

All Into One Ven. René Vajrapani 2024 April/May

Notes compiled and edited by Scott Snibbe

Thursday, April 25

7:30pm

It's been five years since the last time I was here.

We are the same, yet different. We are the continuity of the person we were five years ago, but we cannot say we are the same person. The body has changed and the mind has changed. The I is merely labeled on the continuity of this body and mind. We are a completely new person, actually. But we have this feeling that I am the same person. My thoughts have changed, my body has changed, but I'm quite the same person. In reality, not at all.

When I walk down to the river it looks like the stream of five years ago, but there's not at all a drop of water in the stream the same as five years ago. The stream is merely imputed upon these drops of water, but there's nothing there that is a stream from its own side, because we don't see dependent arising. The more we see things as solid, the stronger our mental afflictions. The more we see things as merely labeled by the mind, the less strong our delusions.

In this room, we have about forty people, human bodies. But we all have a stream of consciousness that comes from past lives. And before that, another life, and another. Spiritually, we are all at different levels. We can only see what we have done in this life, but we don't see what we have done in previous lives. Some of us are quite new to dharma in this life, and for others we have practiced dharma for many lives.

In this life, some of us have a lot of worldly responsibility, so our time for spiritual practice is quite limited. And others have given up their worldly responsibilities and try to devote more and more time to their spiritual practice, familiarizing their minds to spiritual experience. For some, it is quite easy because of the work they have done before; and for others it is quite difficult.

So, even though we do this retreat together, each of us has an individual retreat. Some are practicing for 20, 30 years, and some are quite new.

What we are going to meditate on comes from the lineage of the Buddha that came to India. When Tibet was occupied by the Chinese and His Holiness the Dalai Lama left and

went to Northern India, among those refugees were Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. They had a great impact on many students there, established many centers over the world, and established Vajrapani here. Lama Yeshe's ashes are here in the stupa. Many highly realized masters passed through here. Many mandalas were created by their minds. This is a very special place.

And that energy is contained in this forest, a cocoon in the middle of trees. The energy stays very stable. And they have built this beautiful prayer wheel that has trillions of mantras in it, that Ling Rinpoche will come in a few weeks after the retreat to consecrate. Here, we are going to practice this experiential lineage of the lamrim of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama Yeshe, and Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

We all came here to get some experience out of the retreat. Some of us have practiced the dharma quite a while, and sometimes we fall out of the wagon because we are overtaken by worldly responsibilities, delusions, laziness. For those, coming to retreat is to reconnect. Those that come back after falling out the wagon, their minds quickly come back to where they were before. For others, they have been practicing quite a while, so it is an opportunity to further develop their experience.

Normally to get spiritual progress there are three important parts:

1. **Purification** based on guru yoga to clean the mind of the veil that obscures it, because all of us have the clear light mind. Through devotion and reciting mantras somehow the delusions become thinner, our heart opens, and we touch that clear light nature of the mind. We always think happiness is found through the senses, but real happiness, joy, peace is found through the heart. And how you get to that is through guru yoga—in this retreat, Lama Tsongkhapa guru yoga.
2. And on that base, we will do **calm abiding** meditation. If your mind is constantly shaken around, even though your understanding is correct, you don't get any experience. Your mind is too unstable. When the mind abides calmly, you just use a stream of thoughts to gain insight into emptiness, bodhicitta, etc.. When your mind is resting there, that experience sinks into your mind instead of being some fleeting experience you can't catch. The more your mind is calm, the better your insight comes.
3. Then on that base we do **meditation** to revive our understanding of the path to enlightenment.

The text we follow is *The Three Principle Aspects of the Path* that Lama Tsongkhapa heard from Manjushri himself. We will use a book by Geshe Sonam Rinchen who was

the teacher at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. He taught there after Geshe Dargye for many years. And he had a great root disciple, Ruth Sonam.

During sessions, I will lead the meditations, then I will tell you to read this text in the break time, explained very eloquently by a master Geshe in a beautiful translation. And we will read the root text in the sessions each day.

Lama Tsongkhapa presents emptiness from the point of dependent arising. He doesn't tell you to focus on emptiness, but dependent arising, like Lama Yeshe. It's a quick way to realize how things are, easier than focusing on emptiness. Because everyone can deconstruct things and find nothing. But it's not that at all. What is empty is inherent existence, so you don't fall into the mistake of thinking everything is empty, everything is space. The text has some pith instructions on how to do that.

There are three realizations that we will try to experience during this retreat:

1. **Renunciation.** The determination to be free.
2. **Bodhicitta.** Every day we will meditation on the 11 points, stabilizing with calm abiding. Bodhicitta is a very special mind whose main mind is aspiring to become a buddha with the accompanying mental factor of love and compassion. Reciting the bodhicitta verses is the mere word "bodhicitta," not the experience.
3. **Emptiness and dependent arising.** We will go deeper into these and try to get some experience.

Each of us has a different lifestyle, a different path. For the retreat to go well, it's important to maintain silence. Tomorrow, we will connect with each other, sort out our karma yoga, then silence. On the last day, we will break silence and chitchat through lunch. For some, silence is very difficult, so if you see somebody losing the mindfulness of their silence, just kindly remind them to keep silent.

The term "karma yoga" is from Hinduism, not Buddhism. Each of the five Hindu yogas is a complete path to enlightenment. Karma yoga means to act selflessly, without ego, with no wish for reward. Each time ego arises, ask, who is that I who does not want?

To make this retreat harmonious, we all have certain jobs to do, so try and do your job harmoniously without ego. Then it becomes a powerful aid to your retreat. When you think, "I don't want to do that," ask yourself, "Who doesn't want to do that?" That I is a complete hallucination.

When one meditates on emptiness, one tries to bring up the object of refutation. Each time that inherent I comes up, it's a great opportunity to realize its selflessness. Then you start to discover the merely labeled I, the I that's left.

At 6:45 tomorrow, for those who have received the oral transmission of Lama Tsongkhapa guru yoga, I will explain some visualization to add when we recite the mantra.

Tomorrow, we will start the session by reciting a mantra inside you but also inside all the statues. You train your mind to absorb the blessings of the Buddha inside, but these statues are all blessed by the Buddhas and the mantra is inside them. They are alive. Move your mind to try to feel that the statues are alive and receive blessings from them. And for those that practice tantra they can see this room as a celestial mansion.

Friday, April 26

6:45am

[This section is for those with the oral Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga transmission only]

9:30am

A prayer on the graduated path

Verse 3

How you make progress on your spiritual path depends greatly on your relationship to your guru. You don't always need to focus on the same one. Who's your main guru? The one that has the most benefit to you and who inspires you. But through life it might change. They all manifest from the dharmakaya, so your root guru is really the dharmakaya. You have the same respect and admiration for all your teachers.

How to live for others

You can read all or just one and contemplate deeply

Blessing the speech

Lama Yeshe said a few times, why my speech was so effective, if I was able to benefit so many sentient beings, was because I recited this blessing every morning of the speech.

Nagarjuna also praised the practice for people to genuinely listen to you and pay heed to what you say.

Some traditions say it's good to recite in the evening to multiply the positive karma you create.

Heart mantra of dependent origination

Modghyana asked a monk what he should practice and he taught this verse. Impressed by it, he and Shariputra, the two heart disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha went to see him.

Stainless light mantra

Buddha's speech even has the power to purify.

The Buddha has no reason to brag or to lie or to make up things.

It's hard to imagine for us how such a little deed could do so much good.

Manjushri's promise.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave in Bodhgaya over new year

11am

The lamrim starts when you think the next life is more important than this one. But you can bring some of the advanced stage into this life as to how you live a wholesome life.

One Mahayana state of mind is to try and cherish others more than yourself. So, to try and be concerned about your partner, children, parents, friends, community. Just being kind and helpful to those around you, to be happy and share your happiness with them, being peaceful and sharing that peacefulness with others.

This is the basis of living a wholesome life, to be kind toward others as much as possible.

If you think of the six things we need to perfect on the Mahayana path, generosity, the first kind, is giving to others, and the result is wealth in the next life. The more means you have in life, the more freedom you have to practice the dharma. So it's good to be wealthy.

Sometimes we think, "I'll be generous later on when I retire." But we could die any time. So then it's the other people we leave our wealth to who practice generosity with our

possessions. It's good to keep that in mind. As much as possible, every day you try to train a little in generosity.

In that context, sometimes we feel paying taxes is a problem. But actually, we give that money to do good things with it. It's the same with health insurance, you pay it for all the hospital, doctors, and all the other people who are sick. Your generosity is for them to benefit.

It's good to give as often as you can. Each time somebody asks you for something, give a little bit. It trains you. And then one day you will be like that bodhisattva who, when a spirit asks for his eye, he gives it and then the spirit crushes it.

In America you are asked to give tips. It's very good to give, people in restaurants making minimum wage are good to practice your generosity toward.

Generosity is a state of mind where you are happy to give freely to anyone who comes your way. Train to give according to your means whatever you are able to. Establish the habit of giving.

Of course you have to use your wisdom. But you shouldn't wait. You never know if you will be around in ten years.

The second practice is of ethics, of not harming others as much as possible. People wonder whether eating animals is actually harming others or not. As much as possible, being vegetarian is good. But it also depends on one's health and body. Some people can be completely vegetarian. Others cannot. In the store it's deceptive: you see the meat, not the animal that suffered so much, that wanted to be happy.

When you eat meat, it's good to think, a sentient being gave its life for me.

Another part of ethics nowadays is to be aware of the environment. Be aware of one's carbon footprint, global warming, and that humans are responsible for it. As a result of global warming many fish, animals, coral die. And its effect on people causes people to be displaced, wars, etc.

Then comes patience or forbearance. To remember that getting angry, using harsh speech is actually hurting others and doesn't bring much benefit. It also harms our mind and washes away the positive karma we have accumulated before. Sometimes you have very generous people, but they often get upset, angry. Shantideva says that it's difficult to befriend or trust such people because they can flare up at any moment.

Try to avoid situations where you can become angry, e.g. due to stress.

It's good to be aware of our mood, when we are upset. Then, when people tell us we are short tempered, accept it and say, oh yes, I was angry. We all have our limitations and people able to push our buttons in different situations. Try to be aware of these and avoid those situations where short temper can arise: when you're tired, stressed, or have too high of a workload. Use your wisdom to arrange your life in a way that you don't need to be put under such pressure where your mind gets upset in such ways.

Then perseverance is trying to do good, having joy in whatever you do in life, what goodness you bring in the world. Be happy in whatever you do, do it joyfully.

In terms of calm abiding, it's important to have a little bit of "me time" to recharge your battery. In the everyday world, maybe you have a cup of tea, relax, enjoy a sunset, go to the beach for a walk, go to a spa or jacuzzi; whatever relaxes you. Sitting in meditation may not suit your lifestyle, so instead, whatever brings you a calm, peaceful state of mind. Especially when you are a parent, it's nonstop. It's not selfish. In that space you can recharge your battery, see your life from a bigger perspective, make some wise decisions.

Sadly, today when we have time to ourselves, we go on social media. That's not really relaxing. It's almost like in the old days when we made our minds numb with TV. Instead of in the living room, now the TV is in your pocket all the time. And it makes your mind numb. Real "me time" is different from screen time, which is quite additive. You have a half hour to relax, but suddenly you've spent a half hour on the screen.

Be aware of the devices in your life. Use them skillfully. Be careful because they can overwhelm you. And people who use screens have a shorter attention span. They more quickly become restless, bored. It's very difficult for them to listen passionately, to have meaningful conversations.

Learn to enjoy going for a walk, whatever relaxes you.

For those with a partner, it's good to have a little time alone. The fact is that we are born alone and we die alone. We share this time together, but then each one goes their way. One day, my precious partner will be gone and I will be alone. We have the beauty of sharing life with others, but we are fundamentally alone. I have this precious experience right now, but we struggle, fundamentally, alone.

Psychologically, remembering this is very useful because not only do you enjoy your time together more, you are also happy alone. There are three things in a partnership:

me, your partner, and the couple. You have to give room to all three of them to be healthy and happy.

Then comes the wisdom part. Like karma yoga, you offer service, you do things for others: partner, children, friends, community. Try to do these actions selflessly. Just be normal, simple, help others without self, ego. Politicians and other powerful people feel like they have to brag, and it has become a new normal. But it is not normal. What is normal is to be selfless.

Whatever understanding you have of selflessness, you bring that into your everyday actions and interactions with others. You keep the I, the ego in check: pride, arrogance, low self-esteem, jealousy. Where is this I that has these emotions?

At least keep in mind that it is a delusion to have jealousy, pride, anger. Though many people in society have these emotions and say it makes them feel alive, actually these are disturbed states of mind that take away happiness, and under their control create negative karma. Be aware of them and use your wisdom to get away from their influence.

Another wisdom that arrives out of a spiritual life is to realize that life is quite short. Most of us live around 80 years. The older we become the more physical and mental issues we have and it becomes more difficult to use our time meaningfully. Our time is precious and we should use it well. For each of us, that means a slightly different thing. Be aware when you waste time and remind yourself, oh that wasn't very helpful.

When you live with others, you do things you wouldn't do if you were alone, to benefit family, friends.

Be aware that life is precious, and that we all have this opportunity to find realizations and joy that will go with us from lifetime to lifetime.

Sit for 15 minutes and reflect on your life.

The basis for calm abiding is ethics. If one's daily activities are agitated, unsettled, it is difficult to practice calm abiding. Try to make peace with your everyday life and look at it from this wisdom perspective. Think of ways you could arrange your life to be more in harmony with your spiritual aspirations.

The head of the Gelugpa is the Ganden Tripa.

To the right of Lama Tsongkhapa is Gyaltsab Je with the light hair, to the left Khedrub Je with dark hair, younger. The lineage head passed from the elder to younger down to the current, 103rd. They change now every seven years, but originally only changed when they died. You have to first be a Geshe, then abbot of a tantric college, then those ex-abbots are in the line to become Ganden Tripa. They all have the knowledge of Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings, sutra and tantra.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is mostly Gelugpa. But in many lives, he was also a Nyingma. The great fifth Dalai Lama had a strong Nyingma bent and gave a lot of Nyingma teachings. Khandro-la's life's mission is to revive the visions of the great fifth Dalai Lama and those practices. She is creating a monastery to practice these teachings, which are more of a Nyingma bent.

The mind of enlightenment doesn't have the gross ego, but only the very subtle clear light mind in the heart chakra. When we die, we experience that mind. But then, due to the force of mental afflictions and karma, we come out of that state: black, red, white, four elements... and take again a body in the intermediate state. Due to karma, we are attracted to our next rebirth. But a Buddha never comes out of the clear light. He never emerges back to the subtle or gross mind. The omniscient mind is in clear light, pervades all time and space, and manifests myriad manifestations.

Lama Tsongkhapa was one of these manifestations of the omniscient mind and His Holiness the Dalai Lama is another one. They are not here due to mental afflictions or selfishness, but to benefit. And your wife may have manifest just to benefit you!

Beings like them are supreme nirmanakaya, manifesting as great teachers.

For example, Osel could be a Buddha but manifests a bit differently than the teacher he was in his past life.

All these great beings are manifestations of the dharmakaya, omniscient mind. Depending on the time and place, they manifest according to the needs of even just one person. And the more times are degenerate and teachings not appreciated, they manifest less in the form of a great teacher.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama said he is the reincarnation of Trisang Detsen, or a disciple of the Buddha, Dromtonpa.

Once you are enlightened you can manifest again and again wherever it is beneficial. That's why really meditating on bodhicitta is important, the tenth point: myself and

myself alone will free all living beings. Stop and reflect deeply there. It is my responsibility, not the job of other Buddhas. That state of mind is very important.

What is the meaning of root guru?

Two ways: Sometimes it is one's first guru, like the trunk of a tree, the one who opened the dharma to you in this life. At other times, it is the one most important in your life at the moment.

3pm

Without a mind that is calm and stable, experiences don't translate into stable insights and realizations.

Tibetans don't emphasize calm abiding because their mind is traditionally calmer than ours and because one can become addicted to the inner peace and bliss that comes from calm abiding. Then, one doesn't want to cultivate wisdom. So all you create the cause for is to be reborn in the god realms and form and formless realms. Tibetan masters say we have been there thousands of times, yet still haven't left cyclic existence. But on the basis of calm abiding, you cultivate insight that becomes the basis for realization.

Calm abiding on the breath or on the conventional nature of mind doesn't lead to realization. That's why Lama Yeshe gives emptiness as the object of calm abiding.

But for us who come from such an agitated lifestyle, it's good to train in calm abiding first.

Impermanence meditation:

- Think about your past and how much has changed since then
- Think about your present and how it will change and eventually be gone
- See how it is possible to be in the world but not of the world, to enjoy without clinging

7:30 pm

Whether we are happy or have many problems depends on our karma: sickness, relationships, falling in and out of love. If we didn't create the cause of our problems, it would be impossible for us to have those problems. And if we don't have realizations, it

is because of the obscurations created by our karma. So, one very important spiritual practice is to clean the mind, like we do in Vajrasattva practice.

The most important part of purification is having strong regret. The stronger the regret the stronger the purification.

Then, the determination not to do this action in the future.

Saturday, April 27

When you do retreat you put 8 stones in the 8 directions and they protect your retreat space.

While reciting the mantra of Lama Tsongkhapa, aspire that you meet another teacher early in your next life with the same power as Chenrezig, Manjushri, or Vajrapani: a qualified guru with real experience and real realizations.

Then, that life will end and another one will come. Without a teacher, your realization will slowly degenerate. Without them, your mind gets overpowered by the affairs of that life. You forget that the whole game is beginningless and endless.

How you create the cause to find a teacher again is dependent upon how you relate to your teacher in this life. That's why purifying karma, negative attitudes toward your teacher, your behavior toward them, not following their instructions, is so important.

Psychologically, we have this Buddha nature, so we have the clear light nature of the mind right now in our heart. But we cannot access it. For us, it's obscured. Even though somebody tells you that you are already a Buddha, you think, "Oh, thank you very much, where?"

So, you project the outside. The process is the same in Christianity or early Buddhism. You imagine an enlightened being in front of you, and you relate to him or her: a being who has these qualities. If you've met His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, then you can intuit these qualities in them.

Then you imagine receiving blessings. And you imagine they remove the veils from your mind. The more you see qualities outside in other beings, the more this mirrors and unveils those qualities in you.

In certain teachings, it says that even if your guru is an ordinary person, if you see them as a Buddha, then you get the same blessing as if they were a Buddha. Why? Because psychologically, it is your own projection.

We tend to think things are inherently existent, but it's actually our own mind projecting. Things are merely labeled, merely imputed by the mind. They don't exist out there. Our gurus don't exist objectively out there. The qualities of enlightenment don't exist out there. We merely impute them by our mind.

Or, like Lama Yeshe used to say, we merely project it with our minds.

With our limited minds we say, "Oh if it's my own projection it doesn't exist at all, I just made it up." But when we say, "merely labeled by the mind," what is labeled needs to have a valid base. Yes, it is merely labeled, but on something that is able to sustain our projection.

When you chant, "You are Chenrezig, you are Manjushri..." it reminds you that that being has these qualities. The greater the qualities you can see in your guru, the more these qualities will be awakened in your own mind. You think this awakening comes from outside, but it is in your mind. It just as well may have been in your mind. Instead of seeing the guru before you, you can see the guru in your heart, and it can work as well.

But because we have this habit of seeing things outside with our eye consciousness, it's easier to see our guru outside. But at the end of the practice, you bring all your imagination of the guru in front of you into your heart. And you say, "This is inseparable from my mind." You bring those qualities into your heart and say, "That's inseparable from me."

We all have a self-image. We don't realize how, psychologically, we have this strong self-image. Some people have low self-esteem. Some people have quite high self-esteem. Some have a mixed self-image. But none of us have a pure self-image. We don't experience our self as Buddha.

In tantra, one plays with this. But for most of us when we play like this, we think we are fake. We haven't dissolved our normal self-image. So, we imagine ourselves as Shakyamuni Buddha on top of oneself. Then it doesn't really work. It's like an actor playing that role. Behind is your normal sense of I, put on the back burner, as you embody the role you play.

Whereas, when you practice tantra, you realize that your ordinary self-image is a complete hallucination. It's entirely dependent arising on causes, conditions, habits, and so forth. It doesn't have any essence. Our self-image is just circumstantial. But we believe there's something essential there in me. We don't think our self-image is a product of causes and conditions. We think, "My self-image is really me. There's something essential there."

If you can, dissolve this essencelessness, this sense of I, low self-esteem, high self-esteem. Realize it's just circumstantial. Once our construct of our ordinary self-image is removed, once we realize its essencelessness, then our essential buddha nature reveals itself to us. What remains is our innate pure Buddha nature. It's already there, but veiled by our self-image.

Guru yoga is a psychological method where you first project these spiritual qualities outside yourself, and then you absorb them into you. The reason why it doesn't always work is that we see the projection and our self as self-existent. Then we try to put these two things together, thinking they exist from their own side, we try to merge them, but it doesn't really happen when we try to merge two solid things together.

Still, psychologically, even without realizing dependent arising, there is some benefit to imagining that these qualities awaken within you.

When you recite the mantra now, you can think about the qualities of the gurus in your life, or those you would like to meet in the future.

Calm abiding

1. **Power of determination.**
2. **Power of mindfulness.** From the space of emptiness, love, and compassion, form the deity in front of yourself. Now, for 20 minutes I focus on that. Don't change it for 20 minutes. When the mind wanders off, you bring it back.
3. **Force of introspection.** In a slight corner of your mind, stay aware of when the mind wanders off. This part of the mind is able to bring the mind back to the object. Then mindfulness tries to extend the duration.

Gradually, your power of concentration grows stronger so that one part of your mind can continue to hold your object for 15-20 minutes.

Then comes complacency, “Oh, I don’t need to worry any more.” At that level, you experience subliminal thought and subliminal dullness. Once you remove those, you have good calm abiding.

That requires some effort. But eventually it takes less effort and through perseverance turns into complete calm abiding.

Consider what is the I while meditating.

1. When the mind is completely calm, the mind is just the awareness that looks at the object. And that awareness is me.
2. Sometimes, when thoughts arise, the I is the mind. And within it, appear thoughts.
3. But at other times, within the mind are thoughts that float. But then me, the thinker, something more important than the mind arises.

The thoughts happen to the mind. But sometimes the thoughts happen to *me*.

1. Sometimes the I is the mind
2. Sometimes the I is the mind in which there are thoughts
3. Sometimes the I becomes more important. The I starts having its own substance within the mind. It appears to be self-sufficient, with a nature distinct from just being the mind.

So, it’s good to start from the point where the I is just the mind. Then you can catch your mind sometimes when the I has a distinction of being not just the mind. You have to observe that experientially. Philosophically, we would call this I “self-sufficient, substantial.” But those labels can become obstacles to recognizing this I. Another term one uses is the “dominant I.” Because it is not just appearing within the mind, it dominates. Sometimes another image is given of sailors, where everyone including the captain is a sailor, but the captain is more important. That’s how the I appears relative to the mind, when more important.

If you focus on pain, if the I is silent, the I is the mind with the experience of pain. But sometimes there is a separate I that feels more important *that* becomes the possessor

of the mind, the pain. The I is not just the body, sensation, the mind, it starts having its own nature within these.

When I say the I is the mind, remember that the mind is not static, permanent. The mind changes from moment to moment. So, if I want to be more precise, I have to say that *the I is the continuity of the mind that changes from moment to moment*. And if I want to be even more precise, there are three other mental aggregates: feeling/sensation, discernment, and mental factors. If you have some feeling of bodyness, then there is the body too. So the mind is the continuity of thought, feeling, discernment, and body.

But sometimes you start to be able to distinguish that there is an I within the thought that becomes the possessor of the thought, body, etc. it's not just the body and mind that act, but a dominant being within them that acts.

Impermanence

Everything in this life is impermanent: our relationships, possessions, thoughts, emotions, body all constantly change. Then, when we die our consciousness leaves the body. First, the element earth, water, fire, and air dissolve, then the consciousness goes to a more subtle form inside the central channel, then inside the heart chakra to experience the most subtle form of itself. That very subtle consciousness is the eternal consciousness, the one that reaches enlightenment. The gross consciousness dies, but the continuity of the very subtle consciousness is eternal and will become Buddha.

A sentient being is any being that has this subtle consciousness. An insect has a gross body, subtle body, and a mind of clear light, eternal, very subtle consciousness that goes from lifetime to lifetime. A plant or a tree, even though it may have some kind of feelings, some kind of response to the environment, it doesn't have this subtle consciousness and this very subtle mind of clear light, eternal consciousness. That is what distinguishes a sentient being from a non-sentient being.

We know that plants respond to music, heat, cold, and can even move from place to place over long periods of time. So there's some kind of energy there, almost some kind of self identity, but it lacks the subtle and very subtle consciousness. So, any being with this subtle and very subtle consciousness is a sentient being.

When all the wind energy absorbs into our heart chakra at the time of our death, we experience the most subtle mind which is everywhere, the nature of bliss. Many people think experiencing the clear light of death is enlightenment because it is subtle, clear, and has all these innate qualities. An ordinary being when he dies can stay a few

seconds or minutes in that state, up to three days. Can you imagine having three days of meditation like that?

In that state, you naturally have great concentration because you're not distracted by the body, you don't have hunger. You just have clear, easy meditation for many hours. But then, as an ordinary being in that state, some kind of wind moves you out of that experience. The wind of your karma, habit, imprints of mental afflictions, pull you out of that state because that state appears to you as inherently existent. Whereas, if you were in that state without inherent existence, these forces could not take you out of it. That is what distinguishes a higher being from one that is trapped in cyclic existence.

With the sense of I, you see real thoughts, real memories, real habits. Whereas, if you were in the experience of transparent I, transparent thought, transparent emotion, everything essencelessness, essenceless memory, thought, habit would not affect you. They would still appear, but they would have no hold on you, because you remain in that essenceless experience.

That essenceless experience has many degrees: from 1% essenceless and 99% solid, on up as your experience of emptiness becomes more pervasive. When it's 100% essenceless, you become Buddha.

To an ordinary being who lacks familiarity with emptiness, these are just thoughts, ideas. They are not effective to remove mental afflictions yet. After a certain amount of hours or days in that clear light, the wind of karma, the habit of mental afflictions, make you come out of that clear light. And your consciousness become grosser: back to subtle consciousness, black near attainment, red, white, ...

Then, through the force of karma and your mental makeup, you are attracted to your next rebirth in some form within any of the six realms. If you are born as human, from parents, then you grow up, have a life, make friends, have a partner, children, whatever you fancy. That life appears to be your only reality. Again you go through old age, sickness, death and leave everything behind. Your most dear partner, experiences, wealth are gone, you have to leave it all behind.

And it happens again and again. That process goes on forever. It has no beginning, no end. Fundamentally, each one of us is alone. Nobody can come with you through the process of death. You cannot hold hands and go through death, find new lives together as twins. To reflect on that deeply is how you find the determination to be free, renunciation, to see the beginninglessness and endlessness of being reborn under the control of karma and afflictions.

In some lives you're rich, in some you're poor; in some anonymous you're, in other's you're famous. Your status constantly changes. There's no certainty as to what kind of friends you'll have, or whether you are born into war or peace. Sometimes you have a spiritual teacher, sometimes none. Or there might be a spiritual teacher around, but you have no interest. Instead, you become a football player, a flute player, a pop star if you have skill with music. Anything can happen lifetime to lifetime depending on circumstances.

Again and again we are born, again and again we die. After this life, it is sure we are going to have another life, and another, hundreds, millions, billions of lives await us ahead. All under the control of afflictions and karma.

Try to get a feeling, try to imagine one life after another, to really experience that. Because deep down, something happens when you do that. You start to understand that it's not fun. And you want to find a way to cease repeatedly and endlessly being under the control of karma. You cannot have any permanent friends, possessions, achievements. Everything, again and again, has to be left behind. And you have to start over again.

One other way of looking at it is through the lens of this life: I went to school, got certain opportunities, made my life, and I have my friends. But what's left of all my previous lives? What do I have in this life that came from my past one, or from billions of past lives: not a single dollar or shilling, or whatever was money before? None of my thousands of spouses before came with me. None of my friends from past lives came with me to this life. It's the same with this life, when we leave, all the appearances of this life will be left behind. It's like that endlessly.

If there were no way out it would be meaningless to do this meditation. But there is a solution. That's why one tries to do this meditation: to gather the energy wanting to end this process. The more you think about it, the stronger the wish to be free comes to you, by really seeing deeply the problems of this life. The more you have that experience, the less you feel distracted by the marvels of this life. What's the point? Let's get out.

3 pm

Sometimes one wants to squeeze the mind on the object too quickly. That creates tension and it's not too productive. So, it can be more useful to first relax your body and mind and let the mind settle. Then, once the mind is settled, bring it very gently onto your object of attention: like the spacelike nature of mind, or sending love to heal all beings.

In continuity with what we did this morning, try from time to time to see what is the I. In different moments of meditation, the I appears differently. Sometimes it's the mind that meditates, and sometimes more, it's "me."

Philosophy is like the description of chocolate. It doesn't give you the taste. If you taste chocolate but don't know how it is made or what is inside, still, you know the taste. It is the same with the I. If you observe the experience, it is more important than the description, and that is very valuable. And nothing can bring you that, other than you observing your own mind. You cannot find it in a book, only by observing your own mind's thoughts.

An arhat, a bodhisattva, a Buddha is completely free, he can decide to take rebirth or not. An arhat doesn't take rebirth, because for him, there's no reason to. There's just suffering to look forward to. If you are born, you have to grow old, get sick, and die. And all that happens in a human life is meaningless, you can't take it with you. You don't gain anything for yourself by taking rebirth.

For higher bodhisattvas and Buddhas, it's a different story, because they are bound by compassion. They don't come back for themselves, they come back to help. They don't achieve anything for themselves while on earth, they only benefit others. They have not the slightest bit of attachment to any object, being, or endeavor. Their only objective is to help beings. And then they dissolve back into the clear light.

One energy that binds us ordinary beings to cyclic existence is the force of karma. Whatever actions we do have a definite consequence. Whatever virtuous actions we do will bring about some worldly happiness, and whatever our negative behaviors will definitely bring about some unpleasant consequences for ourselves that can come the life after this one or after millions of lives. The energy of our virtue and non-virtue is never lost. It remains on the mere I.

The power of our karma depends on how powerful our emotions are that push us to those actions. The stronger our anger, compassion, love, desire, the stronger the karma is. How strong our emotions are depends on how strong our sense of self is. If you have no doubt about your self: I really exist, I want this and that. If you don't question your sense of I, the I that acts will be very strong: I think this. It is like that.

Whereas if you have some doubt about your sense of I, the weaker your emotions and the weaker your karma.

For an action to be a cause for rebirth, it has to be complete. For example, you wish to help someone, you have this positive thought out of compassion. And then you actually help that person. So the action is complete, done. After that, you rejoice, you feel happy that you have helped that person. Then that action is complete, and left on the stream of consciousness, it will bring about a good rebirth.

If the action is not complete, e.g. out of love you help somebody but then you regret helping them, then it doesn't produce a rebirth, but rather some mixed result within a rebirth itself.

The wish for liberation and the desire for enlightenment are the only two actions that lead beyond experiences in cyclic existence.

In the Abhidharma schools, like Vaibhashika and Sautrantika, if you sit here, there's your body and mind. You can subdivide the mind further into the five sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness. And then contact, feeling, discrimination... and all the other mental factors.

The continuity of mind depends on the previous moment of consciousness. Due to our prior actions, we create the cause for another life. Due to the mistaken sense of self, we create the effect of having to take rebirth.

In the Hindu tradition they recognize this, that's what they call samsara: emotion, motivation, actions that lead to the result of rebirth.

In the Hindu framework, the way out is to realize there is a subtle awareness that is not the mind, not the body, called the soul or atman. And that subtle awareness is permanent, not changing from moment to moment. It's almost like from behind you have this witness who watches your thought, watches the mind with its content. It's permanent, it doesn't change from moment to moment. It has no parts, it is independent of body and mind.

For them, by becoming that witness or atman, they can separate from the four aggregates that constantly take birth. And then that atman becomes one with cosmic awareness, Brahma.

I sometimes go online to watch YouTube videos of Advita Vedanta and they describe this meditation. Some masters say it's very close to Dzogchen, even though philosophically it's not correct.

At the time of Buddha, these views were quite common among the yogis. Experientially, if you identify with that permanent witness, separate from body and thought process, from your ego, then you're just pure awareness, pure witness. And then you develop samadhi on that.

If you have good concentration, your body would completely disappear from your experience. You would detach from your body and have some kind of subtle, rainbow body. And then gradually even that would disappear.

You can see how that leads you to the form and formless absorptions, where your awareness becomes infinite space or infinite consciousness. If you become proficient in this kind of meditation, when you die you are that experience. You are born in the form and formless realm. And you might think, "Oh I have reached liberation." Because you have separated yourself from the body, the five aggregates. But after millions of years in that experience, karma catches up with you and then you fall from that experience. And the moksha, liberation you thought you had received, you realize it actually wasn't that at all.

That is the first level of what the Buddha thought was a misconception, a path down a dead end. After the Buddha left the palace, he studied with two Hindu gurus but found that after days of meditating like this, coming out, he still had the ego and delusions.

So he left and went further.

The Buddha said that ego is a false view of a separate self, atman, consciousness. In philosophy they say this is an intellectually acquired sense of self that comes from adhering to a certain philosophical point of view, like the Hindu view. But you don't find that self separate from the five aggregates.

There are two levels of self that are innate to all sentient beings: a gross sense of self that is wrong, and a subtle sense of self that is wrong. For butterflies, devas, humans, they all have these false senses of self. Any being that is not an arhat has these two senses of self.

The lower schools remove this gross sense of self, and they think they have reached liberation from ego, affliction, karma. That sense of self is this dominant I that we meditated on this morning. In reality, there is only the continuity of mind and this dominant I that appears from time to time. When you get rid of that dominant I you reach liberation according to the Abhidharma schools.

According to those schools, everything exists inherently, from its own side. For them, if you split matter apart you find basic building blocks, atoms. In their system these building blocks are air, fire, earth, smell, taste, sight, etc.

Then the mind is made of a stream of moments of awareness. You finally find one moment that you cannot split further. That continuity is what produces our consciousness, which we can experience.

The meditator sees the continuity of body and mind that is constantly changing and thinks that's the I, the consciousness, that reaches liberation, the continuity of the five aggregates.

But sometimes we see something more than that consciousness, an I that is the source of our suffering. That I is a hallucination. If you look for it in the body, mind, outside, you don't find that I. When you realize it is a hallucination, you become free.

How do you do that? How do you become free? That's the practice prevalent in Theravada countries.

On the base of pure ethics, giving up worldly concern, you develop calm abiding. And on that base, you observe your mind. You realize that dominant I is a hallucination and you become free of it. Then there's no more manifest desire, anger, etc. You don't create new karma. And with no craving, grasping, you don't take rebirth.

The higher schools of philosophy wouldn't agree with that. They would say that this only removed the gross level of self and afflictions. It doesn't remove the subtle self and subtler delusions.

But they would accept nevertheless that this is a valid path that leads to a certain level of freedom.

I asked a Geshe where these so-called arhats end up and he said, "Well, they are not in samsara, because they don't take rebirth under the control of karma and rebirth. But they haven't reached nirvana, because they haven't realized the emptiness of inherent existence. Thus, their gross afflictions can arise again due to latent karma."

That's why in our tradition we rarely meditate on that. We go straight to removing the subtle state of I. And often our mind is not subtle enough to really get it. So, usually in our tradition, one first meditates to remove the separate self, atman, then one tries to remove the dominant I.

Like a construction worker who wants to go to play an instrument like a virtuoso, he can't do it straightaway. It is the same with the mind. We rarely look at how the self appears to us, so the mind is not really prepared. It tries to grasp something that is too subtle. So, to go through a gradual process is helpful. That is why in the monastery, they explain the grosser levels of apprehending reality.

The text we are using, and our meditation, presents the highest level of reality directly. But you have to be aware that you are trying to apprehend something very subtle. And it's difficult to experience without your mind being prepared.

For a starting point, the highest school wouldn't agree there is a basic building block to reality. Everything can always be split. Similarly with moments of consciousness, the mind. You don't find any stream of consciousness.

So how come the world appears to us? How come there is an awareness that perceives? If there is no body, if it has no essence, if there is no mind, where is the I, the me, the thinker the doer? Who is it that is attached and to what am I attached to? Who is it that is upset and who am I upset toward? Where is the suffering and where is there a cause of suffering that I can point to? Where is there liberation that I can point to, and where is a path to liberation? Where are the Buddhas that exist from their own side? There's no Buddha there, there's no enlightenment.

That's a little bit what is expressed in the heart sutra. From an ordinary perspective, one sees within cyclic existence suffering, liberation, a path from its own side. But a being that has higher perception doesn't see it like that. We think enlightenment is something to reach, but there's no enlightenment there.

At our level, we see everything as self-existent, even the spiritual journey: inherent suffering, liberation, inherent me doing inherent practice reaching an inherent goal. All this is false.

Nagarjuna in his fundamental wisdom of the middle way, he deconstructs all these things: matter, mind, the spiritual path, subject, object, perception, he deconstructs everything.

The middle way is between one extreme that things don't exist at all, and the other extreme where one reifies everything, which is our experience. Reality is somewhere between those extremes.

In the other schools, Kagyu and so forth, for them ultimately things don't exist because you can deconstruct them. Yet when you come out of that meditation, things still exist.

Their favorite description is that things are neither existence because you can deconstruct everything nor nonexistent because you can experience them when you are not in meditation. Neither both nor something else. They come to the conclusion that the way things exist is indescribable, like trying to describe the taste of sugar or chocolate.

Lama Tsongkhapa wasn't happy with those views existing in the 15th century. He felt something was missing, something wasn't clear enough. For him, saying things don't exist at all would be falling into nihilism. For him, what you try to negate is inherent existence. You try first to apprehend inherent existence, then you deconstruct it and you're left with existence.

An important aspect of understanding Lama Tsongkhapa's approach is to clearly understand what you negate. And what you're left with is a mere imputation by the mind, merely labeled. Merely labeled phenomena exist.

Lama Tsongkhapa would qualify, things don't exist inherently, things are not nonexistent, and things are not something else. The main thing is adding that things don't exist inherently instead of things don't exist.

He found that in the *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, there are two places where Nagarjuna expresses that things don't exist inherently. Then it is implied in all the other contexts in the same way. You can't take those other parts literally, but need to apply what he said in those two verses to all the other verses.

It's only when you've had that experience where everything is essenceless that you can become free of grasping. As long you believe there is something to be attached to, attachment will arise.

When you don't see a self any more from its own side, a mind from its own side, a body from its own side, other people from their own side, a beautiful chocolate éclair from its own side, only then can you become free of your attachment.

It's only when your perception has changed that you become psychologically free. Otherwise, attachment, aversion, all worldly emotions are bound to arise.

When you see something as attractive from its own side, attachment arises. When you see something unpleasant, painful, ugly from its own side, aversion arises.

But once you see the pleasurable and unpleasant thing are essenceless, you have an equal feeling for all experience. This equal taste is a sense of bliss. Then, you're not

affected by the pleasant or the unpleasant. Your reaction to any phenomena is a sense of peace, bliss, joy that is not affected by anything.

From the Prasangika view, that's the way to get free: only by seeing the ultimate nature, the essencelessness of things, can you be free.

The lower schools see an essence to things and the problem is the ego that reacts to our problems. Deconstructing this ego removes a certain level of afflictions but it doesn't go to the root.

One inquiry we have is that if things had an essence, if you look for that essence, you would find it. But the more you look for that essence, the more it disappears from your perception. You analyze the book: it's not front cover, back cover, pages; and all the things together are just the parts. There's no bookness there that has the essence of being a book. If it were really there, you would end up with the bookness. And it's the same with everything.

Same thing with the body, it's a collection of parts. From its own side, you don't find the body, it's just a collection of parts. Same thing with the mind, the I. Whereas innately, if you don't analyze, everything appears to have an essence. Things appear to exist solidly.

In that sense, all our senses are cheating us. All that they say is wrong. They tell us there's a world out there that that is solid, and things exist separately. That will persist until enlightenment. When a bodhisattva comes out of meditation, he still has that appearance. The difference is that he doesn't believe it because of his experience.

What I described now is a little bit the path to liberation.

On the bodhisattva path, the Mahayana path, while we are on this path to understanding reality, we also see how other beings are constantly under the same hallucination as myself. The more you recognize the false sense of I in you, the more you recognize it in your partner, children, friends, and colleagues.

As you identify what the real I is, how the mental afflictions function in you, you can recognize how it works in others.

Most of us like bodhicitta, love, compassion. Even though it's difficult, at least we like the topic. Same thing with emptiness, we're kind of curious about it. But hearing and

meditating about suffering and its causes is not so pleasant: endless suffering in cyclic existence without end.

But as long as we lack the strong determination to be free, it's like a two-pointed needle. We want to enjoy samsaric pleasure and we want to reach liberation. And that's difficult.

But our situation is such that we live in the world, we have a partner, a job. We can't give everything up and go into a monastery, a cave. That's not our situation. Those texts were written by yogis, hermits, monks, and taught to the same. Lay people would try as much as possible, but the path was mainly for those that completely renounced their life and went off to pursue it with determination.

If we are realistic, for most of us, given how much we engage in the world, it's difficult to get a deep experience of calm abiding. It needs a full-time commitment. For most of us, in this life, none of us will become an arhat or Buddha. But at least we can strive toward that goal and put as many imprints toward it in our future. Then hopefully in the next life, we advance a step further. So, all the positive imprint we've put by studying, meditating, going on retreat, will gradually ripen over a number of lifetimes.

These texts are meant for yogis who want to get there in one life, from a time and place where that was their full-time occupation. Unless of course some of us put great work into previous lives, the veils are lighter and they need less effort in this one.

But we all have a certain level of taking care of our karma, a certain level of aspiring to freedom, a certain level of good heart and caring for others, a certain level of questioning of the ego and how delusions function, a certain level of doubt about reality.

“Even having doubt about how things exist shatters the foundation of cyclic existence.”
—Nagarjuna

From that perspective, we all have a certain level of experience of the three principal aspects of the path. On that base, we can build and expand those experiences.

Q: The difference between schools' view on emptiness?

They all claim to be middle way, but Gelugpa would say others are nihilist. While the others would say Lama Tsongkhapa holds onto something.

Q: Meditating on form of deity?

First dissolve body, mind, I into emptiness, imagine it is pervaded by bliss, then arise in the form of the deity.

Sometimes one just quickly creates a thought form of the deity. If you meditate on the deity's body without emptiness it is not the cause for enlightenment. If it's not mixed with renunciation, bodhicitta, and emptiness, it doesn't become the cause of enlightenment.

The cause of freedom in the sadhana is emptiness. Without emptiness, your sadhana is the cause of cyclic existence. Always, you should realize that there is no deity existing from its own side. It's the path of emptiness that leads to freedom. That's why, to practice tantra, you need at least a "valid conceptual image" of emptiness. I don't like that philosophical language. You need to have a small taste of emptiness and with that small taste of emptiness, you pervade the I and deity with whatever taste of emptiness you have.

Normally, before arising as the deity, *om sbvava...* or *om shunyata...* after that, meditate on emptiness in the nature of bliss. Shape it as the deity. While meditating on the deity, maintain the awareness that it is in the nature of bliss and emptiness. There is emptiness, bliss, and the appearance. And you are supposed to maintain awareness of all three. When you do shiné on the deity, you do it on all three. So first do all three separately and then bring them together.

Why tantra is the quick path to enlightenment is because you create the thought form cause of the body of the deity and also of the mind. In sutra, you don't create the cause of the mind and the body of the Buddha at the same time. In sutra, your practice is the cause for the body but not actually the body that you imagine yourself in with tantra.

In tantra, to be able to enjoy pleasure without getting attached to it, you need to realize emptiness. The problem is not pleasure, it is attachment.

7:30 pm

Abhidharma schools don't speak about emptiness, they use the term selflessness: of person and phenomena. Selflessness of person means the self that appears more important than the body and mind. That is their realization of selflessness. The selflessness of phenomena are that they are empty of being possessed by that self.

You cannot be my husband, my car, my house, because there's no I that possess these things. Things are empty to belong to that self.

In our Prasangika school, few people meditate on the Abidharma school. But to have the experience that you don't have attachment to your children, car, house, is quite a high achievement. We claim to be of the higher school, but we don't even have the experience of the lower view.

Those who attend Theravada and Zen centers are familiar with those approaches and they are powerful meditations. These were methods taught by the Buddha to reduce our clinging to things.

A term that is a little bit controversial or can be misunderstood is "dependent arising." It means being imputed, a mind that imputes on a base. In everyday language, you could say dependent upon causes and conditions. It's almost like the mind is the creator of the thing. The mind creates the effect, the mind creates the cause by imputing, labeling, designating.

When it says in the scripture that the mind is the creator of everything, it can be understood in two ways. At the beginning of time, the collective karma of beings creates the universe. The second understanding is the Prasangika: things exist by the mind labeling things. This is the subtle Prasangika understanding.

When you look at the rose, it appears there objectively existing from its own side. But actually, a rose is created by your mind. It doesn't exist independent from your mind. It exists as the coming together of the base and the mind labeling. But the important part is the mind labeling.

Not only the mind labeling: merely-labeled, only labeled. There's nothing else but being labeled. Even cause and effect are merely labeled, they don't exist objectively there.

The outer objects are merely labeled by the mind. They don't exist apart from being merely created by the mind. There's no existence out there apart from your mind labeling it. And so it is for your body. It doesn't exist other than a label designated by your mind. And the mind doesn't exist objectively as a thing there. And the I too, is merely designated by the mind.

So the seed that becomes a sprout that becomes a tree, each is merely labeled. Cause and effect function while being merely labeled by the mind. That's the subtle Prasangika view.

While saying it is merely labeled by the mind, you need to be able to maintain that cause and effect function. If your understanding of emptiness is that cause and effect can't function, then your understanding is not correct yet. You must continue to posit

how virtue brings happiness, how non-virtue brings suffering, how the seed brings about the tree. While the whole evolution is merely labeled by the mind.

The main thing in this context is that dependent arising doesn't mean cause and effect. When it speaks about that term dependent arising, it doesn't use the term cause and effect. It means merely labeled by the mind.

A valid base is that which is able to perform the function of what that label says. It should not be contradicted by another valid mind, a mind that is not obscured.

In the Prasangika view, matter and mind are two different things. But matter is merely imputed by the mind.

The mind only school doesn't speak of inherent existence or merely labeled. They split matter up ad infinitum, deciding that there is no matter but there is the appearance of matter. Their favorite example is that it is like in a dream. Cittamatra says what you perceive is neither matter nor mind.

In Prasangika, it says that everything that exists has a perceiver.

Cittamatra says things arise in the mind, a seed producing what is seen, and the seer. Prasangika says it is merely labeled by the mind. Cittamatra also says the mind exists inherently.

You are never finished with purification and accumulation of merit. Lama Tsongkhapa did millions of each. Lama Zopa Rinpoche did prostration and mandala offerings every day. Purification on one side is to clear one's karma, but also to clear the veil that prevents the mind from understanding, experiencing things.

Sunday, April 28

7am

Lama Zopa Rinpoche says the three refuges are better than the three jewels. They are not stones.

Check how the I appears to you during the day.

When you meditate is the I the mind or is it something other than the mind?

The first step of emptiness is to identify the object of refutation, the way the I appears in the wrong way.

930am

Our mind naturally has an inertia. It goes back to our default state of being in cyclic existence as we go about our daily life. To realize the wish to become free, to realize bodhicitta, to realize emptiness, those realizations are not our ordinary state of being. So, we need a lot of effort to gain those realizations.

In our present conditions, what is our link to those realizations, to the state of enlightenment? The Buddhas, our gurus. So, a lot of our work to attain those goals is our guru yoga. If you let go of your guru yoga, there's no link in your daily life to those goals.

In each Tibetan tradition there is the practice of guru puja. For Lama Chopa or Lama Tsongkhapa guru yoga, the point is to connect with that enlightened state that we imagine in the heart of Lama Tsongkhapa and his disciples. We pray and aspire to become closer to them.

In everyday life, sometimes we are overcome by problems, difficulties with relationships, work, or health problems. At that moment, our practice doesn't seem to be going anywhere. We are just an ordinary being with problems. What links us to the state beyond? It's the practice of guru yoga.

In life, when we have problems, where do we turn to as a psychological refuge: Alcohol, watching a football game, Valium? There are worldly ways to deal with our unease in life. You can see how far you are on your spiritual path by noticing where you turn for refuge when you have problems. As a Christian, you would turn to Jesus, God. In each spiritual tradition there is someone you open your heart to. In Buddhism on the sutra path, one turns to the three jewels of refuge. There are many aspects of the Buddha one can turn one's heart toward. In tantra, it's the practice of guru yoga.

It is said that if we were to die, and in this moment of despair while dying you automatically turn to guru yoga, you're guaranteed to have a good rebirth. If your last thought is of Lama Tsongkhapa, your guru, the Buddha, then that overwhelms and overpowers your other karma, and you have a good rebirth.

So for refuge and guru yoga not to be mere words, you have to work with them. You need to make these something heartfelt. It doesn't come naturally to us because it's not in our culture. In other cultures, as a child you create that connection with a higher being. It's almost in your genes. Thus, it's natural for you to turn to these refuges with genuine belief when you have problems.

But when we as adults take on a spiritual tradition, we don't have that lineage, a history of being brought up in that religion as a child. We try anew to create that relationship. It's not something you can work on for a year or two. You have to work a long time to create that relationship. But that's your thread toward enlightenment. Whether toward a human being like Lama Tsongkhapa, or with the Buddha. At the beginning, it's artificial, with a lot of thought. But gradually it becomes a connection in your heart with that higher state.

In each tradition, Sufi, Hindu, they have this link. Hindu says the quickest path to enlightenment is Bhakti yoga, guru devotion. If you lack that, your mind's inertia pulls you back to your normal state, living under the control of affliction and karma. But if you cultivate the aspiration to a higher ideal, you naturally start to go back to that state. That's why we need to cultivate it every day.

In guru yoga, you are lifted up to those beings' level of realization.

In certain traditions, you have only one being to whom you show devotion like a God, or Jesus for Christians. In Buddhism, the situation is a bit more complex. It's not like there are a multitude of gods as in certain traditions. But there is a pantheon of manifestations of enlightenment. To those raised in a monotheistic religion, it is a bit puzzling.

To understand this, you first see that we are each quite different. Why wouldn't the state of enlightenment have many different aspects and we each choose the one that suits our mind?

Theravada is simpler, it doesn't have all these different approaches. But the Mahayana and the Vajrayana have all these different roads to enlightenment. But they are all the same. The aspect is a bit different, but the essence is the same.

Our life is normally focused on a horizontal level. Guru yoga is that vertical link to a higher state. The more you connect with that link, the more it lifts you up.

Not only does it lift you up, it creates a channel of light through which blessings and realizations and intuition come down to transform your everyday experience. It takes time to discover and to bring those practices alive. It takes practicing over years to make it happen if you haven't had those experiences as a child. As a child, the mind has fewer conceptual barriers, fewer obstacles. A child has more access to the inner divine. Once we become teenagers, it becomes more difficult.

My sisters, who are quite religious, said, “We are not going to teach our children any religion, they can choose when they grow up.” But I think this is a mistake. Because you want to have the taste of the divine as a child. If you have never had it before, as a grownup it is very difficult to cultivate.

I see why I have this connection with guru yoga is because, as a Christian, I knew how to speak to Jesus and Mary, so now I know how to speak to Lama Tsongkhapa.

To see emptiness, you need a calm mind that can discern what is and isn't. With a stable mind, it's easier to induce the positive states of mind that come from meditating on bodhicitta and compassion. And when you want to communicate with the Buddha and Lama Tsongkhapa, it's easier with a calm, stable state of mind. So, make a little effort, especially while in retreat, because with the conducive conditions we have it is easier to train in calm abiding.

In Buddhism one reflects frequently on the suffering of cyclic existence. If there were no solution to suffering, there would be no point thinking about it. We could just forget about it and enjoy whatever we can. The Buddha taught suffering so we can learn its causes and eliminate them. The more you reflect on suffering and its causes, the more genuine and urgent your aspiration to become free becomes. If you think the suffering is going to happen in ten years, well, on the way you can enjoy yourself. But if you think suffering is going to come tomorrow, it's more urgent. If you feel that even now there's suffering. If you see that your whole ordinary state of mind is actually suffering.

Compared to a Buddha, we experience a lot of suffering. Even compared to an arhat or a bodhisattva, our state is not at all attractive. The more you're conscious of the suffering that you are in, the stronger your aspiration to be free becomes.

Reflecting on suffering also helps you to generate compassion for others. In the world, the suffering we understand is the suffering of suffering, the obvious suffering of hunger, thirst, pain, sickness, and so on. So, we have compassion toward that. But because we don't reflect often, we don't see the suffering of change. Even for the people who have a good time, their pleasure is not going to last. They are also going to grow old, get sick, and die and come back according to their karma. Their existence is also endless. Unless they remove ignorance, the first link, it's going to go on and on forever.

You can contemplate the eight sufferings of human beings: There's the suffering of birth. The worldly perspective is, how can that be suffering, a beautiful rosy fresh baby

discovering the world for the first time that brings so much joy to their parents? It only looks free from suffering because one doesn't see it in the context of beginningless endless lives. If you imagine yourself as an adult dying and having to go into a mother's womb for nine months and then ejected through a tiny hole and then being born and having to learn everything from scratch again, it's not actually at all inviting, a good prospect for your future.

Once you are born, you can't avoid aging, sickness, and death. Not meeting what one wants, meeting unpleasant circumstances, working for projects that never get accomplished, all these frustrations of the human life start with birth. Without birth, all these problems that follow will not happen.

An arhat has no wish at all to take rebirth. Only bodhisattvas and Buddhas come back because they have so much compassion for us. But if you don't need to come back, why would you? This level of existence is so much trouble compared to being completely free, having a light energy body, not needing food, sleep, and being able to go wherever you want, completely free, with a mind that pervades everything as awareness of past, present, and future. So why would you come back to this constricted world?

One of the problems of the gods is that their life has no suffering, a whole life enjoying sense pleasure in a paradise. But their suffering comes the last week of their life. They realize they are going to die and be reborn as human or animal. And they freak out completely, because they enjoyed so much wellbeing for millions of years. Then suddenly they realize that their karma is finished. The suffering of the last day of the god realms is said to be worse than any type of suffering we can have, a huge mental suffering. Because they cannot prevent themselves from dying and being reborn as human.

Why does one reflect on the suffering of birth, aging, sickness, death, not getting what one wants, getting what one doesn't want? Like receiving bills in our mailbox and so on? All the disagreeable things in life. Why reflect on it? Because we have the choice not to experience that again.

If we would experience selflessness, then we would be free. And if we are not able to become free, due to our devotion, we can be born in a pure land. There, it's like a Buddha retreat center with all the good conditions to get realizations, and you can stay there as long as you need. It's a fantastic prospect. If one has this aspiration, it's quite easy to end up in Amitabha pure land. Amitabha said whoever has the aspiration to be reborn in his pure land, if at the time of death remembers Amitabha Buddha, they will.

Reflect on the specific sufferings of birth, sickness, aging and death that you can recollect from this life, and each time, think, I don't want that again. Therefore, I want to reach liberation.

Most of us have a very comfortable life. And if you look at the less privileged people around us, you can see that we could easily be in that situation too.

This session is just about really developing this aspiration for ourself. To be free of these forever.

Next, reflect from the perspective of others: people in wars dying, injured, no hospitals; people suffering in hospitals diagnosed with cancer, other sicknesses, having to go through painful treatments, side effects. And sometimes the treatments don't help and they die from their conditions or the treatments themselves. People fall out of love and are so despairing they commit suicide. Or their partner leaves and they have no means to support their children, they live in poverty, anxiety. All these beings have been at some time in the past one's partner, children, parent, intimate friend. So, we try to generate compassion that they may be free of suffering, and the wish that one day I will free them from suffering. I want to become Buddha so I can help them be free of suffering forever. Please guru Buddha bless me to be able to help in this way. To lead them to a state where they are never subject to suffering again.

That's why the best way you can help someone is to induce them to create virtue, teach them how to create their own happiness and remove the cause of their own suffering. In the West because we don't know mental cause and effect, we cure effects but don't know their causes. So, if you know a smart way to help people to be virtuous, like the way Rinpoche makes animals circumambulate holy objects.

In Buddhism, one puts a lot of awareness on the power of holy objects. Transforming the mind is best, but this is why Lama Zopa Rinpoche has encouraged centers to build many statues and stupas. By seeing them they create merit, positive karma that ripens into happiness. When turning the prayer wheel, imagine it blessing the whole planet and solar system, that all beings get benefit. So many higher beings in their break time would circumambulate holy objects. The monasteries in Tibet all have a path surrounding that circumambulates all the holy objects inside. Make a gompa in your house and circumambulate your block. Or in your garden. Or just imagine you are circumambulating a merit field, even while walking straight. Or anywhere you are going, driving, biking, imagine that you are riding toward enlightenment, toward your guru, deity. Everything in life can be transformed into the causes for creating merit. Make reminders, put stickers in different places. Lama Zopa Rinpoche has this book *Mahayana Mindfulness*.

3pm

With Lama Yeshe, we used to do some tantric practices and vase breathing even in beginner course, because it's helpful for Westerners to work with energy. For those that practice tantra, they can do it with their yidam. According to tantra, the mental afflictions function because the winds in the body reside in the 72,000 outer channels but not in the central channel. There you have less mental afflictions. When you bring the winds into the central channel and the subtle mind realizes emptiness, your delusions are gone forever.

There's a relationship between the winds in your body and your state of mind. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often mentions that in Dzogchen, there's a method to recognize the subtle mind that is inside the central channel. And also that it pervades the gross consciousness, that a certain level of clear light realization can be realized with certain gazes, certain experiences. But even in these practices, you need to bring the winds into the central channel.

There are many ways to prepare the mind to train in the generation stage: vajra rosary, tummo. Each tantra deals with different chakras. Depending on the physiological makeup of the student, or their karma, certain tantras are more appropriate for one student than another, even though they all have the same result.

Sometimes one says if you have more desire and attachment, certain tantras are more appropriate. If you are more prone to anger, resentment, aversion, others are more appropriate. And for those prone to ignorance, dullness, lack of clarity, there are still others. These distinctions are there mostly for beginners. Once you're at a certain stage all the tantras work just as well.

In the Gelugpa, people practice Yamantaka merely to chase away obstacles, interferences. In that tantra, it explains how to remove interferences to yourself and your environment. The root tantra on how to experience clear light mind come mainly from Hevadra and Chakrasamvara. Guhyasamaja is mainly focused on how to practice the illusory body. Gelugpa masters practice all three, with some branches like Vajrayogini and Cittamani Tara. In each tantra you take aspects from the others to make your practice a whole path to enlightenment.

When you reach the end of the generation stage and start practicing completion stage, you try and make the winds abide and enter into the central channel. You try to awaken your subtle body. This already starts at the generation stage. At the completion stage, it's quite awake, so you try and experience it a little bit.

Before that, even if you don't practice tantra, you can notice that if your winds mostly travel in the right channel your energy is mostly desire. And if they travel more in the left, there is more anger, resentment. So, if one is able to bring the wind more into the central channel then those strong emotions of attachment and aversion can get reduced.

For those who have a deity, try to see the emptiness of the body, mind, I.

This, in the nature of bliss, shapes itself into the form of a light energy body.

In the first Kopan course, Lama Yeshe would do that meditation in the morning session before breakfast. "The small ember meditation."

In retreat, the distinction between session and in between session should disappear. Try to keep the slow, flowing energy, and avoid moving abruptly. That way, the break time helps the session, and the session helps the break. The break time is as important as the session itself for the success of the retreat.

The body has some needs, so you take care of those needs. And your sense consciousness needs to relax by looking into nature or space. Just relax, but don't get busy. And don't get into mental conversation, making projects. No, you have to calm your mind at ease. Try not to look into other people's eyes because even this starts a mental conversation. Just feel, exist, and if you have a hard time, send yourself loving kindness. Sometimes you have good days, some bad, but everything passes. Just relax.

That term "being at ease" is beautiful. Be at ease with yourself. Just relax and things will disperse or pacify on their own. Being relaxed and at ease is really what makes for a successful retreat. It unlocks being loving, kind, gentle, at ease. Fuse your whole being with that energy. And try to remain in that energy while you are sitting, walking, in session, in break time.

I thought that we would jump into the Prasangika straightaway. But without the insight of the earlier Abhidharma schools, it is difficult. The Buddha sat with ease under the bodhi tree. Like he did, you can observe how the body changes moment to moment, a living organism. Then there's the mind. There's awareness, consciousness. Sitting, there is the body and mind.

The mind has six types. You're conscious of the body, what you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch: five sense consciousnesses plus mind. Those consciousnesses sometimes perceive objects and sometimes not: a stream of sensory experience, and a stream of thoughts. You're aware of them.

Through the sense doors, those consciousnesses touch objects. Then sensations arise: sights, sounds, smells, touches. Some are unpleasant, some pleasant, some neutral. Whether you sit here or under a bodhi tree for hours, a stream of sensation is what you experience. On top of that is the mental factor of recognition, discernment, discrimination. When you hear a sound, you are able to discern what kind of sound it is, or what you see: this is a tree, this is a flower. It is the same with the other senses.

Try to sit here with this stream of body, this stream of consciousness, this stream of discernment, sensation. Just sit peacefully to realize that we as human beings are that flow of body awareness, discernment, sensation, and the various thoughts that arise within the mind. You become aware of that flow of being, of existing.

If you could maintain that flow of awareness, the continuous flow of your aggregates, you would be an arhat. That's what it is. But for us, there's a troublemaker who manifests in there: a me, a thinker, a doer. That's what the Buddha realized doesn't exist: the I that appears more important than the five aggregates. But you cannot find that I. The Buddha realized that I doesn't exist. When you have completely realized this and experienced its nonexistence, what remains is the continuous flow of the five aggregates that you are.

We are this stream of body mind. When this sense of dominant I arises, the captain among the sailors, with the corner of your mind, ask, where are you? You follow its tail or you follow its shadow. And you start tasting the fact that it's nowhere to be found. It's a complete hallucination. If this I were really existent, the more you looked for it, the more you would find a place that it exists, and it would become clearer to you in the body or mind. But in fact, the more you follow it and try to pinpoint how it exists, the more fuzzy it becomes.

You can also call him the thinker, doer, feeler. When he arises, it's not just thought. There's someone that thinks. Sometimes there's just feeling, sensation, another time, a "me" that feels. Sometimes there's action, another time an I that acts. Sometimes you're just the flow of body and mind, and sometimes there's the I that arises within it. Then you try to pinpoint where that I is. Does it really exist? What the Buddha realized over hours of meditation, is that that I is nowhere to be found.

Gradually, you come to the realization that this I is a hallucination. It does not exist at all and you can very well be without that troublemaker.

Once you realize that there's not this I, there are still things around you that you use. But they are not "mine." Because you realize this I doesn't exist, so nothing belongs to him. There's no longer this sensation of possession. Things are still there, you use them

and enjoy them. But there's no sensation of mine, of belonging to me. And there's no sensation of lust when the I disappears, no wanting. Wanting is created by the ego, by the dominant I. He wants. The continuity of your body mind doesn't want. It just is.

Now, try to remain in that state and we are going to do some walking meditation being just awareness, body sensation, discernment, thought formation. As we go gently out and we walk around, try to remain in that state of consciousness. Theravada monks alternate sitting and walking but remain in that state of awareness. It's just because the body needs to move.

Try not to let the ego come into the picture and if it does, ask, what it is? Just body, moving, sense consciousness touching objects, discernment, and that's it.

The main key is to be on the lookout for when the I arises. The other part of your mind watches the continuity of the aggregates. The more you can do that the more you can catch him earlier. The realization that he doesn't exist so pervades your body and mind that it doesn't arise anymore. There's awareness and there's the thinker, doer, I that arises. Watch it. If it exists, the more you watch it, the clearer it would become. But since it doesn't exist, it disappears as you try to observe it. Whereas, if you don't watch it, he comes and you become him. In everyday life, we don't question when he comes, it's just me.

In a Theravada monastery, you start at 4am and do just that: sitting, walking until 8 at night. So, of course your consciousness becomes more and more subtle. There's a point where you can clearly discern the I when it arises.

You can have thoughts with and without a thinker. But for us that's difficult. Sometimes the I is obvious, sometimes subtle, sometimes subliminal, sometimes not there. If you're on the lookout you don't let him, her, it take over.

The problem is not the 51 mental factors, the problem is the I.

You start with the five aggregates but what you are on the lookout for is the ego. You want to be free. And to become free you need to recognize what's wrong. What's wrong is the ego. From time to time, the ego makes comment or wants this or that. Instead of agreeing, each time he points his nose you ask, where are you? instead of following what he says. Part of your mind is on the aggregates and the other on the lookout for the I arising. If you just push it away and go back to the aggregates, it's like putting the ego under the carpet. That wouldn't be meditating on selflessness. The insight comes from looking for it and not finding it.

The five aggregates can function very well without an I. Everything works without an ego. For us, it seems the ego is indispensable for doing all these things. But without the ego, you do it even better. The ego wants to be indispensable. If he ceases to exist, he is not happy.

730pm

Unless you can do the emptiness meditation we did today effectively, the emptiness of inherent existence is ineffective, just mumbo jumbo. The non-finding of the self among the aggregates leads to no mind. This is the basis for future meditations and is seen as valid by higher schools.

What Prasangika adds is that there is still another veil to be removed. And that is that the body appears to exist inherently: form, feeling, discernment, mind, I. If you don't know how to meditate on gross selflessness, you won't be able to meditate on subtle selflessness, because it's even more difficult. You can intellectualize and speak a lot, but there's no benefit to your experience.

If you practice tantra, your deity's body is supposed to be empty of inherent existence; your mental formation, mind, I, empty of inherent existence.

Among all the practices, only this non-finding of the gross or subtle I is what leads us to freedom. It's the only method to achieve the mind of a Buddha, to completely eliminate our mental afflictions forever. The other methods are temporary. The only solution is by realizing selflessness or emptiness.

April 29

7am

Nine round breathing with vajra fists, hold 15 seconds.

Left arm under right armpit, start with in breath on right.

930am

Most of us have already been training in love and compassion for a while and have a certain level of these realizations. Each one of you could probably lead a nice meditation on love and compassion.

If you want to go to the next level, you induce a certain state of mind. This morning, we will start with six causes, one effect. Then you try to stabilize it. Alternate calm abiding and using thoughts to feed that emotion. You don't continually think about this and that. From time to time, you stop and remain in that state of mind. And when that feeling, emotion starts degenerating, then again you use thoughts and reason to bring about that state of mind. You alternate stabilizing and analytical meditation.

1

Equanimity between friends, enemies, strangers. This meditation doesn't mean that we no longer has friends, enemies, or strangers, but that we don't have any attachment to friends, aversion to enemies, and indifference to strangers. The emotions of how we react to these three types of beings is what has to be equalized. It is usually described as having to realize that these categories are not permanent. Each category turns into the other, especially if one takes into consideration many lifetimes. There's nothing innate in a friend, enemy, or stranger that makes them so. These are just the flow of life circumstances.

A meditation I have found effective is thinking of a friend you like very much and imagine what behavior that person would have to engage in to see them as an enemy or stranger. And what an enemy would have to do to become a stranger or friend. And what a stranger would have to do to become a friend or enemy.

Even people who are a friend, in the same day there are moments when they feel that they don't know you, that they are little bit a stranger; or you have an argument.

The result of this meditation should be a feeling of equanimity for all these three categories. They all have this basic humanity of wanting to be happy.

This is important, because on this basis, when you generate compassion you do so equally to all beings.

When you reach this equanimity in your heart, then you do calm abiding on that feeling of equanimity.

2

In order for our love and compassion to become strong, we have to have the feeling that all living beings are dear to ourselves, including even the insects, crocodiles, snakes, things that from a first encounter are unpleasant. Or politicians we don't like. We have to make them dear to our heart. Otherwise, our love and compassion aren't strong. One

method is to think all beings have been one's mother. Why? In traditional cultures she is the one who has been the most dear to you. She has given you your body and life, and sacrificed so much for you, especially in the first few years.

Those of you who have been a mother and father can reflect on your own child. So, the first step is to think that all beings have been one's mother not once but hundreds of times. In each life, that mother took care of us. Even in the animal realms, there are extraordinary acts of sacrifice of the mother for her child.

Imagine beginningless time. In the scriptures, you speak of the grains of sand in the river Ganges. Or in the ocean. Each one of them being one of your past lives. In each of these infinite lives, you had a mother. That gives you the feeling that each could have been your mother.

Then you try to bring about that feeling for all the beings you know. Try to see all of them as your mother. Then do this for people you know from the news: politicians, people in wars, people all over the world that you know from having heard of them. The Tibetans speak of "mother sentient beings." It's a good exercise to think, "mother Trump," "mother Putin," "mother Netanyahu." You create a sense of intimacy that that person was once affectionate to you. Then love and compassion can arise easier in you.

Once you have the feeling that all beings were your mother, if you have mice, cockroaches, or ants in your house, if you say "mother ant," "mother mouse," "mother cockroach," then maybe you are a little kinder. Lama Zopa Rinpoche would trap insects in special boxes he made with mantras on top and circumambulate them around holy objects. At his house in Washington, they would make a special food from tsampa, honey, and other ingredients to feed all the 20 ant nests on the property. You can see that he had just as much compassion for insects and animals as for human beings. It's just that he had different things he could offer each of them: teachings for humans, objects and mantras for animals.

In the West, because of the way meat is packed in shops, you don't see the link between the meat and animal, so you don't feel bad when you're buying it.

3

Remember the kindness of mothers. Of course, it's sometimes difficult to remember because we were so small. If you have a photo album in your family, you can look back. I've been the recipient of the kindness of my mom, dad, grandparent. Also, if you are a parent, you can see the sacrifice and happiness you give to your child. In poor countries, you see how moms take care of their babies, like in India: oiling their bodies, putting

makeup on their child's eye, carrying the baby all day, going to work because they don't get time off for being a mother. They have this symbiotic relationship to their child. You can see they are really in love with their child, they have the glow of love. And the baby completely trusts its mom.

Try to bring about that feeling, the relationship of the first few years with your mom, how you have been the recipient of that same love from all living beings. Billions of living beings have taken care of you with that kindness. Trump has given you that love, the snake has given you that love, the ant has given you that love. Each living being has been so precious to you at some point and given you so much love and care. Like that, you start having a strong affection for all living beings.

4

Once you have generated this feeling of all beings having been your mother, a feeling of gratitude arises. Then a wish to repay their kindness is the next step. When you think about your old parents, a wish to care for them naturally arises. Whether you can or cannot is another matter, but the wish is there. All these beings that have been your mothers, fathers, they are not only suffering from aging, sickness, and death, they suffer from being in cyclic existence since beginningless time. Out of that attitude, the wish to heal all beings naturally arises like the wish to help your parents. Try to induce that state of mind toward all beings, whether humans, animals, or insects, the wish to repay their kindness.

5

This leads to the meditation on love, where one tries to induce this feeling: how wonderful it would be if they were happy. And what can I do to make them happy? You feel close to them, remember how kind they were to you, and reflect on what you can do to make them happy. You strongly wish for their happiness. You start with worldly things: food, drink, shelter, clothes, living in peace, not in war. You wish them to live virtuously, to live in love and compassion, to follow the bodhisattva path that leads to enlightenment.

You feel close to all living beings and you wish to help the ants and mice and human beings. Try to induce this state of mind of love that wants to lead all living beings to worldly and spiritual happiness.

6

Then you focus on compassion. Instead of giving love and what people need, you take away what troubles them. You imagine being able to heal their physical ailments, their mental anxiety and unease. Then you take the obscurations from their mind that prevent them from entering the path to enlightenment, prevent them from developing spiritual qualities.

7

This leads us to induce the superior intention: how wonderful it would be if I could free all beings from their suffering, if I could bring all beings to their highest happiness, all enlightenment. I want to do that. The purpose of my life and all future lives, the very reason why I live, is to bring all living beings to enlightenment. It is my job to repay the kindness of all beings, so it is my happiness, my joy, my purpose of life to bring all beings to enlightenment. Try to induce this courageous state of mind.

8

Out of this incredible love and compassion for all beings, wanting to help them by yourself alone, you aspire to become a Buddha so you have all the skills and qualities and knowledge to bring this about. You think about the enlightened qualities and you aspire to develop them in you.

Bodhicitta has two aspects. The primary mind is an aspiration to become Buddha and has an accompanying mental factor of wanting to benefit others. Try to induce that state of mind and for a few minutes stabilize it: to become omniscient, to have all the Buddhas' qualities out of love and compassion for others.

A person who has stabilized that mind is a bodhisattva.

For 20 minutes, try to dissolve your body into the space of emptiness, then arise as a deity if you have an initiation. For those that don't have an initiation, you can arise as Shakyamuni. The main thing is to arise as an enlightened being. Imagine that you are a Buddha and with your love and compassion emanating from your heart, you can heal all the problems of the world and all sentient beings. Imagine that your love and compassion is effective and that you can act skillfully through their motivation. On the tip of each ray of light emanating from your heart is a little Buddha who can help each living being in whatever way they need.

While you do that, try to see if there is an I that arises that does that. You look for it and you cannot find it. You are this light energy body, you have infinite love, compassion, infinite activities to help others, but there's no I in there.

3pm

Your mind can be completely clear and at peace but still go about its day, going to the store, etc. You don't need the ego to function, which only causes many problems.

Calm abiding is peace in stillness.

Meditating on selflessness, there is a wisdom accompanying the peace, seeing that you are merely the continuity of the five aggregates.

When you come back from calm abiding, you are as before, the same level of ego and delusions, you have only temporarily taken a holiday inside.

When you look for the I and you don't find it within the peace of your calm abiding, after you come out, your ego and your mental afflictions are weaker.

Because the I and mental afflictions are weaker, the karma you create is weaker.

For fifteen minutes, let's go for a walk and try to walk without ego, experiencing form, feeling/sensation, discrimination/discernment, and there's a volition here and there. All this can happen without any ego. When the ego arises, search for where it is within the body or mind. When you don't find it, remain in that realization. Yes, I walk, I turn my head, I see things, but there's no ego in there that sees, feels, goes.

At first, one should go slowly to train, but later, one can behave quite ordinarily, yet still be fully aware that there's no ego in there.

When one does shine on the nature of the mind, one technique is to block thoughts as they try to intrude upon your mind before their story unfolds, like catching a stone before it causes a ripple in the water. You can stare at the thought and prevent it from becoming a stream of thought. Once the thought has been followed, you can't help but carry through.

With the ego, it's the same. You are constantly on the lookout for the next moment when the I is about to arise. And when it is about to arise, you ask, where is it? Then, simply staring at where it seems to be, it dissolves through the understanding that it doesn't exist. The more you can stay in the continuity of looking for the ego and constantly dissolving it, the more your ego becomes weaker and weaker.

The key to weaken the ego when you sit or go for a walk isn't being aware of what you see without thought, it's being on the lookout for the ego to arise. If you do that for a

while, it becomes so weak that you have to make little effort. But you still need to be on the lookout until the ego is so weak that it doesn't arise anymore.

With this "calm abiding on the lookout," even as you go to work, or otherwise go about your day, you can always be looking for the I that is about to arise. If you do this, you don't have strong emotions arising. The less you leave space for the ego to arise, the weaker your mental afflictions and the weaker the karma you create.

This is valid with the Abhidharma school, but it is exactly the same with the Prasangika school. Unless you are on the lookout for the inherent I to arise, you never make any progress. You might be meditating properly on emptiness on the cushion, but then you don't keep that continuity going in your everyday life. What does a half hour on the cushion matter if you follow the ego for the other 23 1/2 hours? It's all about being on the lookout for the ego to arise. This is the mindfulness that will set you free.

If we look from the point of view of the 12 links of dependent origination, these teachings come from the Abidharmakosha from Vasubandhu. You see, if there's no dominant I, there's no mental affliction. And if there's no mental affliction, there's no karma. Even though you act, if there's no ego that acts, there's no mental affliction and there's no karma being stored on the stream of consciousness.

When there's still ego, there's still mental affliction, and still karma created that leaves an imprint on the stream of consciousness. But at the time of death, you don't have craving or clinging, so there's no becoming. Even if you have the karmic imprint on your consciousness, if you stay peaceful without ego, that karma you created cannot be activated and cannot bring about a rebirth.

There are many types of karma, but two that are rather important in this context are throwing karma and completing karma. Throwing karma cause a new rebirth, completing karma can influence the circumstances within a rebirth.

For karma to be powerful enough to produce a rebirth, you have to have the intention (or motivation), the action, and the completion. Let's say you have the intention to meditate to reach liberation to enlightenment. Then you do the meditation and rejoice at having done the best you can. That's a complete action that will definitely produce liberation or enlightenment. And if you dedicate it to other beings, that karma will continue to grow until that result has happened. It will create a rebirth where we meet the dharma again, make progress, and advance on the path to enlightenment.

Let's say you meditate but don't have the motivation to reach liberation and enlightenment. You just have the habit. The action is still there. And sometimes you're

happy with the meditation, you rejoice. Then you have two of the points, but you don't have the first, the motivation. Another time, the meditation maybe didn't go well and you regret it: "I should have had breakfast instead." Again, you had two of the three points, so it's not a complete karma.

When you know how to make a karma powerful, you try to establish a good motivation in the morning, do your actions well, and then later, rejoice in all the good things you've done. When you mess up, when things go bad, when you harm somebody or squash an insect, if you have strong regret about your negative action, the lighter the negative karma you've accumulated. So, it's very important to regret, not to be unmoved and not to rejoice.

And when you do good deeds, when you are generous or help somebody, at the end of your action, rejoice: "Wow, fantastic, I was able to do some virtuous deed." Then, that rejoicing greatly enhances the positive karma you created. You don't have to go around shouting it to everybody, but in your mind, you feel happy.

The objects of our craving and clinging at the time of death are very important. Because that's the activating factor of our karma. We have so many imprints on our mind. Every day we create thousands of new karmas. But at the time of death, only one is activated. So, we try to crave or cling to a good karma by remembering a good thing we've done.

Usually at the time of death, if you've done any huge positive or negative actions, what's likely to arise in your mind is one of these significant deeds from your life. This is for an ordinary being who lacks training. If you haven't accomplished any big disasters or good actions, then it's the state of mind you are most familiarized with that is likely to arise.

If you are by nature a kind, loving, compassionate person, that's the most likely state of mind you will die with. On the opposite, if you are short-tempered, if you get upset many times each day, that state of mind is what's most likely to arise when you die.

And if you one state of mind is no more prevalent than another, it's the last thought you have before dying that influences your karma, induced at random.

We have many karmic imprints, some positive, some negative, but only one that is activated at the time of death that produces our next life. Once the death process unfolds, it's the last conscious thought you have, the last state of mind that most influences your next life. Then, your consciousness becomes more subtle and you eventually emerge into clear light. But whatever last thought you had will come out when you emerge and produce your bardo body.

In Buddhism, because one knows the importance of this last thought before death, one tries to help a person dying to do so with the best, most positive state of mind. Remind them of the good deeds they have done, their spiritual practice, their gurus, their yidam; anything to keep their mind preoccupied with virtue.

If you focus on selflessness, the less self there is, the less strong the karma is. And when there is no self, there is no contaminated karma that produces rebirth in cyclic existence. Even though you have karma that produces rebirth in cyclic existence, it does not produce a rebirth.

In the Bodhisattvacharyavatara, there's a debate. "If you haven't realized emptiness of inherent existence, you are not free." "Yes, I am free because I am free of craving." Because without craving karma is not activated. "Yes, that is true, but time can pass and at some point, some craving will arise, because as long as there is a self that has sensation, at some point craving or clinging can arise."

If we could live with less and less craving, with less and less clinging, the less we create karma, the less we activate karma and the more we experience peace.

In the Theravada tradition or the Abhidharma school, it says you can become an arhat within seven lives or less depending on how much effort you make. That's very short compared to beginningless lives in cyclic existence.

With concentration, with calm abiding, you don't find the I. When you experience that directly without any subject object distinction, your mind goes directly into the experience of not I. Then you become a stream enterer. Having seen the truth of the absence of I, you have entered the stream that will lead to liberation. This leads you to reach your last life in cyclic existence.

So how do you get there? It is on the basis of renunciation, the wish to be free, strong ethics, strong detachment. On that basis you develop calm abiding. And on the basis of calm abiding, you look for this I, and you stay single-pointedly on the non-finding of the I.

Path of preparation

Then you become a stream enterer, reach the path of seeing, when you have no subject object distinction. You return again and again until all the mental afflictions and their imprints are removed. This approach is very simple, accessible, and powerful. When you meet monks in the Theravada tradition, some have really high attainment.

From the Prasangika point of view, the Theravada doesn't really teach liberation because those practitioners haven't removed the subtlest level of afflictions. In fact, they are very far from enlightenment because they lack the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. They say these beings take much longer to reach enlightenment because they retain a certain level of self-cherishing. And because they don't know what suffering feels like anymore, it's very difficult for them to enter into the Mahayana path. But still, they say at some point the Buddha awakens them from their absorption and induces them to follow the Mahayana path.

That's why in the Mahayana tradition one tries from the start to develop this altruism toward all beings.

From tomorrow we're going to go into the Prasangika view. But one important point to understand from what we've practiced so far, is that the sense of I that is removed is the gross sense of I. It is innate. We all have it. Weakening it can bring us to the point of stopping manifest, gross afflictions. But it doesn't tackle the very subtle ones. Only the big ones are eliminated. Still, that is huge. The practitioner who has gained this level of realization may be more advanced than we are, while we claim we are on the higher path.

With this level of realization, you have a reduced sense of I, mine, my child, my car, my husband, my house. Imagine what it would be like to have these things in your life, but you don't consider them mine, there's no attachment to them. They are there, you enjoy them, and there's no attachment. It's a huge thing psychologically to be free of "mine."

In the Mahayana also, one might start understanding emptiness on an outer object. But then the real experience comes when you meditate on the emptiness of the I, the inherent I. Then, you meditate on the emptiness of phenomena, the five aggregates. From the Prasangika perspective, if you realize the emptiness of the five aggregates and the I, some say you become free. Others say to realize emptiness you need to know the emptiness of all phenomena. There's a debate on the degree to which you need to go.

Still, the first of the twelve links is the I. If there's no inherent I, there's no mental affliction, and there's no karmic imprint. If there's no clinging, no craving, there's no activation of karma at the end of life.

On the Mahayana path, we generate love, compassion, bodhicitta. But real love, compassion, and bodhicitta should be without an inherent I. As long as there is an inherent I, it's not love, compassion, not pure bodhicitta.

It is said that divine pride is more important than the clear appearance of the deity. But what are you proud about? You have to have a valid base to be proud of something. So normally, to be a transcendental pride, you have to have emptiness as a base. Otherwise, it's just ordinary pride. If there's no emptiness, then it's ego pride. The important point is to focus on emptiness.

According to the Abhidharma school, when you eliminate the self-existent substantial I, the I that remains is the five aggregates.

If there's no ego there's no contaminated karma that produces rebirth in cyclic existence. But uncontaminated karma can still be created that leads you out of cyclic existence.

Without an I, craving will still arise, but you don't follow it. An arhat still has his habits, but he doesn't follow them: coffee, cookie, anger, jealousy. And virtues arise too. Sometimes, during the day you have the feeling you want love and compassion to arise, even without an object. This comes from habit, *samskaras*, the habits in the mind. But then once a virtuous habit arises, the ego can agree and make it his own. Why do you have that habit? "Oh, so many years ago I cultivated that habit." His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that at the beginning it's a thought, then it becomes a habit, then temperament, and then our destiny.

You can be completely engaged in dancing, art, sports and lose your ego, but it's not emptiness of the I, you just have moments when it's not there and then it returns. Like ordinary calm abiding.

There are three experiences of the I:

1. When the ego is there, when he wants to run the show
2. When he's not there, because you focus on something else, whether it's the five aggregates or something else, you experience the peace of the absence of the ego
3. And then you have the peace when you realize the ego doesn't exist

That last experience you could very well have in your everyday life; while walking, tending to your garden. Why don't we do it? Why we don't meditate on selflessness all the time, the mind that is always aware whether the ego is there or not? Try to inquire what prevents us from actually doing it.

If you think about it, this is the method to get out of cyclic existence which we have been in since beginningless time. And now that we have heard it, we know how to get out of cyclic existence. But we don't do it.

When the Buddha gave his talk in Sarnath, the people who heard it became arhats straightaway and remained in that state forever. Why can't we do it? According to the teaching, our determination to be free is not strong enough. If it were, we would do that all the time. Our principal concern would be only to become free. We would be on the lookout for the ego all the time and try to get rid of it.

In the scriptures, it talks about yogis on fire who don't want to stop meditating on the emptiness of the I, because that's the way to freedom.

Why our determination to be free isn't strong enough is because we haven't meditated enough on the suffering of cyclic existence. We aren't completely fed up. To the person who has the determination to be free, even worldly pleasure is suffering. If we had it, we would practice day and night watching the I: while going to sleep, waking up in the morning, eating breakfast, going to work. All the time we would look for the I and apply the antidote. That's what Goenka did. He would go to work, but all the time he would meditate on emptiness.

Think about how you can be more diligent in how to remove this false sense of I. Because we lack the urgency. To say, "I am practicing tomorrow," is not practicing. Either you practice or you don't. And you can only practice right now.

Yes, you can go on holiday, but you are never on holiday from practice. Your mind keeps on not finding the I. The realization of the preciousness of human life and of impermanence and death are very powerful.

Right now, we have these instructions on how to be free, and we may not have had them for millions of lives. Yet instead of realizing how precious this opportunity is, we are not using it to realize this false I that we cannot find. On top of that, we think we have many more years to practice, but there's no guarantee.

In the Foundation of Good Qualities it says, "I have this precious human life and it's only once." You see how these types of realizations of the lamrim are really useful. They become the motivator for you to not waste time.

730pm

It's not enough to know what to do, and not enough to have the instructions and the intelligence to know how to do it. We each have powerful forces in us, powerful habits, powerful inertia, something in us that is unwilling to change. And it's not just us. The Indian and Tibetan masters also had this challenge to overcome. The solution they found is purification, purification, purification to clean those habits we have since beginningless time.

I went to visit Gyumed Khensur Rinpoche Lobsang Jampa and saw that he had a prostration board: he was doing 100,000 in his 70s. If he sees some benefit for him to do this in a 70-year-old body, then the practice must be quite valuable, because doing this each day at his age must not be easy.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche also put so much emphasis on purification and accumulation of merit to the point that we sometimes said, "Too much!" But yet, with his clairvoyance, if he sees some benefit to doing it there must be some reason. The mind is difficult to change. We have billions of years of lives' habits. Our wish for the dharma is like the tip of the iceberg, but there is a huge mass under the water that doesn't want to move.

Don't think it's a waste of time to do purification, accumulation of merit. We would ask Rinpoche why someone disrobed and he would say, "Lack of merit. The karma wasn't strong enough."

Then there is our social and cultural environment that is not geared toward enlightenment, to say the least. There are very few Buddhists around compared to Tibet, Thailand, or Buddhist cultures. So, of course it's much harder.

That's why it is good to come to retreats regularly, to have this sangha experience with like-minded people practicing together. You see how easy it is when we meditate together. Suddenly things appear possible.

Some of you have jobs, family, children, elderly parents to take care of, so life is busy and it is hard to make time. So, it's wonderful that you can come to a retreat like this. Each of you must have a lot of merit and renunciation, because to find the time to actually come to a retreat is difficult. Especially in the US, because people don't have a long holiday like we do in Europe. Here, they give you ten days, and often you don't dare take them, because you feel bad for missing work.

Zoom is a good development because you can have a virtual sangha. It's not the best but it's better than nothing.

We have the potential, we have the Buddha nature. Lama Tsongkhapa did huge amounts of purification too. Beings like him went through hardships, lived in meager circumstances.

Tuesday, April 30

930am

In Tibetan Buddhism, most topics have a Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana perspective. For example, enlightenment in certain Hinayana texts is like the blowing out of a flame. It's an ending of suffering and of consciousness.

In the Mahayana, enlightenment is the state unifying rupakaya and dharmakaya, living in a pure land where Arya bodhisattvas can live and send emanations to earth to benefit beings; particularly to perform the deeds of a ruler like Shakyamuni Buddha, the fourth Buddha of this era.

In Vajrayana, there are ordinary, subtle, and very subtle levels of consciousness. The Buddha's mind is very subtle, omniscient, and pervades all our minds, all phenomena that exist. From that sphere, they can manifest subtle light energy bodies.

From a Mahayana perspective, when you invite Lama Tsongkhapa you imagine him coming down from Tushita to the space in front of you. In the Vajrayana, the perspective is that the Buddha is always with you. You just need to invoke him. All the Buddha forms and deities are always with us from the level of dharmakaya. You simply need to invoke them, and they manifest in a subtle form.

So, if you had a very pure mind, you could see all these Buddhas and talk to them. But we are not at that level of mind.

When you think of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, or any of your gurus, if you have this faith that they are omniscient gurus, as soon as you think of them, they are there with you. Wherever the subtle mind is, there is subtle form, inseparable.

It's almost like you try to adjust your mind to a certain wavelength. In the old days, you had these radios that you turn the dial until you get an emitter, tune to a radio station. It's a bit similar with your mind, you have to attune yourself.

When one does guru yoga it's that comprehension that is there. The Buddhas from their side are always there, but you try to tune your mind to the wavelength where you are

able to communicate with them. Guru yoga is a dynamic process. It's not like you sit there, make a phone call, and he answers. You really have to imagine the Buddhas being there, thinking about their qualities, their love, their compassion for you. When one recites the prayer, it is just a support for the concentration that maintains that link. Within that, you think about his or her qualities, love, compassion, etc., and request their blessings to accomplish what you want.

You cannot just passively sit there and recite the mantra. The more you get involved in trying to figure out what enlightenment is, what the process is, then the practice becomes richer, and more blessings come. You have to be quite involved.

On top of that, if you can mix your guru yoga with love and compassion for all living beings, and then if you can mix it with whatever understanding of emptiness you have, all of these elements add to the richness of the experience. But that takes years to play with it and discover because we are not born in that culture, with parents doing guru yoga and telling us how it works. So, it takes a long time to figure it out. But in the Tibetan tradition, guru yoga is the heart of the spiritual path. Through it, blessings come, your subtle body gets awakened, and then the realizations of emptiness and bodhicitta come easily.

If you are not really set on an object of calm abiding, it's okay at first to move around trying different things.

Always start with refuge, bodhicitta, your heart in the direction of the Buddhas, gurus, then receive their blessing. I'm doing this not only for my sake, my peace of mind, but for the sake of all living beings.

The approach we have seen so far is principally according to the Pali tradition. Traditionally, we say Hinayana and Mahayana, but it is politically more correct to say Pali and Sanskrit traditions. New books from His Holiness the Dalai Lama refer to them this way.

In the Pali tradition, the main emphasis is to reach liberation. The determination to be free is very much emphasized: the emphasis on ethics, concentration, and wisdom that gets free of the dominant I and the self-sufficient substantially existing I (or the ego in vaguer modern language); the absence of self, selflessness. It's very simple and very direct. There's not much to do; very little ritual, prayer; very little support.

Because it is so direct and abrupt, in the cultures of Burma, Sri Lanka, and Thailand where these Pali traditions are prevalent, it is mostly monks and nuns who practice this way. The laity are mainly making aspiring prayers that one day they may live like that,

and sometimes taking lay precepts or the monk or nun vow in early years. Those who were monks before make very good husbands!

Now that the Pali tradition has come to the West, since Westerners are more attracted to meditation, Goenka founded the vipassana tradition. Most of us have heard of or done these 10-day meditation retreats that were very popular while he was alive. There are still Western student disciples who take these ten-day retreats. And there are now many senior western monks teaching this vipassana approach.

In the Mahayana, the emphasis is quite different. The Pali tradition is geared toward self-liberation. In Mahayana, the emphasis is more on all living beings: love, compassion, helping others, leading all living beings to enlightenment. Even though the aspiration to liberation is there, the emphasis is more geared toward helping all living beings.

On the Mahayana path, enlightenment takes three countless eons to achieve liberation while in the Pali it takes seven lifetimes. With such a long time to achieve enlightenment, the Mahayana's emphasis is on trying to help all living beings as much as possible. It is not as concerned to be quick to liberation, but rather opening your heart as much as you can.

Once the Mahayana practitioner has generated bodhicitta, they train in perfecting six things, in order of easiness:

1. Out of love and compassion, and bodhicitta, you try to expand your **generosity**: material gifts, gifts of love, gifts of protection, gifts of spiritual advice. You try to perfect the four types of giving.
2. **Ethics**, so as not to harm anyone through acts of body, speech, and mind. Be conscious even of the tiniest negative actions and abandon them, and cultivate even the tiniest virtues.
3. **Patience**, not to get irritated, angry with other beings that are bothering you; with non-sentient things like rocks and stones; with hunger, thirst and the hardships on the spiritual path when progress doesn't come as quickly as you like; not getting upset at yourself. Sometimes the other term used is forbearance, an attitude accepting whatever hardship comes your way. You could even say accepting with loving kindness.
4. **Joyous perseverance**, endurance. Taking joy in what you do, helping others, your spiritual practice.

5. **Calm abiding.** The objects of calm abiding in Mahayana are vaster, including love, compassion, bodhicitta, and many forms of emptiness to try and perfect your concentration on.

6. **Wisdom.** More elaborated, more subtle and vast than earlier.

In the Mahayana, the main emphasis is bodhicitta. If you reach the state of an arhat in this life, it is not such a big deal. You are still a long way off as an arhat. And as an arhat, the Buddha has to come and convince you to enter the Mahayana path. It takes arhats longer to attain enlightenment because they don't have the responsibility, "I am going to help living beings." It seems this is a very difficult state of mind to generate for an arhat, at least from the Mahayana point of view. In the Pali tradition, from their perspective, there are also bodhisattvas, it's just that the emphasis is different.

If one is able to generate bodhicitta, when performing even a small positive action, like giving a morsel of food to an animal, your merit is multiplied by the number of living beings, so the amount of merit you create in one day is unimaginable. Reciting one mantra is like reciting billions and billions. One prostration with bodhicitta is like trillions and trillions. It's amazing the quality of mind of someone who has bodhicitta.

You are only on the Mahayana path once you generate bodhicitta. That is the entry door. Before that, you make many aspiration prayers that the Buddhas lead you to their omniscient mind.

If you think about it, what greater purpose in life could there be than having this wish to bring all infinite living beings to enlightenment? If one is able to gradually induce that mind and to live with it, with that state of mind, when you help your child, your parent, all worldly activities are transformed. If you do them with bodhicitta, the merit is multiplied by all sentient beings.

Some of our spiritual teachers gave us jobs to do this and that, serve the spiritual teacher, the teachings. All these actions done with bodhicitta have huge benefit. Or if you are a doctor or a nurse, you may be only one person, but the merit you earn is like that earned from helping all living beings.

We as ordinary beings mostly think about ourselves. A bodhisattva thinks all the time effortlessly of all living beings. Their mind encompasses all living beings all the time. If you see Lama Zopa Rinpoche or His Holiness the Dalai Lama, they live continuously in that state where their mind, heart encompasses all living beings. They got there through training over many lifetimes, and now it's natural for them to live in that vast mind all

the time. Even to have the aspiration to generate such a mind is hugely beneficial, and engaging in the training to generate it.

If you think about people in the world, everything that's going on in the world for me, my friends, my family, my country, it's so limited what people strive for or aim toward. If you generate bodhicitta, then you always think of all living beings. You help the ones closest in your life, but it could be anyone. These people around you are simply part of all living beings. To train in this state of mind is just wonderful.

Now we meditate on how to generate this state of mind using the second method of exchanging self with other that comes through the lineage of Manjushri through Atisha and Lama Tsongkhapa, down through to the present day.

1. **[Equalizing self with others]** How much all living beings want to be happy. Put yourself in the shoes of your partner, parents, friends and think how they just want to be happy, just as I do. As I have the potential to become Buddha, so do they. As I have this clear light mind, so do they. Gradually expand to include all living beings, including your enemies. For Lama Zopa Rinpoche it was Saddam Hussein, then Bin Laden, now Trump. Then expand to all animals. They have the same potential as I do to become Buddha. Expand to the pretas, beings in hell realms, devas, and asuras. They all have the same right to be happy as I do. You can imagine yourself in the body of any one of them and think how they all have the same rights and aspirations to be happy.
2. In the middle of these infinite living beings, I'm just one. Yet, instead of thinking of making all these living beings happy, I spend most of my time thinking about making myself happy. That would be okay, if I actually managed to do so. But by being so self-centered, I don't even achieve that goal. At this point, you meditate on the **disadvantages of being self-centered**. Think of all our actions motivated by self-centeredness: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, divisive speech, ill will. And their result, karmically, is that we create the cause of our own suffering.

And when we are self-centered, we make our partner and children unhappy, because nobody likes a selfish person who thinks principally about himself and uses other people and things for their own happiness. And, because he is so selfish nobody likes him very much. That person has few friends, people don't enjoy his company. Even from a worldly perspective, it is hard for that person to be happy. Selfish people easily become impatient with others when they don't do exactly as they wish. And it's difficult for a person so imbued with self-interest to make much spiritual progress. Contemplate all these shortcomings of being selfish.

3. Then you think about **the advantages of cherishing others, of being altruistic**, living with a good, kind heart, care for your partner, parents, friends, community. By living with this attitude, you naturally will not harm them. You will avoid the ten non-virtuous actions, and practice their opposites. Naturally, you create virtue and the causes of happiness. A loving kind person has few obstacles in life. People around you are happy and relaxed and behave kindly. They want to help you in order to repay your kindness.

If we live with a loving kind heart, people appreciate us and are kind to us. We live in a happy environment. People help us in times of need. Even from a worldly perspective, the more we are kind and generous and helping, the kinder people are toward us. We awaken these qualities in the people around us. We create little negative karma and live a life of virtue, a happy life that results in a happy rebirth. Spiritually, because the heart of love, compassion, bodhicitta is the entry to the Mahayana, the path to enlightenment, everything you do gets multiplied by the number of living beings with bodhicitta. Done with bodhicitta, one prostration, one mandala offering is like making trillions.

Shantideva says, just look at the difference between an ordinary being who is selfish and the Buddhas who are omniscient, free, completely blissed out all the time. At some point in the past, they were similar. They might have been brothers, husband and wife, or siblings the same parent. One person started being selfish, the other being generous, kind, entered the Mahayana, and over lifetimes became an omniscient being. While the other is still an ordinary being with a self-centered attitude. Just look at the difference. One has become a buddha, the other is still ordinary. At these two steps, you reflect on the shortcoming of being self-centered and the advantages of being altruistic.

4. Then comes the conclusion of this meditation. Imagine yourself in the middle of a great assembly like a music concert. Should I use all these beings to make me happy, as if I'm the center of the world? No. It's better to use my energy to make everyone happy. Instead of using them for me, I use myself for them because they are infinite in number. The purpose of my life and all lives to come is to make all beings in the six realms happy through my body, speech, and mind. This is the state of mind of **exchanging oneself for other**. Exchanging the attitude of caring for oneself with caring for others.
5. Then comes the training in **love and compassion**. There's no order. You can start with either one. Today we train first in compassion.

Imagine this sea of living beings around you and think of all their problems and

suffering, and that you have the capacity to take all these problems away. Imagine stopping the wars, famine, anger, bickering. Out of compassion, you imagine that you have the capacity to stop it. Sometimes it helps to stabilize your mind and increase your concentration by imaging that when you inhale, you take away all the suffering, war, and other problems in the world; people in hospitals and so forth. Part of the mind concentrates on inhaling, taking away the problems, with a little bit of heaviness in your heart. And the other part thinks about what problems you try to alleviate. Your mind is vast, encompassing all living beings and you take away all the problems of the six realms.

Then, focusing more on the exhale, imagine that as you exhale, you give living beings whatever they need, whatever they like and love: food and drink to those who don't have them, friends to those who need them, houses, means of living, whatever they enjoy, imagine giving it all out of love to all living beings. Then, give them spiritual teachers, teachings, retreat centers, monasteries. Gradually, you lead them to enlightenment.

3pm

Dependent arising

When we study this topic in the West, it is approached through a multitude of situations and topics in deep science, technology, cosmology, astronomy. In Buddhism, the scope is more limited. The purpose of understanding dependent arising is to eliminate mental suffering and to lead us to freedom.

Mipham Rinpoche composed the text we are reading. His commentary on the Madhyamakavatara doesn't negate ultimate existence, only inherent existence. But that's not possible until you reach the path of seeing. What Lama Tsongkhapa did was something very difficult and subtle. It is hard for us to experience at our level.

From the Abhidharma school—what we have seen so far in the retreat—it only says that everything is made of parts, but all these parts exist from their own side inherently. So, when you don't find the dominant I, the self-sufficient substantially existent I, you are left with the five aggregates, the body and mind; mostly the mind, because you leave your body behind once you're dead. So, the I is the continuity of the mind according to the Abhidharma school.

In this school, we don't speak about phenomena existing dependent upon the observer, but upon causes and conditions.

In everyday life, we see things out there and we do realize that there are some aspects that are subjective. A thing is beautiful to some people and not to others. It's not inherently beautiful from its own side. That introduces the idea that there is something about reality that comes from the mind. Also, we experience "I like," and "I don't like." When we have a bad experience, then meet it again, we have fear, PTSD, trauma. In my life, I had a motorcycle accident. But a ride with my brother a few years later was the worst experience I ever had in my life, and I never went on a motorbike again. That is complete projection from me and it's the same with weather, food, politics.

In each situation there is something out there. And on top of it, we project our opinions, likes and dislikes, hopes and fears.

Here, it's the same thing but the projection goes further.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama wrote his own commentary on *The Three Principal Aspects of The Path*. I would have given you this book, had I found it earlier. It is shorter and very wise. In the monastery, one studies that for several years. One has to be quite humble when one studies these things; more humble than we study in the West, where we find fault with the teacher or text when we don't get it immediately. With Madhyamika, it doesn't work like that. Go slowly, patiently, read again and again, do purification practice and accumulation of merit. Slowly, it makes sense.

Verse 9

Some common explanations of the meaning of dependent arising, such as the dependent arising of cause and effect, are accepted by all Buddhist traditions. But this verse refers to subtle dependent arising, in which particular effects come into existence due to other causes, or the part in relation to whole, whole in relation to parts. The part and the whole are related to and dependent upon each other the way long and short exist only in relation to other objects. The hand is part of the body, and the body has parts.

At another level, phenomena are also called dependent arising because they arise in dependence upon their basis of designation and they are dependent upon the mind designating them. This is the subtlest dependent arising, merely by name and designation by thought. Mere existence due to the power of name. From the ultimate point of view, that is the mere emptiness of inherent existence.

This means that since a phenomenon cannot come into being from its own side, it lacks inherent existence and it depends on other conditions. Here, other conditions refers to designation and the designating thought. The phenomenon exists by mere

designation. Since it is empty of self-existence, it exists by mere designation. This is subtle emptiness. We are talking about something being empty as mere designation.

Inherent existence, existing from its own side, are objects of negation. Empty means being empty of these objects of negation, because phenomena are dependent upon something else: the name and the thought by which they are designated. When we explain that things are dependent upon their parts, name, and designation, we are stating that they do not have independent inherent existence. Phenomena are either dependent or independent.

By the reasoning of dependent arising, lack of inherent existence can be established.

When we use the term emptiness, it has some similarity to our usual idea of the absence of something, or voidness. But if you think emptiness is the mere absence of anything, then your understanding is incomplete. We should understand emptiness as the lack of inherent existence. Because phenomena lack this, they have a lack of independent existence, yet they are existent. This understanding of emptiness can be gained by understanding the meaning of dependent arising, that phenomena depend on something else. They do not exist independently or on their own side.

If something depends on something else, it clearly exists. Sometimes dependent arising is described as the middle way between nihilism and eternalism. If something were to not exist at all, then to say it depends on something else would not make sense.

The challenge is to realize that we see everything as existing inherently, independently from its own side. It's easier to start with a simple object to get the experience clear. Many masters use a letter to get the meaning clear. I spent months meditating on letters. And I changed letters because I get bored. I have even moved on to numbers now, because I went through the whole alphabet.

Once you understand the emptiness of one object, you understand the emptiness of all objects. Then you apply your understanding to the body, mind, I, and you get the right experience.

One concept that is importantly to get is "existing from its own side" and "existing from my side." "From its own side" means what is on the paper. "From my side" means what I project onto that.

When we look at a "z" on a piece of paper, it's as if it's there from its own side without my mind being involved. But when looks for the z on that paper, none of its individual three bars are the z, neither are the three bars together. A common mistake is that the

collection of parts is the whole. But it is only the base upon which our mind, the subject, projects or merely labels “z.”

If one makes the four-point analysis, the z is either one with the parts or apart. And among the parts, no stroke is the z, nor the collection. From each side there’s only three bars, there’s no z.

That means there is no z there from its own side on the piece of paper with the four-point analysis. In Pabonka Rinpoche’s *Liberation*, that one is used. In other texts, the chariot.

1. identify the object of refutation: the z that exists from its own side
2. If the z exists as it appears, then it either has to be the same or different, one or many
3. Look whether the z is one with its parts, you don’t find
4. Look whether the z is separate or different from its parts, you don’t find

In this text, Lama Tsongkhapa doesn’t use the four-point analysis. He uses the reasoning of dependent arising. On the base of the three strokes, the mind labels “z,” a dependent arising depending on base, mind, and label. Because it exists in dependence upon those three, it doesn’t exist from its own side.

When you look without thinking, there appears to be a rosary there. But when you start thinking, you can analyze and see it correctly. When you start thinking, “on that base my mind imputes rosary.”

Why is it not an elephant? It cannot perform the function of an elephant.

To work with person is very effective. René projects onto this body, mind, memory, life experience. René is a psychophysiological construct we project onto this collection of body and mind until our death.

And the René I see is individual to me. Imputed onto a collection of things brought together.

For each one of you, meditate on the emptiness of self. There’s no me there other than labeling upon a valid base of body and mental continuity.

There's nothing here that is René. In the Tibetan system, they often use the hand as an example. How many fingers do you take away for it to no longer be called a hand? The hand doesn't exist from its own side, it comes from the mind labeling it. It comes into existence with the mind imputing.

For another example, think about someone whose hand has just appeared coming through the doorway. Before the whole body appears from its own side, is this the person yet, or just the hand?

You don't need to see all the parts to make a valid designation.

If you don't use the term "inherently existent" it doesn't work. Does it exist from its own side independently, inherently?

When we speak about conventional reality, there are the wrong and valid conventional realities. When we speak about how something exists the "wrong" way, we mean that it appears to exist inherently. When we say things exist merely labeled by mind, that is a valid conventional reality that exists. That's how a Buddha would see conventional reality, as merely imputed by mind.

Pleasure, for example, is dependent upon the object, subject, and contact: upon the tea and mouth coming together, pleasure is a valid imputation.

With respect to consciousness, first of all, it's hard to have the feeling of consciousness existing from its own side. Consciousness' definition is clear and knowing. Clear in the sense that it doesn't obscure anything from arising within it. Any thought, emotion, or mental image can arise in the mind. Knowing is that what arises within the mind is known, cognized. There is the clear and that which arises within it.

The third factor is that the mind is a stream of moments. If it were permanent, it would never change. That stream appears to exist from its own side as moments of awareness that change moment to moment. But that mind which is a stream of moments can be split ad infinitum. There is no one there that you watch, objectively. Ultimately, you don't find that mind as it appears to you. But the collection of moments of stream of awareness is a valid base to be called mind.

If you see a person as beautiful from his own side vs. merely labeled by my mind, it makes a big difference. Your mental afflictions don't arise.

Dependent arising doesn't mean causes and conditions here, it means dependent upon a valid base that performs the function of the thing.

Everything in this system is a means to an end. To see whether it reduces our mental afflictions. It's very practical.

Think about people in your life, starting with your partner or child or someone you have problems with and see how that person appears to exist from their own side. Innately, you have an image of the person being there, likeable or unlikable from their own side. Then you ask, where is that person? And you realize they are a collection of their parts, their habits, experiences, temperament. And those have parts. On all those collected parts you label that mind partner, child, and so forth.

Notice the difference. When you see your friend or partner as self-existent, there are strong emotions. And when you see them as merely dependent arising, there is peace, and still room to understand that person and for love and compassion to arise. There is a wisdom that sees the dependent arising of a very complex person with many aspects that constantly change and evolve. And on that complex thing that constantly changes you label my friend, my partner. There's still room to love that person, but there's no more room for attachment.

Try to play with it in your mind.

Sometimes that person appears attractive, unattractive, likable, unlikeable. But you merely impute this on the person. It's not there.

For me, I found that understanding the merely labeled person was easier by starting with myself. With another person, it's easy to see their body and the effect of their mind, but you don't see inside. People are much richer when you see them as merely labeled than when you see them as self-existent. You start intuiting many aspects of the mind. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often makes the comment that when you see the face of somebody through this view, even just how they sit, it's almost like you see their mind.

When you look at the person that annoys you, search for where that annoyance is within them. Due to their past experience, this and that happens and they express it in such a way. And you label on top of it, annoying. It's relatively true but it's not inherently annoying.

People are pleasant and unpleasant, likable and unlikable, but not inherently so. There is a relative truth there that comes about through cause and conditions.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama often says the more we see the person as inherently existent, the more their characteristics are strong. Whereas, if you see them as dependent arising, you see them as just slightly likable and unlikable.

In the equation, there is the I that looks, who is also a big factor. As long as your I seems to be inherently existent, it's the inherent existing I looking at the lack of inherent existence. When it's the lack of inherent existent I that looks, it's easier.

The point is whether your emotional response to the person changes. If the attachment is still there, one hasn't gone far enough. At some point, there's nothing more to be attached to. It's the same thing with aversion. But it only works when it is the merely labeled I looking. That's why one usually starts with oneself.

With respect to people you are annoyed with, it helps to try to generate love toward that person, who wishes to be happy. And focusing on the negative affliction side of that person, how do you generate the compassion that they be free of those characteristics? That must still be able to work based on the collection of parts of this person.

Who is attached? Lama Zopa Rinpoche said all the time you need to do this work. At the beginning, it takes effort. But if you take the habit of always asking where is that thing, where is that person, how does it exist, it becomes easier. It's a matter of habit. The sense consciousness sees inherent existence, the mind sees merely labeled on a collection of parts, empty—that contradicts the senses.

Or you first see inherent existence, then emptiness, then merely labeled. Either order.

Inherent existence is how things look innately when you don't think. Then, analyze that it is made of parts. How it exists is the mere designation of the mind on the base.

An "inferential understanding of emptiness" is realizing emptiness by means of a mental image. Then you need to develop calm abiding on that mental image. Then you enter the path of preparation, practice calm abiding on that object of emptiness meditation. When the mind becomes fused with that image, that is the path of seeing.

That is how it is described in five paths, ten bhumis. But in the Nyingma they say you can have a glimpse of the path of seeing before reaching it. It's not the realization, because it's not stable and you can't go there at will and remain there as long as you like.

In tantra, you also have this glimpse easier because you are using mental images. It's less dualistic between subject and object.

If you don't let the fire die out, it's easier to continue maintain the continuity of your inferential understanding of emptiness. But if you lose it, it's hard to start up again. When I've let them go for a while it becomes difficult to bring up the experience.

I like forks, merely labeled fork! Because you see it every day, you use it. You have triggers that remind you of emptiness. When you meditate so much on the emptiness of one thing you see every day, it then triggers you to see this for everything.

730pm

You always hear that you need to avoid falling into nihilism or eternalism. With nihilism, when you look for the object, you find nothing at all. So, if there's nothing there at all, how does it function conventionally? If there's nothing left, then how come it still appears? If you fall into nihilism, you can no longer explain karma. You think you can be virtuous, non-virtuous, it doesn't matter, because ultimately there's nothing there, there's no more karma accumulating. Some past yogis thought this was a correct meditation on emptiness, believing that karma doesn't exist or that they are beyond karma.

Some people meditate on the nature of the mind and when they don't find that mind, they think because of that, that there is no karma.

Eternalism is existing inherently from its own side and appearing to be unchanging.

Ultimately, Prasangika say things are empty of inherent existence. Things are dependent arising or merely labeled. This view doesn't fall into either extreme.

At the time of Lama Tsongkhapa, a wrong view was that the way things exist is beyond concepts, or that conventional reality is inherent existence, and ultimate reality itself negation. That's why he clarified the understanding.

Saying "merely labeled" is an antidote to thinking things are inherently existent.

The texts of Nagarjuna and early masters can be read in different ways.

To grasp that a mere imputation can actually function is not that easy. It is easier when analyzing a letter, but hard with a living thing. It's like a hologram, a collective projection, nothing more.

Causes and conditions can also be mental projections.

Scholars call the view Abhidharma, because nobody ever really practiced Sautrantika.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says he is on the path of accumulation because he has a valid conception of emptiness but hasn't had the time to develop calm abiding.

Disintegratedness is the continuity of having ceased. But something continues afterward, like it does after music stops.

When we say merely labeled, at the moment the base appears self-existent, merely labeled on something. But at the same time if you say this ad infinitum, that brings you to the more correct view.

As long as there's something there, attachment can arise.

Certain teachers emphasize the base of labeling, others emphasize just the labeling.

You project a movie onto the screen. And in the movie, someone plants seeds, the seeds grow, cause and effect functions. But the whole thing is just nothing there at all. There appears to be cause and effect, but it doesn't mean it's there. We leave the dimension where it appears they are there. We have a collective karma to perceive the world in a certain way.

Wednesday, May 1

In spiritual practice, there's not actually that much to do. If you boil it down, when you really try to take the essence, it's having this determination to become free from our mental afflictions, our suffering. And opening your heart more and more to caring for others. And out of generating bodhicitta, wishing to become Buddha for their sake. Then, acquaint your mind with selflessness. This is sometimes compared to peeling an onion. One starts with the grosser level of misperception. Then the mind's perception becomes more accurate and is able to remove more subtle veils. And this remains true up to enlightenment.

Up to our level, we try to remove the veil of a valid mental image. And only after the path of seeing do we remove the innate delusion, the veil that prevents us from seeing things as they are. As we do, our clairvoyance becomes vaster and vaster and the veils become thinner and thinner, until we become Buddha and they completely disappear.

It starts with questioning our perception, questions our sense of I. An everyday person never questions about the I: how does the I exist, where does it exist? Nagarjuna says,

just asking the question already makes the whole edifice of cyclic existence crumble. Who am I?

We are fortunate to practice during this retreat, beginning with connecting with our spiritual teacher through the practice of guru yoga. At first, Lama Tsongkhapa guru yoga appears strange, but gradually, you begin to feel the connection to your gurus through your heart, even though they aren't on the physical dimension.

As one's mind becomes cleaner, that relationship becomes clearer.

1130am

Meditating on bodhicitta.

We have now practiced the "six cause 1 effect" and "exchanging self with other." Lama Tsongkhapa has combined these into the 11-point approach. Each one of us has a certain degree of love, compassion, and aspiration to enlightenment. But they can be increased until we are a real bodhisattva. And even as a bodhisattva, these keep increasing until we become a Buddha.

Due to the blessing of Lama Tsongkhapa guru yoga our experience can develop.

1. **Equalize friend enemy and stranger** to see that these categories are not permanent, that they arise due to life's circumstances. For those who have been married, before being married you likely had a choice between two or three persons. Then only one becomes your life partner, the one and only. It's interesting how your relationship to this person develops from being a stranger, being acquainted, and then with one of those people, a relationship unfolds to the point that person becomes a big part of your life. But it could have been another one, and you also would have had that privileged relationship with that other person.

Then sometimes the relationship turns sour and you fall out of love, end the relationship. That's painful. Then there's a period of relationship "bardo." Following that, you might fall in love with another person and start another relationship. We all know how these things are circumstantial. No person is an innate partner, lover, friend. These relationships arise due to many factors. And those factors change. So we know that friends and partners are not permanent. They arise due to circumstances that change.

This is also true with the people we have problems with: those problems arise due to circumstances. That person is not innately bad, rotten to the core. They have a

different temperament, we don't agree. When you absorb these teachings, they have a side benefit, in that you realize relationships need to be cultivated. You can affect others. With a little bit of effort you can change somebody you don't like to somebody you can get along with. Because the relationship depends on each other's behavior. Relationships change. And they definitely change from lifetime to lifetime.

2. Reflect that **all beings could have been our mother, father, partner**. Since beginningless lives, we have had parents, partners, children.
3. **Everyone has at some point been very intimate with us**. We shared our heart feelings with them, our little secrets, just as we have in the intimate relationships we may have enjoyed in this life. We have been like that with everyone. Everyone has been our most dear person and has showered us with kindness, affection, gifts, security. We have shared with everyone, just not now. We have those we are close to now, but in other lives it was others. Just as you have these special people in your life now, try to imagine you have had the same feeling with everyone.
4. **Since all beings have been kind to us, we have this wish to return it**. Just not now. Whether the kindness was received now or a million years ago, it was as real as the kindness we receive now.
5. **Equality of self and other**. Not only has every being been a precious person in our life, everyone is also with us in the sense that we all innately want to be happy, and we all have troubles and mental afflictions that bother us. So, all living beings are equal. If we put ourselves in the shoes of your partner, children, parents, and friends, it's easier to see because we know their aspirations and the things that bother them. And we care. So we try to expand our mind to have the same feeling for all living beings. They are like me, wanting to be happy and not wanting to have any trouble: all human beings, all animals, insects, hell beings, pretas, asuras. All living beings who have a consciousness, if they knew that the highest happiness of full enlightenment existed, they would like to have that.
6. Think about **the drawbacks of being self-centered and the advantages of cherishing others**, of being altruistic. Simply put, we are still in cyclic existence because we are self-centered. Other beings became Buddhas because they cherished others. Being self-centered is supposed to bring us happiness. But actually, even the happiness we seek with that self-centered attitude, we don't get.
7. **[The advantages of cherishing others]** And people who care for others, even though they don't want to be happy themselves, out of that attitude, they create virtue that causes them to be happy from lifetime to lifetime and leads them to enlightenment.

We conclude that we should become more caring for all living beings. Shantideva said that out of habit, and despite their being foreign to us, we came to consider the sperm of our father and the ovum of our mother our home. About these foreign bodies, we say, “It’s me,” and we cherish it. Due to habit, we cherish something that was foreign to us. In the same way, we come to cherish other people’s bodies, other beings. Through training, we can love them and care for them.

8. Then we train in **love**. We expand our heart and try to make other beings happy with our exhale. We can start with those close to us: partner, children, parents, friends. Gradually, try to induce the same love we have for them to more and more people. We offer them the happiness of whatever they need in this life. Then we also offer them liberation from mental affliction, love, compassion, bodhicitta, realization of emptiness and the whole path to enlightenment.

By starting with those close to us, we expand to any being, even an insect, a butterfly, a snake, and wish them all the happiness up to enlightenment. Wish that we could offer that to them. In this state of mind, there are three things: (1) focusing on the out-breath, (2) the emotion of love, (3) the visualization of giving whatever they need. We take up beings one after the other, either one at a time or as whole categories of beings. Try to stabilize that state of mind, breathing out slowly, sending love, adding the thought, “May all beings be happy,” showering all beings with your love and care.

9. Then we focus on **compassion**. This time we focus on the inhale, and we imagine that we are able to take away others’ suffering, the physical pain, their mental problems at the moment in the world, and as it has always been and always will be—so much suffering. For some, it is their profession to deal with suffering people. For others, we see suffering through the news. We try to imagine that we have the power to take away their suffering, to alleviate their suffering. We imagine taking away their physical and mental suffering, their lack of love, bodhicitta, and realization of emptiness. Imagine we have the capacity to take that away from others out of compassion.

And if we like, we can add the thought, “May they be free of suffering.” If you have some pain or sickness, mental problems, this is nothing compared to what other people suffer. Some people really have to go through a lot as a human, not even thinking about the hells and other realms. One way is to imagine that as we take away their suffering, wherever we have pain, we take on theirs, imagining that we are able to free them from that pain. And because we have some pain, we can feel a little bit what their pain feels like. We can relate to them better. If we are healthy

and think about somebody else's pain, it is difficult to imagine. But when we have problems, we use that in our training on compassion.

10. Then we try to induce the superior intention, that courageous state of mind that **I will free all beings from their suffering and lead them to their highest happiness.** Because of all the previous points, because they have been my dear ones, the cause of all my happiness for so many lifetimes, and because my own highest happiness is found by caring for others, I'll take the responsibility upon myself of leading them all to enlightenment. Yes, there are other Buddhas and bodhisattvas who work for their benefit. But there are certain beings that have special karma with me. Other Buddhas could not help them as well as I could, because of our karmic connection. It is like that verse we read in the morning: "For as long as space remains, for as long as sentient beings remain, until then may I too remain to dispel the miseries of the world." We try to induce this feeling sincerely. At the beginning, it's quite fake, but the more we meditate on it, the more we eventually reach the conviction that we will never give up until all beings have reached enlightenment. We try to induce that determination in our heart.
11. To do that effectively, I need to have great clairvoyance, to see the past, present, and future of all living beings: which mental afflictions they have abandoned, which they still possess, which method is most appropriate for each individual. I have to be free of suffering myself to be able to free other beings from their suffering. Otherwise, I am like a blind man trying to guide other blind. Therefore, I try to induce this aspiration to become a buddha for the sake of all living beings.

3pm

"Those five aggregates also as empty..."

On top of the selflessness of person

"Form is emptiness, emptiness is form..."

Lama Tsongkhapa's understanding of the verse is that emptiness of inherent existence is the merely labeled form. The emptiness of inherent existence is not other than the merely labeled form. The merely labeled form is no other than the emptiness of inherent existence.

Recite gate gate heart mantra three times, in the middle of the third one, take a deep breath, at end recite the "a" at the end of svaha and stay in the nonconceptual state

meditating on emptiness of the I. Then, as thoughts arise see them as thoughts without the thinker. As the thinker arises, try to find him, see that he is merely labeled.

Before the thoughts are yours, you are aware of the thoughts, but they are not yet yours. Try to see if you can recognize these three states:

1. Space of mind
2. Arising of thought
3. Arising of me

(Dalai Lama commentary)

“(verse 10) One who sees the infallible cause and effect of all phenomena in cyclic existence and beyond and destroys all perceptions (of inherent existence) has entered the path that pleases the Buddha.

This means that if you are able to clearly ascertain and assert the infallibility of dependent arising, and if, without doing harm to this understanding of dependent arising, you are able to destroy the perception that things exist inherently, then you have entered the path that pleases the Buddha. The first two lines introduce the assertion that if you understand cause and effect within and beyond cyclic existence as infallible, and can posit the existence and function of cause and effect, rather than its nonexistence, then you are able to eliminate the extreme of nihilism. The next two lines imply that through understanding the function of cause and effect, you will understand that although things exist, they do not exist independently or inherently, and thus you will be able to destroy the conception that things exist inherently.

So these lines explain that although cause and effect functions, it does not function in an inherent way. In fact, inherent existence is the object of negation and is destroyed by true perception. This eliminates the extreme of permanence. In general, the whole of Buddhist teaching can be subsumed under four statements: all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, all contaminated things are suffering, all phenomena are empty and do not have self-existence, and nirvana is peace. From these four, it is clear that most schools of Buddhism, with the exception of certain subschools such as the Vatsīputrīyas, accept the Buddhist explanation of selflessness.

The selflessness that is accepted by all four schools is the lack of a self-supporting or self-sufficient person — meaning, there is no person who is completely independent of

the mental and physical aggregates. If you view the mental and physical aggregates as the subject to be controlled and the person as the controller, and if you view this controller, a person, as something completely independent of those aggregates, you are maintaining a false view of the existence of a substantial, self-supporting person.”

I would not agree completely independent, could also be the more important sense of self, like the captain compared to the sailors on a ship.

If you want to bring up the substantially self-existent person, think of something you own. Who does it belong to?

The mind only school is also called the Yogacara school. It is close to the experience of yogis in meditation. In deep meditation, everything you see is a product of your mind. The more your mind is pure, the more you will see these Buddhas, dākas, and dākinis. This school emphasizes that whatever pleasure we experience is a result of our virtue, and whatever difficulty we experience is the ripening of our negative karma. Nothing we experience as pleasure and pain exist outside. That would be accepted by all schools of Buddhism. This school just puts a light on that fact. It is the seeds in our stream of consciousness that ripen and produce all these experiences.

“Thought designates name and then the phenomenon comes into being.”

Another definition of cause and effect for Prasāngika:

“If you are able to perceive the real nature of phenomena by realizing that they do not exist inherently but only in dependence on causes and conditions, such as designation by name and thought, you will have entered the path pleasing the Buddha.”

When we speak about dependent arising, the same words have different levels of meaning depending on context. Same thing with emptiness, which means absence of something. But the thing that is empty and the level of emptiness varies.

They dependence on cause, conditions, parts, all Buddhist schools share. Cittamātra adds mind. The Prasāngika is very subtle and they have their own understanding of dependent arising. Things still depend upon causes, conditions, and so forth. But at the same time there is something more subtle there. That is that things are dependent upon a consciousness that imputes. They come into being by a consciousness labeling. This is very subtle and might take years or lifetimes to understand.

The challenge with Prasāngika is that there is nothing there from its own side. It exists merely being posited by the mind. Of course there is something there, but nothing

objectively, inherently, something findable. It comes into existence by the mind imputing it. These words “coming into existence” can be interpreted in many ways. They are not adequate, but they are the only tool we have. Words by nature have the side effect of excluding all other words. The reality is much more fluid. That’s why in the Tibetan monastery you spend a lot of time learning the definition of words. Whereas we in the West are very vague with all these terms. If the two debating don’t have the same definition, it doesn’t work.

When monks learn Cittamatra and Madhyamika, they learn the definitions of the words according to each school. Then you can debate and go very far into reasonings.

One simple way is to have an idea of what “existing from its own side” means: you can point your finger at the thing and you can find that thing. The feeling of the body existing on its own is the object of negation.

The elephant is neither its head, trunk, or tail. You realize that the body exists by merely being labeled on the collection of parts. Or, if you take the hand, there appears to be one hand there. Isolate in your mind this feeling of hand. It appears to exist from its own side there. But if it does, it has to be found there. Yet none of the fingers is the hand, the palm is not the hand, and separate from the five fingers and palm there’s no hand there. The inherent hand disappears from your perception. But it does exist by being merely imputed by the mind.

The mistake one makes is that one is not able to understand what inherent existence means or existing from its own side. Lama Zopa Rinpoche puts great emphasis on “recognizing the object of refutation.” When you don’t find the hand there, what you haven’t found is the inherent hand. It still exists, merely imputed by the mind.

It is the same with the stream of consciousness, a stream of moments of awareness. All the schools except the Prasangika would agree that the stream of consciousness exists from its own side, inherently, independently from my mind labeling it: that it is made of moments of consciousness. Each of those thoughts disappear and gives rise to the next moment of mind. Therefore you can posit a stream. If the mind would be unchanging, you would be always stuck in the same thought. That is how you posit a stream.

But if a moment of awareness exists inherently from its own side, it couldn’t have parts. It would have to exist on its own. Yet if you try to find this moment of awareness that exists on its own, you cannot find it, because it has parts. It has at least two parts, the part that touches the past and the part that touches the future. You can split this moment, and thus it doesn’t exist on its own. In this way, you come to the conclusion

that there's no inherent moment of awareness there existing from its own side. A moment of awareness exists merely labeled by the mind.

When you don't find it, you have negated the inherent existence of the moment, so what is left? Being merely imputed by the mind. It is just like you negate the inherent existence of the hand, but not the merely labeled hand.

You haven't found the body or mind from its own side. So, what about the I, the me? There is not a different I than the one we meditated on before. It's the same sense of I. We just look at it from a different perspective: the I that is upset or wants something. From the lower school, the body, mind, and I exist inherently. We see the I a little bit more grossly. In the Prasangika, these three don't exist inherently. The same I.

If the body and mind aren't found to exist inherently, where could this I be? If the body and mind are merely labeled by the mind, the I is also merely labeled by the mind.

If you are unhappy with this, posit the I that exists from its own side. Where is it?

The challenge is with all the parts together. We know that the hand, heart, lungs are not the body. But all the pieces together are still just all the pieces together that are not body from their side. Still, all the pieces together are a valid base to be called, labeled body. It only exists by name. There's nothing there in its collection of parts that is the body. But it exists as nothing more than being designated by the mind.

There was a debate between Nagasena and King Milinda, a Greek sent by Alexander the Great, where Nagasena argued that the chariot is neither its parts nor the collection of parts. The mind labeling it "chariot" makes it come into being. If you don't analyze it, it appears to be there. But when you look for the "thereness," you don't find it. It exists by being imputed by the mind.

Now try to apply that reasoning to the I, the self. Somewhere within this body and mind there appears to be the sense of me, there or separate.

When you don't find it, you have negated the inherently existent I, but there is an I left there, the I merely imputed by the mind on the body and mind. This I is dependent arising.

First, look for the I where it is and come to the conclusion that it's not there. Then one says, it's merely labeled.

Dependent arising is a shortcut. Because the I is merely labeled by the mind, it doesn't exist from its own side, or it doesn't exist from its own side because it is merely labeled.

If you get it, you start to experience phenomena as being very airy, very thin. There's not much substance to things, yet they exist—just not in the heavy, solid, everyday way we experienced them before. It's harder to be attached when you see things this way, because there's nothing solid there to be attached or averse to.

The other example from the Cittamatra is to experience things like they are in a dream. In your dream, you are afraid of something, but the whole experience is an imprint created by the mind. Yet whether in a dream or real life, everything you experience is the ripening of karma.

People would ask Lama Yeshe is it good to take LSD and he would say, "You are on LSD all the time!"

The inherently existent I, body, mind has never existed. It's nonexistent because we hallucinate. When you try to look for it, you try to prove to yourself whether it exists or not. But there is a merely labeled I, body, mind that does exist. To be able to see them you have to remove the wrong hallucination of how they exist. At our level, we do this conceptually. It's still a mental image, a construct, not the real thing. That gradually weakens our sense of inherentness until we gradually reach the path of seeing, where we see emptiness directly.

In approaching emptiness, we start by meditating on the conventional nature of the mind: clear, knowing, in the nature of the space. We don't use an analysis at this stage to try to meditate on the emptiness of the mind, but then we try to find the I on that base.

At the beginning, you have either the emptiness of the I or the merely labeled I. But they are actually two ways of looking at the same thing. From one side, the emptiness of inherent existence, from the other, dependent arising. After a while, you see that they are two sides of the same coin.

The first stage is to have a clear mental image of inherent existence, the absence of inherent existence, and merely labeled. If your reasonings are weak, if you bring up the I too strongly, it doesn't work.

For meditating on emptiness in a sadhana, if you have the three mental images clear in your mind, then you can bring it forth immediately in your practice. The I doesn't exist from its own side, and you have this bliss. Often, in the sadhana, we just say the word.

You should at least have an image of inherent existence and negate it, a non-finding of something. That non-finding you try to imagine as bliss and then you shape it into this and that.

The non-finding of something is a space. Not finding the body is a space-like meditation on emptiness. The space is a negation of the inherent body. Spacelike nature of the mind is a clear and knowing mind.

Gross cause and effect is material: that a tree comes from a sprout, and similar observations of gross phenomena. This also includes the cause and effect of mental phenomena and karma: that happiness comes from virtue, etc.. In texts, it is sometimes not clear from context which cause and effect they are talking about. In Prasangika, there's a base and a consciousness, and consciousness labels it as such. That is cause and effect. Karma also exists, but on a grosser level.

If you cannot figure out how karma still functions, it means you haven't understood emptiness and karma completely.

Bringing up the strong sense of I is only needed for the complete beginner. Later, you can meditate with the more subtle inherent I that is always there. 90% of the time he's there behind every thought we have. The point is being able to identify the inherent I as the object of negation, whether it appears huge like a mountain or thin like a thread. Ask, does it appear to exist from its own side? That's good enough.

Thursday, May 2

We all like love and compassion. And emptiness is exciting. But meditating on the determination to be free is uncomfortable for us. Yet, it is more important than those others. Even if you can make a slight change in this direction, it is of great benefit. One meditation I have found very useful in that regard is to think about how I am going to die. It is the big unknown. If my mind continues, it is the quality of my mind that will most determine what comes after. And my mind has mental afflictions, desire, aversion. It reacts in certain ways with this and that object. After my life ends, if, as they say, the bardo is a little bit like dream state, well, I don't have much control in my dreams. So, what kind of time can I expect in the bardo?

Then, if I think about all the seeds of karma I have accumulated, not only from this life, but from beginningless lives, there's no guarantee which one will ripen at the time of death. In this life, I've been quite okay, it hasn't been a great disaster. But I don't know about my previous lives.

Then, realizing all that I lose when I die: all my connection with my spiritual teacher, everything I learned from them, a comfortable life in a human realm with enough food, shelter. So, my life is quite good.

When I think about the six realms and all the different options there are, there is no guarantee where I will go. I don't have the clairvoyance or the power to decide where I'm going to be reborn. So, yes, I would like to make enough progress here, now, where I have more certainty, more power to determine what's going to happen after. And that can only happen through spiritual realization.

Facing death, like Milarepa said, I fled to the mountain. At our stage, death is not something that we should feel comfortable about. Yes, we think we have refuge, haven't done too bad, had a good heart, helped people. We had gurus. But when you're in the dream, how much of that helps?

In the dream state, you have the four elements that manifest in a very powerful way. It seems that in the bardo you are in a more reactive mode than a deciding mode of where you go. This is what is meant by the bardo being a bit like a dream, because there too, we mostly react. Very few times in my life have I had a lucid dream.

What chance do we have to have these good conditions in our next life? To end up with a comfortable life, meet spiritual teachers, to be smart enough to understand the dharma, and for it to exist in a language that you know? Just to be born again on this planet is extraordinary. There are not many places where Buddhism is alive, where you have qualified teachers. And you have to grow up in the family of your parents, who may or may not be Buddhists. Then you need to find a way to make a living, one way or another. What chance do you have to meet a spiritual teacher and make progress again? If you do, you would be really lucky, because many good conditions have to come together.

There's a lot of uncertainty there. But in this life, we have everything. So, while we have it, during our few years left on this planet, it's really important to make the best of it. Because after, there's no guarantee. Look how much you have already studied in this life: all the lamrim, karma, bodhicitta, emptiness, ethics you accept and follow, those who have received initiations and practiced a little bit of tantra. We have already achieved so much in this life. We have already understood so much. All that will disappear when we die. And in the next life, we must again find that path, and again, maybe we do, maybe we don't. Everything we went through in this life, we will have to go through again.

For me, these thoughts are a good way to help not get distracted by the affairs of this life. Because time is running out. As we grow older, our bodies start decaying. We have this and that problem. And these problems unlike those in our teens and twenties, are chronic ones that we have to live with. They are signs that death is not far away.

And we live at a time when the planet is still in good shape. But with global warming and the political situations around the world, with mental afflictions and ignorance increasing around the world, when you think about coming back, it seems that each generation is less fun than the one before.

So, it's good to think about these things from time to time. It gives you some energy to be more diligent with your spiritual practice. I found it more useful than emptiness or bodhicitta. At my level, it changed my life. I need to be constantly reminded, otherwise I become careless. I just enjoy everyday life, thinking it will last forever.

If you think about how your mind is when you enjoy something in the present, psychologically, you think it's going to last forever. It seems like that situation will last. Death seems far away. I will be concerned with that later on.

It says in the teachings that there's no point in talking about death if there would be no solution. But with the teachings we have received, there are alternatives. There are yogis and yoginis who don't die. They leave their nails and hair and transform into the clear light mind illusory body. Others also absorb into the clear light and absorb into the illusory body. Others are so pure they can see the pure land where they are going to go, and they see the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. When they die, they just go with these holy beings to the pure land.

We could become like that, or close to that. But somehow, we have some inertia and we are attached to this and that in the human realm. And those attachments prevent us from making the effort to get those higher realizations.

930am

When we do guru yoga, especially when we try to visualize beings like Lama Zopa Rinpoche, it's important to have the faith that, from their side, they are actually there with us. There are two ways to visualize their appearance: One is the Mahayana perspective that they can hear you from the pure land with their omniscient ear, then they come in the space in front of you from that vision of a pure land. The second, more tantric perspective is that the omniscient mind of all Buddhas pervades all phenomena. The dharmakaya, the mind of the Buddha is everywhere, and it pervades the space in front of us and within our own bodies, wherever we decide to visualize. So, the actual

body of the Buddha is there with us too. If we have a very pure mind like the yogis of the past, they actually see Manjushri, they see Tara, they see the deities and so forth. It's not that they come from somewhere, they spontaneously manifest in front of us from the dharmakaya, omniscient mind.

What prevents us from seeing them is our clouded, impure mind. When we pray, from their side, they are there and they hear us. Like when Asanga went into retreat to see Maitreya Buddha: over the course of 12 years' retreat, he went out discouraged after every 3 years, then came back with more perseverance. Finally, Maitreya Buddha appeared to him and Asanga complained to him, "Look, I've been meditating for 12 years, you could have manifest a bit earlier!" Maitreya answered, "I was there from the first day. Only the obscurations in your own mind prevented you from seeing me. And look over there, where you used to spit in that corner of the room, you see you were spitting on my robes!"

These stories are there to remind us that it's really the obscurations of our mind that prevent us from seeing the buddhas. Lama Tsongkhapa has a yogi friend who, from childhood, had such a pure mind, had visions of Manjushri. Lama Tsongkhapa befriended that person so he could ask questions to Manjushri through him. Then, Lama Tsongkhapa did many prostrations and mandala offerings so that he could see Manjushri himself, ask questions, and receive personal instructions.

So, really it's the obscurations that prevent us from seeing the buddhas. Some people see Buddhas in their dreams or in their meditations. Others can even see them with their sense consciousness.

In Lama Zopa Rinpoche's commentary on Lama Tsongkhapa's guru yoga, it is principally in the migtsame when you request that the guru purify your mind, the non-virtues of this life. Doing Lama Tsongkhapa guru yoga with a shower of light can be as powerful as doing Vajrasattva. Do the same visualization.

Another aspect when you meditate on guru yoga is that often there appears to be a truly existent me, Lama Tsongkhapa, and guru. From time to time, try to remember that Lama Tsongkhapa doesn't exist inherently, nor do you. Lama Tsongkhapa is merely labeled on a collection of parts, and I am merely labeled on a collection of parts. Lama Tsongkhapa and I don't exist objectively. Somehow, when you do that in your practice there's a lightness, without a strong duality of me here, Lama Tsongkhapa there.

Generate a motivation of wanting to cultivate calm to realize the path for the benefit of all beings. You need calm for any of the path's realizations.

When you get a little bit of the first levels of calm, if you imagine that calm in the nature of a pleasurable sensation, like bliss, it is more enticing. Instead of bored, dull, calm, you feel happy, joyful, blissful calm.

You can meditate on love, compassion, bodhicitta using verse 90 of the guru puja.

For a normal person without scars, by loving others, you become happier. But some people are wounded, have trauma. The more you think about your happiness, your pleasure, the more suffering and less peace you have. No matter how much you try to make yourself happy, the dissatisfied mind never has enough. There's always something more, something slightly better. All the time, we try to make ourselves happy, but with a self-centered mind it's very difficult.

And the advertising industry is very good at dangling things before your eyes that will bring you to nirvana. Even some cream now is called nirvana.

"This chronic disease of self cherishing..."

For example, you go to a party and there's a plate of cookies and you straightaway take the biggest one. What makes you do that? The thought, "I'm more important than the other." Check for that attitude. In many different aspects of your life, you may have that attitude: "my happiness is more important than other people's happiness."

In the Lamrim Chenmo, there's a quote from a sutra that says, bodhisattvas don't need to focus on many practices, they just need to focus on great compassion. And if they focus on great compassion all the other qualities come as well. Because it's such a virtuous practice to care for all living beings, so much merit is created, and all the other realizations come.

In the Mahayana, this is the core practice: exchanging self for others. "Since cherishing myself is the doorway to all torment, and cherishing others is the door to all good, I seek your blessing to make my core practice the yoga of exchanging self for others."

Next is the practice of giving and taking, tonglen. "...I seek your blessing that all karmic debts..." His Holiness the Dalai Lama explains that we don't take the suffering of others upon ourselves. We visualize our selfish mind in our heart and use the suffering of others to harm that selfish mind in our heart. As we imagine the suffering of others, we inhale, and it undermines our selfish mind our self-centered attitude. Then, when we exhale, we bring happiness to all beings. When visualizing as deity, visualize in your heart your small little mind, and that inhaling destroys your selfish mind in your heart.

Then, when you exhale, you imagine from your beautiful deity's body you send light rays out to help bring all beings to bliss.

3pm

Reviewing what we've done so far.

From the Abhidharma schools, there's a world out there that exists inherently in which things depend on cause, conditions, parts; in which happiness comes from virtue and suffering comes from non-virtue. Within cyclic existence, the way to become free is to realize that within our body mind there is this dominant I, self-sufficient substantial I that appears more important than the body and mind.

We try to identify that mind in meditation first, then in everyday life, that that sense of I is not always there. For example, when you meditate on calm abiding or go for a pleasant walk, that I is not present. Yet, as soon as you start having some emotions or think intently, there is this thinker and doer that arises in your mind. Sometimes you even have a physical feeling that he is in your heart, gut, or head when you think intensely, somewhere in your body. But when you don't take it for a fact that that I is there, the more you look for it, the more it vanishes.

The problem is that we look for it, and it vanishes, and we think that is emptiness. But for emptiness, you have to maintain this experience and realize that I does not exist. It's not enough for it to disappear. That is just like brushing it under the carpet or door. But on the next occasion, it comes back as strongly as before. You have to look and realize there is nowhere for you to be. When you do that, you experience a spacelike meditation on emptiness. You realize that I is not there.

That experience of "not there" is a space. It is the absence of the I, and it is different from the spacelike nature of mind, even though in appearance it is a space. Instead of being the clear and knowing nature of the mind, you understand that space comes about by realizing that the I doesn't exist. In that space is the realization of the absence of the I.

That absorption can last a second, a minute, a day. Afterwards, when you come out of that absorption, who are you? From the Abhidharma school, you are the continuity of the body and mind. And after death, you are the continuity of the mind (that implies the four mental aggregates). To make it simpler, one says "the mind."

For those Abhidharma schools, the emptiness of phenomena is simply that objects can't be possessed by the ego, because it's not there. That possessive feeling comes about

due to the hallucinated view of a self that is not there. The continuity of body and mind has no attachment or possessiveness.

If you want to bring about this false sense of I, you think about “my” something. And suddenly, he is there. This mind belongs to him, not to the body, sensation, discrimination, volition, consciousness. It belongs to “me.” And that me in this school is called the dominant I, the self-sufficient substantially existent I.

When we move to the Cittamatra school, the selflessness of person is the same. If you realize in meditation, and don’t remain in the space-like absorption of mind, gradually that I becomes weaker and weaker until it stops manifesting. The mind doesn’t have possessiveness, etc. when you realize this dominant I doesn’t exist. You still enjoy things, but there’s no I enjoying them, no possessiveness.

You can be Hinayana by motivation, path, or view. You can be Mahayana by path or view. Someone that is Hinayana by path is someone who looks to attain liberation. Someone that is Mahayana by path is the person who wants to reach enlightenment for the sake of sentient beings. They are different paths based on your motivation as to which goal you want to achieve.

You can be Hinayana by view if you don’t assert selflessness of phenomena. You simply assert selflessness of person, the absence of a self-sufficient substantially existent I, ego, within you, that is more important than the body and mind. If you remove that, you are free. That’s the view from the Abhidharma schools.

Mahayana has emptiness of phenomena on top of emptiness of person. In the Mahayana, the Cittamatra has the view that phenomena and the nature of mind don’t exist separate from the mind. Even though things appear as matter, their essence is the nature of mind. They still say that phenomena exist out there and depend on causes and conditions, parts, and so forth. Causes and conditions, virtue and non-virtue function. But the whole game is in the nature of mind, a karmic seed that ripens and produces an object.

Within the Cittamatra, there are two sub schools, one with six and one with eight consciousnesses. The second posits karmic seeds and the mind basis of all.

Emptiness of person is the same as before.

Madhyamika has two schools, Svatantrika and Prasangika. The Svatantrika says the same about removing the self-sufficient substantially existent person. But their view on phenomena is different. They also posit that karma functions (cause and effect), which

is common to all Buddhist schools. It has two sub schools: Cittamatra Svatantrika-Madhyamika and Sautrantika Svatantrika-Madhyamika. The latter says if you look for the thing under ultimate analysis you don't find anything.

The Cittamatra says you find the mind. Relatively, conventionally, when you don't analyze, the Sautrantika would say they exist like Abhidharma schools. Relatively, things exist even though they don't ultimately. On the collection of partless particles, the mind then labels that thing.

The Cittamatra Svatantrika-Madhyamika say the same thing. Ultimately you don't find anything, but conventionally things exist like Cittamatra. Phenomena are in the nature of mind, relatively. But ultimately you don't find them.

When you study these things philosophically, you have these clear categories. But yogis teach from their experience and then the scholars label the yogis as a particular school. We don't know what view the yogis had. The description of the schools doesn't fully describe the experience of the yogi. It's just convenient for studying.

Early in his life, Lama Tsongkhapa was more Cittamatra, then Svatantrika, then Prasangika. It's good to know the categories, but in terms of lived experience, it's not so black and white.

The Prasangika Madhyamika says that things exist conventionally as do the previous schools. But under ultimate analysis, you don't find anything. Conventionally, things exist as mere name, imputation, designation. Conventionally, the Sautrantika find something: the mind, partless particles. Only the Prasangika find nothing, merely designated by the mind.

The Prasangika are now called consequentialists, because they analyze something and they don't find anything. They hear other people's position, and they always show the absurd consequences if you were to show something there. But sometimes they say they have no views of their own. They say they don't dismantle all views, but they don't have any of their own.

Yet Lama Tsongkhapa had a lot of views: that things exist in mere name, and so on. The other Prasangikas look at Lama Tsongkhapa and say, "You have views! You are not a real consequentialist."

But I think why this is so is that, as a yogi, you have an inner debates between the different views and that enriches your experiences. It's not necessarily that one is better than the other, they offer different perspectives.

When Lama Tsongkhapa says things are merely labeled by the mind, they can still function. Virtue can still bring happiness, non-virtue suffering; cause and effect can still function while being merely labeled by the mind. Lama Tsongkhapa's Prasangika says you don't need something findable there for cause and effect to function.

How do you meditate on the spacelike nature of emptiness?

Lama Chopa 106

"I seek your blessing to complete the perfection of wisdom through seeing the mind placement upon ultimate truth conjoint with the ecstasy and great bliss induced by the discriminating wisdom analyzing suchness."

"Inspire me to perfect wisdom through the spacelike absorption on ultimate truth induced..."

You have to know that in the lamrim section where we are, we are still in the sutra presentation on ultimate truth. The absence of inherent existence is like a space. That's called spacelike absorption on emptiness conjoined with mental stability (calm abiding). And calm abiding brings about bliss.

Bliss can also be induced on the path of preparation by analysis. Bliss from calm abiding comes first. You have concentration as long as you don't think, you don't analyze. When you start thinking, your concentration becomes weaker. Through training, a yogi reaches calm abiding. When he starts analyzing, he loses it a little bit. But through further training, you can analyze without losing calm abiding. That is when you reach the path of preparation.

Here the bliss could be either of calm abiding or analysis.

Why do I say this is sutra? Because in tantra it's a little bit different. In highest yoga tantra, the mind of clear light is inseparable from the view. In Dzogchen, from a Gelugpa perspective, they meditate on the conventional nature of mind. In their view, they meditate on the union of the conventional and ultimate nature of the mind. It becomes more blurred in tantra, more unified.

At our baby level, the body is still there. We get this mental image, and we feel the body and mind analyzing it, and some small percentage of mind is focused on spacelike nature of emptiness. But as your concentration grows, a yogi no longer has awareness of body. He just becomes emptiness.

What is left in that space? There's definitely discernment, perception, basically you perceive what you're looking at. There's understanding of what you're looking at. You know you are looking at emptiness of inherent existence. There's a sense of peace, bliss. These two are ever present mental factors: perception of emptiness accompanied by feeling, a pleasant sensation.

Absence is the same as resting in the non-finding. It's like coming out and your car is not there, and focusing on the absence of the car; or the absence of your wallet in your handbag. You have this sense of I, you look for it, and you experience the absence of the I.

At the beginning, you can bring up the strong inherent I. But it can be so strong that the analysis of its emptiness is too weak to dissolve it. So, it needs to be neither too strong nor too weak. And then later, once you have recognized the inherent I, you can even experience it when it arises very subliminally and meditate on the emptiness of that. Later on, you just meditate on the very subtle sense of inherent I. You don't need to bring it up, because by bringing it up, it shakes your mind. At some point, you have a very sharp mind and experience the absence of inherent existence for even a small I.

You have the sense of I there, you look for it and don't find. But the key is to keep it there while you look for it. Otherwise, you brush it aside or you focus on the conventional nature of the mind. The understanding that the I you thought was there is not has to infuse your mind. You have to keep it there and it has to sink into your mind that it's a hallucination, that it doesn't exist.

At other times, you have the I there and you realize that it's not there, and you let it go. Initially, you realize that the space is the absence of the I. But a few seconds later, you forget that space is the absence of the I, and that space turns into the conventional nature of mind.

The non-affirming negation absence of I turns into the spacelike nature of mind. That's when you have to start over again, bring it up, don't find it, and stay in the non-finding. You have to repeat this again and again. As your skill and concentration increase, you can stay longer and longer in the non-finding. I made that mistake for many years.

As long as you are in a nonfinding, you are in emptiness, ultimate truth. When you find something, it is conventional nature of mind.

Levels of searching for I:

1. You look for the I that is separate from the aggregates and don't find it.

2. The I is not there because it is a dependent arising, the I is not there because it is merely labeled on the body and mind. You see the absence of the inherent I like a shadow.

Bring up your ordinary sense of I and look for it among or separate from the aggregates.

The I that exists is a mere imputation on a collection of parts, the body and mind. You can't point your finger to it. It's a dependent arising on the body-mind. The I is not the body, mind, base of body mind, or the coming together of three things.

You have to somehow maintain the object of negation. It easily disappears.

You can focus on the real I, merely labeled by the mind.

Or focus on the absence of the inherent I.

Here the two mean the same thing.

You can do some more detailed analysis before on the sub parts. But it may be better to keep a vaguer sense of body mind.

Because the I is merely labeled, there is the absence of me. And the absence of me is that it is merely labeled.

How does the I exist? As a mere imputation, designation on the base. And because it is a mere designation on the base, it is empty.

You have the relative truth of the I and the ultimate truth of the I.

"Merely labeled by the mind" automatically implies that the I is empty from existing from its own side. And empty from its own side implies automatically that it exists as a mere name.

Form is emptiness. Emptiness is no other than form.

Emptiness is form. Form is not other than emptiness.

There's a fight between inherent existence and merely labeled. Sometimes one is stronger than the other.

You can meditate on the conventional I/general I being merely labeled as well, and it also prevents the inherently existing I from arising.

When the full blown inherent I arises, you can refute it through thought and meditation, by not finding it. But the feeling remains. It's just that the I that has produced the feeling is not found.

This meditation takes some practice and you may find it too analytical. It's easier to meditate on the spacelike nature of mind, or breath. When you do Mahamudra, you focus first on the spacelike nature of mind, which is pleasant. Then you move on to its emptiness. But it's easier to distinguish the absence of the I than of the space of the mind. In terms of appearance, it's exactly the same. But the way you apprehend it is different.

We have the habit of spreading our mind a bit outside our body, but why stop there? The mind actually has no end. But because of our attachment to form, body, we constrict the mind. The more the mind gets detached from the body, the more you feel like the body has no end. I think that's how you experience the mind in the form and formless realm, as infinite space.

This meditation we are doing, it's the essence of the Buddha's teaching on Prajnaparamita, Nagarjuna's teachings on emptiness, and what His Holiness the Dalai Lama often teaches. Lama Zopa Rinpoche often mentions that things are merely labeled by the mind and often uses the reasoning "merely labeled by the mind" and "don't exist from their own side." Lama Zopa Rinpoche taught about these topics for 30-40 years so there is a lot of material, so many angles and examples that he used.

730

Usually, one does the Tsog at night because that is when the dakas and dakinis are active.

Friday, May 3

730am

The mind left to its own accord is peaceful, gentle, and happy. What stirs our mind with our memories, desires, problems? From the Abhidharma school, it is this ego. From the higher school, to perceive on top of that, it is seeing things as existing from their own side, inherently. Because we have this mistaken perception, the mind gets stirred up. Whereas, a higher being lacks those reactions in contact with the world. The main factor is to observe what's going on, our mind, how we react. That is the best way, by just sitting, watching one's mind. We are fortunate to be able to do that here these few days.

Sometimes the mind is cooperative and settles nicely. Other times it doesn't. Even when the mind doesn't cooperate, it's worth it just to watch what's going on. What preoccupies you, makes you worried, what are you thinking about? And, from time to time, check, who's the thinker? Where is that thinker? Gradually, as you observe more and you let the mind settle, going through the surface of thought, you go deeper into the mind and become less hypnotized by the thoughts. Then you find yourself still there with the mind.

930am

In life, it's important to have role models. In our society, it might be politicians, sports heroes, pop stars. Spiritually, to have role models, to read the biographies of past yogis, yoginis, and other masters is very important; to have spiritual ideals, beings that transcended ordinary life, who experienced the happiness that is beyond our worldly limits. Shabkar was one of these Tibetan yogis like Milarepa. It's nice to take some time when you have some leisure to relax and read his biography, it's very inspiring.

I remember reading the biography of Acharya Moon, a Theravada monk from Thailand who achieved the state of arhat in that life. There were some free copies of his book being distributed by Theravada organizations. In it, he described how he attained that state. At some point, he lived with tigers in the caves in Thailand, and they didn't do anything to him, because he was so cool. At some point, he wanted to help one of the villager monks who was infatuated with a girl there, and he came down and said, "You shouldn't be so infatuated with that lady." And the monk freaked out that he was reading his mind.

At another point (he doesn't explain why) he says he gave up his bodhicitta to reach liberation. He went to visit his mother in a god realm and she was so sad that he gave up his bodhicitta. He comforted her but he didn't say why he gave up bodhicitta. However, when he reached a state of arhat, all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas came to congratulate him. Then at midnight, the gods of this realm came to pay him respects and ask for teachings. At 2am, beings came from another realm. He was very busy with all these visitors from other dimensions asking him instructions.

One thing that struck me was how diligent he was. When he would travel by bus he would just go into meditation and forget he was in a bus, single-pointed, always trying to practice, practice. There's a tradition in these countries: Thailand, Burma, Vietnam. We just don't know them because we are focused on Tibetan Buddhism. Some of you with Asian heritage know. Even in China there were great masters.

It's good to hear these stories, because for modern people (the term Western doesn't work anymore because there are many Asians now in a similar predicament), our spiritual environment is so poor. In Switzerland, where I grew up, there are all these caves where Christian yogis used to meditate. One was Nicholas of Flüe. He was married but he had so much devotion to God. He built a little retreat house behind his home. He had a wife and kids but would often disappear there for weeks. He would just fast, not eat or drink for days, in communication with God. His wife was quite spiritual too, because she let him do his things. And he would come out for harvesting, planting season and help. At one point, he disappeared and went to live in the forest. The people from the village heard about him and were very inspired. They asked him to come back and built a church behind his house. He spent 30 years without eating or drinking. He's famous because when Switzerland was created in the 12th, 13th century, the people from the cities and countryside were in conflict. They asked Nikola the hermit to come and was able to bring peace between the different factions.

In Europe's long history, there are stories of many hermits (what we would call yogis). Each of those people had strong renunciation to worldly life and devoted themselves to their spiritual aspirations. Many developed incredible great qualities. In the U.S., there was a movie called *What Would Jesus Do?* with answers from young people who were asked this question. It's a bit similar for us: what would His Holiness the Dalai Lama do, what would Lama Zopa Rinpoche do in my place? This helps to gain some insight.

A friend told me that each time she wakes up in the morning, the first thing she thinks about is His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and it makes her happy. It's a good thing, instead of thinking about politics, daily work, think about your spiritual inspiration, because it has an impact on your mind somehow, your value system. The more we hear about these great spiritual beings of the past the more we want to emulate them. Contemplating the lives of great saints, teachers, yogis helps bring their behavior closer to how we live with our families, jobs, everyday life.

The modern world is so materialistic, so spiritually poor. If you read the news, there's not much inspiration to be found there. There's no news about what's happening in monasteries, hermitages, yogi's accomplishments. It would give us a break to read something a little bit uplifting. There are still people in the world that make the effort and gain qualities. But you simply don't hear about them.

At least we can try to be in a little group of people that know about them. For example, there's Samten, Roger Mano who has been meditating at Shiné Land for 25 years, with his partner too.

In everyday life, we're quite busy and completely involved with our sense consciousness. So, when we look inside, there's all this agitation of thoughts, memories, projects. It's hard to see the calm, clear, pure nature of the mind. For some of you who have trained in calm abiding quite a bit, you can easily get back to that inner space. But for people who are busier, I think nine round breathing is really a good practice. Because it's like focusing on the breath, but at the same time you clear the subtle body. There's some movement in the mind with this practice as you focus on different elements of your breath and the visualization, which means you cannot follow your whole train of thought like usual. It's a good point to start. Then, once your mind is calm, you can let go of the vase breathing and just meditate on the nature of the mind.

With the inner peace, inner joy, and inner satisfaction of calm abiding, you become less restless, less looking out there for this and that. When you know inner peace, you can observe that your parents, children, everybody seek happiness outside themselves. But you know that's not where real happiness is found. You can gradually help them and say, "Look, you have all these ideas about what makes you happy, but in fact that's not where happiness comes from." You can say that only if you have the experience. If you don't, it's hard to say it to others, because you feel like a fake.

If you experience some inner peace, it's easier to let go of wanting this, wanting that: to be happy. You're looking less outside for happiness. Then come other realizations like the determination to become free of your mental afflictions, because you have some taste of how nice it is when the mental afflictions are not there. And how nice it would be if they were never there again. This gives you the aspiration to remove those afflictions. Then love, compassion, and bodhicitta naturally arise toward those running around you looking for happiness where it's not to be found. After that, gradually, you understand deeper how the mind, body, I exists, how everything exists.

To start finding some inner peace is very worthwhile because from that follow all the other insights.

The basic instructions for nine-round breathing are to make vajra fists. Then, place the left fist under the armpit of right. Use your right finger to block the opposite nostril you breath in from, first breathing in the left, then out from the right three times, then do the opposite. With the channels, you hold at your inhale. Then, when you inhale through the side channels, bring the energy up into the central channel. There, heat the ember at your navel and pull up your lower muscles to aid concentration. This clears your channels as you focus.

In Tibetan Buddhism, there's a class of literature called mind training, lojung. One of its poems was composed by Geshe Chekawa, Eight Verses of Thought Training. His Holiness

the Dalai Lama said he memorized those verses before leaving Tibet and he recites them daily. And in daily life, when he encounters problems and difficulties, he recalls specific verses.

1

Determined to obtain the greatest possible benefit

From all sentient beings,

Who are more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel,

I shall hold them most dear at all times.

Due to other beings, we obtain food, clothing, housing, money, everything in life, every worldly benefit, comes through the kindness of others: our partner, children, parent, friends are all sources of our everyday happiness. Then, our spiritual realizations, and all the teachings we receive come from others. We can only practice ethics if there are others around, and we are only able to practice generosity and patience toward the people and things that bother us. We practice joyous perseverance because we want to achieve enlightenment and develop the qualities to help them better. All our worldly or spiritual wellbeing happens due to the kindness of others. Therefore, they are seen as wish fulfilling jewels. Mythologically, there appears to be this fabled jewel that grants your wishes.

2

When in the company of others,

I shall always consider myself the lowest of all,

And from the depths of my heart

Hold others dear and supreme.

People who have the psychological problem of low self-esteem find it difficult to see themselves as “lowest of all.” They think, “I’m already so low, I cannot go lower!” The lowest of all is not being worthless, it’s not in that sense. If you train yourself to leave the honor and victory to others, in that state of mind, there’s actually peace in your heart. You wish others to be happy. You don’t need worldly honors and recognition. If these comes your way, fine, if not, fine.

In terms of wanting to have peace of mind, if you train in holding others “dear and supreme,” it’s very helpful for the peace of mind. Nothing can take away your inner peace, your inner joy. If you hold others dear, thinking, “May they be happy, may they enjoy this and that,” it’s a beautiful state of mind to be in.

3

Vigilant, the moment a delusion appears in my mind,

Endangering myself and others,

I shall confront and avert it

Without delay

If delusions like anger, irritation, and aversion take over our mind, not only do they destroy our own peace, but whatever we say or do under their control will hurt others. Sometimes we are so self-absorbed in our own needs, absolutely wanting them fulfilled, that we forget about the needs of the others around ourselves. And we hurt them through our self-centered attitude.

When a delusion arises, it’s easier to stop it at the beginning. Once it has taken full blown effect, overtaking your mind, it’s more difficult. If you can catch it before it is strong, you can change your mind, prevent the delusion from taking over your mind.

4

Whenever I see beings who are wicked in nature

And overwhelmed by violent negative actions and suffering,

I shall hold such rare ones dear,

As if I had found a precious treasure.

The reason why this verse calls difficult beings “the rare one” is because in everyday life, we are mostly okay with the people around us. When we face a difficult person, it’s a precious opportunity to test our patience and our loving kindness toward him or her. Most of us don’t live with difficult people all the time. If you live alone like me, it’s quite easy to think you have developed patience because nobody is bothering you. “Oh, I’m quite patient.” Then you meet difficult people, and you see how much patience you have actually developed. Meeting difficult people is like taking the exam to determine

whether you have developed patience or not. Can you see them as your kind dear mother who you wish to attain enlightenment for when you face this difficult person? If so, it's a good sign of progress.

5

When, out of envy, others mistreat me

With abuse, insults, or the like,

I shall accept defeat

And offer the victory to others.

If people mistreat us, criticize us and so on, if we retaliate, usually it makes the situation worse. The argument goes back and forth and blows up out of proportion. Usually, it's better to be quiet. Let it pass. Then, when the situation has calmed down, we can go to the person with loving kindness and explain, try to solve the issues; but not at the moment when the person is angry, upset. At that moment, the person cannot listen to what you have to say. This is from the point of view of loving kindness, of peace of mind.

6

When someone whom I have benefited

And in whom I have great hopes

Gives me terrible harm,

I shall regard that person as my holy Guru.

Many of us might have our children as our guru. The idea is to give selflessly without expecting anything in return. You give freely just because it's your nature to give, to make others happy. You don't expect any thanks in return.

7

In short, both directly and indirectly,

Do I offer every happiness and benefit to all my mothers.

I shall secretly take upon myself

All their harmful actions and suffering.

This is the practice of giving and taking. “Secretly” means that, only mentally, you imagine taking their suffering and problems upon you by putting it on the movement of the breath. Inhale taking away their problems, increasing your compassion. Sometimes in a family situation, things are a bit stuck. You see your children having problems, suffering and cannot do much because they are teenagers and don’t listen. At least you can generate compassion for them, inhaling their suffering and their problems. And exhaling, imagine bringing them happiness, peace, joy, and love.

8

Undeiled by the stains of the superstitions

Of the eight worldly concerns,

May I, by perceiving all phenomena as illusory,

Be released from the bondage of attachment.

“Undeiled by the stains of the superstitions of the eight worldly concerns” means being attached to happiness and having aversion to suffering, we try to reduce our attachment, our obsession with happiness and aversion to suffering. Because in life, suffering will come our way whether we like it or not. We have to face physical problems, relationship problems, work problems, money problems. So many things will come our way. If we have aversion to these problems, each time they will take away our peace of mind. And with happiness, sometimes we are never satisfied, never have enough, always thinks things could be better, have more, and so forth. If we can just have a more peaceful mind, these feelings become less extreme.

of the eight worldly concerns, attachment to fame is wanting to become famous or having aversion to being insignificant. I don’t think this is a problem most of us here face, but sometimes in our profession, if it is very competitive, that situation might arise. You want to get a promotion, so you need to put yourself in front.

With praise and blame, even though praise is pleasant, if we look for more and more, our peace of mind is gone. And when we are blamed, that makes us unhappy. Again, it takes away our peace of mind. In life, due to circumstances, sometimes people praise you, sometimes people blame you. It’s just life. Things happen due to inner and outer

karma, our constantly changing situation. So, we try not to be affected by praise and blame.

It is the same with gain and loss. Sometimes we succeed and sometimes we don't. Try to not be overly happy when you win or overly unhappy when you lose. Gain and loss arise due to karma, cause and conditions. My dad was a florist, and he was quite successful. He said, "My success came from about 40% hard work, maybe 60% was due to chance." He was living at a time in the 1950's when most people, if they worked hard in a field, they were successful. He also met the right people. With gain and loss, there's an element of being skillful and smart, and a part due to chance. Because sometimes very smart, capable people don't succeed. They are not at the right time and place.

"By perceiving all phenomena as illusory, be released from the bondage of attachment" means seeing that phenomena are empty of inherent existence. Yes, phenomena are there, but they are like a rainbow. They arise due to causes and conditions, but there is nothing solid there to be attached to.

These eight verses are helpful to remind us to live a happy, peaceful life, to not be affected too much by how people react to us, how things go in life. Things constantly change. If we let the world take away our peace of mind, when we reflect on these verses, we can keep our peace of mind and our loving kindness which is our greatest treasure in life. If we have that, no matter what life throws at us, we have this inner peace, joy, loving kindness. We realize going through life that this is our greatest possession. Whether we live or die with that state of mind, nothing can really trouble us. When we die with that state of mind, we are sure to go to a good place. Because like attracts like.

3pm

Lama Yeshe taught this way to meditate on the mantra in heart sutra.

First, make two repetitions and let your body completely relax, like when you're floating on an inflatable raft on a swimming pool. On the third repetition after *parasamgate*, take a deep breath then slowly chant, *bodhi soha*. Then you stare at that space. Go into it with an attitude of astonishment, that opens the space even more. You can even keep the eyes and mouth a little open. Forget your body. Remain with no thought as long as you can. There are just thoughts, no I there yet. And then slowly, slowly a sense of I again arises in that space. "Oh, that's an I, my thoughts." Try to catch that.

Kalu Rinpoche also does something similar. The I arises and asks what to do with these thoughts. Some are pleasant, some are unpleasant. The I starts acting in dependence

upon what feelings and interactions arise with respect to those thoughts. And then you create karma. If you act at the level of just awareness and thoughts, you no longer create karma out of ignorance. It's when the I, the wrong sense of I arises that you create karma: "Oh, I'm going to do that." That I has never existed, it's a complete hallucination, and it creates karma that results in cyclic existence. Sometimes your mind slows down and you can really see these different steps.

Lama Tsongkhapa explains that there are two ways to understand reality. One is intellectual, the other rational. We can also use similes. These images give you an intuition of how things exist. We should meditate on these similes, like the metaphor of a scarecrow. If it's well made, it looks like a farmer on a field. At first, the mind projects person onto the form; it designates, labels, imputes "human being, person." Another example is when you are in the mountains and, from far away, you mistake a pile of stones or a dead tree for a person. That person is merely labeled by the mind at that moment: from your mind, you impute a person there. When Lama Tsongkhapa says "merely," it means only imputed in this way. Another example is the rope that is mistaken for a snake. The snake is merely imputed, labeled by your mind. From the side of the mind, the mind imputes the phenomenon. Other examples are those people who stand still in big cities made up to pretend that they are a statue. Or with mannequins, when someone is fixing a mannequin holds still and then she moves. Or, when you think you recognize somebody from behind, and they turn around to reveal it's someone else.

What's the difference between these examples and the merely of Prasangika? A valid base. It can't perform the function of the label "human being." Another person can come and correct you; another valid mind will try and convince you of your mistaken perception.

Sit a little bit and use these images we just went through in your meditation.

By meditating again and again how phenomena are merely projected by your mind, when you open your eyes, you realize the way you normally see them is a lie. They exist the way my mind sees them. Gradually, over time this meditation increases the percentage of time that you no longer believe in the solidity of things.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama said, "Whenever I see things, I know they are empty."

The I appears in three ways: the general I, the merely-labeled I, and the inherent I. The general I (also called the conventional I) is defined as that which is neither the inherent I nor the merely labeled I.

It is said that only those who realize emptiness can see the merely labeled I, but I would argue that its perception comes in degrees. You have a valid conception that gradually leads up to the direct realization. Yet that is how people refute the Gelugpa, saying that with this method it is not possible to realize the merely labeled I unless you have realized emptiness.

The dominant I is the one that appears to be a little different from the body mind. When you search for it and don't find that I, then you come to the understanding that the I is just the continuity of mind.

The dominant I is not there all the time. When you're peacefully sitting there, not doing anything in particular, when there's no strong sense of I, daydreaming, walking on the beach, it's almost like you're not really there, just relaxing. That's called the I that is neither inherent nor realizing the absence of inherent I, the merely labeled I. That is the sense of I we have when we are relaxed.

Then, when you start putting some concentration on something, suddenly the inherent I appears. And the merely labeled, it appears only once you have not found the inherent one and you ask, how do I exist? At our level, it's still a conception, an idea, a feeling, an intuition, a mental image. It's not a direct raw experience of the merely labeled I.

Ven. Steve Carlier calls the inherent I the obscured I.

The conventional I's view of the conventional world is obscured because it still sees the world as inherently existent. But if you remove the obscurations, there remains a conventional world that is merely labeled by the mind. Thus there are two conventional worlds: the one obscured and the one not obscured. Mentally, due to meditation we can have an intuition as to how the conventional world would be if we were to remove our obscurations. You can start seeing that with your mind. A yogi on the path believes less and less in that obscured reality.

You could say in the Abhidharma school that there's a general I too and it's the same. You can have that sense of I and not realize it is merely labeled.

In everyday life, the general I is going about, then something happens to rear up the inherent I. Then you have to analyze that inherent I to find that it doesn't exist, there is only the merely labeled I.

The ordinary person has the inherent I and the general I. The yogi or yogini has three as they start to perceive the merely labeled I. And the Buddha has only two: the merely labeled I and the general I.

As a meditator, you start realizing that this inherent I is a hallucination. You believe in it less. It still manifests, but it becomes weaker and you don't follow what it says anymore, because you know it's a hallucination.

In everyday life, you have this sense of seeing a false perception when someone tells you something about a person that contradicts what you know to be true, e.g. that a man is a thief, but you know that he is not a thief.

Once you remove your delusions, everything appears in the nature of bliss. There is no more attraction and aversion, only equality, equanimity. Things are still alive, they function, some are relatively beautiful, and some relatively ugly. But you don't have the strong attraction to pleasant and aversion to unpleasant.

Despite eliminating the inherent I, all these lamas and enlightened beings still have different personalities.

Some, who strongly identify with the I, after seeing its falseness, at first feel fear. But once they become more advanced, or with better karma, this fear subsides and they feel good.

The practice of the five first perfections are contributing factors to realizing emptiness. They create good luck, positive energy. They are not a direct antidote, but they are contributing factors.

I love strawberries. To me they feel desirable from their own side. But I project desirability onto the strawberries from my own side. People see a painting as beautiful from its own side and want to buy it. They don't realize they project beautiful on it according to their culture, upbringing, etc. if you see that dependent arising, normal attachment doesn't come. As practitioners, there's part of us that sees beauty as projected, and a part that sees things to be beautiful from their own side.

You can take examples from your own life: your partner, child, car. It appears to have qualities from its own side, whereas in reality we project these qualities onto that base. By realizing this, our attachment becomes weaker. Many things cause me to project beautiful, and I know that somebody else would project something else as beautiful. That's how our liking and disliking function. But we forget it comes from the mind, we project. It's a relative valid projection. The problem is when you believe it exists inherently from its side without projection.

The problem is that such thoughts need a lot of familiarizing. When we go out, our senses tell us that everything is there from its own side.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama book, verse 12

When I say the delicious strawberry is merely projected by my mind, it means it is not there from its own side, and vice versa.

“This means that if you are able to understand that all phenomena exist conventionally, you will be able to eliminate the extreme of permanence, and by understanding that things do not have inherent existence, you will be able to eliminate the extreme of total nihilism or annihilation.”

When you absorb into the mind that doesn't find the thing, you could conclude that it doesn't exist at all, which would be nihilism. In Lama Tsongkhapa's approach, what you don't find is the inherent existence of the thing. In meditation on the spacelike nature of emptiness, what you haven't found are phenomena existing from their own side. They still exist as phenomena merely imputed by the mind. When you focus on emptiness of inherent existence, what appears is only the spacelike absorption. Once you come out of that, conventional phenomena reappear.

Just having a valid conceptual understanding is the key. Once you get it, it is so clear and easy to understand.

In the Heart Sutra it says, “no body, mind, no ear,” This is a shortcut. You have to understand the whole elaboration to make sense of it.

Be careful not to believe that things exist based on causes and conditions from their own side.

The mind can be quite full of many things upon which we merely label I.

Saturday, May 4

In the Lamrim Chenmo, there is a quote from a Kadampa yogi who says, “The more I contemplate the pleasures of life, the more my attachment grows. The more I contemplate suffering and problems of everyday life, the more my renunciation, my wish for freedom grows.” If we start thinking about what we're going to do after retreat, the relatives and friends you will see, being back in your cozy bed, with your lovely furniture, having everything exactly where you want it to be, then our attachment grows. When we think about getting old, sick, dying, having to pay taxes, then our wish for freedom grows. We can choose how much attachment and renunciation we have. It depends upon what we contemplate. How much do we want attachment, how much do we wish to be free?

Now, when our mind is agitated by attachment, at the beginning we think it's nice. Oh, I'm going to see my friends, relatives, be back in my beautiful bed. Attachment seems pleasant. But if you are attached to these things and they then get taken from you, you suffer. I often think it's better to have the second best thing than the best. With the best, you have great attachment. When the best car gets scratched or crashes, you feel the great loss of your precious attachment. It's a matter of what you value. If you value your peace of mind, second best is better. Get things that you're not too attached to.

Everything that we possess, we are definitely going to lose. When we die, we leave life with nothing. The more you are attached to things and people, the more you suffer, the more you crave to come back.

Milarepa was in a village begging when three beautiful teenage girls passed in front of him, giggling, saying, "Oh I hope I will never be born like Milarepa." Milarepa was thinking, "I hope I will never be born like them." When worldly people see me, they think I'm crazy. And when I see them, I think they are crazy.

In everyday life, it's good to see how you think. Depending on how you look at your friends, relatives, objects you possess. You can decide how much attachment to them you cultivate. It depends on how you think. The problem is not the objects or people, it's how you think about them.

If you value peace of mind, spiritual realization, then you cultivate an even-mindedness. You don't get too excited about things, and you don't feel too unhappy when you lose them. Then it's easy to go into calm abiding. Without strong ups and downs in life, it's easy to meditate.

930 am

Lama Tsongkhapa's writes in his Song of Experience that the root of the path is to follow in thought and action the sacred friend who reveals the path. Seeing this, follow him at any cost and please him with the offering of your practice. Your spiritual practice begins with your relationship to your spiritual teachers. How much progress you makes in your life depends on how much you cultivate that connection in your heart.

In thought, that means you focus on the qualities of each teacher, all your teachers. Try not to leave anyone out. Focus on their qualities and their kindness. Due to that, you start to lead a more ethical life and have more aspiration for liberation and enlightenment. Cultivating good thoughts, caring for others, your understanding of reality, how the mental afflictions function, how to reduce and gradually eliminate them, all this happens through your kind teachers. This is not only so in this life but

going will be so in the next life, and the life after that, and so on until enlightenment. Your spiritual practice will depend on meeting qualified teachers, getting qualified instructions, and doing your best to follow them.

How likely is this? It depends on karma. How well we relate to our teachers in this life creates the cause that we will meet them in the future and have a good relationship with them again. What pleases the teacher most is to put the instructions we receive from them into practice. Of course it might be difficult, above our present capacity, or we don't have enough time. But at least have the aspiration to do so.

When we do guru yoga like Lama Tsongkhapa, the main thing we do is to focus on our teachers, their qualities, their kindness and remember how they helped us change our life; how our outlook has changed due to the kindness of their teachings. Then, we visualize white light to purify whatever failures we have had in that relationship. Sometimes we had negative thoughts or put the teacher aside because we were overwhelmed with daily life, or our boyfriend or girlfriend became more important. We clean those with white light, when we weren't able to keep our commitments and so forth. And then the prayer accompanying this visualization is basically a request: please help me to get all the realizations up to enlightenment, the determination to be free, bodhicitta; help me realize emptiness, tantra.

Your gurus don't need to be alive. They may have passed away. But from the pure mind, dharmakaya, you imagine benefitting from them as you did when they were alive.

Tilopa, in his Ganges Mahamudra, says at the beginning when one starts meditating, the mind looks very turbulent. However, it's not more turbulent than usual, it just sees all the thoughts and emotions it didn't see before. After a while, your mind becomes more like a rushing river, when there are periods where you experience some calmness and thoughts less strong than before. And as you progress more, your mind is quieter and quieter. It becomes like a big gentle river, like the Ganges at Varanasi. At the end, when your mind is completely subdued, your mind becomes like the sea. This example is used in Mahamudra to express how the mind progresses from being very agitated to very peaceful. This image can be quite encouraging for you to bring inner peace.

The more you have inner peace, the more you have inner satisfaction, because you have it in your mind. And this affects the people around you. You don't get too excited when things go well, or too low when things don't go your way. People like that kind of energy around them. You start becoming a source of refuge for others. When they have problems, they come to you, because you seem not affected too much by all these ups and downs.

So, train in having a calm, gentle mind. You can speak about dharma to others, but if your mind is not subdued, what's the point. It's like trying to sell a good that one doesn't have. Leading by example is more important than leading by words. Sometimes you see a very angry father who tells his kids not to be angry. It doesn't work. Try to embody the qualities that you appreciate, like inner peace and loving kindness. These are basic and everybody appreciates them.

Teaching from Lama Yeshe on bodhicitta

3pm

Meditation on the emptiness of the I is either the non-finding or the mere imputation on mind, with thought or without thought.

When we meditate on the mantra and become space, it is the same way Lama Tsongkhapa explained how to meditate on Mahamudra. The space of the mind is clear and knowing: clear, in that it doesn't obscure anything from arising within it; knowing, cognized, known, meaning we are aware of what is happening within the mind.

For those that do Mahamudra, *shiné* on the mind is focusing on the space of the mind. Sometimes when absorbing the guru into your heart, you can expand the blessing of the guru, make your body disappear, and again focus on the space of the mind. The awareness of the same space is just a different way of getting access to it.

Many yogis in Lama Tsongkhapa and other yogi's traditions generated mental stability on this conventional nature of mind. Once they stabilize it, each tradition has their own method to go to the ultimate nature of the mind. In Lama Tsongkhapa's tradition, it is to bring forth the inherent I and realize it doesn't exist, either by doing the four-point analysis, or the reasoning of depending arising that the real I is merely labeled on the mind.

You go into this absence of the I. That would be its ultimate nature. Once you have the experience with one object, you can do it with any object: Recognize the inherent existence of the mind, then as the inherent I appears to you, say that this inherent I doesn't exist, because in reality the I is merely imputed, designated, labeled on that mind.

The way the inherent mind appears to you, it doesn't exist. Either on the stream of moments of mind or the parts of the mind, on the mind with or without thought.

In the context of tantra, again it's the same thing. You go into the spacelike nature of mind. You can do this the moment after you recite the mantra of emptiness, OM SVABHAVA SHUDDHO SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA SHUDDHO HAM, the nature of all phenomena are empty and the nature of the I is empty. Then, you meditate on the spacelike nature of emptiness, emptiness of body, mind, I. This is true in all four classes of tantra.

In highest yoga tantra, you have another way, through the dissolution at the time of death. You visualize consciousness separating from earth, water, fire, air, the subtle mind of white appearance, red increase, black appearance, the very subtle state of clear light. Then you use that very subtle clear light to meditate on Mahamudra. This is the generation stage method.

On the completion stage, it is accomplished by dissolving the winds into the central channel to cause your consciousness to become more subtle. That meditation on emptiness would turn into the dharmakaya. When you reemerge as a body, that would be the sambhogakayas. This is at the level of fruit, result.

At the level of the path, out of the clear light mind, you arise as impure illusory body and then pure illusory body. But it's the same meditation. That's Lama Tsongkhapa's approach.

The method of meditating on emptiness is the same in sutra and tantra, just done with more subtle minds.

Is the dharmakaya the same as the clear light? Dharmakaya is the emptiness of the clear light mind. The mother clear light is that which every one of us experiences when we die. The son, child clear light is the experience of emptiness you bring into that experience.

Then you have the example clear light and meaning clear light of the child clear light. Example clear light is with the help of a mental image. You have a concept of emptiness, not yet a direct perception, and with that, you get to the example clear light.

When you get to the mind of clear light at death, if you can mix that with the direct experience of emptiness like the path of seeing, with no more duality between subject and object, then that would become the meaning clear light.

When you say that the emptiness of the mind is the dharmakaya, that would be at the level of the meaning clear light, a direct experience of emptiness with the most subtle clear light. And yet that's not yet the complete dharmakaya. Because if you have that

direct experience of emptiness with the mind of clear light, you arise out of that with the pure illusory body.

When you can unify the pure illusory body with the meaning clear light, that is called the stage of Vajradhara. The mind experiencing that would be the dharmakaya. And simultaneously, you would realize the samboghaka and the nirmanakaya.

Book: Jose Igancio Cabazon, *Freedom from Extremes*

With the determination to be free, the path of accumulation (Lama Zopa Rinpoche calls it the path of merit), your experience of emptiness becomes clearer and clearer, your mental image. Between that and the direct experience of emptiness there are some kinds of veils. One veil is the concept of emptiness that comes between you and actual emptiness. And then there's the separation of subject and object. It feels like emptiness is in front of you. When it's direct, you're in it. Then you come out of it. Real emptiness comes with the path of seeing.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama describes tonglen in this way: Your general is sitting and you imagine your inherent existent I, self-cherishing I at your heart. You inhale as dark smoke the suffering of others to undermine that selfish I in your heart. The suffering of others weakens your selfish concerns. You with your little problems, compared to the suffering of the world.

In Mahamudra meditation on the emptiness of subject and object according to Panchen Lobsang Chokyi Gyaltsen, you start with dismantling the inherent I, the Gelug approach. In sutra, you start with emptiness of I rather than phenomena. In other yogic traditions, they meditate more on the emptiness of the mind than the I, e.g. Kagyu.

Usually I do the I first, that's what they say you should do, but it doesn't happen all the time.

The sutra approach only speaks from the gross mind perspective, not the subtle and very subtle.

In Nyingma, there is a method for recognizing the subtle mind without completely dissolving the gross mind. That method is looking into space, not focusing on anything before you. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says you can get a first level of experience there, but not the advanced levels.

If you easily experience that, it's easy to be without thoughts. You attune to something slightly subtler, where normally the gross thoughts don't function. It's easier to settle the mind and develop a certain amount of calm abiding there.

On the sutra path, you need calm abiding to get a direct experience of emptiness. On the tantra path, to get the full experience would require the same thing, but you can have glimpses of that before. Because in tantra you use the mind of bliss and that mind naturally has less duality between subject and object. In Nyingma, they say you can have many glimpses of the path of seeing but they last just a second. E.g. you shout *phet*.

The non-affirming negation of mind is the same process as the I.

With the pure illusory body, you alternate meditating on emptiness and going back into the clear light mind. When you remain in clear light mind and illusory body, that is the state of Buddha, Vajradhara, enlightenment. The body turns into nirmanakaya, the mind into dharmakaya.

Once you have the experience of meaning clear light, it might take one or two meditation sessions, and then you have the pure illusory body. You go back into clear light and then you unify both.

Your physical body is still there until you die. They say it's like a hand inside the glove. Outside, people see the gross body, but you identify yourself with the light energy body within that gross body. And when you die, it's like your hand just slips out of the glove. You don't experience dying, though it appears that way to others. You simply go somewhere else. In certain traditions, they take the path of dissolving the whole body so there's only hair and nails left. They purify the four elements and then dissolve them. In other tantras, you leave with the subtle body and leave the gross body behind. Only "special" bodhisattvas can do that. You have to be on the path of seeing of tantra or above, but it's feasible and we should aim at it.

You cannot get shamatha without renunciation and ethics, purifying past negative karma, accumulating great merit. Once you have shamatha everything goes very fast. You meditate two three times on emptiness, and you realize emptiness. You meditate two three times on the deity, and you reach generation stage. Because with that stable mind, you can focus on anything effortlessly. With the right methods, you gain realizations quickly.

The method is there to reach enlightenment in one lifetime. It is still present and there are still living masters who have those realizations and can teach it. But it's very difficult to do in one lifetime. It needs good conditions. What is more realistic is to think that I

can do it at the time of death. You don't need any effort to experience the most subtle clear light mind of death. And you naturally have great concentration without the gross body and all its problems. So at the time of death, you can transform the clear light of death into dharmakaya. Lama Tsongkhapa did that.

When most yogis and yoginis reach the mind of clear light, their guru gives them permission to take a consort, because it is very difficult to bring all the winds into the heart chakra through meditation. With another spiritual partner at the same level, practicing together, due to sexual union, they can use that energy to bring the wind into the heart chakras. That's one way to reach enlightenment before death.

But in certain traditions, these beings are monks or nuns so they don't want to give a strange image to lay people of monks and nuns. So they wait until the time of death.

If we are trained during this life, at the time of death there's a great opportunity to become enlightened then. And, if not, to be born in a pure land. There in the pure land, we definitely become Buddha, our last life as an ordinary being. I think we could all aim for that. You can do it as a monk, nun, or layperson, even as a family person. We can aim at that.

If we have a good relationship with our spiritual teacher, good devotion, keep pure samaya, train in the three principal aspects of the path, train in the generation and completion stages, then there's genuine hope to make a great step forward in the clear light of death, to go to a pure land and reach enlightenment there. And if one doesn't manage to reach enlightenment there, then come back as human and within a few lifetimes we can reach enlightenment.

The view that enlightenment takes three countless great eons can make you lose your sense of urgency: "Let's add an eon, it doesn't matter!" Whereas, if you think enlightenment is possible rather quickly, it's encouraging, and it pushes you to put more effort as much as you can.

Sunday, May 5

Ten days have passed. At the beginning, the retreat feels very long. Yet soon it is over. It's a bit similar with this life. We live our life, and soon it is over. Just like we feel now at the end of our retreat, we will have to prepare for the transition for going out, exiting our life and preparing for the next one. That is, if we are fortunate to die peacefully. If we die in an accident, it just happens suddenly in the middle of our unfinished business. When someone dies suddenly, their relatives don't know how to settle things, where their bank accounts are. It's a headache for the people left behind to take care. We

think we are going to live a long time and there's no reason to prepare for our departure. Yet death can happen any moment. An accident can happen. And we die with attachments to things we want to finish which we take into the bardo. Attachment makes us come back.

And then if we die from cancer when we are old, sometimes we are taking morphine or other substances, so our mind is completely unclear. It's difficult to die with such an unclear mind, because we can't do prayers, aspirations, guru yoga. Our mind is just mush. The people around us try to remind us with prayers, mantras, etc. so that hopefully our last thought is a virtuous one. Some people, like my dad, die in their sleep. From a Western perspective, that's a good death: he didn't suffer. But in terms of trying to generate the last virtuous thought while dying, it's not so clear whether that's a good way to go. You go to sleep and instead of waking up the next morning, you end up in the clear light of death with no preparation.

Ribur Rinpoche gave a teaching at Land of Medicine Buddha about impermanence and death. Someone asked about powa: when do you know it's the right time to do it? Because too early is suicide. Rinpoche said, "Once you've tried all the methods to extend your life and nothing has worked." People were very excited to do this practice. But then Rinpoche said that it's very unlikely you will be able to do powa when you die. Most people don't die in good health. You die sick, but at that moment you are still breathing.

So, I think maybe the best practice while dying is tonglen, dying with a very virtuous mind of love and compassion. That will bring you to a good rebirth. To be able to do this at the time of death, you must have trained and be very familiar with the meditation before. You need a strong familiarity with love, compassion. At that moment, a lot of things break down in your body and mind, so it's difficult to meditate on love and compassion as you die. You try to fall asleep with love and compassion, but the mind is cloudy and it's difficult. And that's when you are in good health. You can imagine how hard it is if you're sick and in pain, and have difficulty breathing.

That's why it's good to be acquainted with these states of mind before. Then we can hopefully use them.

Om Hri Ya Dhe Sarwa Tathaagata Hridaya Garbhe

Dzola Dharma Dhatu Garbhe Sang Harana Aayu

Sang Shodaya Paapam Sarwa Tathaagata

Samendra Ushnikha Bimale Bishudhe Swaaha

Attracts the blessing of buddhas into us, stupas, statues etc. and purifies the negative karma of samaya broken with gurus.

First thing in the morning I recite a prayer on the graduated path by Dorje Chang Losang Jinpa.

930am

The best gift you can give to people is to share your spiritual practice. Young people go right into practice but don't study enough. Then, what they share is not rooted in the tradition, the lineage. Purify, accumulate merit, study. Those fortunate enough to live near a teacher really have it best. To have a close relationship with a teacher over many years is very precious, not just in receiving the teachings, but how the teacher manifests the teachings in behavior and personality. The basis of studying is really important. Of course, you can study extensively the five major treatises, or at least study the long lamrim, lamrim chenmo, Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand.

Later in life, you think, what can I offer as service to the dharma? If none of the new generation takes responsibility as teacher, the tradition dies out. Or support other people who do that, or support centers, study programs. The FPMT education program does a lot of work in making all these sadhanas, practices, teachings available. Now there's so much, you can't even read a tenth of what comes out. And there are so many teachers, so many programs. Good ones, in English.

When you study, don't just study for yourself, but to share with others. You are already thinking, how would I express this to others. Without a spiritual dimension, life doesn't have much purpose. Lama Zopa Rinpoche often says that an ordinary life is not much different from an animal's. We are just a little bit more sophisticated in the pleasures we cultivate, but our mind is not that different than an animal. So, having a spiritual dimension and being able to share that with others is wonderful. And that is the best way to repay our guru.

As you start getting the benefit of the teachings through your understanding and own experience, you realize how you were before you met the dharma, and everything that happened along the way. Your admiration and gratitude toward your teachers becomes greater and greater.

That's what I bring when I do my guru yoga. In retreat, I do Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga and Jorcho in the morning. With less time, I do the shorter one. I can always keep Lama

Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga. While reciting the mantra, I reflect on the qualities of the gurus, their kindness, seek their blessings, inspiration. It's my little time of being with my gurus. Even though outside, I look like I'm reciting the prayers, inside I think about Lama Zopa Rinpoche, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Geshe Tekchog, Ribur Rinpoche. I try to make requests and receive blessings. These are my spiritual ancestors.

The more you think about their qualities and kindness, the more it uplifts your mind. These qualities are mirrored and get awakened in your mind. In my meditation room, I have pictures of all my gurus: 38. I try to look at each one once a day, each one is a beautiful manifestation of enlightenment. I remember how we met, what teachings I received. Some people have a picture of their favorite football player, celebrities. These are my celebrities.

It's good to spend ten minutes to write down the benefit you got from the retreat. Bring that with you, and from time to time read it to recall the space of mind you were in during the retreat. And later, when you get completely overtaken with worldly concerns, you say, "Oh, maybe I should do a retreat again soon."

- The Abhidharma meditation on emptiness of self is to look for the self separate from the five aggregates, not finding him there.
- In calm abiding, setting the intention to focus makes your concentration stronger.
- The Prasangika notion of emptiness is merely labeled on a base, not cause and effect or parts. It is very subtle.
- In Mahamudra, you can meditate on the emptiness of the subject, the inherent I that isn't there in your meditation on the nature of mind.
- The special visualization with Lama Tsongkhapa guru yoga.
- Recalling all the great qualities of your teachers and what they have taught you unified with Lama Tsongkhapa in guru yoga.
- Dependent origination of the I and emptiness of the I are complementary: empty of existing inherently, merely labeled by the mind.
- The time of death is maybe our best chance to become enlightened, putting into practice what we train for in our sadhanas to realize the emptiness of the most subtle clear light mind.

- In the heart sutra meditation on “bodhi svahaa,” on the third repetition, exhale and stay in the nonconceptual state meditating on emptiness of the I. Then, as thoughts arise, see them as thoughts without the thinker. As the thinker arises, try to find it, see that it is merely labeled.

You think you finished the retreat. The real retreat starts now. Try as you make the transition to your everyday life to bring something from the retreat there. Bring a certain energy from the retreat with you.

One way to make the transition as smooth as possible is to move slowly. Don't be too busy too quickly. Give yourself a little bit of “me time” every day to reflect on your spiritual life. If you live with other people, go for a walk, or otherwise give yourself some time to be with yourself so you can digest and reconnect to your spiritual experience.

To bring the determination to be free into everyday life is to remember the transience of things. We are definitely going to die. We don't know when that's going to happen. Keep your awareness on the spiritual dimension of life. Remember often His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, your gurus.

In terms of bodhicitta, try to live with a good heart. You shouldn't be complacent thinking, I have enough love and compassion. It needs to be nourished and continue to grow until you become a Buddha. Even a tenth bhumi bodhisattva has less love and compassion than a Buddha. We have plenty of opportunities in daily life to train in that with the people we encounter. You can think of people very kindly, that they are like your dear mother: mother Trump, mother Putin; husband, child, parents. Even the ants. It's just a habit to take. Then, even when their behavior is outrageous, deep down you feel a connection to them.

Then, bring whatever understanding of dependent arising, emptiness into your life. For those of us who have highest yoga tantra, we have a commitment to remember emptiness six times a day. We have to meditate on that. For everyone, as often as we can, remember that things don't exist as they appear, objectively there, they are merely labeled by the mind. Especially the I, me. When it arises, you look at it. Instead of following what your inherent I says, you doubt a little bit and you look into it.

When you reach the bardo, your guru, the buddhas, and bodhisattvas will be there to take care of you. Don't stress about which pure land you aspire to.

Lama Yeshe used to say your guru devotion unfolds organically. As you have new gurus, their importance in your life changes. Your root guru can change. Root guru means first, the first one who opened the door to the next gurus that followed in your life; second,

the one that has the biggest impact on you now. That changes, and your guru will not be upset with you as their importance in your life shifts. It evolves naturally.

Reciting the *Stainless Light Mantra* results in people who just seeing you creating eons of benefit by your just having a loving, kind, caring expression. The King of Prayers was the aspiration for enlightenment by Samantabhadra in the Avatamsaka Sutra. Imagine that that is your aspiration as you read it.