

# The Six Paramitas: Jigme Rinpoche Seminar Series at Dhagpo Kagyu Ling, 2002

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## THE GROUND

“Paramita” is a Sanskrit term, which means “perfection” - perfection in attitude, action and practice. The accomplishment of these perfections will result in the achievement of the ultimate perfection of wisdom that is enlightenment. Enlightenment is perfect discrimination. It is perfect wisdom that discriminates everything clearly and precisely without any distortion. “To discriminate,” means to understand through one’s own seeing, and wisdom.

At the moment, our mind perceives and follows everything in a tainted way. While we are here in samsara, our perception and actions are inevitably influenced by the many conditions that hold our mind. Nevertheless, we feel, that how we think, or how we act, is perfectly normal. There is nothing wrong and so we follow in all our usual ways. In fact, we think there is no other way. This is why it is important to train in the Six Paramitas because the training allows us to see a different way, and a better way. It reveals to us how the conditions of samsara obscure the mind. Moreover, it also happens to be the most direct way to develop and apply Bodhicitta, while we are on the Bodhisattva Path.



Before we embark on the training in the Six Paramitas, we have to really wish to benefit sentient beings, our reason to achieve enlightened mind. This mental resolve is very important for without it, the training will be very difficult. An understanding of the fundamental teachings of the Buddha, such as the Four Noble Truths, or Bodhicitta, is indispensable. We have to truly appreciate the basic tenets of the Dharma, their meaning, and not only the words. We introspect earnestly to find out what the Dharma is telling us. We look at sentient beings around us, their conditions and surroundings, and see if we could connect our own observations to what the Dharma says. Is what the Buddha said true? Are sentient beings helplessly caught up in suffering? Do we all wish to be free from suffering? When we can relate directly to the truth of the Dharma, we will feel compelled to be connected with it. We will begin to appreciate the inspiration of Bodhicitta. “Inspiration” means to feel, to wish, and to need. And Bodhicitta is the profound wish to be beneficial to all beings.

### to discover what is important

We should understand the purpose of the Dharma, why we need it, and why it is so important to us in the long run. We should scrutinize the essential points until we are convinced that they ring true. In general, we just keep going until we are stuck. We tend not to exert ourselves unless we can’t cope anymore. Only then do we look for a way out. Once a problem has passed, we again slip into our comfort zone. We forget that we were in trouble, what got us into it in the first place, or what got us out. We have, in this way, lost many precious opportunities to learn and to improve over the years. For example, you have a toothache so you look for a remedy. Once the pain is gone, you don’t think about the tooth anymore. This is very common in most people. To pursue the Dharma as remedy for our problems requires, however, a totally different approach. Naturally, in the beginning, we go looking when we feel, “Oh, I feel so anxious,” or “I don’t understand,” or “I feel something is missing.” We must first know exactly what it is that we need, what is really important in life. But how do we know? This is a very important question.

Suppose I tell you, “You have to think like this, or you have to follow this.” Immediately, your reaction may be, “Yes, you are right, but I can’t do it. I don’t know what to do.” You have a strong inner resistance so you can’t listen properly. But if I use an example about someone else or about a situation quite removed from you, then you will probe further, “Well then, what about me? How does it work for me?” It is easier to observe others and their conditions. By using the Dharma as your reference, you can gain insight into other people’s conditions while shedding light on your own.

What we don’t know usually doesn’t matter to us. It also makes sense that the more we know, the better we can attend to the needs of people and situations. At the same time, it is also true that we may become more anxious. Suppose I am sick with a serious disease. I’d probably feel anxious enough to go for treatment immediately. My understanding the seriousness of my illness tells me not to put it off another

day. Only when I am oblivious to its severity, or reluctant to acknowledge it, would I dismiss it as nothing. "Oh, it doesn't matter. It is nothing. I'll ask the doctor next week." I might also be hesitant to receive a rather uncomfortable treatment. I'd wish the sickness to go away somehow on its own. This is human nature. Therefore, we watch out for blinders we put on ourselves.

Seasoned practitioners fully appreciate the meaning of the Dharma so they are committed to the Bodhisattva Path. But someone who does not see clearly still has to be convinced. Otherwise, he cannot follow on his own. He has to care to change. He must first study the basics of the Dharma and see for himself his real conditions. If he decides that he'd like a way out of samsara, his vision, his attitude, and his action will start to change.

An authentic practitioner sees clearly his own mind's conditions, and is determined to improve them without delay. He is like the sick person who goes for treatment right away. Obviously, when you can't see your own problem, you won't seek a solution. This is why for some people, their Dharma practice is always delayed and interrupted by all kinds of activities whereas others can actually integrate the Dharma into their daily lives. How we see our own lives, and how clearly we see the urgency of our situation directly impact on how we live our lives. This is a very important point. Suppose I tell you, "I am engaged in an authentic practice of Dharma to reach Enlightenment." You may ask me, "Why do you seek Enlightenment? Why are you interested in it, or what is your reason exactly?" "Because it looks very interesting, very nice, very wonderful. I like it and I'm intrigued by it." My rationale shows that I have not really understood the Dharma. But if my reasoning is, "The Dharma is absolutely essential and important to me," then this means I have understood the truth of the Dharma.

### **to practice out of necessity not just interest**

As the previous example illustrated, you seek a cure when your life depends on it. You seek help not out of curiosity or interest in a remedy. You act in accordance with what you have discovered and understood. Likewise, you must thoroughly examine the Dharma and decide whether you absolutely need it in your life. During this period of inner introspection and reflection, more precise answers and a clearer understanding will gradually appear to you. An authentic practitioner practises out of necessity and not out of interest. To him, the Dharma is indispensable. He is not going to get bored and give it up. The Dharma is not a leisurely sport like skiing where you can get bored after some weeks and decide to go sailing instead. Ask yourself why you are interested in meditation, or working for others? Do you actually feel that they are both essential in your life? You may enjoy the practice yet it can be quite difficult. But even if the Dharma training proves very challenging, when you see, little by little, the real situation that you are in, no matter how hard it gets, you will put in the effort.

Therefore, reflect carefully, and question your true motives behind your commitment to the Dharma. First try to arrive at some understanding that your current way of perception and experience fall under the illusion of samsara. Use the Dharma as your reference. The Buddha told us that we are in an endless cycle of existence rooted in karma. Try to observe and deduce if karma, the law of cause and effect does play a role in your life or other people's lives. Only you can judge for yourself. If you can see very clearly your conditions then you will want out. And the Dharma affords you the way out of confusion. This insight will come step by step. You will then understand why the authentic Tibetan practitioners spend so much time in meditation, why they have no attachments to worldly forms of entertainment, or material things.

### **begin with yourself**

To really find sense and meaning in life, start with yourself! Unaware of how we function, we always think, "Oh, things are like this now and that's just the way they are. Everything is alright."

This is called, "not knowing". But to see very precisely and clearly is really not that easy. The problem is when we know the Dharma very well we may sometimes feel more disturbed. Here, "disturbed" means in the sense that the mind is actually more delicate. Because we see more clearly, we actually feel apprehensive about our situation. When you don't know so much, more often than not, you feel that things are just normal. "It is like that!" you tell yourself. For example, if you know the real condition of the food you eat, you will be concerned. Not knowing, you are ready to try everything, and you enjoy eating. The Dharma shows you your real conditions. You can no longer turn away and pretend you don't know.

You will feel concerned. The clearer you are, the more you realize the urgency to change. You will actually feel you must practise the Dharma. You can no longer continue in the same old ways.

### **a misconception: we are just the way we are by chance**

The authentic practitioner understands how to use his present conditions to affect the future. He knows how he is subject to the endless cyclic process of samsara. This life is limited to this body with a given name. But the body is impermanent, while the mind is more permanent. In this respect, "permanent" means continuing on indefinitely. The mind will continue after this life. But we tend to think, "Oh, I am like this right now, and I will have a next life where I will be a different human." We can only imagine in this very vague and limited way. But if you know more, you will understand that what you do today is the cause that will yield a tomorrow similar or corresponding to it, be it weeks, months, or years later. According to what you do now, a resultant condition will appear to you. Your present is the link to your future. This is the fundamental principle of karma, the root of samsara. If you can see how conditions are linked without exception, you will then appreciate how important it is to take care now.

The problem is a common misconception that most people have. We think things just happen to us, that we have no choice. An example, an ambassador of a country is sent to a foreign country on a diplomatic mission. The foreign country happens to be a very nice and comfortable place. However, after three years, he is asked to transfer to some place quite harsh like Bangladesh, or Africa. Like it or not, he has to go. Most of us feel that we are like the ambassador. Situations and conditions happen to fall on us. We have to play a certain role in life. We feel that we have been slotted into some sort of mission or job and we just have to go along. True, our mind has been transferred to this body now. After we die, we will transfer to another body, good or bad. If we are not careful now, we may end up in a life full of hardships. Then we would really feel trapped. We think we fall into bad circumstances quite haphazardly. This is a misconception. It is our own past that has brought us here to this point. The good news is that at this point, we also hold our own future. We are shaping our future now, and so we can make it a good one. If we understand karma, the chain of cause and effect, we will understand that by acting positively and planting good seeds now we can build ourselves a better future. To work hard in Dharma practice is not easy. It is quite difficult. But, it is really worth our while to do so.

### **avoid wishful thinking**

Another misconception that we should be aware of is wishful thinking. In the face of difficulties, we often think, "I am like this right now. Things are a little difficult but better circumstances may be ahead so I'll wait and see." As a result, we don't change. We always think subconsciously, "Even if I don't act properly today, it doesn't really matter." We give ourselves excuses so we don't have to change our behaviour, "I feel sick in my stomach today. I ate too many chocolates, but tomorrow I'll be well again so it doesn't matter." We harbor such notions as we live every day. It is also the reason why we always do the same things over and over again. We commit the same negative actions, and entertain the same negative thoughts repeatedly. Because we cannot see clearly, we believe that the problems will go away naturally by themselves, or we believe that the consequences are insignificant. As a result, we don't take care to avoid the harmful things. And we don't change.

It is quite difficult to analyse how we are doing. Nevertheless, you can try. Take one day and analyse it. Ask yourself, "How am I using this day? What am I thinking? What am I doing? How often am I positive during the day? How often am I negative?" If you try to see, you will find that you are probably more negative than positive.

Actually, on our own, we don't know what is negative. That's why we try to learn from the Dharma what are the negative causes, and what are the positive ones. The Dharma instructions may tell us how to behave, what to do, and we try to follow the given criteria. But actually, if we really try to look, we will see that sometimes, we have our own feelings about things. During your analysis of a day, you will be more aware of what they are. You will see a little clearer than usual, and more open. Very naturally, you will see by yourself, it is not forced.

## **karma and the idea of self**

What is our idea of “self”? There is the physical body, and a given name. “Who am I?” you may ask. The answer is, “My name is... and this is my body.” But actually, your name and body are both only your temporary attributes. When you try to look at where the self is, you will never find it in the physical body. We feel that there is a self. It is what we call “consciousness”. But can you then say that your consciousness is “you” in your physical form? Can you say that your name stands for your consciousness? You will answer “no” to both these questions. Your name is the identification connecting it to your body when you were born. But when you try to reflect, of course, you will feel that, “I am my physical body. I have physical strength and capabilities, and I can do many things.” But everybody knows that the body is impermanent. The body is sure to die one day. Then, does the consciousness die, too? If you say that the consciousness is not physical, but that it is like air, then could this “air” be just anybody? When I teach, is it “air” that is giving the teaching? When you die, does the “air” leave the body? Of course, the answer is no. The Buddha discovered that we have mind. As a result, we always feel, and we can choose. But in order to choose, there must be some kind of capacity or potential there. Otherwise, what or who is choosing? We could continue to probe like this. When we don’t know, and we don’t reflect, then everything seems very simple. But when we delve a little deeper, then everything becomes quite complex.

We know we are not able to do everything. Many conditions prevent and limit our capabilities. For instance, our negative emotions often get in our way, and we find ourselves saying things that we don’t mean or acting contrary to what we think is right. Karma enters into the equation of what is possible for us to do. It can be thought of as a measured capacity or limitation of an individual. A person may have a strong digestive system. He can eat as much as he wants. Others see him as very strong. Another person may have a weak digestion; he is careful with his diet. Overeating will make him fat and compromise his health. Just as we live with different physical capacities, we also live with different karma. It is karma that gives us certain potentials in our nature that influence us. Our actions in turn determine our future. Therefore it is karma that connects us to our future the same way our past actions have brought us to the here and now.

## **independent means we create our own karma**

Our upbringing and education mold our view of life. We may believe that humans have been created. We may feel that we are on a mission. We may feel that our fate is pre-determined. But actually, if you really look, you will find that these are wrong concepts. The Buddha said that when you really look, you will see that we are all independent individuals. We create our own karma. For example, if you work on your garden, it will grow well. If you don’t, your garden will not grow. Likewise, if you clean your house, it will be nice and clean. If you procrastinate instead, your house will never be clean. So “independent” means that if you do something, a result is possible. If you don’t do anything, nothing will happen. If you do right, everything will go right. If you do wrong, everything will go wrong. This is cause, action, and result - generally refer to as “karma”.

Everything depends on oneself. Try to observe your own actions in one day. See what kinds of seeds are planted through your thoughts and actions. You can guess at what kind of results they might bring. You cannot judge exactly of course, but you can make an educated guess. The teachings tell us that we have certain notions or tendencies. One example is our “constant wanting”. “I need this, I want this.” It is “grasping”, and we generally accept it as normal. In one way it is, yet the grasping comes with many strings attached making it a source of many more concepts, ideas, and conditions that disturb us. Without this constant wanting, our mind will be balanced, and problem free. I could claim that my mind is just like that. The desire appears on its own. I have nothing to do with it, yet at the same time, it is I who acts under its influence. This we can all observe about ourselves. If we look without the Dharma as our reference, we will be at a loss as to what to make of our observations. Our “not knowing” will remain as it is, and will continue its hold on us. We are constantly bombarded by our own ideas, perceptions, and definitions. But the Dharma presents us with the truth. We should try to connect with this truth. Step by step, our understanding, about how we feel will become clearer.

## **recognize the need to change**

Ignorance is a state of illusion. It refers to a state of mind that follows without knowing. An “illusion” is a very subtle state that is temporary yet it holds us. As a result, we believe in whatever is happening to us and we simply live the illusion. We follow along without seeing clearly. We are entrapped by concepts and ideas from our confused mind causing the emotions to arise in us. We then feel disturbed, we suffer, and are further confused. Acting under such conditions we create more negativity. Inevitably more suffering awaits us. Thus the chain that produces the suffering actually originates in ignorance, or not seeing properly. All humans are subject to it so the confusion of mind and suffering are universal. Because we are creating the causes continuously, the cycle of samsara is endless. To cut this endless process, we really have to reflect carefully to see differently so we can have a chance to change our course.

To make a fire, we gather dry wood for burning, and as we all know, the more the wood, the bigger the fire. In our context here, samsara is the fire, and the causes we create is the dry wood. Veiled by ignorance, we keep throwing in more dry wood. The fire gets ever bigger. But we can stop the fire by not feeding it anymore. We can put a stop to the confused way we have lived thus far. We have to see this need to change, to avoid repeating the same old ways, and to learn a better way. This is not just an idea but a real possibility. It is up to us to recognize the need to change.

Not only do we need to first recognize a problem, we also must learn how to correct it. Then we put in the necessary efforts in applying the remedies. These three components must converge to solve a problem. Look at the effort people are putting in to contain, reduce, and cure AIDS. Countries with the know-how and the financial means are implementing measures to contain the disease. They are successful whereas countries lacking in these means are failing.

## **the aspiration of Bodhicitta**

Everything we do begins first as an aspiration, a wish. The development of the Bodhicitta-aspiration is no exception. This aspiration has to come from an inner acknowledgement of love, compassion, and of suffering. We have to understand that suffering comes from action without clearly knowing. It comes from action where the underlying motivation is a basic desire/grasping and ignorance. This understanding enables us to feel Bodhicitta - compassion towards others' suffering, and a wish for them to be happy that is love. If you catch yourself thinking, “ I like him so I want to help him, or I don't like him so I don't care.” it shows that you have not understood reality. Bodhicitta is non-discriminating where all beings are equally worthy of our support. To understand this, you have to truly appreciate the fact that everybody is subject to the same conditions of ignorance, and of a fundamental craving and attachment. We are all in the same boat! You will then feel it important to do something to help. This is the positive attitude that is the aspiration of Bodhicitta.

To be able to really train in the Paramitas, to do the practice that is authentic practice, you must have the aspiration of Bodhicitta. Without it, you will have no reason to stay in the mountain to practise and develop yourself. From the perspective of a city-dweller, a mountain retreat seems so peaceful and nice, but actually, it is very hard work. A retreatant eats only tsampa (or some very basic sustenance), and drinks hot water. He has to make do without heating. It takes time to develop the ability of “tummo”, or “inner heat” so that he can withstand the cold. For many years, he has nothing until very slowly, his capacity develops. There is nothing interesting about the harsh mountain conditions. What keeps him in retreat is his absolute conviction that only by meditation practice can he find the solution to help others break free of the miseries of samsara.

If you really try to look, little by little, you will also understand what really matters. Otherwise, you don't see so much. You are always drawn to the seemingly important tasks around you in everyday life. Try to be more concerned about your conditions in the long term. Try to go beyond what is only temporary as in today, tomorrow, one year, or ten years. If you can consider the future life by life, then your perspective will change. How you perceive your present conditions, the people and things around you will all take on a different meaning. A whole new perspective will gradually open to you and your attitudes and actions will follow accordingly.

The Six Paramitas is the Path of the Bodhisattvas, or Bodhicitta. It is very important that you first lay the basic foundation for this practice, which is a proper orientation in your attitude and motivation. What has

been presented so far is a brief synopsis of what is necessary with respect to your inner inclination. When you are at a monastery or Dharma centre, you can ask the monks and nuns there why they became ordained and live as they do. Is it because they wanted to escape or avoid worldly life? What is the purpose in living as an ordained person? You can find out what they think individually? It is important to question in this way. There are many concepts, both in the Dharma, and in everyday life. By asking questions, your understanding will grow. You will acquire some basic knowledge making it easier for you to apply all the instructions that you'd receive, and to practice effectively.

## **GENEROSITY**

### **an overview**

The Six Paramitas train and develop our mind. In one respect, they are the basic qualities of mind, our basic potential. The perfection of all six together will give a perfectly clear mind, and the accumulated obscuration and habitual tendencies of mind through countless lifetimes will be totally purified. In their explanation, the Six Paramitas are presented distinctly one by one. In actual practice, they are interdependent, and are developed together. The first five are "generosity, ethic, patience, effort, and meditation", leading to the development of the sixth called, "wisdom", which is our natural state of the mind, or our Buddha nature mind.

The focal point in all Dharma teachings is our Buddha nature, a basic wisdom inherent in every living being. We cannot really see it, but we can feel it because we are not in total darkness. But at the same time, we are influenced by our karmic conditions. They veil and obscure our mind ever sustaining our habits, disturbing emotions, and tendencies. In order to clear these veils of mind, we have to change our habits. We have to develop a clearer way of thinking and acting, away from the confusion of the emotions. We apply our energy and effort somewhat differently than what we are used to. Gradually, we will be able to realize our own Buddha nature.

### **to counter ego clinging**

Of the Six Paramitas, we can practice generosity, ethic and meditation together as the three main ones. First, we look at generosity. Everyone already understands the meaning of generosity as giving. Generosity as a Paramita means to share what I have with others. The practice of generosity is therefore to learn how to share with others. You may ask why we have to learn this. It is because we have a tendency to keep things for the self ever since when we were very small children, perhaps due to past karma. This negative tendency is universal in all living beings including all animals, or any being with a mind. Basically, it is rooted in ego clinging, and a desire/attachment fixation. On the other hand, generosity does not mean to throw everything away either. Rather, it is a way to express the truth in what we do. It is an expression of our natural state of mind in all our actions. On the surface, we learn to share but fundamentally, generosity is a transformation of our attachment, our desire, and our ego clinging – this is the point.

We feel it natural to grasp the many things and concepts. We don't take the time to stop and see more clearly the condition of our mind. We feel we cannot help but have very strong attachments. We are never at a loss when it comes to self-justification. We are ever rationalizing all our wants and desires. But the Dharma tells us otherwise. We are again reminded of the basic principle of cause and effect. True, we feel strongly about our own needs, even though this feeling is only a notion in our mind. The downside is we are unable to share with others. We are afraid to let go of our desire. Why do we have to let go? It is because suffering comes from desire. Things get complicated and problematic because of our wanting. While we may not wish to suffer, we refuse to let go. So we suffer. The desire is the cause, and the suffering its effect.

The Dharma tells us that there is a fundamental state of mind where such self-centered notions are naturally absent. This is why to be free of suffering means to go back to this fundamental mind. The way to do it is through inner reflection and genuine absorption of the meaning of Dharma. Generosity comes first as an idea, then it is applied in action. This means to think, and behave a little differently, away from self-centeredness. It comes about not by force but through a natural process of change in your state of

mind where your desire is slowly turned in a different direction. Talking about generosity is at a superficial level. It only becomes a true result, a true quality, when your mind is actually able to share what you have, and what you know with other beings. This ability comes through the release of your desire.

### **two levels: relative versus the ultimate**

We study first the benefits of each Paramita. We learn about the qualities, or results that can be achieved through each one. Within the context of the Mahayana and the Vajrayana, the Six Paramitas are the practices, or the methods to be applied at our level now, generally referred to as the “relative” level. Training in the Paramitas will enable us to achieve many significant qualities and results leading ultimately to complete Enlightenment. However, it is important to distinguish two levels of Bodhisattva. One is the achievement of an accomplished Bodhisattva perfect in selflessness, which we call the “ultimate”, or “absolute” level. He is someone whose way of thinking, attitudes, and actions are focused exclusively on the welfare of others. The other is our current level now, the “relative” level, as ordinary human beings in training to become a perfect Bodhisattva. We are obviously not matching the ideal yet, and we must not confuse the two, either. While we are still in training, we will sometimes think for our own benefit. This is natural. We cannot just shut ourselves off even if we wanted to. The point is to make a sincere effort to include others, and to think more for their well being. By learning, and training to think and act like the Bodhisattvas, we will be able to gradually develop all the good conditions necessary to perfect the qualities.

Generosity has to take root in our mind. Its results actually appear as natural conditions in our normal everyday functioning. There is nothing spectacular, or outstanding about them. Generosity becomes part of our basic functioning very much like our karma, which underlies who we are. In fact, many cultures, philosophies, and religions extol it as a virtue in an individual beneficial to society at large.

### **giving without expectations**

A mind capable of giving has a deep understanding of the need of all other living beings. It naturally precludes selfishness. It is an open mind ready to share with others whatever is obtained or achieved. It makes us considerate, and tolerant of other people. We do not insist on our own views and ways of doing things. If you find yourself holding on to what you have accomplished, earned, or created, then your mind is not yet really generous. On the contrary, this self-grasping brings up your negative emotions swaying you into negative thoughts, actions, and behaviours. “ I built this, so I want to keep it. I don’t want to let others have it.” This line of thinking only strengthens your inner desire. Your pride, and attachment follow suit, and inadvertently, so do your aggression, anger, and other negative behavior. This whole process unleashes itself quite naturally from the original grasping.

### **away from grasping**

The point is to move away from self-clinging. “ I made this because I need it, but at the same time, I can share it with others. They don’t have to give me something in return. I just help them.” What often happens in real life is we expect a payback, consciously or unconsciously. “ I do this, and help others as well. Why not? I can actually stand to gain more by doing so,” or “ I help others in order to get more for myself.” Real generosity is helping without any expectation of getting something back. “ I do this and I share the results with others. I keep one part for myself because I need it, and I share the rest with others because they also need it.” This kind of attitude and its corresponding action we call generosity. If we have this notion in mind, we will be able to apply it. It is a state of mind. We are less hateful towards others, less angry, and so we don’t suffer so much. Suffering comes from our grasping, desire and clinging. Loosening our grip, we can be more considerate, tolerant, and accepting of others. As a result, we feel we are able to give and share even our valuable things.

In any society, people are always learning, copying, and influencing one another. Those who start out not “grasping” at things might eventually learn this behaviour from others. And so samsaric conditions are ever multiplying among people. To be first introduced to the term “generosity” is the first step towards positive change. We then learn the meaning of generosity as a concept. Next we develop it as an attitude in our thoughts. Eventually, we will be able to apply it in our actions. In time, generosity becomes a habit of mind naturally finding expression in our speech and actions. A change in our nature is implicit. It is not

that we have lost anything. In general, our deeply rooted attachment is felt as a constant need to hold on to things, to get things. We feel all the while anxious lest we should lose something instead. So we grasp on tighter than ever. Our mind is thus distracted, and aversion grows inside us. Even the loss of a tiny thing can cause us great unhappiness - someone using what is ours counts as a loss! For example, putting up a fence around a piece of property is a wish to keep people and animals out. While telling everyone to stay away is neither done nor feasible, the fence conveys the message. Any trespassing can be distressing to us as if something has been lost to us. This kind of notion infiltrates one's feelings, and thoughts at a very subtle level.

You can choose to see differently. You can choose to be more open-minded. As in the example of the fence, you can accept the fact that from time to time, some people or animals will come onto your property. Immediately, your grasping loosens. Your anxiety diminishes considerably. Your mind is accepting. It is relaxed. Why is it relaxed? It is because you have prepped yourself to share. This correlation is simple, obvious yet basic. We are not talking about achieving Enlightenment, or anything deep and complex. On any given day, how we perceive things in relation to the self is influenced or shaped by our attitudes, habits, and tendencies. These inner conditions set the stage for all our experiences. They make all the difference.

Therefore, to be generous at our relative level means to really develop an inner feeling that it is important and necessary to share with others. We live this open mindset. It does not necessarily imply "giving everything away" either. No question, the very accomplished Bodhisattvas could do it but we practise generosity at our level now, and our capacity will grow in time. We have self-clinging right now so we have to put in much effort. As we practise opening ourselves to others, generosity becomes increasingly natural and spontaneous. It comes with practice.

### **good actions bring good results**

When we practise generosity through positive actions, inevitably, our surroundings and life situations become more favourable. This is what the Dharma tells us. We can see if this is true. Our evaluation very much depends on our ingrained habits and cultural upbringing. For example, in Asian countries where Buddhism and Hinduism are widely practised, there is this notion that when a person is in a difficult situation, be it financially, or in his relationship with others, it is due to his lack of merit, or *sönam*. The converse is also true. When everything goes very well for someone, it is also because of his store of merit. It follows then that a person who believes in the efficacy of merit, finds sharing much easier than a non-believer. In the Muslim faith, there are pillars, or attitudes that its followers embrace. One of them is generosity – in theory, a Muslim is to give half of what he earns to the people who are in need. In Buddhism, we don't necessarily tell people that they must give. But practitioners understand the importance of sharing and so they make offerings to help people in need and to the Dharma centers. Sharing is understood as a necessary and natural process to bring about a common good while clearly rewarding the one who shares. Individually, you should reflect carefully to see if this is a valid view.

To reiterate, when you are generous, the result always comes back to you, and so everything comes easy to you. This positive effect happens not only in this life, but in future lives to come. Things will go smoothly for you. Many regular practitioners do not hesitate to share whatever it is that they receive. One reason is because they can fully appreciate the needs of others. Another reason is their understanding that by sharing, their own conditions will also improve through the accumulation of merit. Of course, true Bodhisattvas do not expect results for themselves. Nevertheless, the outcome of generosity is as described, naturally giving benefit to the giver and the receiver. Understanding this cause and effect is therefore important. It explains why some people always enjoy good circumstances while others experience a lot of difficulties in their lives. It is also why siblings lead very different lives as grown-ups even though they experience similar conditions in childhood. Similarly, children from very poor families could become rich, and children from very wealthy, or powerful families could become impoverished later on in life and have to face many hardships. It is all based on individual merit.

Generosity is not a mere concept. It is a virtue that really works. Just as the Buddha explained, if you take the time to look at the karmic conditions of the mind, you will find that when the mind is grasping with desire, it is closed. Negative thoughts grow increasingly stronger. On the other hand, when the mind is open and relaxed, we can think and act much more clearly. Negative emotions are kept at bay enabling

us to be positive and useful thereby creating better karma. Nobody wants to be miserable. Everybody wants to be good, healthy, and comfortable. It is by sharing with others that we create these positive conditions for our current and future lives. This is what we call the relative value of practicing generosity.

If you find yourself thinking,

- “I find it really difficult to relate to the meaning of the Dharma,” or
- “I try so hard, but I just cannot find the time to meditate in my very busy life,” or
- “Even when I try to sit quietly, my mind is so distracted,” or
- “When I am in the presence of a very great Lama, I just don’t know how to relate to him,” or
- “It seems such a waste that I do not make use of this precious opportunity.”

These are all examples that you may be lacking in merit. You may dismiss these feelings and think that they are normal, and that everyone probably feels the same way. The next time when you have such thoughts, reflect carefully on your inner conditions. Try to be more aware, and you will perhaps understand more.

In “The Jewel Ornament of Liberation,” the reference, “ordinary beings”, does not mean regular people. Though not explicit, it refers to people who have relatively less positive karma. They cannot be open even if they are in front of a Bodhisattva. Their minds are closed because they lack merit. Therefore, it is good for them to first learn from ordinary teachers. When they can act more positively, they will accumulate merit, which will help improve their understanding of the Dharma. They could then start to practise the Paramitas. “The accumulation of merit” is always linked with this practice. The net result is a connection to the deeper meaning of the Dharma. It will also lead to meaningful and beneficial exchanges with the high Bodhisattvas.

### **generosity yields two accumulations**

If we wish to have the ability to do Vajrayana practice, the opportunity to meet the Bodhisattvas, and the ability to understand the meaning of the Vajrayana, and the Dharma, then we have to prepare. And the right preparation consists solely of two things. We call them the two accumulations – “merit and wisdom”. Merit, as explained already, refers to an individual’s storage of positive deeds reflected in his overall quality or character. Wisdom is linked with merit and has to be developed through practice. Wisdom has to do with a state of meditation, which is very profound and natural in us. We could say that wisdom is an expression of the emptiness nature of mind yet these words confuse more than they are able to clarify. To explain it can be rather delicate. Just using common language can often be misleading and the meaning of wisdom misunderstood. When you do the practice, you will understand. You will go beyond the terms and ideas. The actual meaning will appear in your mind, this is to really know the meaning. Indisputably your success rests on your accumulation of merit and wisdom. And the practice of generosity gives you precisely these accumulations. Now that you know, you can choose to improve your own conditions.

For the accumulation of merit, we always make the effort to share our good conditions with people who are in need. We help others who are in difficulties in whatever ways we can. It is important to just try to share without grasping, without expectations of others in return. For the accumulation of wisdom, we usually link our practice with the wisdom of Buddha Amitabha, or the Bodhisattvas like Chenrezig, or Milarepa, We can also participate in “Tsok”, offerings to the enlightened ones. Of course, through our own practice, “through wisdom”, we will come to understand how the accumulation of merit works. Therefore, in general, we start with the accumulation of merit.

### **two types of benefit we could give**

We can practice generosity in two ways with respect to the object of giving. Gampopa explained that there are two categories of help or benefit we could give to others. The first encompasses all that we need. It means to give whatever it is that living beings need, be it help, or material things. The second category is knowledge that we give others to enable them to understand the true nature of everything. In

other words, we give the Dharma - the teachings, and the explanations. It means to support others through our own understanding of the Dharma. In short, it means to share the Dharma with everyone.

To give people material things and help is obviously good, but how much more important it is to give people the gift of Dharma cannot be overstated. The reason is because the Dharma can help an individual to develop positively and to change for the better. Only then will he accumulate merit by himself, which will in turn give him a better future. A person, who understands the meaning of the Dharma, is able to disengage himself from negativity. When we don't know the Dharma properly, even if we are very nice people, we are engaged in much negativity more often than not. For example, someone who doesn't know precisely the meaning of life, and karma, even if he is very nice, may not care for the lives of mosquitoes, ants and insect larvae. He would kill them without consideration. He thinks they don't matter, and he has no feelings for them. On the contrary, someone who knows the Dharma does not kill. This is why giving the Dharma is so important. We are not saying that we have to convince people to believe in the Dharma. Rather, we stand ready to share our knowledge of the Dharma with other people where appropriate. At the same time, we are careful with the life of every living being ever aware of the infallibility of karma. We know what is really important, and avoid harmful actions that would bring suffering. We share this kind of knowledge with others. This is the sharing of Dharma, which is more fruitful, and more important than ordinary generosity.

### **a Bodhisattva's perspective**

When we apply the meaning of the Dharma as we understand it now, in action through generosity, gradually, we will experience its true meaning. We will be able to follow the way of the Bodhisattvas, their concepts, and views. This is actually how an ordinary person becomes a Bodhisattva, through a step-by-step process. There is no other way! We do not become Bodhisattvas because we have been assigned this role from someone higher up. A Bodhisattva is not an emanation from a certain source either. He is not a special kind of being, or an extraordinarily talented, or gifted individual. A Bodhisattva is a conscious being whose understanding of the Dharma is fully developed. Therefore, he lives in the Dharma, he acts in concert with the Dharma completely free from the conditions of samsara. There are many ways one can train to become a Bodhisattva. One example is someone who starts out the same as you and I. He follows the Dharma practice precisely step by step. Gradually, his desires are all extinguished. Worldly materials and pursuits are no longer important to him not because he has grown tired of, or lost his taste for them, but because they no longer hold any meaning or importance for him; so very naturally, he is released from all attachments.

Whenever you find yourself thinking, "This is very nice, or this is not so nice," you are in fact grasping at the "nice" things. You are pushing away, or not caring for the "not so nice" things. For the Bodhisattva, these kinds of notions are absent in his mind because he sees very clearly. Things are really not so important with respect to him. He neither grasps at them nor runs from them. For some of us, we are completely occupied by our lives. We are blocked. Everything seems very important to us, and we try to make sense of everything from our own perspective, and with respect to our own self-interest. But to a Bodhisattva who really sees the meaning of life, everything is important, and yet at the same time, nothing holds importance for him because everything is as the Buddha said, impermanent and ever changeable. Things are not so solid, and in this context, nothing is important. But then, we all exist, following along in life, and we suffer, so it is important to try to help one another and those who are troubled. The emphasis is on our readiness, and our willingness to help one another.

The notion of sacrifice is also relative. When you read a story about a Bodhisattva's actions, it is from your perspective. You see them as sacrifices. Actually, there is nothing sacrificed. For instance, a Bodhisattva gives his water to someone else. It is a simple act of giving water to someone who is thirsty. There is not the notion of any sacrifice in the mind of the giver. Your perceiving it as a sacrifice means that you are grasping. Grasping makes you feel as if you have to give something up to try to share with others. But water is water. It has no special value, and I can give it to someone. Gold is gold, and so I can give it to someone. The concept of value in something comes from self-grasping. When released from clinging, I can give anything, all the many different things including the things that I want, I can simply offer. Just offer. Seeing clearly and precisely the actual condition of everything, grasping disappears.

Our grasping is due to our not understanding properly. We feel that things are important relative to our own interest. When you begin to train in the Bodhisattva way, you should try to share, try to practise as instructed. Then, step by step, you will connect more to the wisdom or wisdom. You will understand more. You will see more clearly. And you will be able to do more. As a result, you will turn away from worrying about yourself. Basically, you will see no reason to worry. Right now you worry because your attachment causes you to worry: the lesser the attachment, the lesser the worry. Then, one day, you will feel and understand that there is really nothing to lose. Actually, in a way, you gain something. Gain or loss is relative. Because the Bodhisattva harbours no such relative concepts, to him, there is nothing to lose, and nothing to gain. It depends on your own inner understanding.

The generosity practice, and the other Paramitas, is a step-by-step training program that enables you to achieve the state of the Bodhisattvas. This is why the Paramitas are actually the application of Bodhicitta. As the meaning of Dharma deepens in us, our understanding of generosity in terms of its purpose, and emphasis also becomes clearer. The relative benefit of gathering merit for self-interest is no longer the main purpose. The Bodhisattva practice is ideally without any self-interest. And a Bodhisattva is a person just like you and I just but more developed. This means that we can be Bodhisattvas, too. We don't have to be particularly gifted, or possess any extra special conditions. For the moment, we start by making a conscious effort to practise. We begin to live our lives in the same direction as the Bodhisattvas.

## Ethic

Implicit in the practice of ethic is discipline. Ethic encompasses, in general, three aspects of discipline.

- To abandon negative thoughts, and actions. This means to guard against all negativity. We are careful not to follow our negative habits, and thoughts. In all our interactions with the world, we try to be very proper through our thoughts, words, and actions.
- To link our mental attitude with the Bodhisattva ideal. This means to embrace Bodhicitta in our mind. We train to develop a mind of Bodhicitta. It therefore complements the first discipline.
- To apply the Bodhicitta mind towards all beings. This means to do whatever is necessary in the application of Bodhicitta towards every living being.

The distinction between these three aspects is very important, even though on the surface they appear to be quite similar. One could regard the first discipline as a form of Vinaya, a prescribed moral code or discipline. The second relates more to becoming a Bodhisattva, while the third is the Bodhisattva ideal in application. We begin always with our current set of relative conditions, and then through our practice, we train in ethic taking one step at a time - the same as our training in generosity.

### ethic as basic ground

In the "Bodhicitta aryatara" and also in "The Jewel Ornament of Liberation," the Paramita of Ethic is likened to the fertile ground to grow the proper seeds. Ethic therefore nurtures and shapes our basic capacity into the realization of a Bodhisattva, or Buddhahood. We have to prepare our potential through our own efforts. We have received the instructions, and we do the practice. But if we don't conduct ourselves ethically, we will never achieve any results from our practice. This is why following proper ethic is so important.

### ethic protects against suffering

Ethic as taught by the Buddha is the Vinaya, a code of discipline and behaviour. In general, we think, "If I have not committed myself to anything, then I don't have to be careful. If I have not promised to do something, then I am free. I don't have to feel obligated, or restricted." In our context here, commitment may mean the taking of the Refuge vow, a monk's vows, or a layperson's "genyen" vows. Somehow, we think that if we have not taken a vow, then we are not liable. We don't have to be guarded. We do have this kind of notion. But actually, we really need to understand that the vows give us the guidelines to protect us. They show us the right actions that will lead to positive and beneficial results for everyone. The ultimate benefit is of course to become realized. Proper living is therefore the road out of our suffering. It supports and facilitates our efforts to become free of our ignorance and confusion. How we

conduct ourselves does matter, whether or not we have committed ourselves to an ethical code. The results from our actions will surely mature for us one day regardless of our belief, or commitment. The reason why some people take the outward forms of vows is because they feel that through their serious and earnest commitment, they will more likely be successful to change, and to keep the discipline. They might be more effective and strict with themselves in difficult times when they could not otherwise cope.

### **not to harm others**

The main challenge is not to follow our habits, attitudes, and ideas and act in a way that will harm other beings. We exercise care and awareness in whatever we do. That in-itself, is already helping others by not creating negativity. Therefore we have to first understand ethic, otherwise, we won't know what are the harmful actions to avoid. Committing harmful actions is a double-edged sword. Not only do I hurt myself and others, the negative karma thus created further obscures my mind so I am unable to understand or to see clearly. The obscuration blocks my connection to my mind's wisdom or my Buddha nature. The less the obscuration, the easier it is to see precisely and to recognize the right thing to do. Therefore, ethic is the proper ground that will make it easy for our practice to be effective and productive.

The basic advice is not to harm other beings. We should not lie, and make others believe in a falsity. Lying could easily be habit-forming; it is a bad habit producing negative actions. A special emphasis is not to lie about spiritual matters, which might cause others to believe and follow the wrong path as a result. This is a much more negative consequence of lying.

We should not steal. In general, all societies treat stealing as a criminal offence. We all live by this law. But actually, it is very important not to steal even without the legal prohibition. For example, if you ask, "How can I be healthy?" The advice is to eat healthy, exercise regularly, and get proper rest. We are not forced to follow it exactly. There is really no right or wrong. If I want to be healthier and to live longer, then this kind of advice makes sense. Similarly, acting ethically makes sense because it directly impacts our basic state of mind, which will affect our future. Even when my mind now is not so clear, or well, and there is a lot that I don't understand, acting positively will give me the good opportunities later on. The good karma is translated into mental clarity to really grasp the meaning of the teachings, and instructions. While it is true that everything depends on you, on your knowledge, and effort, at the same time, everything is also linked with karma. Therefore, in order for things to turn out properly, we must act properly. We take care of our state of mind, our speech, and our actions. We are committed even in the face of difficulties. We try to really understand why acting positively is actually very important for us. All living beings, but human beings in particular, live our lives very much driven by our desires and attachments. Of course, we cannot sever our grasping even if we wanted to, because it is immensely difficult, next to impossible. But we can try to not follow the wrong actions, and wrong attitudes! This is ethic, this is discipline.

### **engage in ethic during hardships**

Actually, ethic really comes into play when we are confronted with difficult situations. When there is nothing wrong, there is no need of a remedy. When you are on a spiritual path, as a monk, a nun, or a layperson, real engagement is when you are faced with hardships. Can you still adhere to the principles to get over the difficulties? This is why the Vinaya spells out in detail all the codes to help us deal. In general, as explained already, we live with our desires, we live with our attachments. Due to this, we harbor misconceptions, misunderstanding, and we misuse our opportunities for temporary selfish gains or pleasures. We may think certain things pleasant when they may not be. Nevertheless, our wants of these things make our mind unethical, dishonest. We cheat a little, we lie a little in order to get what we want. Otherwise, we don't need to lie, we don't need to be dishonest. Our negative actions come about due to our desires. We are not only referring to the very obviously negative crimes but the more subtle negativities that always appear in our minds. We try at times to ward off their negative influence on us. Sometimes we are deterred by our fear of being found out. "I cannot do this because somebody would find me out. If nobody is going to know, then it's alright." This kind of wrong concept can also appear. Why? It comes from desire, desire for one's good name, or image. It is ego clinging. "I don't want to be a bad person. I want to be right, I want to be nice in the presence of others." Due to this desire, we always cheat a little, and we are slightly manipulative.

Generally, we don't see what we are like. We are so used to putting up a front because we do it all the time. We think we are normal. There is nothing wrong with it. Of course, there are the harmless little things we do when we socialize with others. They are not actually bad per se but if we are not aware of them they too can slowly turn negative. For example, we want a certain result, in order to get it, we become manipulative to get our way. We all know this but if we are not vigilant, our manipulative demeanor can grow stronger and stronger. Nobody kills just out of the blue. The aberrant aggression probably took root in some form of negativity, seemingly harmless in the beginning. Then slowly, it turned into a total disregard for others. The basic ethic is not to harm others. We cannot be inattentive, or slipshod about it. "Oh, I know what I am doing is not quite right... but I have these problems and things are just so hard for me. But let me get out of my problems first, then tomorrow, I will try harder. Yes, I will try to be good tomorrow." This letting go of our principles is not acceptable. We always have difficulties. We will always have problems. We have to be ever conscientious and vigilant. We always connect with ethic, and apply it in everything we do. be aware of negative tendencies – harmful mind, presence of desire, wrong view. There are certain negative tendencies or notions that are present in our mind. We should try to be aware of them. Three negative tendencies worth noting are harmful mind, mind in the presence of desire, and wrong view. Harmful mind is a state of mind that is thinking of doing harm to others, or hurting others. How not to harm others have already been presented.

The "presence of desire" points to a mind that wants. What is the cause of the desire? It is the feeling that I always need something, a kind of envy. Though it does not mean that we have to cut this desire, but if we are not aware of it, then our mind will never be peaceful. The peace of mind ends where a lot of negative causes appear. Therefore, we listen to the teachings, and we try to look at the self. "How am I doing?" You might think like this, "...but I'm alright, maybe the problem is with the other people." This means you are not seeing really clearly. Try to analyze if this applies to you, "I think I have desires, and I feel envious of others. Maybe this is why my mind is always restless. I am constantly searching, always restless. Even when I don't need anything, I am still somehow restless...". Actually, in everyday living, this "searching-for-something" state of mind is dominant. When we read the newspaper, or magazine, we are constantly looking, even when we don't need anything. Mind is always searching and restless. As a result, though maybe not all the time, we usually do find something because we put so much effort into it.

The next time you find yourself just browsing through a clothing, or furniture catalogue, try to be aware of your state of mind. You might notice that some restlessness is there though it is not necessarily negative. The problem is if we are not careful and aware, it may become the start of a problem. If you are aware, no harm will come from your browsing. You understand that you are just looking and you don't let yourself go further than that. You keep your balance.

Another negative tendency of mind is "wrong view". Actually it means a state of mind unwilling to seek the truth and so rejects it. The word, "truth", sounds very important, and rather serious. But in our context here, the truth points to our regular ways in which we deal with everyday life. Simply look at how you manage the day-to-day things, not necessarily the big projects. You don't have to feel ashamed of your inner wanderings either. Shame is harmful, in a way, it is a form of rejecting the truth. Be aware of yourself. Much like when you try to understand why someone did something really negative, for instance. You try to figure out his motives, or the circumstances that he was in that drove him to it.

### **contentment is one aspect of discipline**

To be content is very important. While it is understandable that everyone wishes to have a comfortable and good life, but on the other hand, to know contentment is essential. It is the way of ethic. We can practise or apply contentment in our monitoring of our food intake. The Buddha explained that when we eat, we should eat until we are three quarters full. This is not a restriction. According to the Vinaya, generally, we can eat everything. But at the same time, we are cautioned as to the amount we eat. Not that eating is bad but if we are not careful, our eating can harm our body. Our stomach needs air and room to digest its content so it's good to allow our stomach to be one quarter empty. This helps our digestion which will keep us healthy. Similarly, the Buddha said that we should take care of our physical, and mental health. We should not harm our body. We pay attention to what we eat. We eat nutritious food and we watch the amount. This is what discipline means with respect to the proper intake of food. It

should make good common sense. It does not mean to deprive oneself of nutritious or delicious food. Neither does it mean to starve oneself.

### **we can reflect at eating time**

Another aspect of eating can connect us to the Paramita of generosity. When you eat, mentally, you can dedicate the food and all the good conditions that produced the food to all sentient beings. The food is made available to you through the effort of many people. Think of them, and how they have contributed. As well, reflect that all food comes from the suffering of many beings. For example, think of where the meat, or vegetables, or grains come from. Even in the case of water, the Buddha said that animals are disturbed by the way we obtain our water. So it is this kind of idea that we should be aware of. Our awareness is through clear understanding in place of a strict and rigid observance of rules. We know and we are not uncaring or careless. We are aware of both the good and the bad. We therefore dedicate the good, and we purify the bad through our conscious prayers and wishes. The purification is not only of our own karma, but also of those beings that suffer. Try to pray for them and accept them into your prayers as part of your practice. This is a discipline we should all try to engage in.

### **use discipline to keep negativity at bay**

Whenever you are with people, to apply ethic means to engender a proper attitude. While it is natural for you to focus on your own work and results, it does not preclude you from being concerned for others as well. Other people are also working for their goals. The proper thing to do is to try to consider both sides. Your words, and actions will then have this proper lean. You don't have to lie, or cheat to get your way. Even when you really cannot help it, you can still try to limit your negative behavior to a minimum and not let it get any worse. This is discipline. Actually, if you can already stop all negativities, then you don't need discipline. To be ethical, and disciplined imply an inability to stop negativity thereby warranting the practice of restraint.

Having desire can be likened to drinking salty water where one's thirst is actually more aggravated. For example, if my slightly negative act produced a good result, I would feel somewhat gratified. Based on this gratification, I judge the behavior not so bad and would therefore most likely repeat it in the future. When repeatedly the negative behavior gives me a favorable result, I would deem it a good method, its negative side ignored and forgotten. Ethic is the discontinuation of something negative. You need to be aware so you could discipline yourself.

Some sutras tell of the Buddha comparing ethic to staying in the shade in a very hot desert. If you maintain step by step, proper ethic and action, you will feel as if you are under a shade in a desert. Lacking discipline is likened to being always under the hot sun, exposed and very hot. A step-by-step process to change is to first understand the many conditions that distract your mind. Then, stay ever aware and vigilant of these conditions. When they arise, remember to remain "content" cognizant of the fact that it is the antidote to the disturbances. Then very gradually, your mind will be increasingly relaxed. You will then be able to rest in the presence of mind, quiet and peaceful.

At the moment, relatively speaking, we have less negative karmic conditions so it is important that we seize this opportunity to lay the groundwork for our future. The positive results of our preparation and discipline now are not immediate, but they will come. Without discipline, our mind is always distracted. There is therefore no peace of mind. On the whole, depending on the circumstances, we are creating more negative causes than not. And the negative results continue to appear. If we know, if we are mindful of proper ethic, then everything becomes smoother and more positive for us, because our mind is the basic ground from which everything arises. If the mind is linked with desire, then all the thoughts and actions will follow in this vein.

### **stop the first concept**

In Tibetan, we have a term that is translated as, "first concept" – it is what we first feel. If left unchecked, this feeling/concept will continue to further define and shape our state of mind. A first concept may be, "Oh, this is very nice. I want to have it; or I want to be like this!" If we are not careful, the feeling will carry us away in its direction. Obviously, if it is a positive thought, then it is quite alright. But a negative one

undetected can gradually develop into a bad habit. And we wonder why it is so hard to change. We can all appreciate how important “awareness” is when dealing with a first concept. We have to grow accustomed to being aware. We always watch carefully our inner conditions. If we can recognize this first concept right away, then immediately it is changed. Why? It is because we can see the quality of our feeling, the quality of our focus. We can see that it does not bring us any benefit. As a result, we will not be led into a second concept. There is a Tibetan expression which captures exactly this idea. Its exact translation is to “close” the negative “first concepts”. By being aware, we can choose not to follow the negativity. In time, we are habituated to this type of vigilance and we will improve. We close, or stop our negative thoughts, and actions. But then, you have to see for yourself what “close” really means!

It goes without saying that you can only see and act according to what you experience. A simple example is if you are cold in a room, you close the window to keep the cold air out; and vice versa, when the room is too warm, you open the window. Similarly, with respect to all the distractions of mind, first, we must know their causes. When a distraction appears, we don't focus on it. This will stop it. We find out what brought it on, and we don't follow it. This is the first of three aspects of discipline, introduced earlier, in our practice of ethic.

### **to embrace Bodhicitta**

The second aspect of discipline is “to embrace Bodhicitta”. It means to engender the positive while abiding in the truth of the Dharma. It is essentially the Bodhisattva attitude and action. It is our commitment to help others while following the Dharma ever connected to its meaning. For example, a dog is very hungry. I catch a fish to feed it. I killed a fish in order to help a dog – an obvious breach of the Dharma. I've created karma that is mixed with both good and bad through an ignorant state of mind. We should be careful that the help we give is in keeping with the Dharma. Otherwise, we could be causing more harm than good. Try to remember the link to the Dharma, then we will remember to apply it, where positive intent is followed up with positive action. This is the Bodhisattva way, or Bodhicitta attitude, an earnest commitment to do everything in a pure and proper way while benefiting others.

### **application of Bodhicitta**

The third is “the application of Bodhicitta”. It means to actually help and pay attention to all beings equally. Of course, each being's conditions and situations are different so our help will be given accordingly. “Equal” in our context here means that every being without exception is important. One being is important, just as a few beings are important, and likewise many beings. We therefore try to help, support, and attend to any number of beings according to their individual needs. From the Tibetan, the meaning is to do something beneficial for all beings, in very important things as well as in very simple things. An example is giving water to someone who is thirsty. We do not dismiss the act as, “Oh, he needs a glass of water. But that is so trivial. I am going to offer him something much better and important.” To the thirsty person, water is very important at that moment. We should try to express our Bodhisattva commitment and help in appropriate ways.

Sometimes you may find yourself thinking, “Oh, he is very difficult to deal with. I am so busy already with many important things. It's alright then for me not to care too much about him.” This is not right. To a Bodhisattva, every single being is considered very important. You will see that it actually makes sense when you start to apply it. Generally, we have a sense that things and people directly linked to our pride and desire are very important. As a result, those outside of our self-centeredness get ignored. We don't care about them so that gradually the defects and wrong views start to appear in our mind.

Normally we feel that everything is alright, yet at the same time, our emotions are quite strong and distracting. Our mind is thus agitated and interrupted. Many complications appear and with them, more confusion. Even though we don't actually go around and describe ourselves as confused, we are actually confused. If we take the time to really look at how we are...we will see that we don't know really where we are stuck, and what we have to do. This is confused mind. And we just follow it. We live like this with many things unclear to us. There is really much confusion. We may not necessarily be suffering a lot, but on the whole, we experience pressures, discomfort, and unpleasantness. And we don't understand.

By using the Dharma as our reference point, we can begin to reflect carefully and precisely. Like doing an experiment, we take the Dharma as hypothesis and test it out in daily life to see if it works, to see if it is true! Then, slowly, the meaning and significance of the Dharma will become simple and obvious to you. Your state of mind will become simple. Simple does not mean stupid. Neither does it imply that people are simple. Simple means it is easy for you to understand. It is a state of mind where you can understand so much better. You can then better cope with situations when there is less confusion, less trappings due to the emotions and distractions.

On the other hand, each individual situation is actually good. It is workable and useful yet neither is it appreciated nor utilized. The point is to really take the time to reflect carefully. All the teachings emphasize this point. Careful introspection will gradually allow us to see that the things that distract us are not really so important. Often, we first focus on the distractions. We magnify them, and make a big deal of them. Then, we follow them like sheep in a flock following one another when startled, without knowing really where they are going or what startled them. It is the same as when a little interruption appears and it distracts you yet you don't know why you are disturbed but you follow the distraction. You do live like this. If you could try to be a little more aware, everything will become clearer. You can apply the right ethic in situations. And you can relax. You will feel happier with your conditions. You'd be able to do very nice things for others, which will make you even more relaxed. As explained already, this is a positive karmic chain leading to good merits or results. This directly causes your practice to go well and you will achieve the good results. In the "Bodhicitta aryatara", or "The Jewel Ornament of Liberation", ethic is described as the fertile field from which good crops will grow. For our practice to blossom and mature, ethic is fundamental, and indispensable. It prepares us by reducing our obscurations so that increasingly, we are able to be "in the moment".

### **awareness is key**

In a way, it is very easy to connect with the Bodhicitta ideal. Our mind and action both can normally maintain this connection except when we are not aware, when we cannot see. Therefore, we have to try to be aware so that we can still pull back when we have gone off. The same as when we are driving too fast, we slow down. We apply this same principle and adjust accordingly our speech, our action, and our thoughts to keep proper ethic. We do not make excuses or try to cover up by thinking, "Oh, I am not really doing anything wrong, so everything is O.K." Actually, we are always engaged in the little negatives. Therefore, "to slow down" in our context means to try to reduce these small negatives. If you can do this, you will see better and you will not make so many mistakes. You will see what you are thinking and how you behave. Mistakes can be avoided. When we are always careful, everything will become proper.

This engagement in ethic is a lifetime commitment, a spiritual path. There is no urgency to change everything all at once, but we use the Dharma as our guide. While it is almost impossible to be very strict all the time, yet to completely ignore any discipline is also not recommended. "I cannot do it, I don't need to follow it," this way of thinking is not good. Try to improve the discipline little by little. At times, you are more vigilant while at other times you can relax. Like this, you will go back and forth, adjusting yourself by being careful and then relaxing. When things are not so easy, your awareness will help you cope. Afterwards you can relax again. If you could do this, then slowly this vigilance and ethical behaviour will become a habit. Actually, things will no longer appear difficult for you, and you will be able to deal with them quite easily.

## **PATIENCE**

### **to counter anger**

The third Paramita is "patience". In "The Jewel Ornament of Liberation", it is explained that patience is often applied to counter anger, a negative emotion that causes many conditions to appear thereby greatly distracting us. When that happens, our good karma and qualities dissolve.

Anger is normal yet changeable. A person with a very short temper has developed this habit or personality. In fact, being in samsara, emotions such as anger are very naturally triggered when our mind

is faced with certain circumstances. We are completely taken up by this negative emotion. There is no room, or time left for anything else. But where does the emotion come from? It is from our very subtle consciousness, which holds the notion of “I” giving rise to all the disturbing emotions. Anger is an obvious one. Temper can quickly flare linked with this basic self-grasping. You may wonder why anger is singularly noted here. It is because the many teachings on the Bodhisattva Path expressly cautioned that anger could destroy everything. Of course, we think anger is natural. By carefully monitoring your own inner feelings, perceptions, and thoughts, gradually, you will come to understand the causes of anger in you. You could then start to change your internal patterns. This is the reason why the Patience Paramita is introduced to help you realize this change.

The first of the two Paramitas help us to gather and keep positive merits. We have been reborn as human beings. This favorable condition comes from merit. Things are readily available to us. By practicing generosity and ethic, we prepare a fertile field where everything would grow well. In our context, the crop is our merit. Our conditions will become better, easier, and less difficult for us; in short, a better karma. As explained already, it is also merit that gives us all the good conditions for spiritual development. We are able to receive the Dharma, we have time for practice, we are connected with a proper spiritual teacher and when we receive the instructions, we can understand and apply them. Being ethical guards our mind from accumulating negative karma.

It only makes sense that we would wish to keep and increase our storage of merit. However, as stated in the many Buddhist texts, very strong anger could destroy, or damage all our merit. Try to reflect deeper to get to its exact meaning. The metaphor used to describe anger is that of a very strong fire that burns away everything, all the qualities, and merit that we have carefully developed. If you really try to analyze it yourself, you could actually conceive your anger causing you damage, in addition to hurting others. Therefore, to develop patience, to stop or counter anger is very important.

### **three types of patience**

In general, the development of patience can be discussed from three perspectives.

1. When someone or something disturbs you, you do not think or feel anything of it. The translation of a corresponding Tibetan expression is “Whatever happens, do not think, do not feel.” You can leave it, or let it go. Of course, it is not so simple to do. You should not expect that you could do it tomorrow just because you know you ought to. You have to learn to be “patient”, otherwise, you cannot do it.
2. Second, you accept all the difficulties or sufferings voluntarily. You willingly take on all the problems and hardships.
3. You “properly search” the meaning of the Dharma. When our mind is impatient, we try to do everything very quickly and so we don’t actually get the proper meaning. To “properly search” means to take the time to investigate what precisely is the Dharma telling us and whether it is true. To train in the Paramita of Patience involves many trials of holding up to the difficulties and resisting negative tendencies. We cannot force ourselves to be patient. It might work for us for one day, but it’s gone the next. We have to train ourselves through experience over time. In this way, we will come to understand much more clearly the meaning of the Dharma. When we really get the clear and precise meaning, then we are sure. We will feel less irritated or bothered by things and people. We will then be able to work with others and all the conditions, following the Bodhisattva Path.

Each of these three points presented contains many elements and aspects just as there are many ways of expressing and explaining them. A more simple approach is to use a few examples to illustrate these essential points.

If someone disturbs or harms you, don’t make anything of it. In Tibetan, we say, “Don’t think so much and don’t feel so bad!” Ordinarily, when someone harms you, and you are very sensitive, your breathing quickens and you turn serious. In short, you are disturbed. You feel a little bit hopeless as in, “What’s the use?” so you don’t react immediately. This is not patience, but a feeling of futility. Sometimes, we react to release some of the internal tension while at other times we don’t, depending on the situation. For example, you drive into town and see a parking spot. Just then, someone else takes the spot. You feel a

little unhappy and upset yet you feel that arguing over it would lead nowhere so you decide to just drop it. But your anger/distraction still lingers inside. When it happens to you a second time with a different parking spot, you will be much angrier. This kind of inner tension is in us. Under certain circumstances, we express and release the tension in our actions. When certain situations do not allow us to express it, we just hold it in. This holding back is therefore not considered exercising patience.

In general, we suppress very small pressures without really registering them. We use an example to help illustrate the point. You come home from work and your spouse has not done what you have expected. You feel your dissatisfaction inside but you don't say anything about it. This kind of small tension we have all experienced. You feel somewhat unhappy yet you are not clear as to why. Then maybe after twenty, or thirty times of holding it in, you react or pop like a champagne bottle, yet without realizing exactly what is happening or what it means. It is therefore very important for you to see clearly your inner condition. This is the key. Then you will understand, and you will have no need to explode. As soon as the distraction comes, you see it, and you understand it. Therefore, you will not necessarily feel tense or your stomach knotted.

### **a gradual process**

It is difficult to say exactly how we go about starting the process of letting go. Having a clear perception and a proper understanding is a start. Then, we have to adopt the Bodhicitta aspiration and engage in its application. The aspiration comes from our understanding that everything comes from ignorance leading to suffering. The suffering is not just temporary but it is ever present as the endless cycles of samsara. If I am really clear about this fact, then even if I am not yet free, I recognize and feel that all samsaric conditions are unsatisfactory. They are not good for all living beings, myself and everyone else included. In order to solve this problem, and to change the conditions, I start first with myself. I try to support others. I try to put the Bodhicitta ideal into action. Then, because I become clearer, step by step, I will be able to train in the Paramitas.

### **to be aware of ego clinging is fundamental**

To be aware of our own ego clinging is a must. We are in samsara on account of our self-attachment. Characteristic of samsara are the many problems we encounter. We may know how to solve a few problems but not all of them. Many things are quite difficult. We feel at a loss as to what to do, so we feel trapped. Therefore we always have to come back to our basic being. We have to be aware of our ego clinging. We have to realize that this constant grasping is not good for anyone. This recognition gradually turns our focus towards other beings. We become more considerate of them. This caring and concern for others is the proper attitude indispensable in the practice of the Patience Paramita.

Consider the following observation and see if you could expand it with your own experience.

The next time you meet some people, try to see how you perceive them. At first, you may find them very nice, and sincere. Then when you next have an opportunity to work with them, you may start to see that everything is not so nice after all. You become more careful otherwise you may run into trouble. When this concept comes up, ask yourself, "Why are the people not really as nice as I thought them to be?" It takes time to probe like this but you will begin to see that it is due to a combination of factors.

We have ego clinging. This strong desire or attachment is very natural. It is not necessarily negative or positive but it accounts for the very strong pride in all of us. In general, pride is quite evident in other people, but to see your own pride is not that straightforward. You probably don't know you have it. You may deduce that you must have it since everybody seems to have it. But, you don't know how your pride functions in you. Most people don't. This is why they do not act quite properly. Even the people who can see their own pride, they are at a loss as to how to be free of it. They want to change but they can't. They feel taken over by it. Why? It is because pride is a deeply ingrained habit linked with so many feelings, thoughts, and concepts. It cannot be seen immediately, so it cannot be changed immediately. Even for some people who think they know, but they don't really know its depth clearly. This is why pride is so hard to change.

### **to see with right understanding**

Because we have ego clinging, we are distracted as we follow our disturbing emotions. It is a distracted state of mind flushed with jealousy, pride or hatred drawn by desire/attachment. Our mind is like this all the time, and so all our planning and goals take on a negative tilt. We are misdirected and at our worst, should we lose control to the negative state altogether, we could really act negatively with dire consequences for everyone. Through our own seeing and understanding that ignorance, or self-grasping is universal in all beings, we become more accepting of others. We are not bad on purpose but rather, we understand that we are totally caught up in ego clinging, pride and hatred. This is why our speech, our actions, and our attitudes are somewhat defensive, vengeful, and dishonest most of the time. These ways come very naturally to us. This is why we often react very strongly. We may not be heavily negative; however, some negativity is always there.

By knowing that this basic negativity is there, then you can begin to work with it. Even if someone harms you, you can just let it go, or accept it. It does not mean you just let him harm you either, or do nothing about it. You should still speak and act sensibly ever conscious of the fact that the person is acting out of an inability to see clearly and therefore he cannot help himself. There is a misunderstanding that to be patient means to not do anything, and to just leave things as they are. Patience means to not let anything disturb your mind, or your own nature. Why this is so important is because if you are disturbed, then you could get very angry. Unconsciously, you will think to retaliate, or revenge. But if we understand clearly, then there is no reason to strike back.

For example, walking on grass could attract ticks. You know that they suck your blood and cause you some irritation. But somehow, when you see clearly that ticks also has a wish to live, too, you don't really get angry at them. Your awareness brings in the understanding. This is what we mean by "the meaning of the Dharma appearing in your mind". And you exercise your wish to follow the path of the Bodhisattvas and you refrain from killing. You see the reason behind a particular situation, or event, so you could then cope in an ethical way. You don't get angry, neither are you afraid. You don't let the ticks feed on you either. You simply remove them, and place them elsewhere. But if you only consider ticks a nuisance, a pest, then you will immediately feel the urge to kill them. Similarly in all of life-situations, we should try to see the basic condition as in the example of the tick. Of course anger arises in us easily. Often, we are so used to it that we no longer notice it when it is there. In fact, there is always a tiny bit of anger in us making us very judgmental. But if we can see clearly, then we will be able to work with it, and so our anger will decrease. Therefore, to see properly with the right understanding is very important. Otherwise, "not to think, or feel anything" is near impossible!

While we are on the Bodhisattva Path, in each moment, we make the effort to be clearer and more precise our understanding. We could make the anger either stronger, or weaker. It is up to us. If we really take the time to listen carefully, to reflect and validate the meaning within our own experiences, then abilities such as "not to think about it" are doable. We may not necessarily be highly-realized beings immediately, but more importantly, if we have the capacity to learn and understand ever connected to the aspiration of Bodhicitta, then, we too, will become highly-realized beings.

When you try to see the precise meaning of the Dharma, you listen properly without letting your concepts, and ideas obscure your mind. This means to not follow your preconceptions, habitual thoughts, and patterns of thinking. It is also a form of patience when you take the time and effort to see clearly; over time, this exact seeing becomes your ability.

### **patience precedes and guides our actions**

We use the term, patience. The term affords us an idea, an easy reference to remind ourselves but we have to subsume patience so that it becomes our nature. It will come with training. At the moment, we believe and we understand but we are not used to being patient. As a result, we are not able to act properly. We forget and so we follow our habits and tendencies. Everybody is like this. Patience has to precede and guide our reactions. For example, when you drive, you are aware of the speed limit. On the one hand, the rule gives you some pressure, but on the other, it is a reminder to drive carefully. Especially when your car has the power to go very fast, the limit is there to deter you. Similarly, when you are used

to being patient, even when your anger, or another strong emotion takes you over, your reaction is still connected with patience and the degree of negativity thus limited.

### **patient with all beings equally**

Our everyday life is a fertile training ground. It affords us many minor incidences when we find ourselves distracted, and irritated. That is the time when we should remind ourselves to apply the meaning of patience and try to see the point of view of others. Try to see their conditions. As explained already, “don’t feel”. In the beginning, we will see that we are constantly judging. In general, we find that intelligent people with good conditions do not need our special consideration. And we tend to be more considerate to those who are lacking in knowledge, or who are in adverse conditions. In this way, we discriminate between the “have’s and the have not’s”. Gradually, we will come to realize that all sentient beings live under the same confines of samsara. The individual conditions may differ due to karma. This realization renders you more available to others equally. It enables you to follow the Bodhisattva Path eventually gaining liberation from samsara.

### **accept all difficulties**

There is a Tibetan expression, which means “to accept your suffering”. It means more than to accept. A Bodhisattva is actually happy with his lot in life because he has gone beyond a mere acceptance of his given conditions. Ordinarily, patience is needed when there is some unpleasantness. We try very hard but sometimes our effort goes unnoticed. Others may be too tired to notice, or too busy to acknowledge it. We feel discouraged because there is no response, and we feel we shouldn’t have to put up with the suffering any more. Disappointed, we give up trying. We become careless because we think it makes no difference. Apathy sets in, and a feeling of futility appears. This is why we have to learn to accept things voluntarily on our own without any expectations.

When you really engage in applying patience, everything is of course not so smooth. There are distractions, and disappointment. We are dealing with people. People are people. The task can be both time consuming and tiring. People do not really see what you are doing. In the meantime, you are also in the suffering as well. But if you see without expectation of results, the meaning of our relative, nevertheless normal, samsaric conditions will become apparent. The conditions are then easier to handle. Without the support of the correct view, being patient is really challenging and there is much suffering. But Bodhicitta in action is to work very sincerely without wanting even in the face of distractions and suffering. There can be no disappointment. Everything comes by your very decision to try to help others. Therefore you are able to deal with all the hardships. As soon as the concept, “this is difficult” appears, immediately it is recognized and accepted as necessary in the scheme of things. And you deal with it quite earnestly, as best you can.

With respect to the human state of mind, it is very complex. And so is the training in patience, which is multi-faceted. We cannot possibly cover all the many facets. However, we could begin to relate to them little by little. We work with the three points of patience presented. If we are able to reflect carefully and make a connection to the meaning of those points through our own experiences, then we will become clearer. The meaning will come through our interactions with others, through experiencing our own feelings, our own emotions, as well as experiencing what other people may feel, and how they live. This is what is meant by “properly searching the meaning of the Dharma”, the third kind of patience. It calls for the precise understanding of the meaning of the Dharma beyond our preconceptions, prejudices, and biases.

What I have explained I feel is very important. But it is my own judgement. Yet we live in samsara influenced by our concepts and ways of thinking and feeling. This is why so much emphasis is given to use the Dharma always as our reference. When you are trying to be patient, and you find yourself caught up in what you would like it is an indication that you have not yet grasped the full meaning of the Paramita of patience. But if you could expend a little time and effort, and work with the difficulties, then in time, you will understand more and so you could change and adjust your concepts and perceptions. In daily life, you don’t simply connect to the parts that suit you, or what you would like and care only for them. You cannot practise patience without distractions. There will be distractions, difficulties, and suffering. They are viewed as such from your point of view. The perceived problems vary individually according to the way

you practise, and the way you deal with things. Because everything comes from how you hear, and how you reflect, then if you are connected to the proper way, you will get the meaning. Distractions will still keep arising for sure because we are human. Their number will however decrease. The important difference is when a distraction appears, you will be able to spot it immediately and you will not follow it anymore.

## Effort

Actually, it is a combination of effort and diligence. These two qualities are necessary to assure “continuity” on the Bodhisattva Path.

### two aspects of effort

1. First is “engagement”. Effort is required to actually engage in something.
2. Next is “to continue without hindrance”. It means to apply effort in order to continue where nothing can block the way. Whether the progress is quick or slow is not a concern here. We can readily see how effort is integral to the practice of patience. In order to cope with the hindrances, we have to “to resist”. We work hard to resist all the problems and obstacles so we don’t veer off the Dharma Path. Yet at the same time, we appreciate the fact that the distractions and hardships afford us the chance to obtain a better understanding. This is why we have to have strong effort and perseverance to stay on track.

### engagement

Effort is indispensable if we wish to reach Enlightenment. It propels us towards greater understanding through engagement in the practice. Effort is connected with all the other Paramitas like meditation, generosity, ethic and patience. We train in each Paramita with effort. In fact, we live every day with effort. As the saying goes, “With right effort, even your finger can make a hole in the stone.” The right effort can get us through any difficulty. Generally, what you consider “difficult” is not so difficult. It is your desire, tendencies, and emotions, which govern you. They take up most of your time. You then find yourselves unable to have time for what is really important. You find it difficult to practise. Even when you believe in the Dharma, and you want to practise, your other pursuits occupy all your time. You then find it difficult to follow the Dharma. “Difficult” in the sense that you feel the time is passing, and you have not engaged in what is really important to you. This is why you have to first “engage”.

Effort comes from our commitment to reach a certain result and it enables us to achieve our goal. Along the way, we will have to persevere through all the difficulties much like the Tortoise in “The Tortoise and the Rabbit”, a story well known to all people. Whatever Dharma practice you happen to engage in, it is your normal tendencies and habits that get in your way. They block you from the habit of practice. There is somehow a little gap. The gap is a lack of discipline to sit silently, and to stay with it. It is not so easy because you are not used to sitting like that. Also, meditation does not fetch you any “interesting” things. You meditate in order to become realized. Therefore, you have to train to develop this new habit. It takes time and it takes discipline. You will also need many support and conditions such as merit and proper understanding of the meaning of the Dharma; otherwise, you will not be able to stay alone in meditation retreat.

### hardships are training grounds

Even when you are alone in a room, the most difficult is to have first an interest in the practice. You have to feel a need to practise, and to value the result you will achieve in doing so. You can find this out easily enough but you have to know very clearly at the outset. Then the second step is to be able to do the practice. You may have the opportunity to practise but you are unable to do it. For example, you are free the whole day yet you cannot just do the practice the whole time. The reason is because you don’t yet have this habit. Even if you wanted to, you cannot do it. You may find yourself needing some kind of support without which it’d be impossible for you to stay. The support, for example, varies with each individual. It may be reading, watching TV, or doing some form of work. The bottom line is you are not

able to engage with the practice continuously. These kinds of problems are there for people who do have the time and yet are unable to take full advantage of it. Of course, many people are very busy. They wish to have the time to practice.

Therefore, in order to really engage and to continue in the practice, we need some hardships to train ourselves. We use them to learn self-discipline and how to resist the distractions so we stay on track. This is the way to form a new and better habit. We are strengthened every time we get through a hardship. The difficulties challenge us and train us to apply our own efforts. In the process, we learn many things and we gain more understanding. Hardships are therefore really important because they can serve us well. We exercise more diligence when they confront us. We move ahead a little and get closer to the meaning of the teachings. When we do, we will find it easier to continue to follow the Path.

These are the very basic points about the application of effort and diligence. We develop and apply these qualities while we are on the Path. We have received all the teachings and meanings of the Dharma and so we must follow through by a willingness to live and practice what we have learnt. We also know now the value of supporting others, so we train in putting effort into changing our past habits into different but useful ones.

## MEDITATION

The purpose of meditation, the fifth Paramita is to train the mind. At the moment, our mind is often not under our control. It is “untamed”, which means undisciplined. “Not under our control”, means that we are unable to cope with all the mental conditions. They influence and destabilize us. We get confused and ignorance is further developed. Here “ignorance” does not refer to the ignorance right from the beginning, but to the “not seeing” in this present moment. Of course, as humans we know a lot, but at the same time, we are very unclear. This is why we need to meditate.

### the meaning of meditation

The proper meaning of “meditation” conveys a stable mind, not only stable, but a mind that is conscious, and aware. This stable mind is at the same time unchangeable, indestructible and capable of remaining within itself. It is a mind that can stay with the all the mental conditions of mind. If we are used to this stable mind, then conditions such as distractions, and emotions will not destabilize us. As we know, attachment, jealousy, and pride are the main causes of disturbances when they escape our detection. However, this does not mean that when we are aware of them, the emotions will simply dissolve. Rather, they will still appear yet their presence no longer disturbs us. This indicates that our mind is getting clearer. You see clearly, and undisturbed, you can then cope on your own. Clarity is the result of a stable mind. Due to this clarity, everything appears very simple, neither distracting nor disturbing.

Meditation originally means a stable mind. But nowadays, the term “meditation” is widely used to describe a method of sitting for a various purposes. In Buddhism, we “meditate” to achieve a stable mind with all the qualities that have been described. The methods we follow are according to the Buddha’s instructions. This distinction is important to keep in mind as we study and practice the meditation instructions.

### three essential points to follow

With respect to the Buddhist methods of meditation, there are many different varieties and forms. The Buddha taught them all. To understand more precisely the stable mind requires us to actually engage in meditation. In this regard, three points are emphasized.

1. We have to follow the proper instructions. The instructions have to be given by someone who not only has theoretical knowledge, but must also have gone through the actual process of meditation himself. He is then qualified to give meditation instructions because he has “first hand” experience in achieving the results.
2. We must train under an experienced teacher, and come to some understanding of the meaning of “wisdom” through our own experience. Here, wisdom points to a kind of intelligence, which is a

result of meditation. Otherwise, the instructions in words remain only as concepts to us without any experience to back them up.

3. We also have to learn how not to get caught by the meditation, which is the third point. A quote from the “The Jewel Ornament of Liberation” advises against “grasping the peaceful state of mind”. Gampopa warned not to be trapped by the peaceful mind because it prevents you from attaining the wisdom of mind. Of course, you will feel good, a relative benefit of a peaceful mind. But it will deter you from further progress and from achieving the results of meditation.

### **the view of Dharma and Bodhicitta form the basis of meditation**

The problem is we are in samsara, so we are attached to all kinds of conditions. This attachment is a handicap blocking our ability to employ the methods to reach Enlightenment. The Six Paramitas opens us to Bodhicitta-mind, without which meditation will be very difficult. Bodhicitta counters our self-attachment. Anyone can meditate but mind will always grasp the peace of mind. While you are training in meditation, you don't need to reject the peace right away. You will get attached to it but at the same time, it helps to know that you must extend the meditation beyond a mere peace. You will then apply the right effort when the time comes. You will feel the need to improve. You will want to develop more clarity of mind rather than abiding in the peacefulness.

The same effort to be clearer can be applied at all times, under any condition, not only in meditation. In one way, it is very difficult yet it does not have to be. The difficulty lies with your mind. If you cannot understand the meaning of generosity, ethic, the basic conditions of samsara, or suffering, as the Buddha expounded in the Four Noble Truths, then the practice can be difficult. But grounded in our understanding of the Buddha's teachings, we will begin to feel from within a genuine concern and need to search deeper in order to reach beyond our current conditions. Our meditation will then progress.

### **the training**

To reach a “stable” mind as described, we meditate. We follow through many steps. Meditation is not easy. First, we have to get used to it. We have to learn how to be quiet, and simple. “Just be in the moment”. We need to train to be in this kind of mind. To train means to use the methods, to follow the methods. The primary meaning of meditation is to sit uninterrupted. But there are always a lot of interruptions. We train ourselves to be aware of them, not to follow them. Like the taming of a horse, you have to know how, then you have to do it. You learn how not to be too rigid yet not completely undisciplined. In meditation, you learn how to be balanced, how to adjust yourself so you are neither too tight not too relaxed. At the same time, you are careful that bad habits don't form. Step by step, your mind is aware and less disturbed by the distractions. You will be able to remain somewhat free of the interruptions. Mind will stay, conscious and stable. It is difficult to express or to describe the meditative mind. But when you sit and meditate, then you will understand what these adjectives mean.

We learn, we practice, and we get used to meditation. Like doing exercises, we do it regularly. We attune our mind to the meditative state, a state of mind markedly different from what is usual for us, following all the thoughts – not knowing where our mind is, how it is, or what is happening in the present moment. But when you meditate, you will know, and feel, “I am clear.” You can see and feel clearly what is happening in the present moment. You are aware and you can stay with it. You are able to continue without being distracted. This is learning the process of meditation. Step by step, you will be able to remain in a balanced state of mind for a long time. It is important to remain in the awareness for as long as possible. When you can, your meditation will continue.

## **WISDOM**

### **mind obscured**

The Buddha said that everything is really our own projection. Our mind now is obscured by certain conditions. As a result, we can only see a little bit. We feel and live as we do now. We carry on with our lives. But suppose your eyeglasses are dirty, you cannot see properly. Similarly, though not exactly the

same, when your mind is not very clear, everything appears to you unclear. Everything goes through your mind's filter. But when the obscurations start to clear in your mind, you will understand so much better. Right now when you read the teachings, your understanding and reflections are nestled in your own inner conditions of mind. Your perception is thus marked and also limited as a human being. You are in a way stuck, unable to understand exactly what the teachings really mean.

To change, we cannot force it. We have to go through a process to change. A Tibetan expression describes meditation as that process whereby "through the wisdom, you will be able to discriminate between illusion and reality". The meaning of the statement is profound, and difficult to express exactly in English. We could say that an unclear mind could not discriminate precisely. Here, "unclear" does not mean "stupid". In our context here, even clever people do not see precisely. This means when we try to analyze our mind, or when we try to focus on it, we can see only what we know. There is a barrier. But while we are here within the human experience, we can only be as we are now. Even if we were to try to alter the way we talk or to talk differently, we could do it maybe for a short while, but we cannot really do it. We always have to come back to how we are now, in our current conditions. We may get the idea that there is more to what we know, or do. We may believe that there is a better way to be. But knowing still does not mean we can actually do it. For example, if you were born without legs, and you wanted to walk, you couldn't. You could see how others walk; yet you could not have an actual experience of walking, what it'd feel like. Your concept of walking is from your own imagination. If somebody said, "Oh, my leg hurts," you could not relate to that experience. So everything comes back to your own feeling. Similarly, the Dharma teachings are copious. They are difficult to understand without actual experience of their meaning.

## **wisdom**

In the opening chapters of "The Jewel Ornament of Liberation," the conditions of samsara and nirvana are both described as states of mind. Basically, the nature of mind is emptiness. Emptiness does not mean that we do not exist; rather, it is a matter of cognition. Samsara is a condition of mind. Therefore samsara itself is also empty of existence. Cognition is a condition of samsara resulting always in experience. And in samsara, experience is a condition connected always to suffering. On the other hand, nirvana, which is a condition of mind, is also emptiness in nature. However, nirvana is a state of perfect clarity where there is no suffering as opposed to the confused state of samsara. Nirvana can also be described as a state of perfect wisdom. Wisdom is the result, or achievement of meditation and the perfection of wisdom is the sixth Paramita.

What is wisdom? It is the result, of meditation. We can use it, we can think with it, but at the same time, we cannot perceive it. For example, you are told that someone has wisdom. But when you look, you realize that you don't understand what that wisdom actually is. It is also not something that you could get. But you can talk or read about it as described by Gampopa. You can get some idea about it. But to really feel wisdom is so difficult yet we all need it. As it is with everything we learn, we have to first work hard to learn it. We integrate the learnt results within us so we really know it. Only then can we feel and experience the results. We approach meditation in this same way. We practice and develop our meditation. In this way, our wisdom in us will naturally expand. As this wisdom grows, increasingly, we will be able to discriminate and to understand clearly. This is why meditation is so much emphasized because it enables us to understand the Dharma. Meditation gives us the capacity to understand. We can say that the capacity is wisdom. We have to learn properly abiding by all the requirements. Then we will begin to see differently than what we have been used to.

## **self-grasping**

To avoid getting confused, we try to keep things simple. We ask ourselves, "Where do all the problems come from?" We find that problems arise when things get complicated. "Where do the complications come from?" The term "ignorance" comes up in all Buddhist teachings. Ignorance is the root of self-grasping, which gives rise to all the complications, and problems. Naturally, we want to know how to resolve or remedy this problem of self-grasping. We have to "work" to understand and to realize that there is no "self" for us to grasp in the first place. And to "work" is to meditate. The non-existence of a "self" is universal. "What will happen when I realize that the self does not exist? Will I then be lost, or disappear?"

The answer is, “No, you will still exist, but you no longer cling to a self.” In other words, self-grasping has changed into wisdom, or enlightened mind. You will not dissolve or disappear. However, your cognition, your qualities, and your knowledge will be totally transformed. They will be completely different from what they are now. At the moment, we always think and feel, “I am here...me, this is myself” It is this view, or concept that is in fact blocking you so that the qualities of Buddhahood cannot appear.

### **is there a “self”**

Practically, while we are human beings, we cannot perceive that things do not exist, or they are empty in nature. From our point of view, the world exists, we exist. Your research may lead you to conclude that there is no form, or composition of matter. Yet you cannot help but see forms everywhere. In order to see the meaning of emptiness, the teachings tell us to develop our mind’s wisdom. It is not simply thinking that things do not exist. It is not enough to simply accept that everything is empty in nature. It requires real understanding. You have to really see, feel, and realize that “self” does not exist. Then you will be able to solve any problem, whatever its complexity. Meditation can give us this real understanding. It can expand the scope of our view and knowledge. We will understand exactly what the Buddha taught.

The Buddha, before he was enlightened, studied extensively and became very knowledgeable in philosophy and spirituality. But when he reached Enlightenment, the main focus of his teachings was how an individual could attain liberation. This means how one can become free of the notion of a self, how to become purified of self. Where there is no self, knowledge reaches its fullest extent as perfect wisdom. What happens if we do not reach Buddhahood? Then, we will always be within the six realms. Gampopa said that our perception or our illusion now is a condition of samsara. We experience ourselves, for the present moment, as human beings. “Human beings” is just a term. Actually, there is no human being really existing singly and absolutely. This is why we say, “emptiness”. But due to our illusion, due to our self-grasping, due to causes and conditions, we perceive ourselves as humans.

### **illusion continues through form and reincarnation**

Two factors are needed to sustain our illusion. First is form, or composition though it is essentially non-existing. The second is reincarnation. When we die, our mind or consciousness leaves the perceived human form. At the same time, our perception, that of a human, expires. Then, according to our past tendencies, our past karma, we will acquire another type of perception. If we were to be reborn as a human being, we would again take on the human perception. If we were to go to a different realm, we’d acquire the corresponding perception.

We may think that after we die, other humans will continue to live here. Of course, each being follows his own illusion. When karma is similar among beings, then collectively, they share similar conditions. For example, human beings here on earth share a collective illusion. But at death, the mind leaves the body form and continues on. Another form or appearance manifests still within the confine of samsara and mind is again attached. The form is determined by karma. Gampopa said that this process of rebirth is repeatedly endless. It is not good, or bad per se, but is infallibly subject to the maturing of karma. And without exception, in samsara, there is always suffering. Even now, we can observe that suffering is universal among human beings and animals alike. We can discern what suffering is because we all experience it. The suffering could be physical, or mental, involving all kinds of conditions. Actually, suffering comes from our mind. If you really examine it precisely, you will be able to witness this for yourself.

To grow our mind’s wisdom, we meditate. “To grow” in this context is to “enable” the appearance of precise and clear understanding in our mind. Then, we will know. In order to succeed in “growing” our wisdom, what is important is to prepare the “soil” in which this growth will take place. When we meditate, there are many obscurations in our mind disabling our meditation. Therefore, preparation is very important. It’s not necessary to go somewhere to prepare. “To prepare,” means to acquire knowledge by yourself, to be conscious of yourself, and to properly apply this awareness in all situations and opportunities in daily life.

## THE RIGHT SOIL

We conclude the teachings on the Paramitas by a brief examination of the ways we could prepare the “soil” to grow our understanding of the Dharma.

Some simple examples have been presented in these teachings to help illustrate the various ideas. It is important to start with relatively simpler explanations so that you could easily catch the meaning. Whenever we read, we tend to be blocked by our own limited vision. We cannot go beyond it. For example, when you hear the word, “emptiness”, you think, “It’s empty, it does not exist.” This is just your idea of it. When at any time you are doing something, then things are not empty to you. Everything is quite solid. Everything does exist. Everything is as it appears to a human mind. The same can be said of the term, “Enlightenment”. We have some idea about it, but we don’t really understand or see it exactly. As a result, during the practice of meditation, whatever we feel, we actually think that something is going on. But actually, everything is somehow just our feeling.

You are encouraged to use the opportunities in your daily life to expand your understanding. Opportunities refer to the many simple things we do every day. By keeping proper ethic and by applying generosity, we will be able to work with patience and effort. Generosity and ethic you can apply throughout the day because you are always with people and you can help each other. The converse is also true: if you are not aware, you could also hurt others thereby creating more negative karma and consequences for everyone.

Take for example, you live together with your family. Every day, you do simple activities such as cooking, or looking after the children. You may regard your cooking as a duty and an obligation. But it does not have to be like that. You can “turn” cooking into an application of generosity. You don’t regard it as something you have to do. Rather, you are aware that you wish to be useful. You look upon cooking as work that will make others happy, not only happy, but that it will also bring them good health, and good conditions. Of course, in the beginning, such an attitude may not come naturally to you. You do not yet feel its exact meaning. But if you try to be aware, and put effort into examining and understanding your inner attitude, step by step, you will understand that your work can become an act of generosity motivated by your wish to be happy together with others. You want them to be happy with all the good conditions.

With respect to ethic in daily life, we could look at how we should refrain from lying, cheating, and using others. When we are told, “Don’t lie and cheat, and don’t manipulate others,” it feels quite severe. Though we feel we know already not to behave like that, somehow, when it comes to actually refraining from these acts, it’s not that easy. Our habits are strong. You may feel that you have no choice but to use and manipulate others. “Use” in this context, means to just want to get some advantage or benefit from someone. You may even think that you are doing it to protect your family and to provide for them. You may think that if you didn’t use people, you would not be here today in your present circumstances. These thoughts reflect your very strong self-grasping, or attachment. Some people in hearing that they should not use each other would immediately think, “Oh, then there is no point in coming here!”

Having listened to the Dharma, it is always good to reflect more about the conditions of samsara, of karma, and of all the beings. Because when you are in a temple, or a Dharma lecture, you listen and you feel that everything sounds very nice. Everything is very nice. But back in your own home, everything seems again quite heavy. You have to really look at your own situation, and see what the teachings really mean to you. You can learn a lot from it. It is a step-by-step process of exercise and practice, of trying to apply what we understand in daily life. In this way, we will become clearer. At the moment, we don’t really understand why the teachings are telling us to be a certain way. There are many things we cannot accept or understand because of the obscurations in our mind. Step by step, whether it is one person who is in need of my help, or whether it is many people in need, I am able to generate in my mind a proper attitude, and to follow through with the appropriate action. I am really doing something beneficial for others – this is generosity.

The problem is always the presence of anger. Anger brings with it a defective or faulty vision thereby unleashing many judgements and criticisms even towards our loved ones. When faced with our censures of others, we have to question ourselves, “Why am I judging like this? What is really the reason behind it?” If we try to backtrack a little, and try to look deeper, then we will see all the basic problems. The

teachings tell us they stem from our own desires, pride and expectations. Of course, we think that these feelings are normal. But, they are the causes of suffering and inevitably all sorts of negative conditions appear and we find ourselves harming others. The Dharma tells us that desires, pride, and expectations are not normal. They are bad habits, which propel us deeper into the conditions of samara. By being aware, and trying to work a little bit at a time, we can loosen their grip on us. We are here in samsara where suffering is prevalent. We cannot escape because the door is closed to us. Even if we do, the bad habits, or conditions come with us, so the problem remains. But, if you try to work with the negative conditions within yourself, then very slowly, you will be able to see clearer. You will understand more, and you will find what used to be difficulties are no longer really difficult. This you will see for yourself. You will not feel that, " I am difficult, I can't accept, and I don't understand." You will find the many problems actually quite workable. They are really not such a big deal.

Generosity, and ethic are the references to help us wade through the many experiences in daily life. They make it possible for us to work with the negative conditions. As a result, our basic perceptions, and concepts will change. We will find ourselves more open, and available. Things are easier to deal with, and more understandable. Then when you meditate, you will be able to do it. You will be able to do meditation properly, and achieve the results. At the moment, your karma and your very heavy emotions block your meditation. Of course, you can sit quietly but you are not able to really continue the meditation. This makes the appearance of wisdom almost impossible.

Everything depends on what we do today and our own concepts. Gampopa said that the obscurations in our mind are blinding us, and so we cannot make use of the methods to reach Enlightenment. If we could learn to work slowly with ourselves, by making use of all the conditions, and applying the meaning of the Dharma, we will be able to sow more favorable conditions. Gradually, we will be able to understand and work with any condition. Over the course of the next few days, try to apply what has been presented here on the Paramitas in your own life. You will appreciate more the meaning of generosity, ethic and also effort and patience. Just holding them as ideas and attitudes is not enough; you will still feel everything heavy and unworkable. But then, if you try to remember the teachings, how important patience and effort are, you will begin to train yourself in a different direction.

**The end**

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