

LAMA YESHE



The ENLIGHTENED
EXPERIENCE

COLLECTED TEACHINGS, VOLUME 3

Edited by Uldis Balodis

Compiled by Sandra Smith

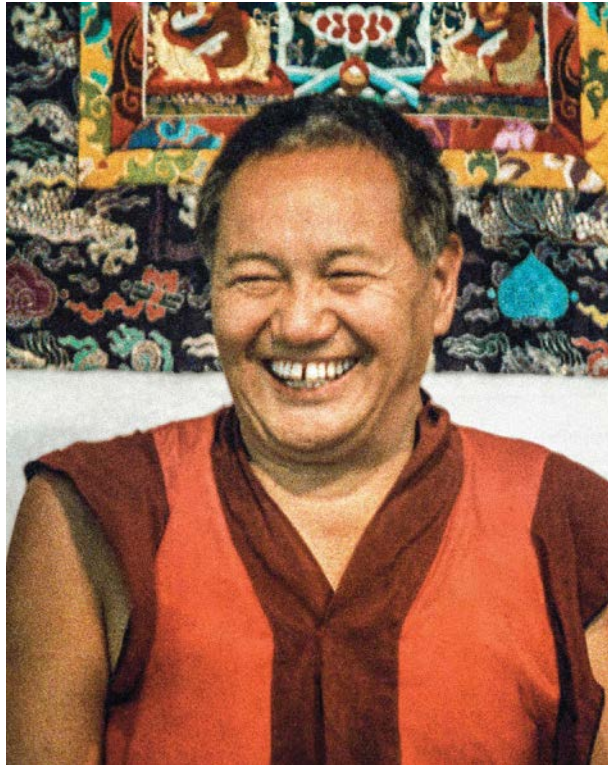
LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE

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May whomever sees, touches, reads, remembers, or talks or thinks about this book never be reborn in unfortunate circumstances, receive only rebirths in situations conducive to the perfect practice of Dharma, meet only perfectly qualified spiritual guides, quickly develop bodhicitta and immediately attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

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LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE

Bringing you the teachings of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche



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Editor's Preface

The transcripts were extensively edited to eliminate repetitions and to present the teachings in reasonably fluid English according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche's instructions. However, I attempted not to lose the characteristic qualities of the lamas' method of presentation entirely.

Due to incorrect hearing and interpretation there are without doubt many errors of meaning and the responsibility for these is borne solely by the editor. It is hoped that this book will bring inspiration and a deeper understanding of the Dharma to those who were unable to attend the course and those of us fortunate enough to share that month on Kopan Hill.

Finally, I wish to thank the many kind people, too numerous to mention, for their dedicated work of transcribing the manuscripts and for their suggestions and encouragement.

The merits created through the effort that has gone into this publication are dedicated for the long lives of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Tenzin Ösel Hita, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all Dharma gurus, their students and for the flourishing of all centers of study and practice. May every living being rapidly attain the sorrowless state.

Uldis Balodis
Den Nyi Ling retreat centre
Drusti, Latvia
July 2020

Introduction

Volume 3 of *The Enlightened Experience* features three discourses given by Lama Yeshe at the Sixteenth Kopan Meditation Course held at Kopan Monastery, Nepal, in November–December 1983. Lama Yeshe had arrived at Kopan just before the end of the meditation course and although he was very ill, he gave these teachings, along with a refuge ceremony and the bodhisattva vows.

In *Big Love: The Life and Teachings of Lama Yeshe*, author Adele Hulse writes: “The students were pretty tense after a month of contemplating their own negative minds, but after just a few words from Lama they began to glow with delight.” These were Lama’s last public teachings before his health suddenly deteriorated and he was rushed from Kopan to Delhi for treatment. Lama tragically passed away in March 1984, so these teachings have a special significance.

On December 8, 1983, Lama gave his first teaching, which is presented in this book as *Practicing Dharma in the West: Q&A with Lama Yeshe*. In this question-and-answer session, Lama offers essential advice to students on how to integrate Dharma when they return to the West. In response to a question about Christianity, Lama discusses the principles of loving kindness and compassion, which are fundamental to all religions. Lama continues with advice on relationships and explains in simple terms the meaning of Dharma, the importance of bodhicitta, the power of holy objects and the qualities of the Buddha.

The next discourse, on December 9, 1983, has the title *The Peaceful Path to Liberation*. In this extensive teaching Lama discusses the inner refuge which enables us to have a satisfied and happy life without depending on our external environment. He explains the meaning of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and gives an overview of the five lay precepts, the bodhisattva vows, equilibrium meditation and the tantric path. The teaching concludes with a refuge ceremony, in which Lama clarifies the correct motivation as well as the essential meaning and purpose of refuge.

In Lama Yeshe’s final discourse, on December 10, 1983, he teaches on bodhicitta, which he describes as a universal meditation that is especially suitable for Westerners. Lama urges students to change the attitude of self-cherishing into a determination to hold others dear and benefit them as much as possible. In the second part of this teaching, Lama discusses two ways of taking the bodhisattva vows according to our level of commitment and concludes with a motivation for taking the vows.

These teachings can be found on the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive website. The archive number for the teachings is 395. To access the teachings online, go to www.lamayeshe.com and search for the archive number using the [Search the Archive Database](#) link on the home page. A comprehensive [glossary of Buddhist terms](#) in this book can also be found on the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive website.

Please enjoy these precious teachings, which contain essential and practical advice for both new and old students. As Lama said, “Be wise. Treat yourself, your mind, sympathetically, with loving kindness. If you are gentle with yourself, you will become gentle with others.”

Sandra Smith
June 2020

Practicing Dharma in the West: Q&A with Lama Yeshe



*Lama Yeshe arriving at Kopan Monastery for final teaching, Nepal, 1983.
Photo by Wendy Finster.*

Lama: If you have any questions—and you should have—you are welcome to ask. We will try, OK. Thank you.

Dharma in Daily Life

Q: How do we practice Dharma in the West while working full-time and living in the city with many personal and professional commitments? How can we adapt the teachings of the Buddha and integrate them fully into daily life? In what can we take sincere refuge?

Lama: How to answer that? Now, first of all, what is Dharma? What is Buddhism all about? It looks like so many subjects, so many philosophies, so many meditations, so much psychology. You feel there are so many things going on in Buddhism.

Being really practical, do whatever you can according to your level. I think it's a gradual path to enlightenment, isn't it? I cannot say, "This is the way to do it." If I say, "This is the way it should be," it's a joke, it's not true. It is according to your life, according to your consciousness, your way of developing, your existence.

In Buddhism we say we are not suddenly born from our mama like a mushroom; we have a long history of many, many, many lifetimes. Each of us is different and we have different realizations according to our life experiences, our own consciousness or the way we have developed. Do you understand? We are all on different levels.

When we reach enlightenment, buddhahood, we will be at the same level—one universal consciousness—then there is no distinction between you and me, him and her. But at this moment, as long as we are tied up in dualistic, superficial concepts, worldly concepts, we cannot break out of where we are. We are suffocated, full of concepts, full of relative interpretations, full of relative mind. This is our suffocation. There are different degrees of suffocation, that's why each person should do what they can according to their own level.

In practical terms what Buddhism really teaches us is to have sympathetic loving kindness toward others and to ourselves too. The second thing Buddhism teaches us is about our ignorance: that we are repeatedly mistaken, repeatedly uncontrolled. It doesn't matter that we are intelligent, we are repeatedly mistaken, again and again. Sometimes we know something intellectually, but our intellectual understanding is not sufficient; it is just some kind of weak mind and weak life. That doesn't bring indestructible protection. It takes time. I don't know what I'm talking about!

Buddhism teaches two things: loving kindness for others, which eliminates self-cherishing concepts, and wisdom eliminating ignorant wrong conceptions in order to realize universal reality. I'm sure you've heard of *shunyata* or wisdom; this is the most important thing for human beings, for all of us. Without wisdom we are already mistaken, we can't see. Check out how our lifestyle has been. When we choose certain things for our life, sometimes they bring us satisfaction but many times they bring misery and dissatisfaction. So, from all these things we can see how we make mistakes too many times. We have already made mistakes up to now, we are making mistakes now, today, and we will make mistakes continuously. We will, we will; there's no choice! It's not something intellectual. It's just what we are, unfortunately.

We know intellectually that loving kindness and dedication for others is the only way to really bring satisfaction. We have no doubt, we know that. Maybe we have had some experience through the intellect. We can see that without having kindness for others, without dedication for others, there is no way to have satisfaction. It's the same thing for wisdom.

Wisdom also has many levels. I'm sure you have heard about this. We say "shunyata" but that is just a word. If I ask you people, if I interview each person, asking, "What is shunyata?"—if I pick one person each hour and ask this, everybody will have a different idea. Sometimes shunyata is something to do with experience; sometimes there are no words. Buddha said it is not words. It's true, the experience of real shunyata is without concepts, without interpretation—we totally lose dualistic concepts. Describing that experience without words is not possible, but when we use words we are not opened, we are full of concepts. That's typical; I'm sure all of you have also had some experience of shunyata, but when you describe it in words, somehow it doesn't come out exactly. I think it never, ever comes. No way!

The essence of Buddhism is true compassion, loving kindness for others, and gaining intensive awareness and wisdom—our totality nature. That is Buddhism's business. So, to do this business, to integrate this into society you don't need anything; you don't need to wear this robe. You don't need to actually say Tibetan words; you can do it in your own language. You don't need to do Tibetan-style prostrations; you can do Western prostrations. You can transform Tibetan prostrations into a Western way. What I mean is you don't need to do all those Tibetan rituals—the prostrations, the prayers, those things. In my opinion you don't need to do any of these at all.

What you should do is the essence: really learn true love and how to technically practice it, and how to practice true wisdom. Don't think about wisdom. Wisdom is awareness or comprehension and knowing what's going on in your mind. That's the only business—you should not worry about what's going on in other peoples' minds, your friends' minds. That's difficult. First you should concern yourself with what's going on in your own mind and try to know your own condition of consciousness; how to operate daily and how to go into the universal reality of your own consciousness. That's the way to integrate, I think.

You should not worry about rituals. Buddhism went to many different cultures—India, Tibet, China, Korea, Thailand and Burma. Everybody does it differently. Everybody makes different prostrations. Anyway, Buddha taught different prostrations to different disciples. It's never the same. So, as Buddhism goes to the West it is taking another shape, a Western shape. It's the only thing to do, so I don't think you should worry.

If you are thinking, "Only the words, the prayers and rituals of Tibetan Buddhism are true, and this is the only way I can practice, by using Tibetan Buddhism," then you cannot integrate it. For sure! So, I think your business is to take the essence, the real nucleus of Buddhism. Do you understand? Don't take something which you cannot understand, thinking, "This Himalayan mountain way is good." We are dealing with sea level! Sea level—always playing with fish, whales, swimming. We like to fish. Alright!

Buddhism teaches us how to develop loving kindness and I think this way may be the simplest. Buddhism does not merely say, "You should love everyone." Why should we have love? How do we generate this energy? We should do this meditation. Besides meditation, if we want to develop loving kindness there are a lot of things to do in the Western world, like helping poor people or sick people. In the West we have everything, and we have a complicated life. We should use our life to serve others and not just space out with thinking meditation. Act physically to help others as much as you can—that is your sadhana. I think that's all. I can't see any complication.

In the Western world, meditation is part of the international language now. I don't think that if you're not doing meditation, you're very bad. Meditation is not only sitting. Meditation is also thinking about something. For example, let's say you have to work until four or five o'clock and when you come back you are already tired, exhausted. So you come back and maybe lie down, then you think about that day—your work, how people reacted, how your mind worked, how many times you became angry, how many times disturbances happened. That's a kind of meditation, thinking, "Is it worthwhile or not?" I think that's good enough.

That's why Buddhism is really simple. That's why I say you don't need rituals. Maybe lying down is a ritual. I think so! It's really so simple. It's a very, very simple way without involving rituals or any kind of trip. Be yourself. Who can tell you, "Don't think!" Maybe your friend doesn't like you to lie down; maybe they want attention. Then, what to do? You can say, "Please give me a little time." That's what you have to do. You have to be open in that way. I think that's all; what else can I say? I think that's good enough.

For example, visualization may be the biggest problem for you—going back to the West and trying to visualize an Eastern Buddha. When you visualize Buddha your visualization becomes a Western visualization, don't you think? Yes! I tell you, it's my observation. Many Western students now study Tibetan painting. We teach Tibetan-style thangka painting but when students draw the Buddha they make it exactly Western. When Western artists paint

the Buddha, they can never make an Eastern face; they always make a Western-style face. It shows what is here, inside. Visualization is very important. Anyway, in the West we do have visualization. Look at television—that is visualization.

In the West everything is directed toward sensory pleasure. Normally visualization is grasping at objects, grasping uptight images. We identify with something about which we fantasize. We work on our self-image, showing our face this way, putting our hair this way. The face should be shown this way, not that old face! We have a fantasy. We can see how it works in the incredible Western fashions and those things. We can see how deluded people are. They're all doing something different, being happy or proud of their life and showing that, "I'm wonderful, beautiful, good." Alright, alright—but all this energy! The motivation, the energy, is unbelievable. My god, really! I'm scared of all this energy. They have so much suffering. They do! They are not really physically suffering but are mentally suffering so much.

We do have visualization. I'm sure you've heard that in Buddhism we have archetypal images of the enlightened state of realization—compassion, wisdom and power. Avalokiteshvara is the archetypal image of universal compassion. Manjushri is the archetypal image of universal wisdom and Vajrapani is universal power. These are the archetypes represented by the deities. I think in Tibet this was common sense. We have descriptions of what Avalokiteshvara is, what Manjushri is and what Vajrapani is, and we already have these three qualities now. We have Avalokiteshvara quality; we all have loving kindness to some extent. If somebody loves us, we try to love them, don't we? We do have love and we do have some wisdom—knowing how to take care of ourselves and how to be happy. We have this now. And we have some power, don't we? We have some power to move, to resist our miserable situation and to bring pleasurable things close to us. We make a good house, we eat good food, we try to look for good friends. That is our own power.

But the compassion we have is so limited, so limited. It's very, very narrow. For example, English people love the English and they like only English customs. They think the English are respectable and other nations are disasters. Anyway, to really love—to love our nation, to love other nations, to love African people—is so complicated. The problem is we can't see. We only see our image; we can't see that black people, African people, are the same as us. It's a problem. We have the distinctions of nation, color and religion.

When we become a Buddhist, I'm sure it's the same—we look down a little bit on Muslims or Hindus. It's almost impossible, I tell you. That's why I say it's completely to do with individual development, individual understanding. We all try, but whatever we try to do just becomes some kind of ego trip. Not totally an ego trip—we mean well—but there's always something sneakily coming. We try to meditate, thinking, "Buddhism is good," then suddenly we have distinctions and we think non-Buddhists are second class. It's unbelievable! Then because we are so discriminating, we have no love for Muslim people. Terrible, isn't it? Then we don't have love for Hindu people or we don't have love for Christian people. That's the way it is. It's so complicated. Our mind is so narrow.

We should definitely admit our false conceptions, our true experience, our discrimination, but we do not admit it. We think, "I'm alright, I'm good enough!" That's complete garbage! We do have compassion, but it's always limited. That's why having some kind of being, an archetypal image, is very powerful. We need some way to enhance our loving kindness into universal love. We're not ready for this totality; we need some kind of sublimation, some

kind of archetypal divine quality which does not bring the miserable reaction of discrimination.

Avalokiteshvara is not like a human being—he is our pure energy of loving kindness manifesting as radiant light.

This method is so powerful. Instead of going to have a haircut and paying—how much do you have to pay for a haircut? It must be twenty dollars in the West in order to have that image. If you emanate yourself everyday as Avalokiteshvara you can save your money. You are beautiful. Beauty is always there. Anyway, I am joking! I'm not going to tell you in a detailed way.

Normally we identify ourselves in a dualistic, deluded way, a wrong conception way. We make a bubble image of ourselves and we believe we are that bubble image, but it is a false image. In order to eliminate this false image, we can emanate as a deity. So, visualization is extremely powerful. You can see how Western visualization is so powerful. When you see something on television, you have no choice: you have to go and buy it, don't you? That is the power of visualization. So, visualization is very important. That's why, when you go back [to the West] you should put the Buddha's image in your room instead of a disaster image, instead of—what is it that young Eastern people like?

Q: Bruce Lee, kung fu.

Lama: This one! What is this one? Pictures everywhere! Even my boys keep this one. Instead of keeping these kinds of things to give us anger energy and nonsense, keep a buddha image. It is so peaceful; always looking very peaceful and compassionate. When we look at a buddha we can feel something. It's useful, because we are not yet beyond form and color. We are dependent on form and color, and that's why visualization is very useful. Alright, I don't want to talk too much.

Respect for Other Religions

Q: I have been brought up as a Christian, but I have unfortunately forgotten it. I would like to take refuge again in wisdom and compassion, and take the Chenrezig and Vajrasattva initiations, and do the retreats to purify and tame my mind and be able to go back to Christianity if I eventually feel like it. Is this possible?

Lama: Possible? Yes!

Q: Could I just add a bit more because another question is similar—about taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Does that imply one can't practice other religions?

Lama: No, that's wrong. You can. First you take refuge in loving kindness and wisdom. Anyway, if you're Christian, you have to take that. When you become Christian you don't take refuge in the sun and the moon, do you? Love is emphasized as a quality of God, isn't it? If you are Christian, you are taking refuge in love and wisdom. In Buddhism you are also taking that refuge, so it's no problem. Then, after that, when you see that the value of Christianity is great, you can go back to Christianity. You don't need Buddhism again. That's right! Definitely, absolutely!

Buddhism—I'll tell you our history. Many of our students come here with no religion. They have a bad feeling for Christianity but many times, after they have practiced Buddhism, they go back to it. They feel Christianity has much to offer, so they go back to their own religion. It's our own history. It's very worthwhile, so if you feel that, do it!

Christianity also has meditation; don't think Christianity has no meditation, but maybe for you, certain technical methods of Buddhism, such as the way to approach loving kindness, are suitable. You can go into the church and meditate instead of just singing songs. That is very good, very worthwhile. Then, concerning wisdom—it's very important. My observation is—maybe I'm wrong—that normally Christians do not emphasize wisdom but there is much emphasis on loving kindness. This is only my superficial observation of Christianity. Therefore, the wisdom aspect of Buddhism is very useful. For some reason Buddhism places a lot of emphasis on intensive awareness of our own conscious reality and I think this is unique. I think you can still keep those aspects while being a Christian. That doesn't break any vow.

Unfortunately, when we talk about religion or religious faith, we have to use concepts again—Christian concepts, Buddhist concepts. When we're dealing with concepts of philosophy, they sound very strange, don't they? It's a very strange way of thinking and the structure or framework of philosophy and religion confuses people. If I explain the confusion maybe you people will get angry. We and most religious people are confused. It's not that we want to be confused, but because we have limits, we can't see beyond the system or the structure of religion. We don't see beyond that and this is our problem.

When religious people learn their own philosophy and their own system, they feel comfortable, superficially comfortable, but I think this comfort is a wrong conception. This comfort is like a Nepalese family living in a comfortable house and thinking, "There's no more comfortable house in the world." That's not true, actually. They haven't seen American luxury houses, Western-style houses, therefore, they think they are right. They think that is the right way to live their life. Anyway, they're lucky if they think that way, aren't they? But even so, it's a wrong conception, isn't it? Even though it is purely a wrong conception, maybe it's right for them. This is only my observation, that religious people make some kind of comfortable house and they feel, "God is there, Jesus is there and the Holy Spirit is there," whereas Buddhists believe, "Buddha is there; this is my Buddha. This is the Tibetan buddha and the Tibetan buddha is the only buddha."

We make some kind of comfortable house—our spiritual house—and then we live inside that. When we leave our religious house and look at other things, we find them very strange. We feel scared or paranoid, and we don't understand and then it is too much; we have no tolerance. We are completely bound by our relative, limited concept of our own religious orientation, our own religious philosophical bondage, and we can't see beyond that. So, that's a good example for us.

When Tibetan Buddhism talks about—I don't know—about Tibetan buddhas or Tibetan thangkhas, for us it is very strange, isn't it? Don't you think it's strange? I agree! We almost cannot accept that there is a Tibetan buddha. There is no room for this idea. I think for us it is not possible that there is a Tibetan bodhisattva, and we think there is no Buddha, no Dharma. Or, when we accept Tibetan Buddhism, we think, "This is the only thing."

This is an extreme concept. First there is difficulty in accepting it, then having accepted it we think it is the only way. It is very difficult when we are so ignorant, because when we are a little bit open we have terrible misconceptions. What can I say? It's so complicated. It's silly and I can see some problems with that. So, when we accept any religion or any trip, we accept it somehow in a narrow way and then we have no room for other things.

For example, for Tibetan Buddhist people is there any Inji refuge object? They never draw Injis. And in the refuge tree, is there an Inji, a Westerner? There is no Westerner, unfortunately. Are there Japanese men? There are no Japanese men. Is there a Chinese buddha? Actually, there is no Chinese buddha, is there? There is no Korean buddha, there is no Ceylonese buddha. Now we're not sure. How can we say there is no Chinese buddha, no Japanese buddha? How can we say there is no English buddha or bodhisattva? Can we say that? How can we say there is no bodhisattva in the Christian religion? Can we say it? I cannot say it—maybe you can say it! Sure, in the Christian religion there must be bodhisattvas. In the Muslim religion there must be bodhisattvas. I truly believe this. In the Hindu religion there must be bodhisattvas, there must be buddhas. There must be. Can you see that or not?

Tibetan intellectual people have an exact answer, but [Christians] are going to say the first stage bodhisattva is not possible because their philosophy holds that there is a self-existent soul. As long as someone keeps the philosophy of a self-existent soul they have no room for realization of the universal understanding of shunyata. Have you heard this philosophy? Intellectual people are going to say “Pham!” They have an intellectual answer. Yes, but we cannot say that all Christians are philosophers. Can we say all Christians are philosophers? No, it's not true! All Buddhist people are not philosophers anyway, are they? I mean, generally speaking, for example, the Tibetan saint Milarepa was not an intellectual philosopher; he just meditated and passed completely through, cut through [delusion.] So, it can be that a Christian has no Christian philosophy. In the beginning they hold or learn it, but then they give it up, thinking, “This philosophy is too narrow.” Maybe they give it up and they are not concerned with philosophy and just go completely into some kind of universal love and compassion, or something like a Christian way of shunyata.

When we were in Spain with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we went to a Christian monastery where there are many monks. His Holiness asked somebody, “What is shunyata?” or “What is your point of view of shunyata?” A Christian monk answered, “Not having attachment is shunyata.” I was very impressed. From the Eastern philosophical point of view, it is the wrong answer. What is shunyata? It is non-attachment! Eastern philosophical people would think, “Oh, how foolish!” That's from a philosophical point of view or framework, but if we look beyond that, he did answer. If we are not concerned with words, he did answer. If somebody does not have attachment, that's incredible.

Without understanding shunyata there is no way to release attachment. Attachment is the concept which holds as dear our concrete concept of “I,” isn't it? This is the fundamental thing, and then comes grasping and attachment. I was very happy with the Christian monk's answer, “Non-attachment is the Christian view of shunyata.” I think that is wonderful; I was very happy. I'm sure you people don't think Christian people develop non-attachment. Do you people think that way? I think Christianity has unbelievable teachings, but very few are practicing it nowadays. Not so many people are practicing true Christianity. I don't think so.

So, what am I talking about? Now I have to make my point. I have talked about so many things and didn't make my point. My point is, when we accept one religious framework this can make us blocked if we can't see goodness in people of other religions. I think that is terrible; we destroy humanity. I think that is very bad, I tell you. At least Buddhism teaches respect for all human beings and all religions. All religions have good things. I think that is true.

Now I will tell you my opinion: in Buddhism's framework we have Christianity and Hinduism and so on. This is my thinking, my observation. In Buddhism's framework, in the Buddha's teaching, there is Christianity, there is Hinduism, there is Islam, there are all religions. I feel that way—it is true! Sometimes the Buddha teaches exactly in a Christian way and sometimes the Buddha teaches exactly in an Islamic way. That's why Buddhism has so many views. The Buddha himself said, "I taught that the self-existent soul exists." He taught something like a Christian point of view. Then at a certain point he taught that the self-existence of the soul is a completely wrong conception, that it is not possible and so on. He taught everything. We have the words in the sutras; we have everything to show you. Before the Buddha died, he said, "I kept so many things—wrong views, right views. I taught wrong views to lead these people to pure morality."

For example, suppose I give you people a meditation course and the first thing I say is, "Western philosophy and the way you people think is all wrong." If I tell you this at the very beginning of the meditation course, you are going to say, "Goodbye," aren't you? You are going to say, "That's not your business," aren't you? You are going to say, "You teach this way, but I thought you were going to teach loving kindness. You are going to teach us anger, so goodbye, we're leaving."

Well, the Buddha knows; it doesn't matter if the people have a completely wrong philosophy or wrong view, he teaches them. He makes their philosophy better and does not say that anything is wrong. He teaches other things that are beneficial for them, in order for them to grow. When they grow, then they can see that their own view is wrong, can't they? Like us; sometimes we hold wrong conceptions for a long time, but suddenly we get a realization, "Ah! Incredible! What kind of person am I to hold such terrible concepts?" We do have that kind of experience. I'm sure all of you have experienced that kind of thing and have grown in that way. So, the Buddha teaches many different kinds of teachings. He said, "Whatever I say is not necessarily true." He made an announcement. He doesn't want us to have devotion based on thinking, "Buddha said this, so I accept it," or to completely reject it because it is too dangerous. He said, "From whatever I told you, be aware of things that are suitable for you. If they are not suitable, give them up. My teachings are completely personal and unique. I teach each person in a different way, showing them a method for growth."

So, without making your own observation and taking responsibility, never accept anything. Buddha's announcement was completely clean clear. I'm sure that sometimes you think it is just like Christianity, don't you? Some people say lamrim is just like Christianity, whereas some people say Buddhism is not a religion. There are a lot of interpretations: Buddhism is this, Buddhism is that. The reason is that Buddhism has a religious aspect—like Christianity—and a philosophical aspect. So many subjects are contained in Buddhism. Buddhism is like having fish, chicken and everything! Everything can be contained in Buddhism.

When we look at Buddhism and it talks about heavy, negative subjects, it's almost similar to Christianity, isn't it? Heavy this way and that way! Except that Buddhism says we can get out. We can change our situation. That's the lucky thing, isn't it? Christianity says if we do something [evil] we are finished—we go [to hell] forever. That is different. So, that's why we shouldn't worry. Buddhism contains satisfaction—religious aspects, philosophical aspects and many different psychological aspects. We cannot say Buddhism is that or this.

Therefore, when we take refuge, we take refuge in the ten directions' buddhas and bodhisattvas. You've heard this? When we take refuge in the ten directions' buddhas and bodhisattvas, it means nothing is left out. A bodhisattva can be anywhere in the world. Therefore, in my opinion a bodhisattva can be Muslim; a bodhisattva can be Christian; a bodhisattva can be Hindu; a bodhisattva can be Judaist. Jewish is difficult, you know. My joke! Really, I believe all these people can be bodhisattvas. If we have enough room, if we open our hearts, those are refuge objects.

However, from the practical point of view, until we have some kind of loving kindness we cannot be a bodhisattva. It's not possible. Have you heard in Buddhism that the appearance of pure or impure objects is a reflection of our own mind? You have or have not heard this? Alright! In order to see something as pure, to see the selflessness of things outside, we must have something in our consciousness to project. Then we can see the outside as pure. This Buddhist way of thinking is very important. I think Western people should know this.

Western people expect to have a concrete bodhisattva outside. If they cannot prove that there is a bodhisattva, too bad! In the West there is so much materialistic expectation, and they want to see a bodhisattva as something outside, something solid, but that's not possible. Buddhism believes that when we have developed some qualities we can see bodhisattvas everywhere. Do you understand? When we don't have some qualities, we can't see bodhisattvas. When we don't have love, we can't see love in others. It is not possible. Therefore, it is important that first we try to generate the qualities ourselves, then taking refuge in the ten directions' bodhisattvas becomes meaningful.

Normally, taking refuge is quite difficult, isn't it? We can see how misconceptions start. It's the same thing in Christianity. Christians take refuge in Jesus; Catholics take refuge in Jesus. But the level of Jesus can be found in the Hindu religion, in the Muslim religion and in the Buddhist religion. But for Christians, if you are Hindu or Muslim it is the wrong path to God or whatever it is. So, what can I say? What can I say? Maybe not all Christians are thinking that way, but the human mind works that way, unfortunately.

I think that's enough. Is what I'm saying communicating? Alright. I want you to watch, to rethink, [to free] your limited mind. When we are religious people, we should be open, we should respect all humanity, we should rejoice in the Christian priests' teachings. I rejoice. Definitely I rejoice if a Christian priest teaches us. Instead of rejoicing, we have hatred. It's so sad!

...[If Buddhism helps us become] more respectful, more free from our own narrow mind, then I agree it is helpful for us. If Buddhism closes us more tightly, if it makes us more uptight, then it's better that we give up Buddhism. I think that's all.

Relationships and the Spiritual Path

Q: How do we turn a man-woman worldly relationship that inevitably involves a degree of attachment and self-cherishing into a spiritual thing?

Lama: Into a spiritual thing? What does that mean? Who is it? He never asks any questions, so I am surprised. Repeat it again.

Course Leader: I'll read it again. How to turn a man-woman worldly relationship that always inevitably involves attachment and self-cherishing into a spiritual thing? How to use this in the path?

Lama: Right! I think that also depends on understanding. Again, it's the same thing. My answer is always the same: it depends on their level of consciousness. It's true; it's always like that. When a man and woman come together, if the man has some kind of higher level of consciousness—if he has some kind of power to bring her to his level, or she has some higher level and she brings the man to a higher level—then it's a good thing. When a man and woman come together, if it's only a fantasy of physical sensation, then that's a wrong motivation at the beginning and it will end up as a disaster, won't it? That's its nature, unless some transformation happens—sometimes in the beginning it is only sensation and the motivation is only attachment, a negative vibration, but then when they come together, they can transform themselves. It's possible.

That's why, according to Tibetan tantra, both men and women—yogis and yoginis—find some kind of interesting consciousness level, the same level of consciousness. Then they work together spiritually and they are helpful to each other. Then, if the man is down or the woman is down, they don't bring the other person down. In Tibetan Buddhism there is a lot of conversation about that. However, try somehow, whatever you can do; then a man and woman coming together is something [worthwhile.] We all need to help each other in many different ways—psychologically, spiritually, materially. We all need each other, so being together as a couple should come from a sincere wish to help the other person, rather than taking advantage of them. I think that is the best way, a simple way to transform a couple's life. That's all.

A man and woman coming together is not only for beauty or the sensation; it's something deeper than that, to help each other grow. I think that way is very good. Anyway, it's nature, isn't it? Man helps woman, woman helps man—it's a natural thing. It's a kind of understandable, universal law. It's nothing to worry about; it's not unusual but something very usual. But in some way destructiveness is usual too. So, what can I say? Tibetan Buddhism never said that men and women being together is necessarily negative; it depends, doesn't it? You know, at a certain point a man and a woman coming together gives the yogi and yogini complete, total realization, it opens the chakra. Tibetan Buddhism has an explanation. We cannot say; we cannot judge. I think it is a completely individual thing, that's all. That's good enough, isn't it? Shall we finish? Are you tired? No? Let's go! I'm alright!

I think it is important that we do not look at a man and woman coming together as bad. It's not true. Again, that is a double delusion; we should not create this kind of atmosphere. A man and woman coming together is a natural thing and whether it's beneficial or not is completely individual. What can I say? We can judge with our own experience. I cannot

judge. So, we cannot project that it's good or bad—just better to leave it alone—let them go, whatever they want to do. That's the way it is.

Bodhicitta is the Real Essential

Q: Sometimes, in especially difficult situations, I feel the Dharma outside of me, more as a good concept that I agree with intellectually but it doesn't come from my heart. Especially, all these merit-collecting practices seem very foreign to me. How do I handle these feelings? Is it good to go on with the practice, to get used to it, or should I leave it if there's no feeling in the heart? And if I leave it, how do I collect merit?

Lama: This problem is a very common one. All religious people have this experience. I'm sure all Christians have this difficulty; all Muslims have this experience; all Buddhist people have this experience. It depends: if the mind is a psychological tornado, so much up and down, shaking the entire mandala of our conscious realm, at that moment it is very difficult. At that moment when we are completely a tornado, shaking, to bring wisdom and love is very difficult. It takes time. Allow space and time; don't push. All of us have this experience, so don't think this is only your problem.

And regarding the feeling "Dharma is not in my heart," sometimes it's true. How can Dharma be in our heart? Dharma is wisdom and intensive awareness of nature. We are polluted and full of fantasy, so having Dharma in the heart is a very difficult thing. Dharma concerns reality and intensive awareness of our own fundamental nature, doesn't it? If we are full of fantasy, it is very difficult. This problem is not only yours; everybody has that kind of problem. I think what you have to investigate is whether Dharma is in your heart or not. What kind of Dharma? When you feel you have Dharma in your heart, what is the Dharma in your heart? What kind of Dharma? Maybe red color Dharma or yellow color Dharma or chocolate color Dharma? We're not sure! Firstly, we're not sure about that question. Maybe Tibetan ritual Dharma, but ritual is not really Dharma, is it? A Dharma heart is understanding or comprehending something.

Then, regarding your question, "If Dharma is not in my heart, do I give up?" Well, what are you gaining? You are gaining being full of attachment, full of misconceptions. I'll tell you again, that is not understanding the real Dharma. In my opinion, if people say, "If I give up Dharma then I'll be happy," it means their Dharma must be something artificial, a suffocating structure. Do you understand? Dharma is an open heart. It makes you peaceful, it makes you happy, doesn't it?

What is Dharma? Come on! That is the question. "Dharma in your heart"—what do you mean by "Dharma"? When you give up Dharma, what do you gain? Do you mean you give up the philosophy of Dharma? Maybe you mean that. When you give up Dharma, it means you give up the philosophy of Dharma. If you have true Dharma, what do you give up? I am telling you, Dharma is part of your realization, part of your consciousness. Do you give up your consciousness? Do you cut your neck? My goodness!

I'll tell you one story. I have an American student who wanted to see some other guru. I'm not going to mention his name. During an interview, the student told me, "I wanted to see this guru and I requested an interview." Then he was asked, "Where do you come from?" He replied, "I'm Lama Yeshe's student," or something like that. He was told, "Ah, you are Gelugpa. If you want to see our guru, you must give up refuge in your guru." My student

was shocked and said, “If I give up refuge in my guru, I don’t exist! I don’t want to see your guru.” It’s a good answer, isn’t it? Actually, it is part of his existence, so if he gives up his existence he doesn’t need to see the other guru, does he?

So, the thing is, I want to know what you mean by giving up Dharma. I’m surprised! There’s no such thing as giving up Dharma, unfortunately. You can give up philosophy, you can give up ritual customs, but the concept of giving up Dharma is very strange, foreign.

Course leader: I think she meant the merit-collecting practices. She says, “Is it good to go on with the practices, the merit-collecting practices?”

Lama: Yes, yes, I’m coming to that! You’re right! So, what I mean is that giving up Dharma is very strange, very foreign. The Dharma is in your heart, so it is truly difficult [to give it up] and therefore it is better to practice collecting merit. Definitely, yes.

You should not worry, because merit is a proportion of energy. It is building up energy in your consciousness. Let’s say you want to go in the Olympic Games—you want to go, you want to go, you want to go, you want to go, you want to go. You think, “I will train, I want to do training,” and then you train for one month, two months, three months, four months, for years and years. You train every month. This is energy, and energy is merit. Similarly, you collect merit when you generate loving kindness for others, when you see the false conception of attachment. You generate merit with the pure thought having a dedicated attitude for others. You increase the energy; when collecting merit, you increase, increase, increase, increase. That’s all.

However, whether we are being positive or negative, each thought has a build-up of energy, either positive energy—merit—or negative energy. “Negative merits,” maybe! That’s all. It’s so simple. What you do mean by “merit”? What kind of merit? I want to know! Some concept of merit, or what?

Q: Positive energy.

Lama: Positive energy, that’s very good! You know, there’s no way you can give up positive energy. Now you’re stuck! Bodhicitta itself makes us so completely peaceful, so happy. The self-cherishing thought is like putting a sword or knife into our heart; our heart is really hurt, relatively and absolutely! But bodhicitta is something which makes us completely relaxed. I think bodhicitta is unbelievable; it’s the most important thing we can practice in our entire life. It makes us really happy and there’s no room for others to disturb us. Otherwise, everybody is our enemy. The opposite of bodhicitta is feeling that everybody is an enemy.

In the West, people sometimes think, “She is taking advantage; he is taking advantage; you are taking advantage.” People think that everybody takes advantage of them, but it’s not true. I know many people who think human beings take advantage of each other. Do you feel that way? I don’t know. It’s not true! Human beings have always been kind to each other, helping each other. Always. It’s our fundamental nature. So, bodhicitta helps us to relax even when we’re not meditating. Really, bodhicitta makes us content, satisfied. If somebody hits us, if somebody beats us, it’s still OK. If somebody’s criticizing us, it’s still OK. If somebody’s stealing our money, it’s still OK. If somebody does bad things to us, it’s still OK. The mind makes it OK; that’s all it is. And it’s the mind that makes it not OK, isn’t it?

So, I think bodhicitta is the best. In my opinion we all need bodhicitta, especially in Western society. If we have to integrate our practice into Western society's working life, I think bodhicitta is the best way. Bodhicitta is definitely the best way to integrate our practice. In Western society people have very strong, concrete relationships with each other, for example, "I'm working for you," or "You and me," becomes so concrete. You say, "I want you to do this," and I say, "Yes, I can do this much." Do you know what I mean? In the beginning we have to talk to make such an incredible relationship, therefore bodhicitta is really, really important.

For me it seems like bodhicitta is the real essential. Western people can easily help others, but when we try to teach them indestructible samadhi meditation it is very difficult, because Western life is not made for that, unfortunately. Of course, we still have time. But we can practice bodhicitta so easily; we can see other people suffering, we can see our boss suffering, we can see the workers suffering, we can see so much suffering. Oh, my goodness, Western people have so much suffering, so much conflict. I really have compassion when I go to America. Californian people are sweet, they're hardworking and physically they're comfortable, but in their mind they're going on an incredible trip. The more I stay, the more I have compassion for them. Really, they have so much suffering mentally. I don't know, maybe it's my projection, but I'm telling you my experience. I feel that those people have so much mental suffering.

So, in my opinion, bodhicitta is the best way. Bodhicitta makes our heart completely relaxed. In our life we have to deal with other peoples' difficulties, so this helps. When people give us problems but at the same time we can be satisfied and can help them, this comes from bodhicitta. We should have bodhicitta; it is the best!

Even in a man-woman relationship, bodhicitta is very useful. A man can see the woman is suffering or the woman can see her partner is suffering—when you can see that, how can you add more suffering? Normally in relationships people hurt each other, don't they? "I'm dissatisfied with him so I will hurt him." Or he hurts her because he's dissatisfied. Can you imagine? That's the way it is. All these relationships are a disaster because they are not getting enough. You definitely decide, "I'm not getting enough from him (or her)." That is selfish—completely, purely selfish. I think that is clean clear. You hurt your partner because you are dissatisfied, because you are not getting pleasure. "I'm not getting pleasure, so I'm leaving!" That's California style! It's easy, isn't it? It's very easy. "I'm leaving. I'm dissatisfied, I'm not happy, therefore I'm leaving." I think it's completely selfish; it's unbelievable! How can we always be happy with each other? We have so much garbage, so many trips inside.

How can I expect to always be happy with you? I cannot! I cannot guarantee that you people will be happy. It's true! Therefore, you should accept it: "How can my selfish mind think it's unfair this way? It's not true. I should be reasonable. It's natural that sometimes I get pleasure and sometimes I do not. I'm not happy but still I will try, and I will analyze what is wrong and why."

Anyway, I don't know what is going on; I don't know what I'm saying. Read on, I don't know what I'm saying!

The Power of Holy Objects

Q: Do the deities and holy objects possess an external power from their side, or is their power derived solely from the working of our mind? Is there an outside Buddha?

Lama: Yes, there is also outside power. When I sit this way and you look at me, you can see outside power, can't you? Then, when I wear nice hair like that, you can see some kind of power, can't you? The image itself has some kind of power. Definitely, yes. When I sit this way there's different power; when I sit that way, again there's different power. The different images in different positions make a different impact on your mind. It's true! Especially the way the Buddha is sitting always gives you a feeling of a middle way. You can see that the Buddha's face, the Buddha's eyes and Lama Tsongkhapa's face are always like this. My eyes are always like this. [Lama demonstrates with eyes wide open.] The Buddha's face and eyes looking like this are symbolic of his having reached beyond dualistic thought.

One way of looking is a symptom of dualistic conception. It's true, isn't it? If you are a psychologist, you can see what sickness people have and what is going on in their mind by looking into their eyes; you can see a vibration. In one way our twentieth century world is good and in one way it's bad. We are so sensitive, we can see people's faces and vibrations and we can see what's going on in their mind, can't we? Don't you think nowadays we check vibrations? It's true! Maybe in ancient times they didn't check vibrations. I definitely believe that the way we sit, the way we set up an image and the image itself has vibration and power; that's why I say if we put up our buddha image and look at his way of sitting and his body control, it's unbelievable.

In most Western cultures, number one is that we do not control our body energy. Do we control our body or not? We do not control our body; this is my observation. Our mind forgets our body. We cannot control our body because in the West we are so involved with sensations or feelings and we just let go with whatever feeling or sensation comes. All of life's decisions come from the sensations of the body. Do you disagree? I'm sure you disagree with me! The body is so delicate, it is the most important thing in our life. In the West it is everything: in the morning when we get up after sleep, everything is done for the body. To my wrong conception, my feeling, it seems like that, and I think the body is very much out of control.

The Buddha controls his body. I think definitely this position of control will automatically bring some change in us, to our hormones and structure of the nervous system. I definitely feel that way of sitting makes us a little bit more controlled. The sensation or feeling which is out of control will become more controlled and this helps to control the mind. Therefore, I think the Buddha's image itself has external power and a positive vibration.

Of course, you have to understand that the Buddha's qualities are not something external, they are something selfless and universal—loving kindness and bodhicitta. So, if somebody cuts the Buddha with a knife, piece by piece, and somebody else puts perfume, the Buddha has no discrimination. Remember when he was in Bodhgaya, when he became enlightened and somebody tried to harm him, he never paid any attention. If somebody gives him perfumes and nice things and love, he doesn't pay any attention. Buddha has that kind of understanding and inner realization, and he does not pay attention to all the sensations, good or bad. Whether somebody does something good or somebody does something bad, he doesn't care. Buddha gave up all this discrimination. For him it is the same, because he has equilibrium.

So, understanding the Buddha's image and putting it somewhere is so powerful, so powerful. It is a reminder and restores us when we've degenerated. It is true! In Tibet when we were degenerated, we went to a temple, to our favorite buddha; it gave us so much strength and energy. It's the same thing in a Western church—many people go to see Jesus Christ and they get so much powerful energy, or they see Mary and get a lot of energy from that image. So, the image itself has power, and when we understand the qualities of the Buddha we get more power. Does that answer your question?

One last question? Yes, it's five minutes before eleven; we can stop at eleven o'clock.

Q: I can understand how I could develop equanimity, love and compassion when someone is torturing me, but how should we train our mind to develop equanimity, love and compassion when we see someone torturing another person and we cannot stop it?

Course Leader: Do you understand?

Lama: Understand? Yes, I understand! Firstly, congratulations! Anyone who can have a feeling of equilibrium when somebody tortures you, completely congratulations! We rejoice and collect merit. It's true! That's why in Buddhism, merit collection is very important; we can just watch people doing things and enjoy it and rejoice, without doing anything. It's very powerful. We cannot stop other people doing things. What can I say? We just send our loving kindness energy to them. I think that's all. I think that so many bloody things are happening in the world. Like, for example, in Saudi Arabia a princess was persecuted by her grandfather, who said that she misbehaved because she had sexual contact with a non-religious person, therefore she was a bad example and he should kill her. So, she was killed. Many people in the world know about it and somebody made a film. What can we say? We cannot stop the Saudi Arabian government. Do you remember the movie? It was so sad, incredible; it broke my heart. She was a very beautiful girl and very kind-looking in the movie. Anyway, what can we say? This is a good example, isn't it? [\[1\]](#)

What is it we are talking about? Repeat the question. Oh, yes, it's clear!

So, what can we do? It's just karma, that's all. We can stop certain karmic things coming; we can change it if it's not already ripening. But karma which has already ripened, what to do—it just comes. If I become a monkey in my next life, then you people will say, "Oh, my lama has become a monkey! Oh, how awful; I wish I could help you!" Maybe you can give good food and say OM MANI PADME HUM, OM MANI PADME HUM, but you cannot suddenly change my body into a human body. Impossible, isn't it? That is the karma. You cannot change certain karma which has manifested, but you can change the karma which will be the future result.

Maybe we stop now. Tomorrow would you like to continue the question and answer, or would you like to choose one subject? You people have the choice. For me, I don't mind. I can continue question and answer, or I can give an introduction to refuge and precepts and bodhicitta. So, you have the choice. I don't care. Whatever you people feel. Thank you so much. We will do whatever is beneficial.

Thank you so much. Thank you so much. Now maybe we can do dedication.

Ge wa di yi ...

The Peaceful Path to Liberation



Lama Yeshe giving final teaching at Kopan Monastery, Nepal, 1983. Photo by Wendy Finster.

Today I'm supposed to give an introduction to taking refuge and the five precepts, and to bodhicitta and tantra. To demonstrate this in a clean-clear way and to do so completely is difficult in a short time. I'm sure most of you already know why and how, so I'll just explain a little bit briefly. I'll try, OK?

External Refuge and Inner Refuge

Taking refuge is actually very important. Anyway, we do take refuge—in food, clothes, friends and security. We try to be secure, to make life comfortable—this is taking refuge. Even mosquitoes and chicken take refuge. Refuge is not something new. I want you to know this clean-clearly. Even when we are babies we cry: “Ehhhhhhh! I want milk; I want milk, Mاما!” The baby doesn't say “milk,” but the “ehhhhhh,” cry is itself the asking for milk and saying, “I'm thirsty.” Everything that we try to do physically or mentally is an expression of trying to take refuge. That's why taking refuge is not a new thing. It's important to know that taking refuge is not something new; it's our trip. We do everything to try to make ourselves happy.

In an industrialized country we take everything—the minerals of the earth, everything—don't we? This is taking refuge. Those big companies digging for oil are taking refuge, aren't they? You know what I mean—to make a better world, they say. Maybe it's true to some extent. All of you appeared here like mushrooms, coming by plane. Maybe those companies worked hard and did research. Anyway, we mean well; everybody means well. We take refuge to make life better, more comfortable, richer or whatever.

I agree we human beings need comfort; I agree we need a peaceful and healthy body. There's no disagreement with the Western philosophy of having a healthy body; we agree. However, if we take refuge only in a healthy body and forget about a healthy mind, that is unfortunate, because we are forgetting the principal thing, or nucleus of life and we are just trying to do something unimportant, secondary. We should try to put effort into the important things. The Buddhist point of view is that the mind is the most important thing so that whether we are healthy or sick physically, our mind will be healthy and happy. The mind is the most important thing in order to have clarity and satisfaction, because the mind is what has the experience of misery or happiness. That's why taking refuge in a temporary object is alright; taking the right food and right medicine for our body is important.

We call some things an "ultimate refuge." This means taking refuge or comfort without depending on material objects, on substances or external energy—oil and petrol or whatever, or our friends, our wife or husband, our girlfriend or boyfriend. There's something inside us which somehow can deal with things and create mental satisfaction within ourselves. That is important. For example, you people come here to Kopan and your standard of life at Kopan is sort of third world. It's uncomfortable, you know, cold, no hot showers! I mean, it is something unusual for you; it's not your style. But you are trying something, checking up what's going on in Tibetan Buddhism, so your mind has decided, "I'm alright; I'm uncomfortable but that's alright. I am trying to check out what they're thinking, what they're doing." So you're still existent here, aren't you? That comes from the mind, not from the body. If your parents were to come for one day they couldn't stay here, I tell you! Except Philippe's mother. He pushes his mother too much. I was surprised this year: his mother's house in Geneva is super comfortable and she stayed here. I could not believe it!

So you see, taking refuge is something we can do in any situation—sometimes we are so tired, sometimes angry; you never know. You may have a check here, but the situation is that you cannot buy something, so you will be angry, won't you? In life we can never predict what will happen the next day. Life is something unpredictable: whether we will be alive tomorrow or dead tomorrow, who knows? We all have to go through sickness, don't we? Most people on this earth die from illness. Is it true or not? Yes, we do have to go through sickness. So, when we have physical sickness, if our mind is tranquil, peaceful and blissful, we are satisfied, there's no disaster. But if the mind doesn't have any refuge, any kind of technique to keep it clean clear and satisfied, then if the body is bananas already, the mind becomes bananas too!

Buddhism teaches that if the circumstances of the body are poor conditions, such as being a prisoner in a concentration camp or in any other kind of bad conditions, if the mind has refuge, strength and some way to utilize that moment, then we can use that time and energy to make life useful, satisfied, controlled and clean clear. We can definitely do that. That's important, isn't it? Physically not having good conditions—some sort of disaster—but mentally we can be content and satisfied. That is the difference between taking refuge inside and taking refuge only in external things. The difference is that when disasters or miserable conditions come, we can cope with the situation and still be clean clear. We can hold a clean-clear, satisfied and happy life inside the mind. That is the benefit of taking inner refuge.

This was my own experience: I was a young monk, a young boy, who was taken care of by all the family—the Tibetan family is very strong. In the monastery one old monk, my uncle—my father's brother—took care of me. My mother and my father took care of me and protected me in that way until I was twenty-five years old. When I was twenty-five years

old the Chinese came and somehow, I had to leave my life, that protected situation. I had never been educated about the world; I didn't know about the Western world. I only presumed that there must be some place where there's no China and they have some freedom, where my own spiritual growth could continue. I only knew that! So I said, "OK, I'm just going—at least there's spiritual freedom there. I'm going—I don't care where I'm going." Actually, I didn't know where I was going to.

So, they put us in some concentration camp. Somehow we could still cope with the concentration camp: the only thing left that could help was some kind of Dharma, "orientation thinking." That was the only thing which helped me. The rest—my comfort, my home, my Mama, my Papa, my uncle, who took care of me up until twenty-five—all disappeared. I never thought I needed clothes up until then because they gave me clothes—they were just there. Suddenly, when I was alone, I realized, "I need some clothes." Then I thought, "My parents were very kind."

However, what I'm saying is that we were alone, with nothing; we didn't even have prayer books. Normally monks used to have a lot of prayer books but I didn't have anything; I had one *bālgö* [2] with which I slept on the floor in the concentration camp. Then what was left over was whatever Dharma I had learned. That was helpful, really helpful. That explained why I had to leave my home and family. That was the only reason I adjusted to the concentration camp. This was my experience—there was no comfort when the dahl and rice came, it was unbelievable. The dahl that came was like *kaka*, you know, because it was not our style. When dahl and rice came it was incredibly painful. When we ate the dahl we got dysentery. I had dysentery for months and months. Sometimes I realized I would have to stop eating dahl. Anyway, you understand. Now I don't want to talk about my trip.

I'm not talking about higher realizations; I'm simply talking about a difficult time. What was really helpful was first of all, thinking, "It must be my karma." Secondly, the Tibetan people, all of us, have some common karmic connection and everybody has some kind of way in which we are contributing to each other, a reflection of karma. So, we have to experience some suffering. However, to adjust to this situation, Dharma was the only thing left that was helpful for me. I didn't cry at that time; I was just in a completely new situation. Nobody explained the new situation because I didn't know the language. The only explanation came from my little understanding of Dharma, and this preserved me. At least I didn't become crazy at that time. It's possible, isn't it? At that time many people became crazy and many people killed themselves because they couldn't understand. India was like a hot hell, completely, and they had lost everything—their wife, their husband—it was unbelievable! They couldn't cope and some people killed themselves. However, taking refuge in Dharma will help to bring us up and help us adjust our life in any kind of circumstances, any miserable situation. That is the way of taking refuge.

So, taking refuge is very useful. Why it's useful taking refuge inside is that then we do not depend so deliberately, with such intensive awareness, on that or this comfort, on that or this beautiful flower. We know exactly that this flower is an impermanent, transitory relationship. It's alright—it has some kind of energy, it's giving us help; but if we take refuge only in the flower, my goodness, it's crazy, isn't it? Completely crazy! Oh, what a crazy mind we have! I am just talking about a flower now, but we do have this crazy mind. We choose one object, and think, "Wonderful! Fantastic! This is my life. This is my refuge. This is my god. This is my Jesus. This is my everything." Something like that. When we have an exaggerated mind that is the beginning of trouble. When I say, "You are the Buddha, the

Dharma, you are Jesus, you are God,” you people think I’m crazy, “This monk is crazy!” So, we all have this similar crazy attitude. We do have it—check it out. This is what makes us miserable.

This kind of attitude of projecting and then starting a relationship with the external world always brings trouble because it’s not true. Even if we have this kind of relationship with the external guru or external environment, or external church or temple, it is completely wrong. It is not possible to take these with us all the time. Then we say, “This is my life.” This is the beginning of trouble and more trouble. So that is when we should take refuge clean-clearly and deliberately: “My relationship to the external world, well, it goes, it comes; it is not absolute. My destination, taking refuge, is something I need, that I can keep. But in a true sense when taking refuge, I’m never sure when and where I’m going in my life. Who knows?” Even though we say we control our life, we do not control it. I never expected that in my life I would be talking to you people. I just happen to be talking to you people and I just happened to come to India. I never planned, “I’m going because Tibet is going to be taken by China.” It just happened. I don’t even know why I have to talk to you; I’m just doing it. It’s true. I have to be honest, don’t I? I’m joking.

Life is never a certainty; even one night is never a certainty. When you are sleeping comfortably and are healthy, suddenly in the middle of the night asthma comes. It is my experience: I am sleeping very comfortably and I have an experience of asthma suddenly coming. You check your life: it’s something you have to deal with.

Without Inner Refuge, Western Life is Painful

What I’m saying is not only about dying, but in every situation of our life we have circumstances where we are up and down, up and down, and to really keep a happy and healthy condition we definitely need something inside—some understanding. Without understanding something inside it is very difficult, so miserable. I think it is very miserable, especially in the Western world. We have so much external comfort, yet it seems like our mind is more difficult, more sensitive, more dualistic, more superstitious, more deluded, than these simple country people. Simple country people don’t even know good chocolate, do they? They don’t know the twenty-one flavors of ice cream. We have so much, so we have conflict just choosing what ice cream to eat! Those conflicts come from the mind, not the body. There’s no question—Western people definitely need to take refuge. They need it desperately, I tell you.

Westerners suffer from loneliness, and relationships within Western society are without much connection. The connection is very artificial, a very—I don’t know—shunyata relationship. I think in one way I can maybe call them shunyata relationships because there is no relative connection with each other, is there? It’s very complicated! So that’s why we have such loneliness feelings. There are a lot of people who, even though they are working together, are still incredibly lonely—they are working together but the relationship is shunyata, so there is no warm communication to touch each other’s human heart. There’s nothing. It’s not that one is a bad person; it’s something in society’s structure, that’s all. It’s just the structure of karma, that’s all. It’s not that Western people are bad guys. Alright!

So, we have to deal with the Western situation. My point of view is that Western life without something of inner comfort, some inner refuge, is very painful; extremely painful. Maybe I’m deluded; this is only my opinion that it’s so painful. The Western life is dedicated so much,

from morning to evening, to hard work just for bread and butter, just for the existence of the body. My goodness! Working so hard, so dedicated; working for bread and butter and to eat well and make kaka and sleep. I'm sorry, I've made you angry now. I hope not. We work hard and make money and buy more bread and butter, and eat and make kaka and sleep, then we go and do it again! I'm putting this down a lot.

I think you have to check it out, don't you? In Buddhism I can say anything, it's my opinion, so you have to check it out; you have to analyze.

We are born and we get old—sixty, seventy, eighty years old—then what? What is left over? Our life is spent that way, that way, that way and that way, isn't it? With no inner strength, with no confidence, no satisfaction from what we did. If we didn't serve any other people, the result is that when we're old we say, "Wow! It's incredible—I came to this earth and I worked so hard to make money. Of course, I helped my wife or helped my husband. I gave them money and then I ate, I slept, I made kaka, but really, I didn't do so much in this world." The result is guilt.

Guilt is not something that comes from religion, you know. Guilt is feeling, "I should have done something better; I could have done something more, but at that time I didn't. At that time I had some opportunity, but I didn't. I didn't contribute much for others." And then, before dying we are so sad. It's just natural. I think it's so sad. And then, when we retire, we just wait for death, thinking, "Young people never look at me because I'm too ugly." Do you understand? In the West young people never like to look at old men or old ladies; they think they are terrifying. They think, "I'm going to become like that. Who wants it? I hope I die before I become like that!" Well!

Buddhism talks about reality: what is happening in reality; what is happening in life. Buddhism's only business is in what is happening in life—what is happening in my life, in my body and my mind. If we are really clever, if our mind is clean clear, we can see what will go on for the rest of our life; we can see something. It's not something we have to have mental telepathic powers for—we can see it with our present level of mind. "My mind is going this way, this way and this way, so I can see my life going this way and that way." We can predict it because of the karma of our existence. Don't you think it's painful, that kind of thing? It's very painful. Especially now, Western people are so sad; many are non-religious people. They're non-religious people. When they're old they don't have any sort of strength, they don't get resources from relatives or from anything, you know. They're just so scared, very scared. It's very sad, very sad.

In the Western world when you're old you're almost dead already! Let's say I'm your father: I'm old and useless, I cannot do anything. You are going, you have no time. Do you have time? If you are my daughter or my son, do you have time for me? Do you in the West have time for me? Answer the question—maybe the question's silly! I'm your father, a sick man, bananas! Do you have time for me? You can't have time! Some say they have time, but it's very difficult: you have obligations to your friends, you take care of your friends, so how can you have time for an old man? It's just difficult, very difficult. So, for the old man who is just waiting to die the reality is that he has no confidence that dying can be very happy; no confidence, no mental exercise—just misery, meditation on misery. Alright, I'm not going to talk too much. I'm not putting anyone down, but you check. Maybe I exaggerate sometimes, but this is my experience. I want to show some reality, that's why I express things like this.

My reality is that without happiness or without having the inner strength from taking refuge or something, I think we are very miserable. So, taking refuge is very important.

Why Take Refuge in Buddhadharma?

Then, the business of taking refuge—why take refuge in Buddhadharma? Buddha means “opened” in the Sanskrit language, totally opened. A mind that is totally opened, having universal understanding, embracing universal reality. You can say “opened”—you can call that buddha. Maybe you are already a buddha. It is only a word. Of course, we have a philosophic, scientific explanation of the meaning of buddha, but I’m talking about it in a simple way. Buddha means opened mind, rather than closed tight, or wrapped up in a confused way. That’s why the Buddhist point of view is that all of us have got problems; we have small thoughts, wrong conceptions, tightness, bondage, superstition. But we also have the capability to cut all these things and be totally open, to become a buddha. To unify with buddha is within our capacity; we do have buddha potential. That’s why you shouldn’t think buddha is something foreign, don’t think that way; buddha is completely developed method—great love, bodhicitta, whatever—and great wisdom. Then you become a buddha. That’s all; it’s very simple. Don’t think in terms of language, don’t think of buddha in that language; you can call buddha something in your own language. What would you call it? Maybe Mickey Mouse. When you become a buddha, you become Mickey Mouse. Or maybe I shouldn’t say that. Sorry!

So, you understand, language is a problem: we are so oriented to dualistic concepts. Whenever I say an Eastern word you pull a face. Language is terrible; language makes a double wall for you—somehow buddha means a completely developed human being; that is buddha. That’s all, that’s all.

Dharma is the wisdom, the way to become a buddha, the way to liberation. Liberation from what? From human problems, human conflict, ego problems, attachment problems, hatred problems, desire problems, ignorance problems—liberated from these. So, Dharma is the way to liberate yourself from the difficulty of the three poisons.

Sangha are those who help each other. Maybe you can say we are Sangha. We try—I mean well when I try to talk to you. I hope I can help you. Maybe I’m your Sangha. Alright! So Sangha is us helping each other, acting together for the graduated path to enlightenment. We try to help each other, we mean well. Anyone who helps you to become more clean clear, more realized, more satisfied—not superficial, worldly satisfaction, but some deeper satisfaction, more solid, more stable, more lasting—through wisdom and pure love, that kind of human being is Sangha. That can be a lady or gentleman, or anything. Sangha does not mean only those who have taken monk’s or nun’s vows—all of us are Sangha. Most of you Western people are couples, and a couple can be Sangha. A wife and husband can be Sangha, can really help each other—they can temporally help each other and ultimately help each other. We all need help for temporary adjustment in life, we need help emotionally and we need to give ultimate help to each other—we do need it, you know. We have emotions, so we need to somehow take care so we are emotionally stable, and we need to develop some kind of true great loving kindness and great wisdom.

Anyone around you who can do that is Sangha—that is your Sangha. That is not necessarily only a Buddhist. If you go back to a Christian priest and he helps your development of loving kindness and wisdom, he is also Sangha, even though he has a philosophically

different religion. But as long as he helps you practically, he's your Sangha. It's true! Why do we need a helper? It depends—we don't always need somebody who helps us to be right in front of us and we don't always need relative Sangha—but while we are beginners we need somebody's support, somebody's help. When we are developed and have total confidence, we don't need external Sangha or helpers; we don't need an external guru—we can go completely inside, totally inside, like Milarepa. That's a good example—Milarepa went alone into the mountains; he didn't have any friends. Similarly, you can stay in your society and have good friends, but you don't need “blah, blah,” friends.

You can see, in the West people desperately need a friend and yet the friend brings us down. What is really happening? Instead of being helpful to us, by being a friend they bring us down, make us irritated, increase our hatred and increase our agitation. That is not Sangha. “Sorry, I'm not helping you, you're not helping me; when I helped you, you hurt me,”—that's not right. You can say, “I have compassion for you but I can't help you; I'm sad, so goodbye,”—that's a little better. If you hurt other people, it's no good. Alright! So now you understand clean-clearly that taking refuge in Buddhadharma is so simple. You see, to take refuge in Buddhadharma you don't need to say one word of an Eastern language; you don't need to say one Western word—it's just a way of understanding and an experience, that's all. In Eastern countries, like Thailand or Tibet, people perform the taking of refuge; it's the custom. Buddhism went into the culture, so people come together and recite:

La ma la kyab su chi o
Sang gyä la kyab su chi o
Chö la kyab su chi o
Ge dñin la kyab su chi o

Taking refuge is definitely not some words. My opinion is—maybe I have the wrong conception—that it's not saying any words, but just shutting up this mouth, locking it. First, you shut up this one, the mouth, then secondly you shut or block your eyes; then this sense; then this sense; do you understand? You lock the five sense perceptions and stay in intensive awareness, that's all. I believe that's the best way of taking refuge. Do you understand? In Buddhist countries taking refuge is again sensation: *La ma la kyab su chi o, sang gyä la kyab su chi o*. Again sensation, isn't it? It's the same thing as in a church; church sometimes becomes sensational, like a dancing place or opera. Puja becomes like an opera, unfortunately. Western people sometimes like Tibetan rituals and they come to see an opera the same as they watch in the West. It's as if they're watching gorillas or monkeys—Tibetan monks like monkeys!

In the true sense, when taking refuge, actually it is better to shut up this one, you know. But, of course, sometimes strong words help mental contemplation. We can do both; there are many different ways we can do it, but only words—“Blah, blah,”—is not taking refuge. What I'm saying is that “Buddha, Dharma, la, la, la ...” is not taking refuge. The mind ... something, mind ... something, something, something—I didn't say anything, did I? Do you understand what “mind something” means? Oh my God! My language is only half, half, half! Do you know what I'm saying?

The mind is somehow confident because of having utilized your skill to put it into a clean-clear state, an intense awareness state. You have the ability to develop; you have the mental skill to bring your mind to such a tranquil, peaceful level. I think that's all. Is that clear or

not? I think that's the way to be liberated. So simple, isn't it? You have method, you have wisdom, you are capable. That's all.

If you think, "I cannot, I cannot. Buddha can do it, somebody else can do it,"—that's garbage! That thinking is weak; then there's no strength. You can do it; I can do it. It's true. Then you have confidence in the external Buddha and confidence in the internal Buddha; confidence in the outer Dharma and inner Dharma; in the inner Sangha and outer Sangha. That is the way to take refuge. In my opinion it is like some kind of realization. In my opinion, taking refuge is not something just like, "I'm hopeless, so Buddha help me, Dharma help me, Sangha help me!" It doesn't work. "I'm miserable, so Buddha help me, Dharma help me." I don't think so. Somehow, for me, that is difficult. I won't accept that, unfortunately—I must be a bad guy, you know!

That's why I say taking refuge is some experience, some kind of realization. Many people misunderstand; they say, "I'm hopeless, so this is my protection. I get many problems, I am so much out of control, so I take refuge." Maybe it's OK, I don't know! Maybe it's alright, but taking refuge is something inside, it's your experience, something very worthwhile, your realization, something pure, something very worthwhile. "Because I've had a certain experience already, I can go on in this way continuously. Keeping clean-clear conditions within my consciousness is the only way to liberate myself." This is the way to take refuge.

It's very simple: no rituals, no dorje and bell. You can take refuge in an airplane—you do take refuge there, don't you? Sure! Definitely! Who knows when you may take refuge; perhaps they may suddenly say, "Oh, ladies and gentlemen, now our engine is going." Who knows? Who knows? So, you take refuge. As long as there is engine power, as long as our mind is clean clear, who cares? Who cares? Come, come, go, go—that's all you know. What you can do is keep your inner mandala clean clear, OK? It's so simple. I think I'm not going to talk so much about taking refuge; that's enough. Time is running out. Buddha, Dharma, Sangha—then what else? Is that enough for you people? Alright!

That's good; otherwise there can be so many subjects about taking refuge—how and why? The qualities of a buddha: great compassion and limitless love, limitless wisdom and limitless power. You know these things from Rinpoche's teachings; if I explain these things it becomes too much.

We also have explanations about true Sangha, remember? The ultimate Sangha are those who have the cessation of samsaric sufferings; we call them aryas to distinguish them from ordinary beings. The absolute Sangha have clean-clear understanding of shunyata. Practical Sangha is anyone who really brings you up and makes you clean clear, who brings you satisfaction and happiness. That is why we have so much explanation in a scientific or philosophic way about how they have cut this and this, but that takes too much time. OK, that's enough.

Five Lay Precepts

1. Abstaining from killing

Precepts are very important actually. Let's say we talk, like last time, about collecting merits. You do not kill other people but you may ask, "Why should I take a vow not to kill other people?" It's different when you understand the situation and decide, "I don't want to kill

anybody. I will never kill any sentient being, any human being.” When you make that decision about any human being, about universal human beings, you get some kind of growth, some sort of energy. For example, if you say, “I will never kill my relatives or my friends, but those who are not my friends I’m never sure,” you make it limited, but when you say, “I will never kill; it doesn’t matter what nation—East, West, African or any people, without discrimination color-wise—I will never kill any human being,” you get merit according to the number of people in the world. So in your mind the object of not killing that you embrace is all international, universal people.

Also, if the situation comes there is no hesitation. Let’s say we have made a strong determination and then one African man tries to harm us, we have no hesitation about whether we should kill this African man or not. We have already decided we should never kill this African man, haven’t we? We have already made the determination, “I shall not kill anybody,” so when the situation comes there’s no hesitation. That’s why it’s very useful to take a vow to not kill any human being. I tell you, it’s such good merit. When we are determined, the merit is strong, and also loving kindness for others increases in each moment. Not killing is not something we are joking about; we are putting ourselves into the situation of others’ space, aren’t we? “I don’t want to be killed, so why should I kill other people?” So, I think it’s very useful for developing love and compassion.

You people should be the number one example for peacekeeping, shouldn’t you? Don’t you think you should be a good example, the number one example, for keeping peace in the world? Yes, I think definitely, definitely. You should decide, you know.

We are not going “blah, blah, blah, blah.” We will definitely be a good example by not killing anybody on this earth. We have enough understanding so we should make the determination. I was surprised when I gave lectures at Berkeley and Santa Cruz University. There were a hundred people there and my lecture was on “The Nuclear Age and Buddhism” or something like that. I explained how many miles of damage there would be physically and then how much damage from the vibration if they [bomb] San Francisco. After this we were talking and I asked, “How many of you people have a determination to not kill anybody?” I asked them to raise their hands. Most of the people did. They were just people who came, university-style people, not all meditators, and they all said that. I was so emotional: wonderful, isn’t it? American life is not an easy life; American life is a distracted life, so these people saying, “I will never kill,” was incredible. I was just so happy.

Even if we ask Eastern people directly, “Will you ever kill anybody in your life?” they are going to say, “Well, something” They make rationalizations, you know. It’s not easy; I was very happy that all these Berkeley people and Santa Cruz people said, “I will never kill anyone in my life.” I couldn’t imagine those people saying that—American life is not easy. Is it easy or not? In some ways easy, yes, but in some ways not killing is not easy. It’s very difficult, that’s why we should as much as possible be determined to keep peace by living in the vow to not kill other human beings, otherwise we are worthless. I think that’s the main point.

On this earth now so many people are killing with selfish motivation. To kill a human being is not a big deal now. You don’t need, what is it? A gun without sound—they have bullets without sound, have you heard? Guns without sound—my goodness!

Q: It’s called a silencer.

Lama: How do they make it? It's too much! It was in the newspaper—some embassy person or someone was killed by a bullet without sound. It's too much, you know! And then we don't need a gun—we just need some small poison, some smell. There are so many ways to kill people now.

This is my advice about what you should do: number one, be a good example for peacekeeping. Don't think you are not capable—you are capable. Not killing is practicing loving kindness. Even if somebody else has killed and we rejoice, that is terrible, again that is negative. For example, maybe she said something “blah, blah,” criticizing, and then he killed her and we heard about it and thought, “Oh really, he killed her—good!” Then we get the merit of killing.

Killing is not only done directly, but also indirectly—I can order someone else to do it. That is very dangerous. So, taking a vow to not kill is extremely important. Those presidents of big countries send out armies—they just sit there and do nothing, but they kill because they gave orders to kill. Then, of course, some Western people are very sensitive: “I'm taking a vow to not kill any sentient beings, so how can I walk?” When walking we kill—we kill ants. Even if I wave my arm like this I can kill because in space there are so many animals, sentient beings. And when we drink water, we kill. Anyway, there is no choice, so what to do? Without killing, drinking tea is not possible.

You people think in Buddhism we don't have science: we have science that Buddha taught about 2,500 years ago. We talk about the science of water; what is in the water. What we have to do is analyze as much as we can and then use it—that's all we can do. But certain animals, insects, in the water are invisible. Then we just have to give up, don't we? Normally in monasteries we have to use these cloth strainers before drinking the water. But still there are insects—I saw them. So what to do? In those instances, we do not deliberately kill so there's no breaking of the vow. If we kill deliberately with motivation, that is breaking the vow. Some things are not possible without killing. What can I say?

Now you can decide your way of not killing, “I will never kill any human being,” or “I will never kill any female,” or “I will never kill any man,”—it's still good enough! Even that kind of understanding is good enough, or you can decide, “I will never kill any living being deliberately.” This is the condition—“I will never kill deliberately with intense awareness.” That's good enough.

I know that when you travel along a highway in the summertime many insects are killed. Unbelievable, isn't it? When I came from Europe to Delhi, I was completely shocked at Delhi airport—oh, my goodness, it was incredible, full of these big animals! What is their name? I don't know the name. Beginning from customs, the entire area was completely, totally filled. You could not walk without killing so many. Really! What to do? I mean, international people were arriving at the airport and they had to pick up their luggage, but there was no choice—there was no place to walk because it was so full of animals. That was their karma. So, we shouldn't worry about those kinds of things. When we're driving a car, we are not thinking to kill—they are just there.

2. Abstaining from false speech

Then, not lying. Lying is by motivation—all these are by motivation. In Buddhism the characteristic of lying is to change other people's reality—to show a false reality. Lying is

creating a double delusion for other people. Are we communicating or not? Lying is not just joking about things; lying is done with a seriously selfish purpose. What can it be? The selfish purpose of getting materials, getting clothes, getting food, getting money, getting reputation, gaining something for ourselves and wanting to change other people's minds. Are we communicating? Alright! That's all.

Lying is not just words; it needs the false motivation to change other people's will. That's terrible, isn't it? It should be a selfish purpose; if the purpose is to benefit mother sentient beings—other people—we don't call it lying. Westerners call it lying. From Western society's point of view if we say something different it is a lie. Do you understand? But from the point of view of ethics, Vinaya, Buddhist psychology, if, let's say, New York was going to be destroyed by a nuclear missile or something and we lied in order to protect the New York people, that would not be a lie. That doesn't have the negative connotation of lying. That's positive; that's compassion; that's love. Are we communicating or not?

Western people think, "Oh you, lied! Look, you did know!" It's not bad; it's a good lie, isn't it? It's positive—it's Dharma, it's wisdom. Lying has an incredible explanation because we are so sneaky. Especially in the Vinaya we have explanations for monks and nuns: lying is dangerous, like if we don't have any kind of knowledge yet we try to show that we have that kind of knowledge by giving a false appearance. Are we communicating or not? We show "I'm a very high man" by false appearance. This is the most dangerous lie—cheating other people. We say that's the worst lie. We call it *mi chog la me dṣün* [3]—it's a kind of unsurpassed lie. If we don't have higher realizations yet show a false image of being a very high person, that is cheating. Those kinds of things are lies.

Maybe that's good enough about lying. My main point here is that lying is to do with a bad motivation—to change other people's reality. To give a false, wrong conception is very dangerous. Other people have enough confusion already, enough ignorance already, and then we put more ignorance on them. Lying is not just a joke; it's a very serious thing. We should be aware.

3. Abstaining from stealing

Then, stealing. Stealing may be direct or indirect. Stealing is again to do with motivation. The most important thing in Buddhism is motivation. For example, maybe I take your pen from you—normally we take pens from each other just unconsciously, don't we? I think I do, and other people take my pens too! I don't say they're stealing from me; like when we are working together. Stealing has to be deliberate. Mostly the motivation is selfishness, attachment or hatred. I think many young people have hatred for rich people, feeling that they don't really need their money or whatever. Young people say, "These rich people have too much, so I will take it and give it to poor people." That is also some jealousy. If it's pure motivation it may be OK—I cannot say it's not OK. Rich people don't even know how much they have. But if [the person taking from the rich] does it with a motivation of hatred it is wrong. We should never have hatred for rich people.

We should never have hatred for Ronald Reagan. [4] Come on—never! As long as we have hatred for Reagan that's our problem isn't it, not Reagan's problem. We are making ourselves unhappy by being angry with him. It's not worth it. It's better if we just pray for him, "Poor man, so much obligation. Some are pulling him this way, some are pulling that way, and he is just in the middle, confused." That's my feeling—he has no choice. In many

of Reagan's decisions he has no choice. He's just an object of compassion. It's true! Most politicians have no choice, but American people think they do have a choice and they blame Reagan, saying, "He has the choice. He made this decision and it's wrong." They don't understand the notion of interdependence. Somebody else often controls his power, so it's a waste of our time if we're angry with him. Why? What are we gaining? We're not gaining anything. So just love him and say, "Poor man."

What am I talking about? Stealing. Then, any problems with stealing?

What I'm saying is, the way we take has to be deliberate. Taking unconsciously is not wrong. Unconsciously we can do anything. I will give you an example: what about a mad monk? A mad monk who kills, who has no control. A mad monk who breaks everything due to some mental disorder. Sometimes in the monastery monks become mentally disordered, completely disordered, crazy. According to the Vinaya, we consider that they are not breaking vows. They aren't conscious, they don't have control, they don't know what they are doing.

Also, dreaming that we are stealing is OK; we are not breaking the vow. Are we communicating or not? If the wish to steal comes suddenly we are not breaking the vow because it is mental speculation; it has to be physical in order to break the vow. OK, clear? Stealing is also something technical, isn't it?

Suppose last year I borrowed something from another person—"Please lend me this cup, it's so nice for drinking my jasmine tea." Then I become so happy with this and develop attachment and I think, "I wish Annabel would forget about this; I hope she never comes back to Kopan, so I don't have to return it." This is stealing. When I reach a certain point of thinking, "Oh, she has completely forgotten so now this belongs to me," it is completely stealing. So, stealing is very much to do with a sneaky mind; the mind is sneaky, therefore stealing is also very subtle. Or, for example, in the Vinaya it is explained that if you go on a bus or train and don't pay according to that country's law, then you are stealing. It is explained very clearly. Of course, if you don't have money, that is something else, I think.

4. Abstaining from sexual misconduct

We have some understanding of sexual misconduct. Misconduct means, for example, if you are married to somebody and you have verbally said, "We are together; we will live together; we are partners and will never ever take any other partner,"—if that's understood with clear determination inside and then you go with another lady or gentleman, you have broken your agreement. This is sexual misconduct. In marriage a couple make a vow to each other, they understand it to be that way. So, when you break the vow, that is dangerous. Most couples make a disaster with each other because they do that, don't they? Then they distrust each other and so much conflict comes. If you don't trust your partner, that's terrible, isn't it? You live together in the house and don't trust each other: "I'm very uncomfortable, I'm not going to live for one hour with that kind of person." It's very difficult, isn't it? You make a disaster out of your situation, that's why it's no good.

The Vinaya rule is that you can change. Buddha said that when the country's customs change, the conditions change, the delusions change or the motivation changes, then the rule changes—whatever is the opposite, whatever is necessary, whatever mind is good or bad also changes at that moment. Are we communicating or not? If the culture changes, the

mind changes, delusions change, motivation changes, behavior changes. Maybe one thousand years ago some behaviors were considered negative but then the mind changed and the culture changed and now maybe it's positive. Buddha said to then change. What was considered to be negative mind before can possibly become positive now. Are we communicating or not?

I will make an example: earlier the British sent their criminals to Australia. Do you know that history? A long time ago Australia was an empty place [5] so the British sent their criminals there. Last year in Australia they found some documents about a woman who stole one piece of bread or one piece of butter, such a small thing, and they sent her to Australia. It's documented there, the paper is there. Do you know, Wendy? You don't know? Wow! Can you imagine? At that time the British people were incredible, weren't they? At that time the British were conservative and very ethical people—some lady stole one piece of butter and they said, "Oh, you're a criminal." But now the British people don't think that someone who steals a piece of bread or piece of butter is a criminal; I don't think so. It's a different culture now.

Have you heard something like that or not? It's a completely new culture, isn't it? It almost seems that something like that is coming into the world now. So what is the big deal? If the couple say, "OK, whatever you want to do you can do, as long as you come home," or if the man says, "Whatever you want to do, you can do. It's OK, it's fine," then what is wrong? It's completely clean clear, isn't it? It's the mind that's the problem, not the body. If you have said it and it's clean clear, then what is the problem? Then that is not sexual misconduct. Are we communicating? The situation has changed. It's possible; who can say? The human mind is incredible and changes. Now men know what women are going to do; men are not stupid. And women also know what men are going to do, anyway. So they somehow say OK, you know. The culture is changing, so the connotation of sexual misconduct can change.

We also have different interpretations of this vow in the Vinaya. For example, have you heard that at new or full moon times it is considered that merits are multiplied one hundred times? So, if you do a negative action it also becomes multiplied a hundred times. Therefore, according to the interpretation of the Vinaya, even if you do it with your wife, on the full moon it becomes sexual misconduct, something like that. It's only an interpretation. But there is this interpretation, so I don't want you to be confused. You shouldn't worry about that; whatever you feel is a problem is good enough. If you feel something is a problem, "I shouldn't do it because I get out of control,"—it's clean clear. Anyway, don't create a disaster situation. It's simple, isn't it? If you want a happy home with your husband or wife, a warm home, a comfortable, peaceful home, a satisfied home, don't create problems, that's all. The conclusion is: don't create any kind of disaster situation where you distrust each other; it's no good. It depends; only you know, I don't know.

5. Abstaining from intoxicants

Then, intoxicants. Intoxicants can be anything—drinking wine or alcohol, or it can be heavy drugs. I don't know what kinds of drugs make you unconscious. You should not take any kind of drug that makes you unconscious unless it's for medical purposes. For medical purposes it's alright. Also, if taking the drug does not damage intense awareness, then it's OK; you can take as much as possible! I think you know hashish, yes? Does hashish damage your consciousness or not?

Q: It depends on how much you take.

Lama: That's right, isn't it? Taking a little bit is OK; it causes some kind of waking up, some intense awareness. Possible! Maybe! Some drugs can help intense awareness. For example, Tibetan monks who studied very hard would drink very heavy, strong Tibetan tea. I did it myself when I was in Tibet. If I drink strong Tibetan tea, really strong butter tea, I can stay awake all night and I can study, I can read. I believe that is kind-of being intoxicated, isn't it? You are very much awake and don't want to sleep, so you read and you think very clean-clearly. So that's why I cannot criticize or say taking drugs is bad. How can you say that? Very strong tea is like a drug, isn't it? When you drink strong Tibetan tea and you don't eat well, you shake, because there is too much of a wind explosion in the blood—you are almost walking in space! It's our experience.

I'm sure most Tibetans who were doing very heavy studies in Tibet all liked heavy, heavy, strong tea. Some monks were addicted to tea, I'm sure. Yes, I saw it! I could not believe it—they didn't really care about food but they had to have their tea. That's very bad. Their faces became so dark and like pig skin. They didn't eat; all they did was drink their tea. We've got our problems. Even though those people were extremely learned, extremely knowledgeable, they became like that.

In 1978 or something, when I was at Santa Cruz University I went down to the beach and there were two young couples and their parents there. They came together and took hashish together—young children and old parents came together and took hashish. They were very happy with each other, you know. Very nice, isn't it? Very open—young son and old father taking hashish together by the ocean. They laughed with each other—it was very nice. Maybe it's California style. It's so simple, isn't it? That's the way it is.

The emphasis in Buddhism is to not become intoxicated because being intoxicated is very dangerous, for example, when you are drinking wine you could break every [vow.] Many monks break their vows because they drink. When you drink, your good knowledge-wisdom goes, doesn't it? But desire is there, hatred is there, everything's there. Everything is there; the body is there. That's why intoxicants break vows: first thing, you can have sexual contact unconsciously; maybe you steal ladies and gentlemen from their partners. Then you come home and you lie. So the one action of drinking leads to doing the five things together. It's dangerous because you get out of control, with no awareness. That's all the precepts are.

The way of taking precepts is that you can take five, you can take one, you can take two, you can take three; you can take them for one day or one month, one year or your lifetime, whatever you want; it's up to you completely. But it should be clean-clearly understood that there is no pressure. If you're not clean clear, there's no need to take them—there's no pressure. I'm not pushing you; but my responsibility is to make it clean clear for you so that when you take them, we are not hypnotizing you—do you know what I mean? We are not pushing you—you are clean clear to make your own decision. In Buddhism we believe that your own decision is the best. We don't say anything; we just make it clean clear. That is our duty, if we can.

Then what? Next, bodhisattva vows.

The Bodhisattva Vows

There are two ways of taking the bodhisattva vows. The first is the wishful way. Here we are completely sure, without the slightest doubt, that the only way to live is with bodhicitta; that the selfish way we have lived so far is only painful and dominated by the paranoia that others are always trying to take advantage of us. This is not true. Everything we have has come through the kindness of others. We were born with nothing; all our food, clothes and other possessions have been given to us by other people. At least, this is what we Buddhists believe. We were born naked; we weren't wearing clothes when we came out from our mother's womb. All our happiness has come from others. Is this a difficult concept for Western minds to grasp? That all our happiness comes from others? It's not difficult to understand—it's true, definitely true—we can prove it scientifically. Think about it—everything we have has come from others.

In my opinion, bodhicitta is the essence of all religions, the essence of all good philosophies, the essence of all humanity, even the essence of all animals. I mean, wild animals die for their young, don't they? Even if they have no hope they'll try to protect them. So, bodhicitta is the most worthwhile thing there is.

For Westerners, bodhicitta is the best and easiest thing to practice, much better than sitting meditation. Sitting meditation is often very difficult—it's not your style. But loving kindness, bodhicitta, is something that Westerners can easily relate to, probably because of your Christian background. Christianity greatly emphasizes love, so that philosophy is already deeply rooted in you. I feel Western people have a lot of love in them, and for that reason they find the practice of bodhicitta very simple and very logical, and it makes them very happy.

It seems that many Western people think that others are always trying to take advantage of them. They feel it's a feature of their society: "People are always trying to take advantage of me, me, me; I have to protect myself." Now you're probably thinking, "He's exaggerating; Lama Yeshe doesn't understand Western society." However, I'm not talking about an individual point of view, I'm generalizing. Perhaps I shouldn't do that, but sometimes generalizations help. And even if people do take advantage of you, they've benefited you far more often. Even people who spend all their lives working hard and collecting possessions with selfish motivation don't take those things with them when they die. They leave them for the benefit of others.

Bodhicitta is very important. When we have bodhicitta we're relaxed, we have space. Even if someone tries to take advantage of us, we're relaxed. If we don't have bodhicitta, it's very painful for us; very, very painful. For example, in poor countries there are always beggars coming up to us asking for something, knocking at our door, "Hello, I'm a beggar; please give me something." If we don't have bodhicitta we'll really hate that beggar: "He's disturbing me, asking me for money." If we have bodhicitta, we'll think, "Oh, I'm so lucky; now I have chance to share something with someone," and we will give happily.

It's the same when we're at home: our friends always ask us for so much—money, things, and especially our time and attention. If we have bodhicitta, we give our friends whatever they want with much happiness and satisfaction. If we don't have bodhicitta, we feel pain whenever they ask us for anything—unless we have something to gain. Usually when someone asks us for something we think, "If I give it to them maybe they'll do this for me,

so I'll give." This sort of generosity is a joke; it's just bartering. It doesn't give us any satisfaction—not the inner satisfaction that I'm talking about.

Bodhicitta is extremely practical. Just the philosophy itself helps us a great deal, without having to meditate. If we simply understand the philosophy and psychology of bodhicitta and daily try to act according to it, experimenting in all our actions, that's good enough. That, for Western people, is very practical. Of course, actual bodhicitta is some kind of realization. For us to have the realization of bodhicitta, there's a long way to go, baby! There's a long training to undergo, such as the seven-point thought transformation—we have to change our self-cherishing attitude into cherishing of others.

So that's what Buddhism offers you—training. We don't tell you that bodhicitta is fantastic because Buddha said so. We tell you how to actualize, how to practice bodhicitta; we give you the method. This is the most important thing for you. Thus, gradually you are led to bodhicitta. You should appreciate this quality of the Buddha's teaching of the graduated path.

Equilibrium Meditation

Now, the first thing we have to develop is equilibrium, space in our mind. This is the foundation of bodhicitta, just as level ground is the basis on which we build a house. Past meditators' experience is that when we have developed equilibrium, we can realize bodhicitta very quickly and easily. But equilibrium is one of the most difficult things to develop. Our habit of discriminating between friends, enemies and strangers is very deeply rooted. With our tremendous grasping desire, we become attached and cling to our dear friends, and with aversion and hatred we reject those we don't like as enemies. As long as we have these kinds of minds, we can never realize bodhicitta, therefore equilibrium—the first of the four immeasurables—is extremely important.

Equilibrium is not an intellectual thing. We have to make our mind equal. For example, when I teach a group of people at a meditation course, I feel the same toward each of them. I haven't met them before; all of a sudden they have just gathered together—popped up like mushrooms. I haven't had time to develop attachment or aversion to any of them, so my feeling is neutral, equal. If I take the experience of this ordinary feeling of equality and apply it to my dear friends to whom I am attached and to my enemies and critics, I can start to develop equilibrium.

Actually, there is a meditation technique for this. You imagine three people—your dearest friend, your worst enemy and a total stranger. Visualize your friend behind you, your enemy and the stranger in front of you, and all other sentient beings in human form surrounding you. Then examine your feelings toward each of the three people you have visualized and analyze why you have labeled each of them as you have. You will find that the reasons for having done so are because of events of only this life. When you reflect that each sentient being has, over beginningless past lives, done just the same kind and unkind things to you as have the friend and enemy of this life, you will see that all beings are equal in having been friend, enemy and stranger. Thus, your feelings of attachment and aversion to your friend and enemy will subside and you will start to experience some equilibrium. So, you hold that feeling and meditate upon it.

Meditating on equilibrium is one of the best ways of producing mental health. Instead of going to a psychiatrist and paying one hundred dollars an hour, meditate on equilibrium. Shut your mouth, eyes, ears and nose and ignore all physical sensations; abandon the five sense perceptions and go deeply into the intensive awareness of your mind's experience of equilibrium—it is so good for you. After just ten minutes of this kind of meditation you come out into a different world.

The wishful way of taking the bodhisattva vows is very important. You determine that this is the only way to live; that no matter what happens, whether you are rich or poor, you will dedicate yourself to others; that this is the only way to be satisfied; that this is the only way to make your life worthwhile. It's true: you've been born human, you're considered intelligent, however, if you live with the same selfish attitude that animals have, you render your human life meaningless. Thus, even if you cannot actualize bodhicitta, taking the vows with the wishing attitude is most worthwhile.

The second way of taking the bodhisattva vows is with the intention of actualizing bodhicitta in your daily life. Here you actually have to keep the eighteen root and forty-six branch vows; hence you should understand them. They are not some set of rules that you have to obey for fear of punishment, but a psychological method for transforming your mind. When you understand how they work, why you follow them and what is going on in your consciousness, taking and keeping these vows to actualize bodhicitta is highly meaningful.

Once you have taken them in this way, what is your responsibility? What should you do? You have to practice the six paramitas: generosity, morality, patience, enthusiastic perseverance, concentration and wisdom. From the practical point of view it means sharing your body, wealth and everything else with others. Anyway, you have to do this; there's no choice. Do you think you really have a choice about sharing your time and energy with others? I believe that everybody does share their things with others. Perhaps I'm deluded! None of us never share anything with others—if you understand that, it's a kind of realization. The difference is whether you share your things with others with bodhicitta or not. If you don't have bodhicitta it can be very painful when you have to share things; you feel very badly toward those who ask you for help. I mean, you do give to them, but reluctantly.

When we have bodhicitta it is so easy to share with others. First it is difficult to share even small things, but slowly, slowly we can learn. It's simply a matter of mind, of conscious energy. We have more than enough, so why not share? Human energy is inexhaustible; we humans have unbelievable resources of energy within us and we have so much energy to share with others. All of us have. So with bodhicitta, we can share with great happiness, and when we do, it's just like meditation—bodhicitta meditation. This is extremely worthwhile.

When you practice bodhicitta you shouldn't worry that your practice is only an Eastern trip or that you are merely following some religious belief. It has nothing to do with blind faith. You don't have to believe in anything, even Buddha. All you have to think is, "My religion, my meditation is sharing with others, having concern for others." This is highly beneficial and not at all dangerous.

You see, there is a danger that if you are an extreme believer, a religious fanatic, bloodshed can result. You might fight with followers of other religions. If you have bodhicitta, you will never, ever fight with or kill others. Sometimes disciples of one guru kill disciples of another;

dangerous things like that happen, but not if you have bodhicitta—it is totally pure, a perfect medicine, totally safe.

Even other meditations, such as shunyata meditation, can be dangerous. They can cause lung [wind disease.] Bodhicitta will never cause lung; it always makes you peaceful. Equilibrium and bodhicitta are the essence of the Mahayana teaching and completely perfect. You will never want to hurt anybody; you will want only to serve others as much as possible. It is the only way you will want to spend your life and I think this is the best kind of life there is. There's no doubt about that—bodhicitta is very, very, worthwhile. With bodhicitta, there's no pressure. According to your level, you dedicate yourself to others as much as you can. There's nobody telling you, "You should do this; you should do that." Just do what you comfortably can, that's all. When you dedicate yourself to others with concern for their happiness, your heart opens and the tightness disappears. That makes you really healthy.

When you meditate on equilibrium, you think, "It's silly; such small things upset me. What a waste of time! Many, many times this person has helped me—in beginningless past lives they have been everything to me: my mother, my father, my wife, my husband. For life after life they have been so kind to me, for hundreds and hundreds of years, but just at this moment, this short moment, they are criticizing me. Why should I be upset? It's so transient. In fact, by doing this they are helping me. They are reflecting the hatred within me, showing me my weaknesses. So even now they are kind." I truly believe this myself—that those who give us a bad time are actually helping us.

For example, when the Chinese took over Tibet, from the point of view of my personal development I was very happy. They really helped me. They gave me a much better understanding of Buddhadharma and my refuge. So in my experience, the Chinese were very kind and I'm grateful to Mao Zedong. If I'd stayed in Tibet, I'd have got caught up in family obligations; my family was very strong and I was on the way to becoming a geshe. If I'd received that title and the reputation that goes with it, I'd have had to get involved in an incredible trip, taking care of my family and that sort of thing. This is not a monk's business, but it's what would have happened. True monks don't have to look after their families.

So, I'm glad Mao and the soldiers threw me out of Tibet and showed me my reality! I really had to ask myself, "Now, what's your reality?" I'd been a monk from the age of six and from then until I was twenty-five, I'd spent each year receiving teachings and studying. When I was chased out by the Chinese army with machine guns pointing at me, I had to ask myself, "OK, now you're close to death. OK, Thubten Yeshe,"—I'm not lying about this— "Now you're dead. Here come the soldiers with their guns, and what have you achieved? Are you ready to die? Can you die peacefully?" All these questions came because of Mao Zedong. This was my own experience. So the enemy is a great help. Those who kicked me out of my home improved the quality of my Dharma and my refuge. Even our enemies are very, very kind.

When we have bodhicitta we are warm, peaceful and satisfied; we can relax. Without bodhicitta we cannot relax. Even though we might think we're relaxed, we're not—the selfish attitude is deeply rooted in our nervous system; it twists us, it shakes us. You see, even though in Buddhism we have many meditation techniques, clean-clear wisdom and method, it is still very hard to actualize the teachings so that, for example, we can help the poor and sick without flinching. Personally, I find it very difficult to work with people

suffering from cancer or to go to dirty places like leprosy colonies. Why? Because of the selfish attitude.

For us, Christians are a very good example; they are so dedicated to helping others. Without worrying about getting the disease themselves, they touch lepers and dress their wounds, working voluntarily to help. They put us Buddhists to shame. We talk about our great methods, but we don't put them into action; they remain intellectual. We should observe Christians very carefully to see what hardships they undergo to work with devotion and humanity to take care of the old and sick and to live under difficult conditions, like in Africa, in order to spread Christianity. We wouldn't want to go to Africa and live where there is trouble finding food and water and there is much discomfort, because we are selfish.

So, I have much respect for Christians; they really have bodhicitta. We just say the word "bodhicitta" and don't do anything about it; they don't say "bodhicitta" but they act the way we should. Christians talk about love, having loving kindness for others. That is incredibly worthwhile—it is the essence of bodhicitta. If we never think of anything else, I'm sure that's enough.

The Essence of Tantra

Tantra is such a simple thing; tantra is a method to quickly transform oneself into having divine qualities. Technically, our body is transformed into a rainbow radiating light body; our speech is transformed into the purity of the divine, pure mantra instead of "blah, blah" nonsense words; and our thought into dharmakaya—right now. Tantra is very Western style: in the West the attitude is "I want to be happy right now; I want everything right now," isn't it? So, tantra is like that. In tantra we never believe, "I'm selfish, I've got a long way to go—I will become a buddha at some time when these garbage thoughts have finished." We generate the recognition, "Right now my body is a buddha's body, my speech is a buddha's speech and my mind is the enlightened stage of wisdom." That's the kind of technique we experience when we practice tantra. Tantra is a method to manipulate every uncontrolled situation and transform it into the peaceful path to liberation.

Tantra is very powerful because normally we consider every situation of worldly involvement bad and we twist every situation, everything we think about. In the lamrim, in the ordinary sense, it is negative, but the mind can transform every situation into medicine, into intensive awareness and loving kindness. That's why it's so quick—everything is turned upside down, turned positive. Normally we consider these situations as poison, but here we make them into medicine, and that's why it's powerful. Normally we consider that having pleasure is being out of control, but in tantra we should have pleasure as much as possible, because it is the method to utilize intensive awareness of nonduality, intensive awareness of shunyata. Then every situation is a resource to free us from the uncontrolled mind. Tantra is like an industrialized country which uses everything for human benefit and for money—digging up the earth for minerals; using air, space, the sun's rays. In tantra it's the same thing; we use everything. Every human being has to do things, so we just do those things and use the experience to develop blissful intensive awareness.

That's why tantra is very powerful. Normally only skillful people, very intelligent people, very fortunate people, can practice tantra. I think the essence of tantra is taking desire objects, normally considered as negative, as the path to liberation. Only tantra can do that. There is no method in the Paramitayana to do that. I think that's enough on tantra.

Question Time

Now, do you have questions? We can do the taking of refuge easily, in a couple of minutes. Are there any questions about taking refuge? The reason why I'm taking time and asking for questions is that I want you people to be comfortable—I don't want to cheat you people. I don't want to say, "Buddhism is special, you should do this." That's not my style, not my business. My statement is, "I want you to be free, I want you to be responsible." My style, my statement is, "You are free to go wherever you want to go"—that's my style. If you want to become Christian, I give you permission; if you want to be Rajneesh, Hindu or Muslim, you are free, completely. I'm happy—that's my style. I don't say, "You do this, you do this." I believe you have buddha nature; you decide everything. This is my style.

Q: I come from a rich Western country where people are killing, stealing and lying. Why should I take precepts in this situation?

Lama: Western people are also doing good things, that's why they're rich.

Q: But the West is rich because people kill and steal and lie and exploit third world countries.

Lama: The Buddhist way of thinking is that the West is rich not because they take advantage of underdeveloped countries. We think differently—that Western people are rich because they created their internal richness within themselves, so they can create wealth now. They have projections of how to make the outside rich, whereas underdeveloped countries have no imagination. Like my neighbors, these people here. It takes visualization to make wealth; it takes such energy and karma. You are thinking the wrong way; we think positively, you think negatively.

I have some evidence too. Like the history of American life—if you look at it superficially it seems that in order to keep their economy they have to make war, but from another way of thinking, it's not true—besides that, they have some karma so that they have the mind to create wealth. I don't think only about the negative side. If you think about it, Western wealth has both positive and negative aspects.

Millions of American people live a comfortable life—they are good, they are lucky and they deserve it. I believe they should have a comfortable life, because American people are very hard-working, however, Nepalese people do not work hard—they just gamble. I know, and everybody knows, what he's saying; he's right in one way, but we shouldn't think only in that way. From the Buddhist point of view, Western people, you people, are rich not only because of this life—for millions of lives you have made the karma to live comfortably and be intelligent. Maybe in the lamrim it sounds like your entire life is negative.

Q: How can I stay clean if people are killing and stealing? If people don't kill and lie for me then I can't sit here and I can't take precepts.

Lama: What are you saying? You're confusing me!

Q: An example would be that two months ago the United States invaded a small island in the Caribbean. [6]

Lama: Yes, I know, dear.

Q: With that example, as a US citizen and with my government supposedly working to represent me, did I not participate in some way in the killing of the people during that invasion? And what's happening in Central America—am I not accumulating karma by that activity? That's one example. A history of those types of activities has given me the freedom to be here to know the Dharma in some way.

Lama: I see, yes. I don't know how to answer your question. I can only answer that there is a good side and a bad side at the same time. For American people to live a comfortable life and have pleasure is good karma, but we cannot say it is because they killed. It looks like that, but it's not the case. It sounds like you are saying America is like that because they killed other people. I understand what you mean, but I don't think so.

I agree that you have some karmic involvement if America goes to war with other countries like Russia or Vietnam. Definitely, because you paid your taxes. There's no choice and that's why, due to universal karma, you are included with your own nation. You have karma all together and then individual karma. So, there is definitely some karma. But if you are clean clear yourself all the time, then that cannot harm you; when you are confused, all karma arrives because you have no space and time. You came here with tickets, but it's not true to say, "My ticket is due to Americans killing in Vietnam." That's not true; you worked hard so you could come here with that ticket. Do you get the ticket without working?

Q: I got it by lying.

Lama: You are not lying, come on! I don't believe you! You worked hard.

Q: When I am working, I am lying.

Lama: When you work, you have to lie? Everybody? All these people here are working class people, but they do not lie. I don't think you are lying when you work. Let's say you are my boss. I say, "I would like to do this," and you agree and give me a job, then I just do it as well as I can. If you are not satisfied, you say, "Go." That's the way it is. Do you have to lie?

Q: Of course, everyone is lying!

Lama: Oh, I don't think so.

Q: People have to do it; you can't stay clean. People will do it. If you don't kill and lie it's easy because you stay clean. But you mustn't forget that all the people are working in the shit. Where is bodhicitta?

Lama: Where is bodhicitta? That is your question?

Q: It's my question—where is bodhicitta? Isn't bodhicitta working in the shit to enable all the people to stay here and listen to the Dharma?

Lama: You mean you have to lie?

Q: Even to kill! There are soldiers in my country, in every country, like in Jack's example. I know some soldiers who are disgusted by killing but they do it because they have to do it, and that allows us to sit here and listen. Where is bodhicitta?

Lama: We cannot say bodhicitta is there or there. Bodhicitta is conscious energy. We cannot say, “This is bodhicitta.” To show it physically is difficult. I think we all understood what you mean. I think that’s good enough, isn’t it? Really, you are explaining the lamrim: talking about life and how to do it. I am successful! Alright dear, we are communicating. Any other questions? That question is clear; what he says is clear.

Q: If good people had not killed during World War II, then Hitler may have been the ruler of the world today.

Lama: Not clear—repeat your question please.

Q: If I take a vow not to kill

Lama: Yes, are you in the American army?

Q: No. Then tomorrow there is a crazy guy who wants to be the king of the world.

Lama: They will do it, yes! Definitely, they will. They haven’t been able to do it, that’s why they are waiting for the opportunity. If somebody feels as you said and they get the opportunity, they will do it. I tell you, that’s the character of a selfish attitude of mind. Then, do you have to go with a gun to kill this person or not?

Q: That’s my question—to protect the Dharma.

Lama: Then do it, yes! If you have great love and want to protect human beings of the entire world, forget about creating a disaster if you kill. I give permission; Buddha gives permission; we all give permission to you. If you kill for the sake of us, you don’t break a vow. As I told you, breaking a vow is acting with selfish motivation—the condition is killing with a selfish motivation, without caring for other people. It’s very clean clear—that’s not negative killing, it’s positive killing. That action is positive. He’s scared now! Sometimes killing can be positive too.

Q: [Tape inaudible]

Lama: I agree with what you say. Every nation fights with negative, selfish motivation if their territory is attacked. What he said about killing a guy who wants to destroy, to get power over the world

Q: But that’s an individual

Lama: It’s an individual, and he knows exactly what he’s doing. I agree, it’s difficult. If you don’t know, you shouldn’t kill; if you kill without knowing, it’s negative.

Q: [Inaudible]

Lama: Tibetan people are attached to their own territory, so whoever was fighting the Chinese, it was negative. I agree.

Q: [Inaudible]

Lama: That’s what we call ignorance.

Q: [Inaudible question about killing fleas and lice]

Lama: Try without killing. It's possible. Put something there and they will go away. For example, what I do is put spray there before the fleas come; then they never come. They know the horrible smell. Make protection before they come. The same thing with lice, put some bad smell and they will go away. The same with worms—take worm medicine that just paralyses the worms; it's not necessary to kill. There is a method, come on! There are many drugs you can use which do not kill.

Q: I'm studying to be a plant pathologist and we have to deal with insects that are destroying crops and causing starvation for thousands of people or wiping out entire areas. My job would be either to go in and spray directly and kill these insects or give the order to someone else.

Lama: Yes, that can also be done with compassion. Think with compassion of all the people starving and then the killing is part of compassion. You are not in the least selfish, so it's alright.

Q: Why should you care more about the people than about the insects?

Lama: I think it's a matter of value; a human being has more value—a human being can do more to help, can do more powerful actions than an animal. If you have strong compassion to preserve human beings, then maybe it's not negative; it depends on what kind of motivation you have and how strong it is. It depends on what you look at and how your motivation is.

Q: I don't understand initiations and how they work, for example, Vajrasattva initiation. To visualize one of these images and then to say a mantra and for that to purify one of our past negative karmas? It doesn't seem to deal with the root delusions inside me which cause that negative karma.

Lama: Think, when you emanate yourself as Vajrasattva, that it is the already pure energy within you now that is revealed and developed strongly, and that understanding is produced, a better understanding of yourself. We hold some kind of self-pitying image of ourselves and that's why we manifest anger and hatred and desire. But when we emanate as a pure aspect of our archetypal image, then the self-pitying image concepts disappear, and in that way we eliminate the root of desire and anger and ignorance.

You see, for most of us the problem is we have a strong ego which holds a self-pitying image of ourselves and this basic mistake brings tremendous problems in our life. Tantra is dealing with this self-pitying image and causing it to vanish, so we identify ourselves with the pure, divine quality of an archetypal self-image. In that way we can eliminate all kinds of worldly problems. Is that some sort to help for you?

Q: I want to say something about the insecticide or pesticide questions because I think we are experiencing quite a lot of negative karma right now and will experience much more. I think most of it is done with greed, because it is ordered by people who are greedy. A lot of farmers have greed—they want to plant more, to have more crops, more grain. Lots of countries are greedy and just want to have grain for exchanging or whatever, and even if these people who are using it at the very moment are not governed by greed, then those who have ordered it in the long run are greedy. We will experience [negative karma] in the long

run and even in the short run we are experiencing a lot of negative karma for that. You can look around, especially in the United States or Europe, and see dying woods and dying animals and a dying world, so that's negative karma.

Lama: That's true, it's a very good explanation. You know, industrialized countries actually produce more than they need. Here, we never spray, but there is just enough for everybody this year. I asked Chowkidhar, an old guy, "Is this year OK?" He said, "This year's OK. There's enough." In Tibet we never sprayed—we didn't have any drugs to spray. Often countries do not get money and they throw the crops into the sea, tons and tons. Here we have suffering, in Africa there is suffering, yet they don't give the crops to these people. Industrialized countries are facing many problems now—they have almost destroyed their environment and their health, and they have contaminated their water, so it has become toxic. In America so many cities have toxic water. Children are dying, so many people get cancer and trees die.

It's so dangerous, I tell you. If you eat dahl-rice you don't need to worry because it doesn't have poison. In America whatever you eat always has drug poisoning. When you eat an apple it's unbelievable—the apple is so nice, so beautiful on the outside, but inside it is completely rotten. And it smells like drug spray. The environment and the people are becoming unhealthy, so what can we say? That's karma—some good things happen, some bad things happen sometimes.

I absolutely agree—the way industrialized countries produce food is completely greedy. Those who are working don't know that's going on, especially in America. You know, this time when I was there, they reported that some poor black people had been captured and kept as prisoners and made to work on a farm. Can you imagine? They were given two dollars for one day—can you imagine? That is unbelievable, in America! I'm not talking about some small thing—it was on the television. This man beat black men and also white men, like in history. It's heartbreaking. In America we don't need slavery, but there is slavery. In America what can you do with two dollars? One cup of coffee is two dollars!

Q: I think everybody here has the chance to practice some bodhicitta right now by not asking you any more questions.

Lama: Great! Great!

Now, at this time, anyone who wants to take refuge, just meditate. If you don't want to, it doesn't matter—you can stay but you don't need to participate; just sit down and meditate on bodhicitta. Anyone who wants to take refuge, sit down and meditate.

Refuge Ceremony

The way to meditate is normally you put your father on the right side and your mother on the left side. Buddhism is concerned so much with one's father, mother, enemy, dear friend and everything, so visualize your father on your right, your mother on your left, your enemy in front of you and someone you feel indifferent about behind you. Generate much equilibrium, much compassion and much love, wishing to liberate them and wishing to develop intensive awareness, nonduality wisdom of shunyata for the sake of your father and mother and all sentient beings who criticize you.

Buddha's liberated consciousness is externally manifested as a yellow radiant light rainbow body. From his crown, white radiating light energy comes; from his throat red radiating light energy comes; from the heart infinite blue radiating light energy comes—to your crown, throat and heart. It purifies impure body, impure speech and impure wrong conception mind and develops intensive awareness of reality.

Think, "The totally open state of my consciousness is my Buddha; the total intensive awareness of reality is my Dharma. Those who help me to develop these two are the Sangha. I take inner refuge to liberate myself from misery and awaken my Buddha, awaken my Dharma, awaken my own Sangha. Other people's totally open buddha quality can also help me; other people's intensive awareness of universal reality can help me; and other people, Sangha, can help externally and also internally. My own Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are the most important thing in order to liberate myself. From now until my death I am taking refuge in my inner qualities, my inner wisdom, my inner loving kindness and my own conscious energy. Especially I am taking refuge in order to develop my loving kindness and wisdom in order to sufficiently help others."

To help others is very difficult. We don't know how to help, so we need to develop ourselves a lot. For that reason, think, "I take refuge in order to elevate myself."

Make a strong determination. "Without having inner refuge, taking refuge in the external world is foolish and painful and lonely, because I have not revealed my internal richness." So, any time I have symptoms of a problem I will take refuge, absolute refuge, in my inner quality to solve the problem and bring satisfaction within me. My limitation mind is so lonely; when I have problems I take refuge externally but ice cream and all these things are ridiculous, so superficial. I have the solution right now which does not depend on any external matter or energy. My consciousness is a limitless resource of energy that I have." Well, that's good enough.

For the people who want to take precepts, you can take them for one month, two months, one year, or you can take them for your lifetime. You can take one, two, three, four or five, but with the understanding I mentioned—"I am never going to deliberately cheat other people by lying and I will not steal deliberately. I will work, eat, make business, sell and in my country make profits as honestly as I can." Everybody makes profits—it is allowed. That's not lying; that's right livelihood. So, there is no need to always be lying, there's no need to always be stealing, [taking] whatever you want to, whatever you feel is worthwhile, even for one or two days.

In my opinion not lying even for one day takes unbelievable awareness. We are sleeping, you know. We have no mental discipline; we're like a wild animal. No rules. Going there, going there, up and down—our mind is like a monkey mind or like a tiger. When we have precepts, at least we have some kind of direction about how much further we can go into total negativity. I think it's very worthwhile, because we can feel how much we are going in the right direction. With precepts it's like being psychologically free, and we can see how much further we are going. This is my experience: honestly, precepts help when I'm going to extremes.

Without mental rules, without an understanding of psychological freedom, it's like being completely open to any negative inclination. When we are sinking in the ocean of negativity, we don't know we are negative; we don't know that we are uncontrolled because we are

sinking into the ocean of uncontrol. Knowing the conditions of what kind of negative mind leads to what kind of action and that it brings a miserable result has such a clean-clear scientific explanation. Therefore, whatever you want to take, whatever you feel is worthwhile, you should do. Also you don't need to feel now that you have to make a lifelong commitment—you can just say, "I'll take them and check them out for one month, and see if I can handle them and they are helping me. If not, I will give them up." Giving them up in a gentle way is OK.

Buddha's teaching and Buddha's ordination is very clear. Ordination is like a bridge. In order to cross a river we need a bridge, and after we have crossed the bridge we are not concerned with keeping it, so we say, "Thank you so much," and forget about the bridge. It's the same thing with ordination. It's not something absolutely necessary; it just guides us temporarily in order to develop intensive awareness and to judge our actions for ourselves. If we are capable, if we totally understand our mind—absolutely and relatively—we don't need precepts. The person who takes precepts is one who has an uncontrolled mind and habitual behaviors of repeatedly making mistakes even though knowing intellectually that it's wrong. Controlled people like Milarepa don't need precepts. Buddha didn't have vows. People who are uncontrolled and undisciplined, like a mad elephant, need direction.

So, we know what we need. "For countless lives I have been sort of hypocritical—blah, blah, blah, blah—not doing any action but saying, 'I want to be a great meditator, I want deep samadhi,' but then my three doors of body, speech and mind were a disaster! I did terrible actions because of being distracted by desire, distracted by hatred, distracted by ignorance, but still saying, 'I want good meditation.' I blamed others for not having good meditation, saying, 'You are disturbing me.'"

Good meditation comes from a harmonious body, speech and mind, and harmony comes from not being associated with body disasters or speech disasters. If we keep the body, speech and mind in a clean-clear condition, the mind becomes intensively aware. So, ordination is helpful, supportive, for making a mandala—for making the environment for good meditation and intensive awareness. Hypocrisy is people who talk "blah, blah, blah," but do not keep any ordination, any purity. I tell you, it's impossible: if we don't act, if we don't try to control our body, speech and mind even for one day, and we expect that suddenly meditation will become indestructible, it's impossible. The mind and body are related, they work together very closely, and having a body not linked with negative actions is extremely important. If we have emotionally strong desire or are physically disturbed, how can we have good meditation? It's not possible. Ordination makes space in order to have tranquil, peaceful, intensive awareness. We should not expect deep samadhi meditation and intensive awareness without having harmonious body and speech.

Suppose your husband or wife goes on for twenty-four hours, "Blah, blah, blah, blah—you are bad, you didn't give me a Christmas present last year," do you think you can have good meditation? It's not possible! That's your karma, isn't it? If somebody makes us physically agitated, mentally agitated, it's not possible to have indestructible meditation. That's why keeping the precepts is action. As long as we have a mad elephant uncontrolled mind, we need discipline. When we have completely reached total intensive awareness, we have no rules—we go beyond ordination. Lord Buddha didn't take five precepts because he didn't need them. Therefore, it's completely up to the individual.

Also, if you don't want to take them totally, but as much as possible, you can also do that, thinking, "Whatever I see that's negative and disturbs me and brings difficulties, as much as possible I will try to control." This is also honest; so you can do it by not taking them completely, but saying, "As much as I can, I will do." Whatever you can do; it's up to your mind. Ordination is also a condition—it comes from the mind; it's a projection of the mind. With strong determination and renunciation of old negative habits you will be happy; you will feel pleasure but it's not the kind of pleasure that will lead you to misery. You feel many things as pleasurable but they lead to misery.

Therefore, have strong renunciation, "For countless lives, and from when I was born up to now, I repeatedly did that, that and that with an uncontrolled mind. I was never satisfied, so I am tired of the cycle of samsara and therefore I should rest from the cycle of samsara. So, I should cut off at least the gross mind." Ordination, especially these five Vinaya precepts, is dealing with the gross mind. The way to correct our behavior and our mind is first to control our gross negative old habits and then control subtle things. If we first try subtle things, complicated things, it doesn't work. We have to control easy things first.

With a strong motivation think, "Especially I want to help others: I want to help my wife; I want to help my husband; I want to help my boyfriend; I want to help my girlfriend; I want to help my mama; I want to help my father. With my disaster-making mind, my mad elephant mind, how can I help? It's a joke. I'm ashamed. I try and help my mama, but my mind is worse than my mama's, so how can I help her? I should correct my own mind, my own behavior, then I can help my mama, my father, my wife or my husband. With my disaster mind I cannot help. So, I will try as much as possible to control the gross and negative mind, to make a transformation and make myself satisfied and happy. If I am satisfied and happy that is the way to help all humanity.

"If I'm hypocritical, if I go 'blah, blah, blah, blah,' but with my own actions never do anything solid to make real Dharma or to purify; if I say other people are bad and impure while I myself am impure, I will never correct myself. Keeping precepts purely for one day is so worthwhile—at least I will reach beyond being a hypocritical religious being. It's completely personal, my need has nothing to do with my nation, nothing to do with other people. It is my personal need for development. With strong motivation I will meditate on Dharma and actualize Dharma and develop intensive awareness of the inner life, and I will keep these vows as much as possible until I become completely free of my uncontrolled mind."

The essence of ordination is peaceful energy, a peaceful consciousness, without expectation. When you make the determination that you are never going to kill, there is no hesitation; when you have decided, totally, to never do sexual misconduct, there's no hesitation, there's no alternative—otherwise when the time comes you are just out of control. But the strong motivation helps you, protects you from getting out of control.

With ordination you can trust yourself; when you trust yourself your mind and your actions are controlled, and you trust other people. When you are uncontrolled you don't control yourself and you never trust anybody because you can't trust yourself. If you develop confidence, control and a feeling of trust within yourself, then you can trust others. Ordination is peaceful energy—peaceful, light, blissful energy throughout your entire body and consciousness. That experience of some peaceful energy is the essence of ordination.

The essence of ordination is compassion, love, peace, bliss, because you don't harm other people.

One characteristic of Buddhism is compassion, to never try to harm anybody. If you cannot help, you should at least never harm anybody. The basic reason for taking ordination is to never harm anybody or do those actions that are harmful for others. The worst thing is harming others. I think that's all. So, we have finished taking precepts.

Today we didn't do any ritual, we just made strong determination. That's good enough. We have ritual prayers, but we don't need to do Buddhist prayers. So, in Buddhism you are responsible. The giving of a name is to remind you that on such and such a day at such and such a time you took ordination. It is to remind you of your newborn life. So, if you want a name, you can have one; if you don't want one—it is still superstition and delusion, and you don't want any more delusion—you don't need to take one. It's not important but is a tradition.

As I told you, we should be responsible for keeping peace in this world, so at least we should have the determination to never kill any human being. We should be a good example, we cannot only say “blah, blah.” You shouldn't care what other people do—you must show that you are a peacekeeper. Trust yourself. What can I say? If I have not made it clear, I have cheated you and that would be terrible. Maybe we will do dedication with bodhicitta.

Jang chub sem chog

Bodhicitta: The Perfection of Dharma



Lama Yeshe giving final teaching at Kopan Monastery, Nepal, 1983. Photo by Wendy Finster.

The best Dharma practice, the most perfect, the most substantial, is without doubt the practice of bodhicitta.

I think it is absolutely essential for us to have loving kindness toward others. There is no doubt about this. Loving kindness is the essence of bodhicitta, the attitude of the bodhisattva. It is the most comfortable path, the most comfortable meditation. There can be no philosophical, scientific or psychological disagreement with this. With bodhicitta, there's no East-West conflict. This path is the most comfortable, most perfect, one hundred percent uncomplicated one, free of any danger of leading people to extremes. Without bodhicitta, nothing works. And most of all, your meditation doesn't work, and realizations don't come.

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

Also, without bodhicitta it is very difficult to collect merits. You create them and immediately destroy them; by afternoon, the morning's merits have gone. It's like cleaning a room and an hour later making it dirty again. You make your mind clean, then right away you mess it up—not a very profitable business. If you want to succeed in the business of collecting merits, you must have bodhicitta. With bodhicitta you become so precious—like

gold, like diamonds; you become the most perfect object in the world, beyond compare with any material things.

From the Western materialistic point of view, we'd think it was great if a rich person said, "I want to make charity. I'm going to offer \$100 to everybody in the entire world." Even if that person gave with great sincerity, his or her merit would be nothing compared with just the thought, "I wish to actualize bodhicitta for the sake of sentient beings, and I'll practice the six paramitas as much as I can." That's why I always say, actualization of bodhicitta is the most perfect path you can take.

Remember the story of the Kadampa geshe who saw a man circumambulating a stupa? He said, "What are you doing?" and the man answered, "Circumambulating." So the geshe said, "Wouldn't it be better if you practiced Dharma?" Next time the geshe saw the man he was prostrating, and when he again asked what he was doing, the man replied, "One hundred thousand prostrations." "Wouldn't it be better if you practiced Dharma?" asked the geshe. Anyway, the story goes on, but the point is that just doing religious-looking actions like circumambulation and prostration isn't necessarily practicing Dharma. What we have to do is transform our attachment and self-cherishing, and if we haven't changed our mind in this way, none of the other practices work; doing them is just a joke.

Even if you try to practice tantric meditations, unless you've changed within, you won't succeed. Dharma means a complete change of attitude—that's what really brings you inner happiness, that is the true Dharma, not the words you say. Bodhicitta is not the culture of ego, not the culture of attachment, not the culture of samsara. It is an unbelievable transformation, the most comfortable path, the most substantial path—definite, not wishy-washy. Sometimes your meditation is not solid; you just space out. Bodhicitta meditation means you really want to change your mind and actions and transform your whole life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Also, bodhicitta energy is alchemical. It transforms all your ordinary actions of body, speech and mind—your entire life—into positivity and benefit for others, like iron transmuted into gold. I think this is definitely true. You can see, it's not difficult. For example, look at other people's faces. Some people, no matter what problems and suffering they are enduring, when they go out they always try to appear happy and show a positive aspect to others. Have you noticed this or not? But other people always go about miserable and angry. What do you think about that? I honestly think that it indicates a fundamental difference in the way these two kinds of people think. Human beings are actually very simple. Some are a disaster within and it shows on their faces and makes those whom they meet feel sick. Others, even though they are suffering intensely, always put on a brave face because they are considerate of the way others feel.

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

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

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama said recently, if you're going to be selfish, do it on a grand scale; wide selfishness is better than narrow! What did His Holiness mean? He was saying that, in a way, bodhicitta is like a huge selfish attitude because when you dedicate yourself to others with loving kindness you get a lot more pleasure than you would otherwise. With our present, usual selfish attitude we experience very little pleasure, and what we have is easily lost. With "great selfishness" you help others and you help yourself; with small it's always "me, me, me," and it is easy to lose everything.

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

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

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

Westerners need that kind of practice. Fundamentally we are lazy. Well, maybe not lazy, but when we finish work we are tired and don't have much energy left. So, when you come home from work, lie down comfortably and meditate on bodhicitta. This is most worthwhile. Much better than rushing in speedily, throwing down a coffee and dropping onto your meditation cushion to try to meditate. It doesn't work that way; your nervous system needs time and space. You can't be rushing through traffic one minute and sitting quietly meditating the next. Everything takes time and space. It is much better to have a quiet, blissful cup of coffee, and don't pressure yourself either; that too is very bad. Don't punish yourself when you are too tired to meditate: "I should be meditating; I am very bad."

You destroy yourself like this. Be wise. Treat yourself, your mind, sympathetically, with loving kindness. If you are gentle with yourself, you will become gentle with others so don't push. Pushing doesn't work for me, that's why I tell others not to force themselves. We are dealing with the mind, not rocks and concrete; it is something organic.

The Western environment offers lots of suffering conditions that act as causes for our actualizing bodhicitta, so life there can be very worthwhile. For example, it is much better to subdue an adversary with bodhicitta than with a knife or gun. When attacked, you can practice loving kindness. We could also do this in the monasteries of Tibet, where there were often horrible monks. Don't think that Tibet was full of only holy people—we had unbelievably wild monks there that nobody in authority could subdue! If you would try to control them wrathfully they would only get more aggressive. But arya bodhisattva monks, people who had completely given themselves up for others, would treat them with loving kindness, and the wild monks would calm down completely. They would feel, “This man loves me; he has great compassion. He has given up everything for others and has nothing to lose.” In that way aggressive people would be subdued, without authority but with bodhicitta. There are many stories about this kind of thing, but I'm not going to tell them now. Perhaps you think they're funny, but it's true—you can conquer your enemies, both internal and external, with loving kindness and bodhicitta. It is most worthwhile and there's no contradiction. Bodhicitta is the totally comfortable path to liberation and enlightenment.

In his text *Lama Chöpa*, the Panchen Lama says, “Self-cherishing is the cause of all misery and dissatisfaction, and holding all mother sentient beings dearer than oneself is the foundation of all realizations and knowledge. Therefore bless me to change self-cherishing into concern for all others.” [7] This is not some deep philosophical theory but a very simple statement. You know from your own life experiences without needing a Tibetan text's explanations that your self-cherishing thought is the cause of all your confusion and frustration. This evolution of suffering is found not only in Tibetan culture but in yours as well.

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

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

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

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

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

Remember what happened the first time that Avalokiteshvara took the bodhisattva ordination? He vowed to guide all universal living beings to enlightenment from behind, like a shepherd. "I do not want to realize enlightenment until first I have led all mother sentient beings there first. That will be my satisfaction." He worked for years and years, leading thousands of beings to enlightenment, but when he checked to see what was happening, he found there were still countless more. So again he worked for years and years and again when he checked there were still so many left, and this cycle was repeated until finally he was fed up and thought to himself, "For eons and eons I have struggled to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment but there are still so many left. I think it is impossible to fulfill my vow." And because of the intensity of his emotion his head split into eleven pieces. Then Amitabha Buddha came and offered to help, and blessed him to be successful.

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

The Bodhisattva Vows

At the outset I mentioned two ways of taking the bodhisattva vows. The first is the wishful way, wanting to develop the mind that wishes to help other sentient beings as much as possible, realizing that to help others in the best way you have to develop toward liberation as quickly as possible, and trying to maintain that motivation continuously in this, the next and all future lives. You have no doubt that this is the best way to go, but you may feel, with respect to actually practicing the bodhisattva path, that you cannot keep the sixty-four vows or engage in the extensive deeds right now. Think, "I shall do as much as I can, but I cannot take the full commitment at the moment." This way there is no heavy vow and you do what you can.

If you take the vows the second way, you think, "I shall keep the root and branch vows and actualize the six perfections as much as I possibly can from now until my death, forever." This is the sort of strong determination that you make.

Thus, there are two ways to take the bodhisattva vows and both are acceptable. The first way is not a kind of lie. There is no doubt in your mind that the altruistic mind of loving kindness is really your path; that bodhicitta is your deity, your Buddha, your Dharma, your Sangha, your bible—your Buddhist bible, your Hindu bible, your Muslim bible, your all world religions' bible. This is the way you should think. When you take the vows you don't

have to be nervous about breaking them because you have said, “I’ll do as much as I possibly can,” and you have not promised something that you can’t do. You shouldn’t feel that by taking the vows this way you are somehow cheating.

Many people have a commitment from certain initiations to practice the six-session guru yoga each day, in which they renew or make their bodhisattva vows clean clear. Those who don’t have this particular practice can still do the same thing. Six times a day, for just a minute, you can simply remember your commitment to the development of bodhicitta. You don’t have to do anything dramatic, like Muslims bowing to Mecca. Wherever you are—standing or sitting or when you go to bed—just remember bodhicitta. That’s good enough. Actually, there is a traditional way of doing this six times a day, with a visualization of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions in front of you and a prayer to be recited, but there is no necessary requirement to do this. If you want to do this, it’s good for reminding yourself about bodhicitta, but the other way is easier when you’re amongst ordinary people.

When you get up in the morning, sit on your bed for a minute or two and think, “Today I shall actualize bodhicitta and make my life meaningful for others.” That’s all. Then take a shower, have breakfast and go off to work. You get a lunchbreak, so after you’ve finished your sandwiches and coffee, just sit for a minute or two and renew your motivation. The same thing before you go to bed. So, according to your daily life, you can find six times to do this short practice. It is simple isn’t it, and it doesn’t conflict with your culture. It’s no big deal. But formal meditation, sitting cross-legged, is a big deal, isn’t it? You cannot just drop into the full lotus wherever you are. And you can’t mix sleep with formal meditation, but you can mix bodhicitta with ordinary sleep.

Thus, bodhicitta is the most worthwhile path. No argument, no worry about this. It is completely the right thing, something we can practice for the rest of your life. Really the best. Forget about tantra. Of course, if your tantric practice helps you grow bodhicitta, do it, but if you don’t forget your bodhicitta from now until the time you die, you are totally guaranteed freedom from a bad rebirth. I can promise you that you’ll not be reborn in an African desert! The mind that has bodhicitta is incredibly rich, an unbelievably rich mind. There is no way a person with bodhicitta has to go without water—a rich mind makes us rich. That’s why I say the bodhisattva path is the most comfortable path to enlightenment. It’s very comfortable and very scientific. You don’t have to worry that you’re not understanding it or whether it’s working or not. It’s clean clear; it’s perfect.

For us it can be difficult when someone asks us for even a cup of tea. If the situation is right, it’s OK, but when we are busy or something and someone says, “I’m thirsty, can I have some tea?” we get uptight, uncomfortable and unhappy.

When we have bodhicitta and someone asks us for a drink, no matter what we are doing we are delighted to be useful, to have a chance to help someone. In the old days, bodhisattvas used to be so happy when a beggar came to their door asking for money or something. They would think “He’s so kind, helping me along the graduated path to enlightenment, helping me eliminate my self-cherishing,” and they would give with respect. This is a good example for us. We live among people who are always demanding our attention, our time and our energy. Young people’s parents, for example, ask, “Why don’t you come home tonight?” or “Why don’t you stay with us for Christmas?”

There is so much happening in our life; everybody wants something from us. It's true, isn't it? Definitely. Maybe good things, maybe bad things; our wealth, our body, our speech, our mind. It's complicated. Also, sometimes we are obliged to give our time or our body, even though inside we don't want to, so we give with an unhappy mind. But when we have bodhicitta and someone asks us to give our body, we do so happily. This is true; at a certain point it's true. This is a scientific situation; I'm not just joking. Sometimes we are obliged to give our body or our speech, so it is much better to give with happiness than with anger. It is no good at all to give anything with anger. When we have bodhicitta, where giving once used to cause us pain, now it makes us blissful. This is scientifically true.

Remember the story of one of the previous lives of Shakyamuni Buddha? It happened in Nepal: he was a prince, and one day went into the jungle to the place that is now called Namo Buddha. He saw a tigress who was dying and too weak to feed her cubs, so he took off his clothes and offered his body to the tigress. She was too weak even to notice him, so he broke off a branch of a tree, cut himself and let the blood flow into her mouth. Thus, she gradually regained her strength until she finally ate the prince. Then the king and the queen came along, saying, "What has happened to our gorgeous son?" Well, the gorgeous son had gone into the tiger's mouth, but he felt no pain because he had offered his body with great compassion. And this also caused his mind to develop much further along the path to enlightenment.

Similarly, Chandrakirti explained how a first level bodhisattva can offer his flesh to others, piece by piece, without pain. Each time he cuts off a piece all he feels is bliss. Such happiness comes from the power of the mind; it's not something physical. It is the result of bodhicitta, loving kindness. Of course, although these are good examples of the power of bodhicitta, we should forget about trying to make these kinds of offering. Neither can we nor should we think of cutting our body like this—we'd cry; we'd die. We have to be careful when we hear this sort of teaching. It is always emphasized that bodhisattvas should engage in such practices only when they are ready to do so. Until the mind is ready we shouldn't give anything like that.

Bodhisattvas even have a vow against giving certain things that they need for their practice—certain texts, for example. When we're in trouble we need to have our Dharma book to refer to, so we should never give it away; it is a reflection of the information a bodhisattva needs to follow the graduated path to method and wisdom. It is wrong to think that a bodhisattva should give everything. There are rules for giving: at this level we give so much, at the next so much, and so on. There are complete explanations, so don't make mistakes. A bodhisattva should follow the middle path and avoid extremes.

Now, the reason I'm telling you all this is that we are living amongst the problems of human life and we have to deal with them. That means that sometimes we do have to give a little of our time and energy, everything, to others. If we can give with bodhicitta our ability to give develops gradually and makes us blissful instead of tight and uncomfortable. Wrong giving is not worthwhile; I want you to have right understanding. Until you are on the first bodhisattva level you should never give your body: you are not ready for that. Don't give your eyes; don't give your heart!

So far I have met three students who have offered me their heart: "Lama, I want to give you my heart; please take my heart." I said, "Yes, whenever I'm ready I'll write to you." What else can I say? I was a bit shocked. I mean, I talk about bodhicitta, "Blah, blah, blah," and

actually my students are really true bodhisattvas, saying, "Please take my heart." They make me lose my concepts! It's true—I have met three students who made this offer. They are very good, they mean well. I couldn't give my heart! Anyway, who'd want it? It's a broken one with three holes and doesn't work properly.

The reason I have explained all this is for you to see that through the power of bodhicitta, loving kindness, even things that are very difficult to give can be given easily and with great happiness. That's a function of bodhicitta.

The bodhisattva's mind is very broad. When we adopt a religion, sometimes we become very dangerous, fanatical, closed. "I'm a Buddhist; I hate Muslims." This is very, very bad. With bodhicitta, we are completely open. The bodhisattva has space for all religions—Hinduism, Christianity, Islam. That's one of the most beautiful things about it. In fact, one of the bodhisattva vows is that we must never put down any other religion or a religion's philosophy. It even says that we should not put down the lower levels of Buddhist philosophy like the Hinayana. What other religion says that you shouldn't put down other religions or other divisions of your own religion? That's why we say that Buddhism has universal understanding of the entire universal human consciousness. We should understand that the bodhisattva path is completely open, embracing all mother sentient beings, all humanity, everything. There is no sectarianism, no discrimination against any other religion. This is the most beautiful thing to make us grow happy and healthy. I think it is wonderful.

Without this attitude, life on Earth is terrible. Some people accept one religious group but hate all others. They criticize and put down other people. This is the most dangerous thing, the worst example they can set. Observing this sort of behavior, non-religious people have no hope: "Look at how the followers of that religion act. They fight amongst and kill themselves and others. Who needs religion? It only makes more problems." I agree with people who say this; I can't blame them for feeling that way. Who wants to be like those religious fanatics? Inside they are most painful, most dangerous, and they damage others. It's so unhealthy. But if we follow the bodhisattva path, we embrace, we have space in our heart for all universal living beings.

Now, as you take the ordination in one of the two ways, think as follows: visualize before you the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions of the universe. What are buddhas and bodhisattvas? Those who have attained high realizations in their consciousness, who have actualized bodhicitta, who have crossed the ocean of confusion and dissatisfaction in order to be of the highest benefit to limitless sentient beings. Consider them in this way and think:

"Today I am so fortunate. I have come to the conclusion that I must change my attitude of self-cherishing into that of holding others dearer than myself. I want to serve others, therefore my entire meditation and my practice of charity, morality, patience, effort, concentration and wisdom will be for the benefit of others, for me to grow better and better in order to serve them as best I can. This is my attitude today, my strong determination. I am so lucky, so fortunate to feel like this. It is the most precious thing in my life. This attitude is far more valuable than any material possession. I am so lucky to have it. And I am especially lucky to have discovered the real antidote to my unhappiness, my life of self-pity. There is no question that the solution is to follow the bodhisattva's path, to actualize bodhicitta. Without doubt, this is the most comfortable path. From now on, may I never separate from

this wish, this determination, this pure enlightened thought. I shall actualize this thought and hold it in my heart twenty-four hours a day, as much as I possibly can.

“In front of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions of the universe, in front of my lama, I make this request. Please give me the inspiration and strength to increase this determination continuously for the rest of my life, to make my life meaningful for the benefit of others. For countless lives I have held fanatical concepts, the selfish attitude concerned for ‘me, me, me’ alone, continuously reinforcing the cause of all misery and sickness. All suffering comes from this kind of mind, but now I have changed this thought into openness for others. I have created space in my heart for all universal living beings. I shall never forget this new experience and actualize it every day to the best of my ability.

“Buddhas and bodhisattva of the ten directions, please listen and pay attention to me: just as you have all actualized bodhicitta and gained happiness, today I too dedicate myself to the bodhisattva path. I shall actualize bodhicitta as much as I can and make the rest of my life meaningful and happy, truly happy and truly satisfied.”

With this kind of motivation, take the bodhisattva ordination.

Notes

- [1.](#) “Death of a Princess” is a controversial British 1980 drama-documentary based on the true story of Princess Mishaal, a young Saudi Arabian woman who was publicly executed for adultery.
- [2.](#) Wyl: *bal gos*. A type of woolen cloth.
- [3.](#) Wyl: *mi mchog bla med rdzun*
- [4.](#) Reagan was president of the United States from 1981–89.
- [5.](#) There were an estimated 315,000 to 750,000 indigenous people in Australia when British settlement began in 1788.
- [6.](#) The United States invaded Grenada on October 25, 1983.
- [7.](#) *Lama Chöpa*, v. 94.

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May whomever sees, touches, reads, remembers, or talks or thinks about these books never be reborn in unfortunate circumstances, receive only rebirths in situations conducive to the perfect practice of Dharma, meet only perfectly qualified spiritual guides, quickly develop bodhicitta and immediately attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

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The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) is an international organization of Buddhist meditation study and retreat centers, monasteries, publishing houses, healing centers and other related activities founded in 1975 by Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche. At present, there are more than 160 FPMT centers, projects and services in over forty countries worldwide.

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What to do with Dharma teachings

The Buddhadharma is the true source of happiness for all sentient beings. Books like this show you how to put the teachings into practice and integrate them into your life, whereby you get the happiness you seek. Therefore, anything containing Dharma teachings, the names of your teachers or holy images is more precious than other material objects and should be treated with respect. To avoid creating the karma of not meeting the Dharma again in future lives, please do not put books (or other holy objects) on the floor or underneath other stuff, step over or sit upon them, or use them for mundane purposes such as propping up wobbly chairs or tables. They should be kept in a clean, high place, separate from worldly writings, and wrapped in cloth when being carried around. These are but a few considerations.

Should you need to get rid of Dharma materials, they should not be thrown in the rubbish but burned in a special way. Briefly: do not incinerate such materials with other trash, but alone, and as they burn, recite the mantra om ah hum. As the smoke rises, visualize that it pervades all of space, carrying the essence of the Dharma to all sentient beings in the six saṃsāric realms, purifying their minds, alleviating their suffering, and bringing them all happiness, up to and including enlightenment. Some people might find this practice a bit unusual, but it is given according to tradition. Thank you very much.

Dedication

Through the merit created by preparing, reading, thinking about and sharing this book with others, may all teachers of the Dharma live long and healthy lives, may the Dharma spread throughout the infinite reaches of space, and may all sentient beings quickly attain enlightenment.

In whichever realm, country, area or place this book may be, may there be no war, drought, famine, disease, injury, disharmony or unhappiness, may there be only great prosperity, may everything needed be easily obtained, and may all be guided by only perfectly qualified Dharma teachers, enjoy the happiness of Dharma, have love and compassion for all sentient beings, and only benefit and never harm each other.

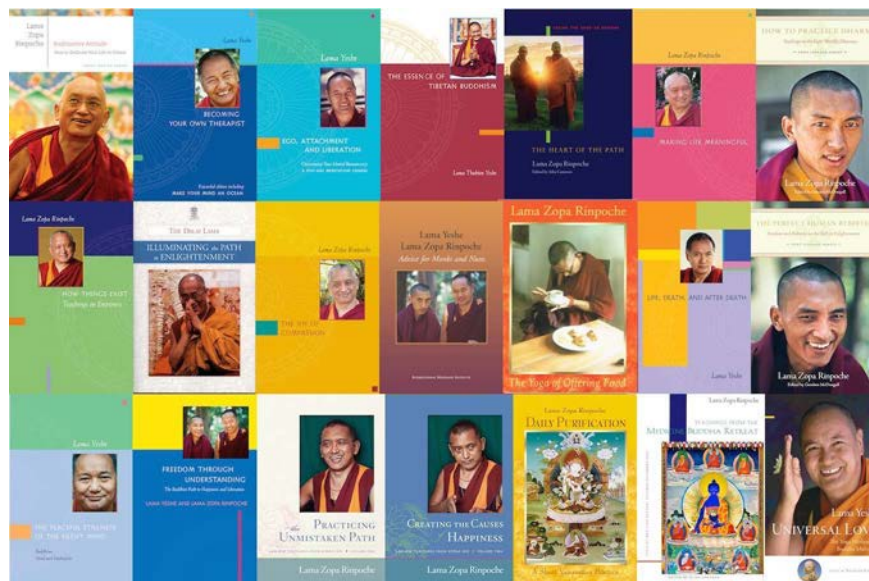
Lama Yeshe

Lama Thubten Yeshe was born in Tibet in 1935. At the age of six, he entered the great Sera Monastic University, Lhasa, where he studied until 1959, when the Chinese invasion of Tibet forced him into exile in India. Lama Yeshe continued to study and meditate in India until 1967, when, with his chief disciple, Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, he went to Nepal. Two years later he established Kopan Monastery, near Kathmandu, in order to teach Buddhism to Westerners. In 1974, the Lamas began making annual teaching tours to the West, and as a result of these travels a worldwide network of Buddhist teaching and meditation centers—the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT)—began to develop. In 1984, after an intense decade of imparting a wide variety of incredible teachings and establishing one FPMT activity after another, at the age of forty-nine, Lama Yeshe passed away. He was reborn as Ösel Hita Torres in Spain in 1985 and recognized as the incarnation of Lama Yeshe by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1986. Lama's remarkable story is told in Vicki Mackenzie's book, *Reincarnation: The Boy Lama* (Wisdom Publications, 1996) and Adele Hulse's official biography, *Big Love*, (forthcoming from LYWA).

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