

***Commentary on “Instructions on the Garland of Views” the only written
teaching by Padmasambhava (Lopon Pema Jungna)
Teachings by H. H. The 14th Dalai Lama
. Translated by Dr Thupten Jinpa
Part 1***

Since we are not receiving the empowerment ceremony in that form, please do not feel this is a great loss for you. In fact, it is in fact more important to contemplate reflect, and meditate, practice, even if one may have received tens , hundreds , thousands of empowerment ceremonies they may not be much effect and benefit. We will be spending two days teaching the explanation of the text and the teaching of the dharma which in a way is more important than empowerment ceremonies.

Of course in very exceptional cases where on the part of the disciple all the karmic conditions all fully ripened and ready and on the part of the teacher, there is a great affinity with the disciple and all the various conditions and prerequisites are ready for full karmic maturation, under such circumstances - it is conceivable that by some simple blessing ceremony, some empowerment ceremony, whole realizations may occur in the disciple.

Generally speaking it is only through understanding and hardship that realizations will grow. If you look at the life story of the great saint Milarepa, we read that once he came across a teacher who claimed to have a very special instruction which if practiced during the day will bring enlightenment in the day and when practiced at night will give rise to enlightenment at night, it is such a unique transmission that one can attain enlightenment without any meditative practice. Once Milarepa heard this and met the teacher, he also heard that this practice was for a practitioner only of great karmic maturity so Milarepa felt that he must qualify as such a mature disciple and be one of those practitioners who is greatly advanced and so went to sleep and did no meditations.

In the morning, when asked by the teacher what signs or indications he had, Milarepa said had no positive signs of dreams and he was then told by his teacher that in that case he was not appropriate student for these teachings and told him that he should go to see Marpa, the disciple of the great Indian master Naropa. We know how much hardship Marpa gave Milarepa so we know that it is through hardship and constant practice and understanding that he gained realizations and not through simple blessing or touching of the head by a palm.

His Holiness speaks : As you know, I am just one simple Buddhist monk, I am a human being – basically we all have the same nature. Everyone wants a happy life, a successful life – I also have this desire and we all have this desire. Certainly, we all have the right to have a successful and happy life. Each of us as human being of this planet I believe also has a responsibility to think about humanity, about the world as a whole because our future depends on that. The world and humanity if happier, more prosperity and with less trouble and difficulties, we individuals as part of humanity also get the benefit

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automatically. The world with turmoil, fear, doubt, confusion and other difficulty we also as individuals suffer. Therefore taking care of the planet is not holy or something it is just realistic. As a person who has some experiences of our inner world or inner experiences I feel a motivation that the inner quality value is very crucial for a successful life and the betterment of humanity, therefore my number one commitment is the promotion of human values, according to this text I may touch on that.

Second promotion of religious harmony. I am a Buddhist , I am a believer. In today's world, the various traditions in the world still have an important role to help or serve humanity. But due to different traditions, sometimes, some conflict happens. Therefore effort to promote understanding between religious traditions it is important.

My third commitment is about Tibet which really has no connection with today's program. With the two points, I will give some more detailed explanation about Buddhadharma and some explanation of the way of practice of Buddhadharma. In that field, I am poor teacher. Perhaps students, with some exceptions, also generally speaking poor students, so poor teacher and poor student, very fit, very good.

Among the members of the audience here many of you may be familiar with my lectures teachings from before but quite a number of you may be listening for the first time. For those listening for the first time can you please raise your arms?

In that case, I will share some of my basic thoughts and opinions with you today and for those who have heard my lectures and familiar with my ideas please do not feel I am repeating myself. In a way just as the Indian master Shantideva states in the beginning of his text that there is nothing new that I am presenting here; the point is that from the point of view of spiritual practice in fact repetition is necessary as it is not sufficient to understand once but that understanding needs to be repeatedly cultivated so familiarization is essential for spiritual practice. Secondly, as it is said in the saying of the Kadam masters of the past said "although there is nothing new that I have not heard before there is something new that I have not understood before that I understood today" so even though I may repeat myself there is no error or disadvantage in this.

This being the first session of the first day we will do chanting of the Heart Sutra. Tomorrow morning since there are some members of the Chinese Buddhist sangha community it would be wonderful if recitation of the Heart Sutra in Chinese could be performed tomorrow morning.

The subject matter of the Heart Sutra is of course the teaching of emptiness. Heart Sutra belongs to the category of Buddhist scriptures known as the Perfection of Wisdom and it is one of the shortest in that collection and sometime referred to as Perfection of Wisdom in 25 Stanzas. The main subject matter of the Heart Sutra is the presentation of the ultimate nature of reality, of all phenomenons including the aggregates, the constituents and so on including the stages of the path, all of these are presented as being devoid of intrinsic

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existence. This is the explicit subject matter of the Heart Sutra which is the teaching on emptiness. The implicit subject matter of the Heart Sutra is stages of the path.

The essence of the stages of the path is the cultivation of bodhichitta - the awakening mind, by means of cultivating the thought of the welfare of others as more important than one's own, so these two are the subject matter of the Heart Sutra with the emptiness presented in the Heart Sutra is the understanding of emptiness in terms of dependent origination.

When we do the recitation of the Heart Sutra, those who are familiar with the Heart Sutra should reflect on the meaning of that scripture and those who are not familiar but practicing Buddhists should use that time to reflect on the enlightened qualities of the body, speech and mind of the Buddha, the fully enlightened one. Among the members of the audience who are non-Buddhists and practitioners of the other traditions can take this opportunity to take some rest.

Then we will recite salutation verses from Nagarjuna's Stanzas of the Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way and from Maitreya's Abhisamayalamkara, Ornament of Clear Realizations. Other than these we will not have any preliminary recitations or mandala offerings.

Next we will take refuge in the Three Jewels and generate the awakening mind, bodhichitta and this will be done on the basis of the recitation of one stanza. The first two lines pertain to the going for refuge to the Three Jewels and the next two lines pertain to reaffirming and generating bodhichitta, the awakening mind. In this context since going for refuge is done in conjunction with the generation of bodhichitta, this form of the refuge you take in this particular context is that of the unique Mahayana great vehicle approach. As you recite "until the attainment of full enlightenment" a specified time frame, expressing the wish to go for refuge until you attain enlightenment which makes it unique, the Mahayana form, and the Great Vehicle approach.

Next you recite two lines "that through practicing generosity, giving and so on may I attain Buddhahood for the benefit all beings", these two lines refer to the generation of the awakening mind. In both of these instances there is a reference to the person, the individual "I" and in the second part there is another reference to the person, the individual "I" – "I will attain Buddhahood for the sake of all beings". When you reflect on these lines and especially on the term "I" it is important to be aware of the emptiness of one's own existence as presented in the Heart Sutra.

If you examine your normal sense of selfhood we tend to believe there is something called "I" which is eternal and enduring within us which is the experiencer of all our subjective experiences and the core of our being, we tend to believe in some form of an enduring eternal reality within ourselves. As presented in the Heart Sutra, this is a false conception and the "I" that we tend to perceive does not really exist in the manner in which we perceive it. The "I", even our own existence is devoid of intrinsic reality and one should reflect on the emptiness of the "I" and go for refuge in the Three Jewels and generate the

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altruistic awakening mind for the sake of all beings intention to attain enlightenment for all beings. If you reflect on these lines in this way it constitutes the practice of accumulation of both merit and wisdom – that is why in the last line you say that “through the power of the accumulations”(these accumulations refer to both merit and wisdom). So this way your practice of going for refuge and generating the awakening mind will be complete.

The text that is being used for our lecture series is the Garland of Views – a series of instructions to the Tibetan monarch King Trisong Detsen and to his circle of followers. Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) gave a series of instructions to the monarch and these instructions later before Padmasambhava left Tibet he put them together in the form of a note to the monarch and his attendants. The instructions were then put together as a note. This was composed by Padmasambhava as a summary of all the instructions he gave the King and his circle of attendants.

It was in the 8th century, the Tibetan monarch Trisong Detsen invited from India the great Nalanda master , one of the greatest scholars of his time, Shantarkshita , who was not only a great, established and highly renowned master in Buddhism but renowned particularly for his expertise in the fields of Buddhist epistemology and Madhyamika philosophy of emptiness was highly revered. Along with Shantarakshita, the great realized tantric master Padmasambhava was also invited to Tibet. From the combination of the efforts of these two masters a complete form of Buddhism was established in Tibet , not only fully established but with a powerful aspiration for its long term survival and as a result to this day a complete form of Buddhism survives and it is through their kindness that we are able to see this.

The root text we are using, the Garland of Views, among the commentaries (classical or traditional) on this text the earliest commentary is by Rongsong Pandita, a contemporary of the great Indian master Atisha . Since Rongsong Pandita it has been more than 1000 years. However, subsequently the study and practice of this instructional text has degenerated and almost disappeared and it was the great master Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo who was responsible for the study, practice and reviving the teaching of this text. One of his main disciples Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye also has written a commentary which is very explicit and clear.

(Holiness elaborated on other commentaries, etc.)

As for the transmission of the teaching I have received the teachings of the text from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and transmissions of the root text from Tushi Rinpoche.

The title of the text is “Instructions on the Garland of Views” , the opening line states that it is “*a note summarizing the different views and vehicles and so on*”. There is a reference to the term views versus vehicles.

Views refer to philosophical views which are part of the tenets of the philosophical schools. Generally when we use the term *drupta*, we refer to established standpoints of philosophical schools or traditions arrived at through the process of reasoning and

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understanding of certain scriptural authority. On the combination of scriptural authority and reasoning process one arrives at a standpoint. These standpoints refer to the philosophical tenets.

Vehicles refer to vehicles of the path such as the vehicle of the disciples, hearers, (self realized ones - pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattva.

In essence the views are ways of understanding different standpoints from the point of view of the wisdom aspects of the path. And differences of vehicles are understood from the point of view of skilful means (method) of the path. From the wisdom aspect of the we have four schools of philosophical traditions – Vaibhashika, Sautantrika, Cittamatra, Madhyamaka.

Vehicles are ways of understanding the different methods and skilful means – From the method vehicles of the path we have the Shravaka, Pratyekabuddha, Mahayana (sutra, tantra, etc.).

The differences in the views of the philosophical schools are understood from the philosophical view of the individual, while the differences in vehicles are understood from the point of view of the courage and motivation of the practitioner. So an individual may have a philosophical inclination toward Mahayana madhyamika in philosophy but lacking courage and follower of shravaka. The differences of great and less in terms of view may not correspond exactly to the greater or lesser vehicle.

In this regard of understanding the different vehicles and so on it is important to bear in mind that due to the language, (lesser and greater etc) there is a tendency for some individuals to understand these vehicles as somehow unrelated and independent of each other. This is a totally wrong way of understanding the Buddhist teachings .If you look at all the teachings of all the vehicles, you will understand that all the key teachings of the Pali tradition developed based on the councils that took place following the death of the Buddha enshrined in the Pali scriptures and the main subject matter of these scriptures are the teachings on the four noble truths, the teachings on the 37 aspects of the path to enlightenment , the teachings on the 12 links of dependent origination - all of these teachings really represent the basic structure and framework of the Buddhist path to enlightenment.

It is only on the basis of such foundation that one can then speak about the relevance and the validity of those other teachings presented in the Mahayana (Great Vehicle Scriptures) such as teachings on emptiness, the teachings on the six perfections and the ten perfections and so on. It is on the foundation of teachings presented in the lesser vehicle scriptures that one can add other practices such as the six perfections and so on . Similarly, based on the foundational teachings of the Pali scriptures and Sutra vehicle, one adds on the uniqueness of Vajrayana teachings and practices such as deity yoga.

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Without the foundational basis of the other teachings there is no relevance and place for the teaching and practice of the Vajrayana. To have the understanding that the Vajrayana as totally independent from the other vehicles and the vehicles are unrelated is incorrect. Also the tendency to proclaim oneself a follower of Mahayana or Vajrayana and belittle the teaching of the ethical discipline found in the Pali scriptures and dismiss them as teachings of a lesser vehicle, similarly to proclaim oneself or followers of Vajrayana to belittle followers and teaching of the Sutra Vehicle and proclaim oneself as a follower of Vajrayana is erroneous and reflects a fundamental flaw of understanding and ignorance on the part of the practitioner. The terminologies of the three vehicles are found in the scripture themselves. Lesser Vehicle (shravaka, pratyekabuddha), Mahayana (Bodhisattva, Vajrayana). Even this way of presenting the vehicles suggest that Vajrayana is a subset of Mahayana. It is important to understand the relationship between the vehicles.

Furthermore in terms of the attainment of realizations presented in scriptures. The realizations described in the Lesser vehicle scriptures can be gained based on practicing the teachings of the Lesser Vehicles. However, in order to gain the realizations described in these scriptures of Higher Vehicles in Mahayana and Vajrayana can only be gained on the basis of the realizations explained and described through the Lesser vehicles. That means in order to attain realizations in the Lesser vehicles there is no need to rely on teachings on the Higher Vehicles, however, to gain the realizations of the Higher Vehicles, there is an indispensability of having the foundation of the realizations explained in the Lesser Vehicles.

“*and so on*” refers to the further sub-divisions within Vajrayana of the different classes of tantra and so on.

The text opens with the statement that the “*countless erroneous views that exist in the realms of the world may be subsumed into four categories.*”

In the world of human beings there are individuals with so many philosophical persuasions, points of view which are erroneous and totally ignorant. These various points of view if subsumed can be subsumed into the four categories:

- (i) the unreflective – those with no understanding
- (ii) the materialist
- (iii) the nihilists
- (iv) the extremists

The text defines the first erroneous view as

i) Unreflective (*tib: chelpa*) – “*the unreflective do not understand that all things and events have causes and conditions, they are thoroughly ignorant.*”

The reference here is not related to simple understanding of everyday events, such as if a person plants a seed you would expect a shoot, a sprout and eventually a fruit. This sort of cause and condition everyone would understand. What is being referred to here is the type

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of people who apart from everyday experiences have no tendency to be reflective – they simply do not wish to contemplate the ultimate origins of everything and tracing the chain of causation – majority of the people do not have the tendency to reflect and contemplate on what gives rise to all things and events. Such people would not reflect on whether there is a creator for the origin of the universe or life after death. Although this is presented as erroneous view, it is more a form of ignorance and simply a kind of ignorance and a lack of interest and lack of reflectiveness. This fairly characterizes the standpoint of many of us who do not wish to be reflective.

(1 hr 7 mins)

ii) Materialist (tib:gyang phen).

The text read *“the materialists do not understand whether or not there exists previous and subsequent lives and, relying upon the words of mundane secrets, they acquire wealth and power (only) for this one life.”*

The term gyangphen is the same term as the Indian philosophical school named Charvaka but here we are not referring to Charvaka but referring rather to the materialistic standpoint of individuals whose main concerns are on the affairs of this life. They are reflective and deeply concerned about well being the welfare of this life but reject view of previous existence and future lives However, for the sake of the welfare of this life, they rely on mundane secrets (referring to rituals or propitiation of spirits or nagas in earlier times) for the concerns and aspirations of this life to be fulfilled.

Just as the first standpoint, this second standpoint is not so much erroneous but somewhat unreflectiveness , lack of understanding and unwillingness to probe beyond a certain level and falls more accurately as a lack of understanding or reflectiveness.

iii) Nihilist

“the nihilists view all phenomena to be devoid of causes and effects and maintain all elements of existence that have come about in this one life as having done so accidentally. Thus they uphold nihilism.”

This is a philosophical standpoint and refers to the Indian Charvaka school where it is not a matter of a lack of understanding or unwillingness to be reflect but an active persuasion of rejecting any long term causality of events. Through philosophical analysis and reasoning come to the conclusion that all elements of existence that comes about in this life, come about randomly with no underlying causes or deeper causes. In this way uphold nihilism and from a Buddhist point of view this is an erroneous view.

In this context it is important to understand and relate these observations to one’s own personal case. Leaving aside questions of rebirth, possibly of live after death, future existence and pre-existence and so on, even in the of our case of our everyday experience of happiness and well being of this life, there is a tendency on the part of many people to believe that conditions for happiness lies almost exclusively in the external facilities and conditions, including acquisition of wealth, money and so forth. Quite often people tend to believe that the sources of happiness really lie outside and on the basis of that premise we

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tend to expend our energy and dedication to fulfilling that aspiration to attain happiness by seeking and focusing our attention almost exclusively externally.

However, if we reflect take a stand and reflect a bit more deeply we would come to understand that although we all have the natural disposition to seek happiness and to overcome suffering, when we speak of the suffering we wish to overcome and the happiness that we wish to seek in fact it turns out that there are two levels of experience of happiness and suffering. On the one hand suffering and happiness primarily related to experiences of our physical, corporeal, bodily existence. On another level we have experiences of pain, joy, happiness and so on that relate primarily to the level of thoughts and emotions, a mental level of happiness and suffering (pain, emotions, etc.).

How do we know this? We can simply observe that we can envision , imagine a situation where we may be enjoying the best facilities around us, even in that context of physical comfort, you can have an individual whose state of mind is deeply disturbed, he is in pain and suffering. Similarly the same individual in the same physical surrounding of comfort can have a mental state which is joyous, happy and contented so on - this shows that in terms of our experience we have a level of experience that is on the physical state and a level of experience that is on the level of thoughts and emotions.

Generally speaking in terms of these two levels of experience even the animals to some extent possess these two levels of experience of the physical and mental (experience). In relation to human beings what is unique is because of the tremendous sophistication of our faculty of intelligence and also imagination and other faculties , human beings have much greater scope of the mental level and these experiences of pain and joy on the mental level have a deep impact on our experience.

The fact that this is so is really a fact of reality. We can observe and understand that there is a level of experience which is on the level thoughts and emotions which leave a very strong impact of our own experience of joy and happiness is something we can understand by simple reflection. It is important to understand that when we think of happiness that we seek and suffering we wish to avoid we should have a much nuanced and deeper understanding of the nature of suffering and happiness.

(1 hr 20 mins)

Between these two levels of experience of happiness and joy , the one which is on the level of physical experiences, particularly of the senses, the five senses , the sensory experience and the level of emotions and thoughts , between these two let us ask ourselves this question - which level of experience is more acute, more powerful.

If we reflect deeply, we can imagine that if the individual's state of mind is contented, happy, joyous and there is a deep sense of satisfaction, in that case the individual in some cases even if the individual may be facing great hardships on the physical level because of the individual's state of mind being contented, happy and fulfilled satisfied that

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experiences of mental emotions and thoughts can supersede and override the physical level of discomfort and pain.

However, even if though the individual may be surrounded by the best facilities for physical comfort if the mind is totally agitated, pained ,disturbed and perturbed, then even if this person is listening to his favorite music, have the most comfortable and pleasant clothes , being served the best tasting delicious meal, coming into contact with the most fragrant smell and so on, because of the power of the mental disturbance of this individual who is in pain and a deep sense of unhappiness, none of these experiences this individual will be able to enjoy.

What this indicates is that the mental level of experience of joy or pain can override and supersede the physical level of discomfort or pain. Whereas the physical level of comfort and happiness cannot supersede and override the pain and suffering that is on the level of emotions and thoughts. Once you can understand the differences between the two you will recognize that experience of pain, happiness and joy on the level of thoughts and emotions is much more acute and powerful than on the level of the experiences of the senses.

Given that no matter how pleasurable and comfortable ones physical experiences may be in terms of facilities and material wealth and so on, since it cannot override and supersede the experience of pain and suffering on the level of thoughts and emotions - what this indicates that since the experience of pain and suffering on the level of emotions and thoughts is so dominant and acute for us humans beings we need to find a way, a method, a means by which we can learn to overcome and remove this particular level of suffering and pain. What we come to recognize is that many of the external facilities such as material wealth and the acquisition of things, money and so forth pertain to the factors necessary for creating a level of comfort on the level of bodily existence, on the level of the senses. With relation to our aspiration to overcome suffering and pain on the level of thoughts and emotions, they do not have much of a role to play. We need to find a methods and means that is much more appropriate to the seeking of the overcoming of the suffering on the level of emotions and thoughts. What is required here is the cultivation of ways of thinking, an attitude or states of mind which are appropriate resources to help overcome this level of suffering and pain. In conclusion, what this suggests to us is that to place all our hopes and trust in external material conditions for the alleviation of suffering is a misplaced hope and we need to seek some other means in addition to the material facilities to overcome the suffering we wish to avoid. And here what is required primarily is a way in which one can cultivate a peace of mind, calmness and tranquility in oneself.

Here strictly from the point of view of this life alone as explained before to place our trust and hope entirely on the external factors and means is a misplaced hope and we need some other methods and means. I personally believe that although on a deeper level the practice of a religious teachings and a spiritual faith may be important but purely from the point of view of the well being of this life alone my own personal view is that one can find a method and means by which one can bring about the resources for overcoming the

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suffering and seeking happiness that we aspire to without resorting to any religious faith or religious belief.

The key really is as explained before the fundamental human values particularly of loving kindness and compassion. I believe that it is not a question of religious faith, by the simple biological constitution of our body we human beings have the natural capacity and seed for generating affection lies in all of us by nature. This is because all of us have the capacity to appreciate when other fellow human being express affection towards us.

No matter how evil, no matter how negative an individual person may be, this person if a loved one of that individual, a family member or a friend, shows affection to that individual, this individual will be capable of responding to that. That simple fact reflects that in this individual at least there is the seed for affection and compassion.

My belief is that if we human beings do not have a seed or a capacity to express affection to others, in that case even if someone else person shows affection towards you, you will not be able to respond to that as there will be no basis for appreciating that expression of kindness, concern or caring. The fact that we all have this natural capacity to respond to others affection indicates that we do possess, in each one of us the seed for affection and compassion. I believe that it is the cultivation and enhancement of this seed for compassion that is the key to overcoming the suffering and bringing about happiness on the level of thoughts and emotions.

In this respect there is no differences whatsoever between the educated or uneducated, rich or poor, no ethnic differences or whether or not an individual is a religious believer or non-religious believer. In so far as the seed for compassion is concerned and potential for the cultivation in all of us is concerned , there is no difference whatsoever we are fundamentally equal in that respect.

His Holiness also mentioned that so long as we are individual human beings who has been born from a mother's womb and nourished and nurtured on a mother's milk, we will share this basic capacity and basic nature and disposition for appreciate of affection and compassion. Because of this fundamental belief I always make the effort to share with as many people as possible the need and tremendous importance of recognizing the value of these fundamental human values and the need to cultivate and enhance them.

This is what I refer to as the perspective of secular ethics the promotion of the understanding off secular ethics. In actual fact, among the more than 6 billion human beings who live on the planet today, the majority of human beings belong to this category of secular ethics.

In actual fact the majority of us human beings of this six billion human beings belong to this category of the unreflective, someone not too concerned about the deeper meanings of existence, deeper causes and conditions but rather our concerns remain primarily on the concerns and well bring of day to day life and day to day experience. This includes those members of the monastic order who may put on robes and also who may claim to be

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explicit followers of the Buddha Shakyamuni, member of a monastic order and so on but deep down many of us who wear these clothes and make the statement of being a explicitly a religious practitioner may deep down be following the path of the unreflective where our concerns may be more about day to day experience and concerns well being of this life.

His Holiness : While we are giving explanations about nirvana or these things, at the practical level more concerned about the dollar . In order to get some dollar - selling dharma. This is the indication!. We are appears like followers of Buddha Shakaymanui but at practical level more concerned about day to day life.

Theoretically we belong to Mahayana or Tantrayana , practically we belong to this group. So, I think it is very very important to remind from time to time and watch, check one's own way of thinking and behavior. That is very important.

The constant observation of one's body, speech and mind is extremely important. The constant watch. The external police intelligence may be important but most important is internal police watching from time to time.

When thinking along these lines, the sayings of the great Kadampa master resonate deeply, the Kadampa master for example the master Baen Gungyael who once stated said that so far as his own spiritual practice is concerned he has only one thing to do, which is "to stand guard at the entrance of his mind with a spear in his hand, and whenever mental afflictions arise to immediately challenge it and when mental afflictions are becoming more clever and cunning then he too needs to strengthen his own vigilance and be equally clever to respond."

It is said that this master was once a thief. After he became a monk, he became a great practitioner. One day when he was a monk, because of his old habit of stealing , his hand reached out his right hand reached out automatically to steal something with his right hand , instantly he was able to recall his mindfulness and grabbed his right hand with his left arm and screamed "there is a thief here, there is a thief here."

(iv) Extremist

The fourth standpoint is referred to as extremist and defined in the text as the following: ***"The extremist uphold the existence of an eternal self for they reify all phenomena through conceptual imputation. (The extremists comprise of) those who view the presence of effects where there is no cause , those who view cause and effect erroneously ; and those who view the absence of effects where there is a cause. All of these views are views of ignorance."***

This particular standpoint of extremist refers to the adherents to philosophical schools. So generally speaking within human beings, there are those who are adherents of philosophical schools and those who are not adherents of a particular philosophical school. Many of the views described earlier were strictly speaking not really philosophical views

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as such but referring to mental persuasions of individuals. From here on the views here refer to the views and standpoints of philosophical schools.

When we speak of philosophical schools in this context broadly speaking there are the Buddhist schools on one side and non-Buddhist schools on the other. The different demarcation between Buddhist and non-Buddhist is really made on the basis on whether or not the individual upholds what are referred to as the four seals or four axioms of Buddhism, and those who uphold the four seals are characterized as adherents of the Buddhist philosophical schools and those who reject the four axioms or seals but uphold different standpoints as adherents of non-Buddhist philosophical schools.

The four seals or axioms of Buddhism refer to the following.

All conditioned things are impermanent.

Generally speaking when we talk about impermanence or the transient nature of things we can understand on two levels - in terms of the continuum of a phenomenon or thing or in terms of the moment by moment existence of a phenomena. We are all aware of the transient nature of things, if you reflect upon the existence of a thing over a period of time, for example, in the case of our own existence, we are born, we live and at some point we will die.

Even in relation to objects we understand that over a period of time these things will change and perish. This is not the real meaning of impermanence in the Buddhist context. The real meaning of impermanence from the Buddhist context refers to the understanding of impermanence in terms of moment by moment existence. If there was no process of change on a moment by moment basis then one cannot account for change across a period of time. For example if we take as an example our own body – from the moment of our conception until the long period of our existence and finally at the point of death our body goes through a tremendous process of change and development and decay towards the end. In the case of our body at the cellular level, there is a constant dynamism, a constant process of change that is taking place and these changes on a moment by moment basis are really responsible for the changes that are observable. Sometimes some of these changes will even be reflected in the visible changes in our physical appearance, when we age and grow old and so on. The mechanism that gives rise to the change at the macroscopic level is really at the subtle level of bodily existence. It is by understanding this dynamic moment by moment changing nature that one will understand the subtle impermanence of conditioned things. Within the Buddhist tradition then the question is asked, what is the factor that really compels conditioned things to decay, to eventually disintegrate and cease to exist?

The Vaibhashika School explains this in terms of the temporal process where things come into being first; they abide or endure for a period of time and then begin a process of decay and then eventually disintegrate and cease to exist. However, most Buddhist schools really understand the mechanism for this change and the transient nature in a much more subtle way where it is understood that the very cause and conditions that brought the phenomenon to being, as subject to change as subject to decay. In a sense the mechanism

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or the seed for cessation or destruction is produced the moment the thing itself is produced; so in order for a phenomenon to cease to exist and decay or disintegrate there is no need for a third factor. Anything that is born, that has come into being as a result of cause and condition will eventually over a period of time will decay and cease to exist. It is this understanding of the subtle impermanence of the moment by moment process of change that Buddhists understand all conditioned things to be subject to impermanent and all conditioned things are transient and impermanent.

The second seal or axiom of Buddhism is:

All contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering

This does not suggest that according to Buddhism all conditioned things are subject to suffering. Within the conditioned things one makes a distinction between those that are contaminated and those that are uncontaminated. Anything that is the result of contaminated causes and conditions are subjected to the nature of suffering. Here primarily it refers to those phenomenons that come into being as a result of contaminated causes and conditions such as the fundamental ignorance that lies at the heart of our existence. The fundamental ignorance - although some Indian masters such as Asanga understand ignorance as mere unknowing, but primarily ignorance must be understood as an active form of misknowing or distorted understanding. This distorted understanding of the nature or reality lies at the heart of our causes and conditions. Any effects produced by such distorted states of mind are bound to be distorted effects themselves and there fore in the second axiom or seal the Buddha states “that all contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering.”

The third seal or the axiom is that:

All phenomena are empty and devoid of self hood or self existence

This refers to our understanding of the nature of our own existence and phenomenon. For example, if we observe our normal sense of selfhood we tend to believe that underlying our physical and mental elements that goes through change over a period of time, there is something that is constant, that is enduring that is called “me”, “I” and the person. If someone was sick once and today if you are well and have the memory of being ill, then instinctively you will remember that experience as “when I was ill – I did this” or “this happened to me”. You have this underlying way of thinking or assumption of something that is constant that endures across a period of time although your physical health and body has changed, your body has changed but somehow there is something called self or “I” that remains unchanging across that two different times when you were ill and when you are now well.

Similarly, if you can push that temporal framework further in the case of yogis who are capable of recalling their past life experiences then in these cases the memory will reach much further into the distance of time and these individuals will have the thought that “I was born in such and such a life and so on”. The temporal reach of that memory and the reference to the term “I” becomes much longer. We in our normal conception of self-hood tend to have this idea that underlying this body and mental processes which change over time, there is something that is enduring that is lasting and unchanging , that is one and the

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real “me”. This is very natural for us to feel. One can then have philosophical thought processes which may even reinforce this which will look at the nature of self-hood and come to the understanding that given that the body and mind change and fluctuate then the self cannot be identified with body and mind. Therefore independent of the body and mind there must be a self that is unitary, that is one and unchanging, permanent. Buddhism is stating here (with this axiom) that belief in such a enduring, unchanging, eternal, permanent selfhood is a misconception. Apart from our body and mind, the physical and mental element there is no independent self that is outside that has an independent existence.

In the Buddhist tradition that notion of selfhood as independent, unitary , permanent and unchanging is rejected not only in relation to one’s own existence but also in relation to phenomena as well. Therefore the third axiom states that all phenomena are empty and devoid of self-existence.

(End of Part 1)

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