training that Atisha brought to Tibet.



Vajradhara (Tib. Dorje Chang)

The teachings of the Kagyu lineage originated with Vajradhara.

Chapter 2: The First Dharma

*Grant your blessing so that
my mind may be one with the dharma.*

THE FIRST DHARMA of Gampopa is usually translated as, “May my mind be one with the dharma,” but a more literal translation would be, “May my mind go into the dharma.” For beginners, whether or not the activities of the body conform to the dharma doesn’t make that much difference. Whether our speech conforms to the dharma or not doesn’t make much difference either. But whether our mind conforms to the dharma makes all the difference. If our mind conforms to the dharma, then our speech and our body’s activities will conform to the dharma on their own. And if our mind doesn’t become one with the dharma, then it really doesn’t matter what we do with the body and speech; it won’t be of much real benefit anyway. That is why it is most important that our mind becomes one with the dharma in the beginning.

THE PROBLEMS OF LAZINESS

For our mind to become one with the dharma it is necessary to abandon the cause of our mind not becoming one with the dharma. This cause is laziness, and through laziness we are unable to practice. There are three kinds of laziness. The first is underestimating oneself by thinking, “Well, the situation I’ve got is sort of okay. I don’t think that I can really do any more than this. I’m just not ready for doing any more. It’s great to talk about enlightenment, but those aren’t things that I could accomplish. I’m just not that sort of person and it’s really beyond me.” Thinking this way, we just begin to slide into more degrading activity, and this behavior becomes a great obstruction to being able to practice the dharma.

The truth, on the other hand, is that there is no reason we

aren't capable of practicing because we do, in fact, have the ability to accomplish great things. We have within us the conditions for becoming liberated and enlightened. This lack of courage that we feel is groundless because we have already achieved a state of being free and well favored. We also have a marvelous mind that has *sugatagarbha*, which literally means "the essence of the one who has gone to happiness" and is usually translated as "Buddha-nature" or "Buddha-essence." This *sugatagarbha* refers to the potential of becoming a completely enlightened person—a buddha.

We are fortunate to have found a situation that can bestow great benefit upon us; that is, we have achieved a human birth, which allows us to practice on the path. Whether we are male or female, young or old, big or small, strong or weak, beautiful or ugly doesn't make any difference. We have a body that can actually practice the dharma. Unlike animals we have the ability to speak so that we can discuss things with other people and improve our understanding. We have a mind that is suited for thinking about things and it's not beyond our capacity to think over what we've heard and to understand it.

It is said in the oral instructions that to achieve a human birth is to have found a body that is like a precious jewel. The reason for this metaphor is that a jewel is worth a lot, and with a precious jewel we can buy whatever we want. Similarly, we now have a body that enables us to do what we want. That's why we don't need to adopt this attitude of laziness in which we believe that we don't have the prerequisites for doing great things in this life.

The second reason we do not need to feel discouraged about our situation is that we have within us the *sugatagarbha* that is the root from which all the good qualities of intelligence (Skt. *prajna*) and wisdom (Skt. *jnana*) can develop and increase. All sentient beings without exception have this *sugatagarbha*, which is the essence of the *sugata*, "the one who has gone to a happy state." Except for not putting forth the necessary exertion, there is no reason whatsoever that we cannot achieve complete enlightenment. Because we have this nature that

allows for enlightenment to be achieved, we should never think, “I could practice forever and it won’t do any good.”

The second type of laziness is called the “laziness of attachment to negative actions.” Generally people enjoy doing good things, but there are people who actually enjoy doing all kinds of negative actions. If one becomes involved with negative actions, this creates an obstacle to one’s happiness and comfort. So if one has this kind of laziness, one needs an antidote for it. The antidote to such an attachment is to meditate on the impermanence of life and on karma and its effects.

Followers of other religious traditions say that Buddhism is very negative because all this talk about impermanence and *non-self* tends to depress people, whereas a religious tradition should uplift people. But the truth of the matter is that thinking about impermanence leads one to have exertion. Contemplating impermanence, our delight in all sorts of things subsides and we begin to feel some regret or remorse. Although in the beginning thinking about impermanence might discourage a person, this is just a temporary situation. Thinking about impermanence has three benefits. First, in the beginning it calls us to the dharma and exhorts us to practice the dharma and to think about the dharma. Secondly, when one is further along the path, whenever we remember impermanence, it calls us back to our practice and inspires us to further exertion. When we become distracted by something else, the thought of impermanence brings us back to practice. And thirdly, impermanence is said to be the friend of achieving the fruition of our practice; that is, it inspires exertion and through exertion, the fruition is said to arrive “in the palm of one’s hand.”

In addition to thinking about impermanence, we need to think about karma. “Karma” literally means “action” and is the relationship between cause and effect. Now the word “karma” is relatively well known, and generally people understand it to mean that they are helpless. When something negative happens, they say, “Oh well, it’s just my rotten karma and there’s nothing I can do about it,” meaning they are doomed, that they are not independent and free. That is the opposite of what

karma really means. The teaching of karma is a teaching of our actually being in control. We can create what we want. Since everyone without exception wants happiness, people can have the happiness they want. So if we practice decent and virtuous activity, happiness comes about as a result. If we develop understanding and confidence in this teaching about the relationship between the actions in the present and the results experienced at a later time, this understanding of karma will destroy the laziness of attachment to non-virtuous activities.

The third type of laziness is the laziness of indifference. This is what we ordinarily understand by laziness; it is just doing nothing at all. We don't feel like doing anything particularly positive and we don't feel like doing anything particularly negative. We're just bored and don't really want to do anything at all. However, this is a very dangerous situation. The antidote to this type of laziness is thinking about what's wrong with being in samsara. Samsara has the nature of change and it has the nature of suffering and that is why we need to understand samsara. The very definition of samsara is "that which has hardship and obstructions." We often think there's some other reason, some particular detail that we need to alter to achieve happiness, and we almost always believe it's our inability to change the situation that is the cause of our suffering. We think, "I don't have the right woman (or man) and that's the problem" and "if I form a relationship with a good woman (or man), then everything will be all right." Or we think, "There's something wrong with my job. I need to find myself a good job and then things will be fine." But actually that is not the situation at all, because suffering is the nature of samsara. When we understand that the problem isn't just some temporary situation like being in the wrong relationship or not having enough money, and that suffering is actually the very nature of samsara, then we realize that only the dharma can allow us to achieve liberation from the suffering of samsara. So that is the meaning of "May my mind become one with the dharma."

Chapter 3: The Second Dharma

*Grant your blessing so that
the dharma may go along the path*

THE FIRST DHARMA of Gampopa discussed the necessity of practicing the dharma. This chapter will discuss the second dharma of Gampopa, which involves the need for motivation that will bring about the final fruition of the path, which is enlightenment. There are two types of motivation. One is seeking happiness for oneself, which is called the motivation of the Hinayana. The other is the motivation of seeking happiness for all sentient beings, who are as limitless as space. This is the very pure, exceptional motivation of the Mahayana.

The motivation of the Hinayana is a good motivation, but because it is taking care of one's own welfare alone, it is a narrow motivation. Therefore, it is necessary to abandon it and to take up the very vast motivation of the Mahayana or the Vajrayana. We need the very vast motivation to achieve the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings throughout all of space. Everyone wants happiness and wants to be free of suffering, so understanding that, we aspire to accomplish the welfare of all sentient beings without exception.

Both of these motivations are referred to as "mind generation" or "mind development." The Sanskrit is *cittaput dadma*, which means "arousing of the mind." Both are ways in which one's mind can be aroused towards the dharma. With Mahayana motivation we will be able to accomplish the welfare of ourselves and all other sentient beings. Without such a motivation we will achieve something good, but not attain complete enlightenment and the extraordinary fulfillment of the welfare of others. The Mahayana motivation is called "arousing one's mind toward supreme enlightenment."

How is it that ordinary beings such as ourselves can arouse

such an extraordinary attitude of seeking supreme enlightenment through bringing about the welfare of all sentient beings? Having this attitude depends upon refuge in the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. We recognize the Buddha as the teacher of the path that leads to enlightenment and affirm the Buddha as our own teacher by saying, “I am going to follow the teachings that the Buddha gave.” We then need to identify the teachings and the path of the Buddha. This is the beginning of refuge and the basis for the Mahayana motivation to develop.

For our mind to develop the Mahayana motivation, we need to have a mind that is at rest, relaxed, peaceful, tamed, and well trained. There are a variety of systems teaching how to do this. Some teach first taking refuge, then arousing bodhichitta, then doing the preliminary practices or *ngöndro*. Having completed *ngöndro*, we would practice the methods of tranquility (Skt. *shamatha*) meditation to set our mind in a relaxed, peaceful, and clear state. Another way of doing this is practiced by Shambhala in accordance with the teachings of Trungpa Rinpoche. He taught the practice of shamatha meditation first to develop some peace of mind, some relaxation, which becomes the basis for receiving the vows of refuge and developing the aspiration of the Mahayana. After that *ngöndro* is introduced. It seems to me that this is a very beneficial, very practical and sensible way to do it. It particularly helps in developed countries where people have very busy lives and they have a lot of worries. So in developed countries we can practice the methods of pacifying the mind first.

THE NINE STAGES OF SHAMATHA MEDITATION

There are nine ways of resting the mind accompanied by various antidotes to bring about a peaceful, relaxed, clear and calm state of mind. The first is called “placing the mind,” which is how one enters into meditation. Rather than exert ourselves strenuously, we simply allow our mind to relax and whatever comes about is fine. Whether our mind relaxes for a long period or a very short period of time, whether it’s stable or

not stable is just fine. In this stage we are trying to experience the mind being at rest and not generating a lot of thoughts.

When we are able to set our mind in a relaxed state free from thought for a little while, we enter into the second stage of “continuously placing the mind.” Basically, we are able to set our mind in a state of relaxation somewhat longer. In the first stage there is more distraction than there is mindfulness. In the second stage the balance shifts in that when we become distracted and the mind begins to wander, we don’t go on with the distraction very long. Rather, mindfulness appears and our mind becomes clearer and is able to meditate again.

In the second stage, when a thought or distraction occurs, one still goes with it for a while. In the third stage, when a thought comes up, one is able to see it as a thought and comes back to simply setting the mind in a relaxed state. This third stage is called “placing again.” One is trying to practice shamatha meditation and set the mind in a state of peace. So at this point one recognizes that one does indeed have thoughts. Yet these thoughts keep occurring and one might become discouraged. Sometimes people will say, “here I am trying to meditate and I’ve got all these thoughts appearing.” But actually there’s a reason for not feeling discouraged, because that’s just what our mind is like. We have this untamed explosion of thoughts that just occur and that’s why we need to practice meditation. In the past all this thinking was also going on, but we were totally unaware of it. There was no mindfulness and no meditation then. But with meditation we develop an ability to recognize thoughts as thoughts and that is a good quality.

This discussion of having so many thoughts is set down in various manuals of instruction on meditation. It’s said that when one begins to make a little progress in the practice of meditation, one begins to think that things are definitely getting worse. One thinks, “Before I was practicing meditation I didn’t have a lot of thoughts and now that I am practicing there are a lot more thoughts than there used to be.” It also says in these books that this isn’t the case at all. Before one began

meditation practice, one was always distracted. We had many thoughts, but we never recognized them and so we never had an experience of them. After practicing for a while, we are able to identify the thoughts as thoughts and it is said that an irritation at all these thoughts is actually a sign of one's mind beginning to rest somewhat.

After we are able to recognize our thoughts, we usually develop an attachment to them. We begin to think, "These thoughts are very important and very good." And so we go on thinking about them, following them out because they seem important. To not fall into becoming fascinated by our thoughts, we have to apply an antidote. We tend to think our thoughts are extremely important because we're making various plans about what we're going to do. It is appropriate to say firmly to ourselves, "Okay, I've got plans I need to make, but I can do that later. Right now, I'm supposed to be meditating." A traditional example is that when a pig breaks into a garden and begins eating the flowers and vegetables, the gardener should come up to the pig with a stick and rap it sharply on the nose. The pig then will run away. Whereas if the gardener were to be very gentle and coax it along and pet it, pretty soon the pig will have eaten up all the flowers and vegetables. It's pretty much the same way with thoughts in meditation. If thoughts arise and we think, "Oh, that's very important, I'll have to think about it" and we don't stop these thoughts right at the beginning, we will get lost in them. So it's harder to get rid of the thoughts later than it is to immediately say "no" to them.

The fourth stage is called "close placement." At this point in meditation we are able to cast out thoughts when they come up. We just put them aside. But this takes some forcefulness of discipline to do and this is done through the techniques of mindfulness and awareness. At this point mindfulness is basically a matter of remembering that we are practicing meditation. Awareness then is looking inside the mind and seeing what's going on in our practice. With mindfulness and awareness we are able to accomplish the fourth level of resting

the mind.

The bodhisattva Shantideva discussed this fourth stage in his treatise on the bodhisattva path called *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, in which he said that all of these thoughts could be compared to thieves. He said that if someone has an intention to steal from you, they would look into your house to see if the guards protecting your house are clever and strong. If they find so, they would simply go somewhere else. On the other hand, if they see that the guards are timid and not very strong, then they will overcome the guards and break into the house and carry off your possessions. It is somewhat like that with mindfulness and awareness, which are the guards of your practice of meditation. If they are not strong, then thoughts come along and just carry you off. But if mindfulness and awareness are well established, then thoughts are not able to come in and take over. In this particular metaphor, Shantideva points out that our mind resembles a doorway. It is like a doorway to a bank where something very valuable is stored inside. If the guard at the bank is a strong and alert person and carries a gun, the thieves will go somewhere else. They'll simply say, "It's not going to work, we can't get in there." Similarly, mindfulness and awareness are the guardians of the treasures of our mind, which are the virtue and merit that has been accumulated in our practice. If mindfulness and awareness are well established, then the disturbing emotions (Skt. *kleshas*) will not come in and wreak havoc, stealing the virtue we have accumulated and harming our practice of meditation.

The fifth stage of practice is called "taming." At this point one has been practicing meditation for an extended period of practice and one's mind becomes tired. It becomes very difficult to practice and one doesn't really want to practice any more. The mind has become thick and heavy, lacking freedom or independence. This is the time to remember the purpose of practicing meditation and the good qualities of meditation. One encourages oneself and recalls the reasons for meditating with, "If I am able to succeed in this practice and pass beyond this

obstacle, I will achieve true happiness of body and mind and achieve the real fruition of my practice. And if I let my mind continue with this heaviness, I won't be able to achieve these things." This is the time to remember the real benefits and good qualities of meditation and having done so, one will be glad to continue, being delighted in meditation.

Becoming delighted in practicing meditation makes it easier to practice meditation. This then brings us to the sixth stage, which is called "pacifying." At this point one is beginning to look more closely at the thoughts that interrupt one's practice of meditation. Rather than just noticing thoughts with, "Oh, it was a thought," one begins to look into it and say, "Hmm, meditation isn't going so well today. What are these thoughts? Is it attachment? Is it aggression? Is it doubt? Is it discouragement? Just what is going on now?"

So by recognizing attachment, aggression, doubt, and so forth, one can deal with them this way. If the thoughts are attachment or desire, one can remember that there is no real benefit that comes from clinging. Understanding that no benefit comes from pursuing desire is the key to abandoning the emotion of attachment. In the case of hatred or aggression, one recognizes that hatred harms oneself as well as others and doesn't do anyone any good. One realizes that abandoning hatred is good both for oneself and for others. This is really the key to being able to pass beyond hatred. To deal with doubt, one understands that if one is eaten up by doubt, the more one thinks about it, the worse it gets. Having doubts about things doesn't really help to resolve the matter; it just makes more and more doubt. So during meditation, it really is fruitless to dwell on doubt. It's a faulty way to do things. So looking at things closely in this way and stepping over them is the way one pacifies the mind.

Up to this point we have abandoned the coarser problems that come up in meditation. Now we need to talk about the more subtle obstacles that are more difficult to overcome. Although they've been present all along, at this point we begin to focus on them. These are what's called a heaviness of mind

on the one hand and wildness of mind on the other. Wildness of mind means simply being unable to place one's mind in a state of tranquility. You might be thinking about some game that you enjoy playing or some place where you like to stay. Whatever it is, if your mind begins to center on that, then it's not possible to just release the mind into a peaceful and relaxed state, because it is strongly stuck on something. The other type of problem is a heaviness or darkness of mind in which the mind begins to sink and become extremely unclear and inflexible.

To overcome wildness or heaviness of mind we first must identify it as such. Basically, wildness of mind occurs when we are excited and really interested about what we think. This means it is necessary to suppress our mind. There are a number of ways to specifically counteract wildness of mind: thinking about one's motivation for practice, or engaging in a particular behavior, or visualizing a particular object in one's meditation. For example, to deal with wildness of mind by altering one's motivation, one can think about impermanence, or the faults of samsara, or the disadvantages of not being able to meditate. This will somewhat subdue the wildness of the mind. To counteract wildness of the mind by behavior, if the room were very bright, one could simply darken the room, making it more like a cave. This will enable the mind to relax. One could also make the place of meditation a little warmer, which will relax the body and in turn release some of the tightness and tension in the mind. To counteract wildness of the mind with visualization, one could visualize a black lotus with four petals at the heart that is turned slightly downward and visualize a black drop (Skt. *bindu*) descending into the petals of the flower. Just visualizing this will reduce the wildness and tension of the mind.

To overcome heaviness or dullness of the mind there are again three major ways of doing this. In relationship to changing the motivation, one needs to cheer oneself up and to lighten up. The method that is traditionally recommended is to think about the remarkable qualities of the Buddha or the

remarkable qualities of the dharma. Thinking about these things tends to lift one's mind. In relationship to behavior one can counteract heaviness of mind by adjusting one's posture so one is sitting very precisely and erectly. One can also make the room cooler and brighter which will have the effect of overcoming the heaviness that has set in. In relationship to visualization, one can visualize a white full petalled lotus with a white drop at the heart and have the drop rise slowly through one's body to the *Brahmarundhara* at the top of the head. This white drop rises there and just stays there.

The seventh stage of resting the mind is called "thoroughly pacifying" and is an extension of the sixth stage of "pacifying." As before, one is still working principally with the obstacles of heaviness and wildness and works with them in the same way.

Now the eighth stage of resting the mind is called "one-pointedness." At this point one is working on all sorts of obstacles and one needs a variety of different antidotes. At the early stages of meditation we have been engaged principally in getting the mind to stay within the practice of meditation and working on the more subtle qualities of heaviness and wildness of mind. In this eighth stage the meditator needs to investigate what is going on within the mind and to practice the appropriate antidote.

The ninth stage is called "placing the mind in equipoise." At this stage further exertion is not needed. Rather, one desists from applying the various techniques used up to this point and simply allows the mind to be in a relaxed and clear state, which is called a state of being "thoroughly processed" or *shin jong* in Tibetan. There is a certain independence of mind; it's really just a matter of letting oneself be in a state of meditation.

The Nine Levels of Stability of Meditation

1. Placing the mind

(One places one's mind on an object for a brief duration.)

2. Continuously placing the mind

(One places one's mind on an object and it wanders, and then one places it back again on the object.)

3. Placing again

(One keeps placing one's mind, but there are still thoughts such as "this is important" or "I like this," which prevent complete placement.)

4. Close placement

(The mind appears to be vast, and the thoughts appear only as small intrusions on this vast space.)

5. Taming

(One feels joy, enthusiasm, and relaxation in one's meditation.)

6. Pacifying

(The mind appears tame, but it still wanders because we are still attached to these wanderings.)

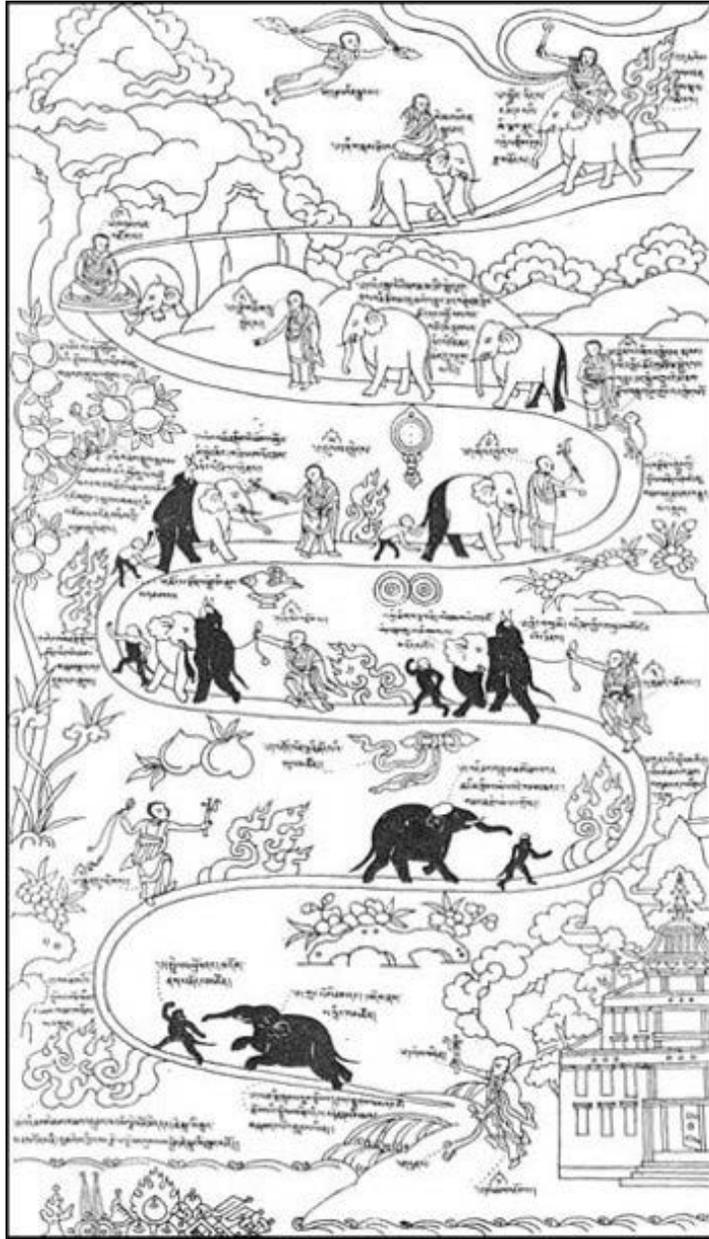
7. Thoroughly pacifying

(Whatever the distraction that appears in mind, one immediately applies the right antidote.)

8. One-pointedness

(One can place the mind almost completely, but it still requires some exertion.)

9. Placing the mind in equipoise
(Mind rests simply and naturally in its own nature.)



The Nine Stages of Shamatha Meditation

Chapter 4: The Third Dharma

*Grant your blessing so that
the path may clarify confusion*

THE SECOND DHARMA of Gampopa is about the motivation and the basis for the dharma progressing along the path. What is it that we mean by path? In samsara we experience various sorts of obstacles, suffering, and hardships. What are these suffering and hardships? They are confusion, which is not established by their own nature. Since they are not something inherently existent, they can be abandoned. So the third dharma of Gampopa is “may the path clear away confusion” and is about how one can go about abandoning confusion.

As we are in samsara, we experience body, speech, and mind. It's body and mind that experience samsara, not speech. There are various kinds of experiences that we experience in our body, and our mind experiences unhappiness and disturbance. Then between those two, the mind is preeminent. Things depend upon the mind, and mentally we experience various sorts of interruptions, obstacles, hardships, and difficulties. So to have true happiness and comfort there is a need for clearing away that suffering and unhappiness so that it will not arise. Where does that hardship and difficulty come from? From the point of view of the dharma, the hardship that we experience comes from desire, hatred, and ignorance.

Now in terms of the world, desire basically means that we hope that things will go well for us. We would like things to turn out in a good way. The nature of mind is that when we get the first thing that we hope for, we develop a second hope for something else. Gradually our hopes expand and become greater and greater and there is no limit to them at all. Eventually, we hope for something that cannot be fulfilled. At

that point we meet with suffering.

Just as desire relates mainly to hope, so aggression or hatred mainly relates to doubt in the sense of fear or even paranoia. Our prajna or knowledge is not very strong, so we don't really understand clearly what's going on with other people. We begin to have all sorts of doubts that so-and-so doesn't like me and that he wants to embarrass or harm me. Then we respond with aggression and experience further mental hardship.

Ignorance in this context refers mainly to obscuration, and there are two main types of ignorance: mixed and unmixed. When we say "mixed" we mean mixed with desire or hatred. When desire is born in us, then it may be mixed with ignorance. When hatred is born in us, it is mixed with ignorance. With desire, our hopes are usually clouded by ignorance. We don't know whether or not we're going to be able to accomplish something that we set out to do, something we have placed our hopes on. We don't know whether accomplishing it would actually be helpful to us. And because we don't see the situation clearly, we begin to hope for things that are not possible or not beneficial, and we end up hoping in vain.

In the case of ignorance mixed with aggression, we have doubts or fears about someone else and we don't really understand the situation with another person clearly and we start thinking this way simply because we've misunderstood the situation. So we react to somebody falsely and we express some hostility, and they, in turn, express some hostility back at us. Even though there was no real basis for this aggression, gradually people become angry at each other. Consequently, you can see the way that aggression could be mixed with ignorance and lead to a lot of hardship.

The second type of ignorance is unmixed ignorance, which is not associated with desire or aggression. It's simply ignorance by itself. This also has two types: not being aware of the situation and misperceiving the situation. The first is just not realizing what the situation is. We don't understand the situation clearly and we don't have any desire to find out the

truth. We just aren't interested. The second is misunderstanding the situation. We have a mistaken belief about it. So if it is something good, we think it's bad; if it is something bad, we think it's good.

Then, just in terms of suffering that we experience mentally, there's the suffering of doubt, which also has two different types: doubt that goes up and doubt that goes down. Doubt going up means thinking, "Well, it might be this way or it might be that way," but we are tending towards viewing things the way they really are. So gradually our doubt is cleared away and we actually develop the correct view. The other type of doubt is that we're thinking, "Well, maybe it's like this, or maybe it's like that," but we are leaning towards viewing things differently from the way they really are. So we head in that direction and gradually we end up firmly holding the incorrect view.

So these different factors disturb our mind, but what is important to realize is that we have created all this trouble for ourselves. No one else did it; it didn't come from somewhere else. Once we start going in this way, we become unhappy, we become crazy, and we become mad. The central point is to realize, "I created all this trouble for myself; it didn't come from outside of me."

Now, where does all this suffering come from? It comes principally from desire, aggression, and ignorance. Where do desire, aggression and ignorance come from? The root of all these is the conception of a self. First, we think "I." Then, having thought "I," we think, "I need good things." And then we start developing hope for good things and fear of bad things. So if we want to get rid of our suffering, what we have to do is eliminate this conception of a self or "I." Now, we are very fortunate because it is possible to get rid of this concept of "I." The reason it is quite possible to eliminate this concept is that the object we conceive of as a self doesn't exist. That is to say, there is no self. It's just confusion. Once we realize that there is no self, then the conception of self will naturally be turned around.

The Buddha taught a variety of methods for eliminating the suffering of samsara. In the context of the Hinayana, the Buddha taught that the suffering we experience is rooted in the disturbing emotions and these kleshas themselves are rooted in the conception of self. By realizing that self does not exist, it is possible to achieve liberation from suffering. When we first hear the teaching of non-self, we might take this to mean that there is no mind whatsoever, that we're just a corpse. That's not what the Buddha taught.

The conception of self has two aspects: first, to conceive of something as self and second, to conceive of something as belonging to self—that is, to think of things as being “mine.” It is a little bit easier to explain this in the reverse order. For the most part, what we mean when we talk about conceiving of something as “mine” means usually that we're talking about our house, our clothes, our salary or whatever. But this can vary quite a bit; sometimes we might think “my country,” which is very vast, and sometimes we might think “my toe,” which is something rather small. So there is nothing definite that we can point to as “mine.”

The conception that things belong to “me” can quite easily lead to suffering. For example, if you go to a store that sells watches, and you happen to see someone drop a watch on the floor and it breaks, you think, “Oh, a watch fell to the floor” without any particular feeling about it. However, if you drop your own watch on the floor and it breaks, you think, “Oh, it's my watch and it's now broken” and you become very upset. So it's the feeling that it's “mine” which leads to pain. However, if we examine this idea of something belonging to oneself and try to discover if this object is really one's own, we don't really find anything. We may ask, “Where is this ‘mine’ or this ‘mineness’ of things?” It is not something that is outside the object, it is not something that is inside the object, nor is it something between these two. The watch that was in the store and broke and the watch that was on one's wrist and broke were not really different. They were both watches. But one of them has this conception of “mine” attached to it and that is

what led us to some pain.

The second aspect of the concept of self is conceiving of something as self. When we think “I,” we tend to believe that the “I” at birth and the “I” as an adolescent and the “I” as an old person all refer to the same thing. But this is not so. The Buddha explained this in terms of what are known as the five aggregates (Skt. *skandhas*) illustrating that there is no real essence to whatever it is that makes up “I.” The five aggregates are form, feeling, discrimination, formations, and consciousness. Yet there is nothing in them that corresponds to what we imagine when we think of “I.”³

The five aggregates are a way of talking about the past, present, and future. Many people think that when the Buddha taught about selflessness that this teaching was contradictory to the teaching that there are lives prior to the present lifetime and lives subsequent to the present lifetime. They would say that if there is no self, then there is no way that there could be former lifetimes or later lifetimes. In fact, there is no contradiction between the teaching of selflessness and the teaching of reincarnation. There is no self that goes from the past to the present to the future. If we consider just one lifetime, there is a great difference between an infant, an adolescent, and an adult. Yet we think of them as just one thing. When you are five years old you are very small, and when you are twenty-five years old your body has changed quite a bit from what it was before. But somehow you always think, “Well, it’s just me.” But there is a big difference. For instance, as an infant you could not even say “daddy” or “mommy,” but gradually you began to learn to say these words and thousands more. There is also a great difference between the experience of a young person and that of an adult. Young children might not regard gold and diamonds as particularly interesting, but they might be fascinated with a little toy made out of plastic, thinking that the plastic toy is something beautiful and very important. When they get older, they may not be interested in something made of plastic, but think that something made of gold and diamonds is interesting and important. So despite the great difference in the

ways of thinking that we have at different times in our lives, we still persist in believing that the self was just the same mind all along.

Fortunately, there is no self and this is fortunate because through understanding selflessness and meditating on that, the path is able to clear away confusion. In the great vehicle of the Mahayana, there are two ways of discussing this view of selflessness. The first is explained by the *Chittamatra* or Mind-only school, and the second is explained by the *Madhymaka* or Middle-way school. The Mind-only school holds that there is no true existence of self and furthermore that external phenomena have no real existence. There are all kinds of appearances in the mind, but they are not objects that exist outside our own mind. For example, when we dream, all sorts of things appear in our mind: mountains, houses, animals, and so on. But if we ask ourselves if these were actual mountains, houses, and so on, the answer is clearly that they were just things that appeared in our mind. So the nonexistence of phenomena is illustrated by this example of the nonexistence of dream phenomena.

The Madhymaka school is concerned about emptiness. Up to this point we have described how what seem to be external phenomena are merely appearances of one's mind. The Madhymaka school believes that mind itself does not inherently exist; it does not exist by way of its own nature. Does that mean that it is just nothing? No, that's not what it means, because everything must be looked at in relationship to conventional and ultimate truth. If we look into phenomena we find that they are not ultimately real. However, on the conventional level of reality things do appear. Thus we can speak about the union of emptiness and dependent arising in terms of conventional and ultimate. Returning to our example of a dream, if we dream about an elephant, is this elephant really an elephant? No, it's not really an elephant; the true or ultimate truth is that it is an appearance in the mind. However, if we were to say that there was no dream about an elephant that would be false. In other words, on the conventional level

of reality there was an elephant. In other words, ultimately things are empty of any nature of their own, but their emptiness does not preclude their appearing in a conventional manner. These conventional appearances, however, are not inherently established. They are not established in terms of their own nature.

QUESTIONS

Question: It's a little hard for us to imagine what it would be like to act without hope and fear. When we try to act that way in the ordinary world where people aren't interested in dharma, people tend to think that we are crazy when we act that way.

Rinpoche: It seems to be that it is our own hope and fear that actually puts other people off. When we have some hope about something, we tend to see other people as themselves having a lot of desire. When we have fear and someone else looks at us slightly quizzically then we see them as utterly hard. So it might come back to us lessening the hope and fear that we're broadcasting. If we can bring that down, then what we're trying to accomplish in this world will probably go better.

Question: In dealing with the grosser aspects of the world such as war and crime and poverty, how does it follow that we make all the trouble for ourselves in that situation and how would our minds relate in that situation?

Rinpoche: Well, there certainly is a great deal of hardship and difficulty in the world these days such as wars and criminal activity. Our problem with this actually comes back to how much hope we have that things will go well. If we see a war going on, for example, and think, "I hope that doesn't come here." So actually what would be good is just to take a reasonable estimate of what we are able to do to help in this world. If we're able to help a hundred people, then we help a hundred. If we can help a thousand, then we'll help a thousand. But we should not overestimate more than we can actually do. If we have some realistic hope, rather than a completely

unrealistic hope, about what we might be able to do in the world, that would help.



Gampopa (1079 - 1153 CE)

Chapter 5: The Fourth Dharma

*Grant your blessing so that
confusion may dawn as wisdom*

THE MAIN POINT of the third dharma of Gampopa is selflessness and emptiness. However, the selflessness and emptiness that is taught in the third dharma is not realized naturally, but rather is acquired through the practice of meditation. Also it is not an emptiness that is nothingness, rather it has wisdom. And that wisdom has the three aspects of knowledge, tender love, and great capacity.

The true nature of all phenomena is just the same whether the person has manifested wisdom or not. However, realizing this true nature varies from one individual to another. The completely enlightened Buddha has completely manifested this wisdom. However, in our case as ordinary persons, that wisdom is somewhat obscured, covered, or stained. Therefore when we speak about this wisdom in ourselves, we call it *sugatagarbha* (literally “essence of the Buddha”), which in English is translated as Buddha-nature or Buddha-essence.

When we speak about *sugatagarbha*, we are speaking about the union of wisdom and space. To be more precise the word “wisdom” is *jnana* in Sanskrit or *yeshe* in Tibetan. The word “space” is *dhatu* in Sanskrit or *ying* in Tibetan. However, this space does not mean space in general, it is the space of dharma where the qualities of an enlightened person can be generated. It is the sphere within which the thoughts, stains, and so forth of ordinary persons can be abandoned. This wisdom we are speaking of should be understood as completely unchanging. It doesn't get better or worse. It is immutable, unlike knowledge or *prajna*, which tends to increase or decrease upon one's experience. There is no differentiation of this space from wisdom. It's not like space being empty of obstructive things

so that something could pass through it. It's not just a blank emptiness, but it is something that serves as the very basis for good qualities to develop and for these qualities to increase.

All sentient beings have sugatagarbha, the union of space and wisdom. However, we are not able to manifest it at this point because it is obstructed by the disturbing emotions. Nevertheless, it does exist within us, as is taught particularly in the *Uttaratantra*.⁴ This is taught by way of nine examples, three of which are the main examples.

Sugatagarbha exists within us in a completely perfect form, but it is hidden. By way of an example, if we had a little statue of the Buddha inside a lotus flower and the flower were closed, one could not see that this perfect body of a Buddha is within the flower. However, if someone knew that the Buddha statue existed within this flower then they could open the flower and see it. Similarly, there is this sugatagarbha that is inside, but most people don't realize it. The Buddha, however, realizing that there was sugatagarbha within that afflicted state of mind, taught the methods for abandoning the afflictions that cover it. And through the abandoning of such afflictions, the sugatagarbha can fully manifest.

This particular example was taught by the Buddha in a sutra and was taught again in the *Uttaratantra*. The reason for teaching this particular example is that temporarily the disturbing emotions are quite attractive. However, they don't stay that way. Similarly, the lotus flower is a very beautiful thing for a certain period of time. But it's not something that one can look at always and find pleasure in, because it eventually becomes old and withers. So that's one reason why this particular example is used. The reason that the body of the Buddha is used is because one is trying to discuss the wisdom of the Buddha, and you can't use worldly things to point towards this wisdom. So to indicate Buddha, we have to use a representation of the Buddha.

In the second example, sugatagarbha is indicated by the honey guarded by bees. In the previous example we said that sugatagarbha lies within desire, and now we are saying that

sugatagarbha is also in the center of hatred. However, until we clear away the emotional obscuration of hatred, we cannot discover the union of space and wisdom—the sugatagarbha—that is within it. In this example, a very sweet honey is protected by angry bees. Even though it's protected by angry bees, someone who realizes that honey exists there can clear away the bees and take the honey.

The reason for giving this particular example is that bees are somewhat analogous to hatred, and when one employs the methods for clearing them away, then one is able to taste the sweet honey. Similarly, when one is able to clear away hatred, one is able to experience peace and happiness and achieve the complete enlightenment of a buddha.

The third illustration of sugatagarbha is connected with the affliction of ignorance. Even though sugatagarbha exists within ignorance, it is not manifest. By clearing away ignorance, the sugatagarbha that exists within it can be made manifest. An analogous illustration of this is rice that is encased within its husk. The husk of rice is very thick and hard. Without eliminating that hard case, it's not possible to eat the rice and gain any nourishment from it. However, if one removes the husk, it's possible to eat the rice and to obtain nourishment from it. Similarly, sugatagarbha is hidden within the affliction of ignorance. If the ignorance can be eliminated, then sugatagarbha will manifest.

Since our sugatagarbha has not fully manifested, we need to allow it to manifest through listening, contemplating, and meditating. Through listening to and contemplating the teachings, we are able to develop a certainty about them. Having done so, we can realize it directly with meditation. Having realized it directly, we can gradually make it manifest completely. This manifestation is the full flowering of wisdom and the exalted activity of the Buddha. This is why we need to clear away the various afflictions that cover sugatagarbha.

The point of these three examples is that usually we think that disturbing emotions and ignorance are what we have inside us, and the good qualities are something that exist outside us.

We believe we need to achieve these new good qualities. However, it is the other way around. The afflictions and stains that we experience are not inherent in things, they are as if on the outside. It is the sugatagarbha that is inside. It is like the flower petals covering the Buddha statue, the bees preventing one from getting the honey, or the husk preventing one from being able to eat the rice. The sugatagarbha exists in a fully developed form already. The problem is that we're not able to make it manifest. What we need to do is to make it manifest, and that's what is being pointed to in this teaching from the *Uttaratantra*.

Up to this point we have been discussing the path according to the system of the sutras, in which one is led by a path of reasoning to the understanding of emptiness, selflessness, and so on. However, in the context of the Vajrayana, we see that it is very helpful to understand this reasoning, but one needs to settle these ideas mainly in terms of the mind itself. In terms of Vajrayana meditation, one looks directly at the mind. It takes a very long time to follow the sutra path of reasoning. In the Vajrayana we look directly at the mind itself, and this takes much less time.

Although we experience mind, if we try to find it, we can't. The reason the mind cannot be found is that it has no inherent existence; it is empty. Does this mean the mind is nothing whatsoever? No, it is not mere nothingness, because the continuity of mind is unsevered; it goes on. It is mind that knows various phenomena. It is mind that illuminates various phenomena. Thus, we talk about the mind as being empty and luminous, or empty and clear. What one needs to do is to identify this union of emptiness and clarity and to practice meditation in terms of this union. When one practices this way, various temporary experiences (Tib. *nyam*) come about. There are three types of these temporary experiences of meditation, which are: (1) experiences of pleasure or bliss, (2) experiences of extraordinary clarity, and (3) experiences of nonconceptuality. These experiences just appear by themselves when practicing meditation. They are neither particularly good

nor particularly bad. They just appear, and one ought to just let go of them without fixating on them.

For example, when Gampopa was training under his guru Milarepa, he requested oral instructions. Having received these instructions and practiced them, he had various experiences during the meditation, which are described in the *Rain of Wisdom*. Sometimes Gampopa would experience the mandala of Chakrasamvara; at other times he would experience the mandala of Hevajra. Sometimes the mandala would be white in color, and at other times it would be red in color. Gampopa thought, “Oh, this is very good. My meditation is really getting somewhere now,” and he would go back to Milarepa and describe what had happened and Milarepa would say, “Well, it’s nothing particularly special, it just comes along. It’s not good and it’s not bad. Just keep meditating.” At other times Gampopa had experiences when he practiced that seemed very bad to him. The whole world would become utterly black and dark. Other times it would be as if the entire world were just spinning and spinning and spinning. He thought this was a serious problem with some evil spirits tormenting him, and went to Milarepa to describe these experiences, but Milarepa just said, “Well, it’s nothing, it’s really nothing at all.”

Now to give an ordinary example of these temporary experiences, if you were to poke your finger in your eye and then look up at the sky at night, where everyone else sees one moon, you might see two moons. You might think, “Everyone else sees one moon, but I see two. I’m really something wonderful.” But that is not the case. In this circumstance you also might think, “Everyone else sees one moon, but I see two. This is really bad, I’ve got a serious problem.” But you see two moons just because you poked your finger in your eye. Seeing two moons is not a particularly good quality nor is it a particularly bad quality, and it is just like that with the practice of meditation: all kinds of experiences come up, but they really aren’t anything.

There is, however, one thing that we need to be very careful about when we practice meditation. There is one fault that

could become very dangerous. When we begin to understand emptiness, we might think, “Oh, everything is just empty. There’s nothing that’s real. So it doesn’t really matter whether I practice virtue or non-virtue. This karma stuff about the relationship between actions and the effects that are experienced later is something I can disregard because ultimately everything is empty.” In fact, that’s not so. If we think this way, we could easily become involved in giving up whatever virtuous practices we might have engaged in, and all sorts of ill deeds and non-virtue could just increase and increase and increase. So this is one thing that we need to be very careful about.

In the fourth dharma of Gampopa we speak about “confusion dawning as wisdom.” “Confusion” refers to the stains of the various afflictions. These stains or kleshas are adventitious in that they are not inherent in the nature of things. They have just come along. They need to be recognized for what they are and when we do so, then wisdom will come about from within. This is because the wisdom of which we have been speaking exists primordially within everyone and becomes completely manifest when the kleshas have been abandoned. That is the fourth dharma of Gampopa, the transformation of confusion into wisdom.

QUESTIONS

Question: If there is no self, what is it that gets reincarnated? If what gets reincarnated isn’t me, then why would I care about it?

Rinpoche: We spoke about the five aggregates or skandhas. We said the first aggregate is called form. From the very top of your head all the way down to the soles of your feet is the aggregate of form. It’s very different from one occasion to the next: the form of a child and the form of an adolescent and the form of an old man are distinctly different from each other. The second aggregate is feeling. We experience feeling with both the body and the mind. Feeling comes in three flavors: there is

pleasure, there is pain, and there are neutral feelings. The third aggregate is called discrimination. This refers to determining the various details of things, like knowing that sometimes what one sees is white and other times it is red. The fourth aggregate is called formation and refers mainly to the various sorts of thoughts we have such as virtuous thoughts of compassion and faith and unvirtuous thoughts such as desire, aggression, and ignorance. The fifth aggregate is called consciousness and this refers to the six types of consciousness: the five sensory consciousnesses of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and body sensation and the mental consciousness. Now each of these aggregates is a collection and then you have them all collected together. Then you have the aggregates of the past, of the present, and the future. So we take all these things and sort of roll them together and think of them as a single thing, which we call “me.”

Whereas, consider the stage of an infant, then an adolescent, then an adult. At the time of adolescence, the aggregates of the infant have ceased; then the aggregates of the adolescent cease and you have an adult. So it is not that the one is the other: they are actually quite different from each other. In fact, they are said to be a different entity. But we tend to see them as one thing and when the various feelings appear, we think, “I felt that.” We even react to feelings that appeared a long time ago with “I felt that” or “I still feel that.”

We talk about this collection of things going from one lifetime to another. But actually it’s that the five aggregates of this lifetime serve as a basis for the generation of the five skandhas of the next lifetime. It’s not that anything actually goes from one lifetime to the other, but one doesn’t have to cross lifetimes to understand that or to see that. It’s just the same now with the aggregate of an infant being the basis for adolescence and the aggregates of adolescence being the basis of adulthood. Nothing goes from childhood to adolescence and then adolescence to adulthood; there is nothing that goes from one thing to another.

Question: We perform various virtuous and unvirtuous actions, and doing this we accumulate karma. Having accumulated these actions, what is it that carries them from the past to the present or from one lifetime to the next?

Rinpoche: It is true that we accumulate karmas and these are carried as latencies or predispositions that are established in the mind. They are established in the mind and exist right with the continuum of the various aggregates. When concordant conditions are met, they ripen and give forth their results. It's similar to planting seeds and then getting the harvest. If one plants rice seed and good conditions exist, then one gets good rice. If bad conditions are encountered then one will get a bad harvest of rice. Secondly, depending upon what sort of seed you plant, you get the appropriate type of rice as your harvest. If they are good seeds, you get good rice. If they are not particularly good seeds, you get poor rice. Similarly, the actions we perform establish the predispositions in the mind. When the proper conditions are encountered, those predispositions are aroused or awakened and then one experiences their effect.

It is said that there are two different types of effects. The first is a disposition that is reinforced in one lifetime and carries on in the next. For example, having a strong attachment to something in one lifetime and then in a later lifetime tending to like that sort of thing very much again. The second is when one does certain actions in one lifetime and the results of these mature later. For instance, one might be an angry person who has harmed people in one lifetime and then in a later lifetime, as the effect of having harmed others, the result would be a great deal of suffering for oneself. So these various kinds of actions and established predispositions are put right within the continuum of the mind.

A loose illustration of this is the nuclear explosion at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union. All sorts of poison was thrown into the atmosphere and the wind carried this poison to other

places such as Sweden. It fell to the ground and gradually poisoned the ground. Once the ground became poisoned, then the grass and trees became poisoned. Then the cattle that ate the grass were poisoned and now the humans who eat the cattle are poisoned. So gradually the poison which started out as being very localized in a particular spot becomes pervasive everywhere. It's similar with actions: once one accumulates unvirtuous actions, they remain within the continuum of one's mind in an unspoiled fashion; that is, they won't disintegrate by themselves. They just stay there and eventually when they meet the right conditions they start to manifest, perhaps over a series of lifetimes, gradually poisoning everything.

Question: Even though everyone has sugatagarbha, due to having accumulated many bad actions in the past, could it be that one would not be able to progress along the path even if one wanted to practice?

Rinpoche: One does not proceed along the path automatically. It doesn't just happen by itself. And there are all sorts of bad deeds and obstructions that we experience, such as the bees that obstruct our getting at the honey or the husk that obstructs our getting at the rice. However, just as it is possible to drive the bees off and remove the husk, so if we exert ourselves, we will be able to separate out the bad deeds and obstructions.

There are two classic examples of this. One is a verse in which Nagarjuna refers to "the clear and beautiful appearance of the moon in a cloudless sky." Sometimes one can't see the moon that way. However, when the clouds disappear from the sky, the moon is there in a completely beautiful and unstained way. Similarly, there are many stories that come from the Buddha himself. In these stories various people would come to him who had been afflicted by the results of terrible things they had done or they were afflicted by tremendous desire or hatred of others. In these stories, when the person entered into the door of the dharma and practiced the dharma, they were able to achieve a condition free from samsara in one lifetime.

Question: How can one get rid of the disturbing emotions that are surrounding sugatagarbha without getting rid of sugatagarbha also?

Rinpoche: Sugatagarbha is what we are; it is our very entity or nature. The various disturbing emotions are adventitious, which means they are something extra or superfluous. Because they are superfluous, we can remove them. However, removing them does not mean throwing out sugatagarbha at the same time. It is like the clouds and the moon. When the moon is blocked or obstructed by clouds, we cannot see it. However, once the clouds have been cleared away, the moon can be seen directly and clearly in all its beauty. Eliminating the clouds doesn't mean eliminating the moon also. It's the same way with the disturbing emotions and sugatagarbha.



Milarepa, Gampopa's root guru
1040 - 1123 CE

Chapter 6: A Brief Account of How Gampopa Entered the Dharma

GAMPOPA WASN'T JUST an ordinary person who became famous. Rather, he gave us the root of all the Kagyu lineage of the four greater and the eight lesser schools of the Kagyu transmission. Gampopa's spiritual accomplishments had been predicted by the Buddha in several sutras. The Buddha made a prediction about Gampopa in a sutra called the *White Lotus of Compassion* (Tib. *Nyingje Pemakarpo*). In this sutra, the Buddha said that some time after his passing, there would come a monk who will also be a doctor. This person would live in a place that is in the north near the bank of the Rohita River and had served and received teachings from many buddhas in the past. This person had also spent much time practicing the Mahayana teaching and he would be able to benefit a great number of beings and spread the teachings of the Mahayana. This name "rohita" is the Indian name for "red river." Most rivers in India are only full of water during the monsoon season and the rest of the time they are more or less the color of the stones on which they flow, with most of them being bluish or whitish, so a red river is quite rare. However, we shall see that Gampopa established his seat near a river that was red and that he was a physician and a monk.

GAMPOPA'S EARLY YEARS

Gampopa was born in the year 1079 CE. The first thirty-two years of his life were spent in the normal way as an ordinary person. He married before the age of twenty and became a householder. Gampopa trained as a medical doctor, helping people during these years through the practice of medicine. Then when he was thirty-two, his wife and child died. Not being able to save his wife and child, he felt tremendous dissatisfaction with the world. As a result, he became a monk and embraced the religious life. While ordained, Gampopa

received the teachings of the Stream of Instructions of the Kadampa tradition and he also received Mahamudra instructions. Gampopa was to unite these Kadampa teachings with the Mahamudra teachings that he received from the great Buddhist saint Milarepa. Gampopa took these instructions and practiced them and developed such good qualities in meditation that, for instance, when he sat down to meditate, he was able to stay within the same meditation without moving for thirteen days. He also experienced tremendous happiness and contentment and bliss; so much so, that he became less interested in any of the ordinary pleasures and experiences of life. Also it is said that his bodhichitta—his pure wish to help all beings reach enlightenment—was extremely powerful and became very firm.

HOW GAMPOPA DEVELOPED THE MAHAYANA POTENTIAL

It began one day when Gampopa arose from his meditation and went for a walk. On the road he met three beggars who were talking among themselves. Gampopa overheard what they were saying because it was through his guru's compassion that this particular scene would act to incite him to the intense practice of dharma. The first beggar was saying, "We are not very fortunate people because if we were fortunate, we would have patrons sponsoring us so that every day someone would bring us food. It would be so nice to be fed every day." But the other beggar said, "Don't make such a wish. It's not worth it. You should wish for something better, such as becoming a really important man. Then you can do what you want and people will have to bow to your wishes. This is the best thing to wish." Then the third beggar said, "No, your wish is also too narrow minded. You need something even better than that, because even if you are very powerful, one day you are going to have to die. I think the best wish is to wish to be like Milarepa because he doesn't need any clothes, and he doesn't need any food. The dakinis feed him. He can fly in the sky and nothing makes any difference to him: whether he is born or

whether he dies. We should make a wish to be like him.” As that last beggar was speaking, one could tell that he was moved by faith because he had tears coming down his eyes and he had folded his hands in the gesture of prayer at his heart.

As soon as Gampopa overheard the name of Milarepa, he was shaken by an overwhelming feeling of strong faith and devotion. He immediately rushed up to the beggars and asked them about what he’d just heard. They told him everything they knew about Milarepa and how he lived in the peak of Bin Nenam. As soon as Gampopa heard this, he felt a strong urge to go meet Milarepa.

That same evening Gampopa was sitting in prayer and meditation, and after awhile he fell asleep and had a dream. In his dream he was blowing one of these very long Tibetan trumpets, and this made a sound so loud that it could be heard in the entire world. He dreamt that he was in the sky beating a drum, and the sound of it was so loud that all the wild animals ran towards him. Then a woman appeared and said, “Now that you played the drum and all the wild animals have come, you must give them all a cup of milk.” Gampopa had a cup of milk that the woman had given him, but Gampopa said, “I can’t give it to everybody because there won’t be enough.” And the woman replied, “Well, drink some first and then there will be enough. They will all receive some.”

After having this dream, Gampopa left in search of Milarepa, who was at that time staying in a place called Tashigong. When Gampopa arrived, he made an offering of gold and blocks of tea to Milarepa. But Milarepa said, “I’m an old man who doesn’t need your gold. It’s better that you keep it to sustain yourself during your practice. What is your name?” And Gampopa answered “Sonam Rinchen.”

Then Milarepa thought, “This is must be the man who was spoken of in the predictions. His first name “Sonam” means “merit” or “virtue,” indicating that he has gathered all the accumulations. His second name “Rinchen” means “very precious,” and this means that he is extremely precious for all beings. Milarepa had a cup full of *chang*, which is Tibetan

beer, and he gave it to Gampopa to drink. Gampopa, of course, was very embarrassed because there were many other people there watching and he was a monk who is not supposed to drink. Then Milarepa said, “Don’t think so much, just drink,” and Gampopa then drank the whole cup. This drinking of the whole cup was a very good sign indicating that in the future Gampopa would be capable of receiving the complete transmissions of all the instructions.

GAMPOPA BEGINS TO PRACTICE

When Gampopa first encountered Milarepa, Milarepa gave some instructions, saying, “You must meditate without becoming involved with discursive thinking. Don’t spend so much time speculating, but spend the time meditating.” When Gampopa had received these instructions, he then had the feeling that Milarepa’s body was getting brighter and brighter and brighter until Milarepa became so incredibly bright that Gampopa just couldn’t even bring himself to look at him. Gampopa then took his leave for that evening and went to sleep.

The next morning he went back to Milarepa and Milarepa said, “If you want to practice the dharma, then you must really apply yourself with all your strength. You must be completely diligent or it will be no good. However, during the autumn, it is all right to go and beg for alms.” This is because after the harvest, the monks go begging for food to carry them through the bitter winters of Tibet. So Milarepa said, “Apart from the autumn when you go begging for alms, you should spend all your days in a cave in meditation. This is the way to really practice.”

When Gampopa heard this, he was convinced of the truth of what Milarepa was saying and went to a cave to practice the subtle heat (Tib. *tummo*) instructions that he had been given. So Gampopa began doing the subtle heat practice and was completely naked in a place that was very, very windy. Although he was completely naked he was successful in his meditation and felt incredibly blissful and comfortable and very

warm. One night Gampopa had been meditating all night and he fell asleep at dawn. When he woke up, his body was very hard like a stone and incredibly cold. But he continued in his meditation, and for seven days he meditated continually, and the blissful feeling and the impression of heat became stronger and stronger. Finally, after he had been meditating for those seven days, he had a vision in the morning of the five main Buddhas in front of him and thought this was a very special experience and asked Milarepa to explain it to him. And Milarepa said, “You know, when you press on your eyes with your fingers, you will see double, so if there’s one moon in the sky, you will see two moons. This is not a supernormal phenomenon. In the same way, when you were meditating, all the energy began to flow within your body. But there was a small constriction of this energy that represents the five elements in your body, so you had this experience of seeing the five Buddhas. You shouldn’t think that this is a defect or that it is a good quality of your meditation. It is just a direct consequence of this slight blockage of the circulation of energy in your body. So just continue with your meditation.”

After this Gampopa resumed his meditation for three more months. Then very early one morning he had the feeling that the whole of the world was spinning very, very fast like a wheel. The feeling caused him to feel so dizzy that he started vomiting violently and because his stomach was empty it was incredibly painful. After this, he asked Milarepa if something was wrong or if it was a good sign. Milarepa simply said, “Again, there is nothing very special here. It is just the sign that the circulation in your body has slightly expanded in your right and your left channel. So you just carry on.”

From these experiences we learn that our mind changes all the time, going from one state to another very easily and quickly. Sometimes we feel that something is very good and sometimes we feel something may be very bad or dangerous. But in fact, whether something is actually very good or very bad, its effect is not directly felt. Meditation isn’t something that would drastically change everything for you overnight.

There's absolutely no need to become involved with what you think is good and become proud of it. On the other hand, there isn't any need to become worried and scared about what you think may be bad in meditation.

On still another morning, Gampopa saw in front of him all of a sudden a form of Avalokiteshvara (Tib. *Chenrezig*), and that form was oscillating between being very vivid and clear and then fading. This form of Avalokiteshvara also changed into very many forms with there being a moon under each one of these forms. Later when Gampopa asked Milarepa to explain this experience to him, Milarepa said this simply meant that the Buddha-nature subtle drop (the *bodhichitta bindu*) had come up to the head chakra, and this subtle drop had increased, and this was why he had the experience. But this experience had no deep meaning whatsoever and Gampopa didn't need to feel that this was important and Milarepa said, "Just go on with your meditation."

Still another time Gampopa saw one evening all of the hells and the suffering and all he witnessed was so unbearable that he felt incredibly sad and very, very frightened. When he asked Milarepa to explain this, Milarepa said, "This only means that your meditation belt was too tight, and was compressing all of the life force (Skt. *prana*) inside your body so that there was retention of the energy inside your body. So all you need to do is just loosen your meditation belt and go on meditating."

Then still another day Gampopa had a vision of six different types of gods that belong to the desire realm of existence. Each of these higher gods was pouring healing nectar (Skt. *amrita*) down onto the lower ones. When this healing nectar reached the lower gods, they drank all this nectar and felt very satisfied and happy. But then Gampopa saw his own mother there, and she was very thirsty and wasn't getting any nectar to drink. Milarepa explained that this flow of nectar was the sign that the bindu at the level of the throat chakra was increasing and Gampopa's mother being thirsty was the sign that the central channel hadn't opened yet. So he advised Gampopa to practice some vigorous physical exercises to increase the flow of this

energy.

Following this, Gampopa meditated for another month, and after that he started having very, very unpleasant sensations in his body. His body felt incredibly restless, and his mind was also very disturbed. He felt like he wanted to scream. He started wondering whether he was being possessed by a demon and he went to ask Milarepa about these experiences. Milarepa said this was only the sign of the increase of the bindu in his heart center and he said, “Just carry on with your yoga exercises more forcefully.” Following that particular experience, after that time, Gampopa didn’t need to eat anything any more.

Still another day, Gampopa saw the sun and the moon in front of him in space, and both of them were being eclipsed. It was a very dark eclipse, like that produced by the tail of a horse. When he went to ask Milarepa, Milarepa said this was neither good nor bad. It just showed that the prana inside his body was shifting from the right and the left channels into the central channel. After Milarepa had told Gampopa that this was neither good nor bad then Gampopa thought to himself, “Milarepa is an extraordinary teacher.” And then Milarepa said aloud three times, “Now, now, now,” and he didn’t say anything anymore after that. Gampopa took it to mean that now was the time that something was really going to happen. He went back to his practice and he really meditated with very strong effort and diligence.

He practiced for another month and one day he saw the mandala of Hevajra and thought to himself, “That must be a good experience,” and he went off to see Milarepa. However, Milarepa said again that Gampopa shouldn’t regard this as a significant experience and that it was neither good nor bad. It just meant that through his meditation, the blood in his body had increased and the blood circulation was felt very strongly in all the channels in the heart area. So he said, “Just carry on.”

Later on, Gampopa had another experience in which he felt that his body was becoming so big that it completely filled the whole universe and that all the six realms of samsara that live

in the universe were inside his body and all of them were drinking milk. There was a tremendous roaring sound everywhere, and then at dawn when he took off his meditation belt, everything disappeared all of a sudden. So he went to see Milarepa and to ask him what had happened. Milarepa explained that in the body there are thousands and thousands of different channels and on a coarse level these channels are like the arteries and the veins that convey the blood. On a more subtle level they are like the nervous system and on an even more subtle level they are the circulation of the very fine energy of the mind. Milarepa explained that now the circulation of the most basic aspect of prana, like blood and the nervous system, had been activated. Gampopa's task now was to transform all this into purer energy, that of jnana, that of pure intelligence. And then he said, "Now just go back to your practice."

Then another day, Gampopa had a feeling that his whole body had become a skeleton without any flesh on it, with his body being just tendons and nerves holding his skeleton together. He asked Milarepa to explain this to him and Milarepa said this came from the fact that his breathing was too rough, that it should be much smoother and softer. To correct this Gampopa changed his pattern of meditation a little so that at dusk, he would meditate on his yidam, then later on during the night, he would do prayers to his guru, and then early morning he would do some breathing meditation. One morning after he had done this breathing meditation, he fell asleep, and during his sleep he had a dream in which there were twenty-four different items, but this dream was something that bore no relationship whatsoever with any previous experience he had had. The meaning of the objects is very complicated. He thought, "Is this a good dream or a bad dream? Well, my guru is a Buddha, so I should go and ask him." So he went straight away and asked Milarepa. When he arrived, Milarepa said, "What have you got to tell me?" And Gampopa replied, "I've just had an amazing dream," and he described his dream in a spiritual song. Then Milarepa gave the explanation in another

spiritual song, saying, “I am experienced in dreams. I can tell what is good or what is bad in a dream. I know that the nature of all things is like a dream, like an illusion. And now I will explain your dream for you, but please, do not start thinking about all kinds of things and do not fret. Just keep your mind at rest, completely natural.”

In his song Milarepa explained the meaning of the dream. And in many ways this constituted a prediction for what would happen later on to Gampopa, and it was all very positive in terms of a great development of the Buddhist teachings and Gampopa gaining full realization. Then he teased Gampopa a little bit and said, “You are someone who practices very hard and who is very learned, and you do very well. But it seems that today you seem to be very, very involved with that dream of yours. Don’t you know that the Buddha said that dreams are completely devoid of any meaning, that they are really without any substance? So are you really very serious about this dream of yours, or are you just asking me casually? There is really no need to make such a big fuss about your dream. It’s just something that happened.”

Notes

1. There are four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism: the oldest lineage is the Nyingma lineage founded by Padmasambhava, the Sakya lineage founded by Khon Konchug Gyalpo, the Kagyu lineage founded by Marpa the Translator, and the Gelugpa lineage founded by Tsong Khapa which is the lineage of the Dalai Lama.
2. There are three bodies of the Buddha: the nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya and dharmakaya. The dharmakaya is the body of the complete wisdom of the Buddha. From this manifests the sambhogakayas, which are the pure realms that can be visited by realized bodhisattvas. The nirmanakaya is the bodily manifestation in the world such as occurred with the historical Buddha Shakyamuni.
3. The five aggregates are the steps in perception with there first being a form which is perceived by the sensory organ going up to consciousness in which the sensory object is recognized and associated with previous experiences. In Thrangu Rinpoche's *Open Door to Emptiness* this logical reasoning is given in detail showing that what we think of as "I" is really a whole set of disconnected thoughts and feelings with no unifying entity that can be called the self.
4. A treatise on Buddha-nature that was transmitted by Maitreya. A detailed commentary elucidating the *Uttaratantra* is available in *The Uttaratantra: A Treatise on Buddha-Essence* by Thrangu Rinpoche, Namo Buddha Publications and Zhyisil Chokyi Ghatsal Publications.

[A Biography of Thrangu Rinpoche](#)

THE LINEAGE of the Thrangu incarnations began in the 15th century when the seventh Karmapa, Chodrak Gyatso, visited the region of Thrangu in Tibet. At this time His Holiness Karmapa established Thrangu Monastery and enthroned Sherap Gyaltsen as the first Thrangu Rinpoche, recognizing him as the re-established emanation of Shuwu Palgyi Senge, one of the twenty-five great siddha disciples of Guru Padmasambhava.

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche is the ninth incarnation of this lineage and was born in Kham, Tibet in 1933. When he was four, H.H. the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa and the Palpung Situ Rinpoche recognized him as the incarnation of the Thrangu Tulku by prophesying the names of his parents and the place of his birth.

Entering Thrangu monastery, from the ages of seven to sixteen he studied reading, writing, grammar, poetry, and astrology, memorized ritual texts, and completed two preliminary retreats. At sixteen, under the direction of Khenpo Lodro Rabsel, he began the study of the three vehicles of Buddhism while staying in retreat.

At twenty-three Rinpoche received full ordination from the Karmapa. When he was twenty-seven he left Tibet for India at the time of the Communist military takeover. He was called to Rumtek, Sikkim where the Karmapa had his seat in exile. At thirty-five Rinpoche took the geshe examination before 1500 monks at Buxador monastic refugee camp in Bengal and was awarded the degree of Geshe Lharampa. On his return to Rumtek he was named Abbot of Rumtek monastery and the Nalanda Institute for Higher Buddhist studies at Rumtek. He has been the personal teacher of the four principal Karma Kagyu tulkus: Shamar Rinpoche, Situ Rinpoche, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, and Gyaltsab Rinpoche.

Thrangu Rinpoche has centers in Asia, Europe, and North America and has traveled extensively throughout the world to teach. In 1984 he spent several months in Tibet where he ordained over 100 monks and nuns and visited several

monasteries. In Nepal, Rinpoche founded the Thrangu Tashi Choling monastery and the Shree Mangal Dvip boarding school, for the general education of lay children and young monks, in Boudha; Thrangu Tara Abbey, a monastic college for nuns, in Swayambhunath; the Thrangu Tashi Yangtse monastic college, retreat center, and medical clinic at Namobuddha, east of the Kathmandu Valley; and the Thrangu Shekhar retreat center in Bhaktapur, just below a cave where Tibetan yogi Milarepa practiced. In India, he has completed the Vajra Vidya monastic college near Deer Park in Sarnath, where Shakyamuni Buddha gave his first teaching on the Four Noble Truths. In North America, Rinpoche is the abbot of Gampo Abbey, Nova Scotia, Canada and has established the Thrangu monastery in Vancouver, B.C., Canada and the Vajra Vidya retreat center in Crestone, Colorado, USA.

Thrangu Rinpoche is one of the most highly regarded masters of Mahamudra meditation. He has touched the lives of students from all parts of the world through his compassionate presence, his immense knowledge, and his way of making even complex teachings accessible.

Because of his vast knowledge of the Dharma, Rinpoche has been appointed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be the personal tutor for the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa, Orgyen Thinley.

For more information see www.rinpoche.com

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