



Profound Treasury Retreat West 2023 Sourcebook

Finding Wakefulness Within Confusion

Emotions, Wisdoms, and the Five-Buddha-Family Mandala

Selected Teachings of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Compiled by Judy Lief for the 2023 Profound Treasury Retreat West

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Suggested Readings

from *The Profound Treasury of the Ocean of Dharma*

READINGS FROM VOLUME I

Chapter 34. Cutting Thoughts and Short-Circuiting the Kleshas

“This list of six root kleshas is several thousand years old, if not even older. Our beloved teacher, the Lord Buddha, pointed out to us that we have these six problems. In fact, our whole samsaric existence—all our misery and all our problems—can be summed up by these six defilements. They govern our life. However, the kleshas can be overcome.”

Chapter 53. The Power of Flickering Thoughts

“Minute shifts of attention are what create the emotions of aggression, passion, ignorance, and all the rest. Although those emotions are seemingly very heavy-handed, large-scale, and crude, they have their origin in the subtle twists that take place in our mind constantly.”

READINGS FROM VOLUME II

Selected Slogans from Part Seven: Mind Training and Slogan Practice

Slogan 40. Correct all wrongs with one intention.

“When you experience increasing kleshas, or you are in the midst of perverse circumstances such as serious illnesses, economic or domestic crises, court cases, or resistance to practice, you should develop compassion for all sentient beings, who also suffer like this—and you should aspire to take on their suffering yourself through the practice of lojong.

The problems you experience should be overcome right when they occur. . . . Whenever you don’t want to practice, whenever any bad circumstance comes up, stamp on it! With this slogan you are deliberately, immediately, and very abruptly suppressing the kleshas.

Slogan 44. Train in the Three Difficulties

“The three difficulties are the difficulty of recognizing your kleshas, the difficulty of overcoming them, and the difficulty of cutting through them.”

“You should develop the determination to stop feeding the neurosis or being attracted to it. In order to overcome the kleshas, you need to take an abrupt approach.”

READINGS FROM VOLUME III

Chapter 14. Unconditional Ground

“The absence of grasping and fixation provides something extremely firm. It is not firm in the style of grasping or fixation, but it is the firmness of pure ground. It is like flying in an airplane. We take off and we fly up, and when we rise above the clouds, we begin to realize that upstairs there is blue sky all the time.”

Chapter 16. Fundamental Magic

“At this point, we are basically working with passion, aggression, and ignorance: the three root kleshas, or three poisons.”

“Magic happens at the level when you begin to loot the privacy of passion, aggression, and ignorance. You begin to search and loot.”

Cutting Thoughts and Short-Circuiting the Kleshas

A sense of knowing, or seeing, always happens. If you are willing to acknowledge its existence, there is the potential of being wakeful, open, and precisely there constantly. This is not based on being a sharp person, a smart person, or a very careful person. Rather, it is about being a person who can actually be—by yourself, very simply.

PAGYÖ: A RESIDUE OF MINDFULNESS

The result of shamatha practice is pagyö, a residue of mindfulness. *Pag* means “residue,” and *yö* means “possessing”; so *pagyö* means “possessing residue.” *Pagyö* is also translated as “conscientiousness” or “being heedful.” *Pag* refers to deposits of little fungi found on rocks. In Tibet, we used these fungi, which are sometimes orange or red, and sometimes yellow or jade green, to color our *tormas*, or ritual cakes.

Residues are produced when what you experience on the spot is confirmed by your previous experience. Residues are partly a matter of memory, and partly a matter of what you are presently experiencing. Having such residues gives you something to connect with. Based on your experience of this world, you always have a residue of something or other. When you look at red, you have a residue of red, and when you look at white, you have a residue of white. Such residues enter into your system,

and those inputs should be acknowledged. Then you can begin to see things as they are. It's very basic.

The point of mindfulness is not to be aware of possible dangers, or to watch out in case something might go wrong. Mindfulness means being there on the spot, along with your residue. If somebody attracts your attention by saying, "Look out!" or "Look at this!" you do not have to be cautious; you could just look. You could raise your eyebrows and say, "What's going on?" You could be mildly attentive and inquisitive.

Sometimes pagyö is described as the gaze of an elephant. An elephant is not usually easy to startle. If you make a loud noise or if you throw a firecracker in front of an elephant, it just looks around. It has that "So what?" kind of approach. An elephant doesn't get excited. Likewise, pagyö is tentative but highly keen. You cannot be startled and you do not panic—you just have a residue of mindfulness. Pagyö is also referred to as decorum. Since you have developed perspective, sophistication, and subtlety, you are aware of what is going on. Pagyö is a very positive idea.

TREN-SHE: RECOLLECTION AND KNOWING

From mindfulness also stems *trenpa*, or "recollection," and *sheshin*, or "knowing." *Trenpa* can also mean "wakefulness." With *trenpa*, you are fully there, but you are not particularly overwhelmed by anything. *Trenpa* is a process of discovery in which you are touched precisely, rather than being overwhelmed by emotions or excitement. In the process of *trenpa*, you make very precise discoveries about yourself constantly.

With *trenpa* you have some kind of memory or recollection, and *sheshin* is a check on those recollections. *She* means "knowing," and *shin* means "as it is"; so *sheshin* means "knowing as it is." *Sheshin* is the kind of knowledge that makes you feel at home in the world, rather than regarding the world as a strange place and not knowing how to handle it. *Sheshin* functions within the environment of *trenpa*. Once you have a memory, you check it with what is happening in the present. It's like renting a car: if you rent a new car, you automatically refresh your memory of how to drive; you check out the gearshift, the brakes, the lights, and the steering wheel. *Trenpa* is the possibility of working with what is happening, and *sheshin* is actually dealing with what is happening.

The main point of *trenpa* and *sheshin* is that a sense of knowing, or seeing, always happens. If you are willing to acknowledge its existence, there is the potential of being wakeful, open, and precisely there constantly. This is not based on being a sharp person, a smart person, or a very careful person. Rather, it is about being a person who can actually *be*—by yourself, very simply. In our lineage, one example of such a person was His Holiness the sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa. It may be rare, but it is possible that one could *be*, and at the same time act.

The combination of *trenpa* and *sheshin*, of recollection and knowing, is called *tren-she*. *Tren-she* is the kind of recollection that connects the past and the present together. For instance, you may remember that if you step in a puddle with your shoes on, it is likely that the water will run into your shoes, and your socks will get wet and dirty. It is something you have done before; therefore, you know what's going to happen if you do it again. The traditional analogy for *tren-she* is that of a warning, but I would like to correct that analogy. *Tren-she* does not simply mean being warned about something bad—it is realizing that you should be on the dot.

Tren-she is not concentrated awareness; it is a more general sense of awareness. For instance, if you are wearing a bright red coat, you are aware of the redness and brightness around you, and whether your coat is made of wool or cotton. Likewise, you are aware of your posture, your head and shoulders, and whether you are wearing your glasses or not, a watch or not, stockings or no stockings. That intrinsic awareness we always generate is like antennae. We know that "I have a beard" or "I have earrings on" or "I have a safety pin in my trousers to hold them up." We are aware of things of that nature, beyond simply being aware of the in-breath and out-breath.

With *tren-she*, you know what you know and what you have without being told. It is almost at the level of clairvoyance. For example, you may get a sudden flash that your father is in trouble, and it turns out to be true. That sense of *tren-she* is the very early stage of the development of superconsciousness or clairvoyance. However, you should be very careful about such things. You might have an image of your father falling down and find out that he is perfectly well and happy in Miami Beach! So things could be other than you think. Nonetheless, when *tren-she* takes place on the spot in your existence, you simply know. *Tren-she* allows you to be very sensitive and very precise.

OVERCOMING THE SIX ROOT KLESHAS

The result of *pagyö* and *tren-she* is that you are able to use your awareness to overcome the six root kleshas: ignorance, aggression, passion, pride, jealousy, and avarice.* Kleshas intensify your claustrophobia and pain. They are the density of your mind, which brings further denseness, like a sponge soaked in oil. They are blockage. You are so thoroughly absorbed in the kleshas that there is no room to breathe. It is quite detrimental. Kleshas are connected with the naive desire to get what's best, without knowing how to get hold of it.

Ignorance

The klesha process begins with ignorance. The klesha of ignorance is not original ignorance, or *avidya*, but just *naiveté*, or delusion. It is basic, ordinary singleton-mentality. In Tibetan, ignorance is *timuk*. *Ti* means "just so," and *muk* means "falling asleep" or "covered up"; so *timuk* means "just so, you are covered up." It is like being cross-eyed and becoming even more cross-eyed. *Muk* also means "dust." It is the thick fog that surrounds you while you are sitting there being cross-eyed.

Aggression

The second klesha is aggression, or *shedang* in Tibetan. You want to feel good, and if you can't, you get angry. In the English language, the word *aggression* can mean speediness, or a fast-moving and heavy-handed quality; but *shedang* very specifically means "hatred." In this case, *she* means "intention," and *dang* means "to expel," or "to pierce out"; so *shedang* means "wholeheartedly wanting to pierce out," which amounts to wanting to hurt somebody. You want to puncture somebody with your weapon. Once you are in an aggressive communication with somebody, you are in *cahoots* with him. You have a connection, otherwise you couldn't become

* The six root kleshas are an expansion of the three poisons as depicted in the wheel of life in the form of a rooster, a snake, and a pig, symbolizing passion, aggression, and ignorance. In different contexts, Trungpa Rinpoche uses variant forms of the primary six kleshas, most commonly: (1) passion, aggression, ignorance, greed, envy, and pride, and (2) desire, anger, pride, ignorance, doubt, and opinion.

angry with him. And when you hate someone, you want to tear him from the inside out.

Passion

Wanting comfort, wanting to feel good, brings passion, or *döchak* in Tibetan, the third root klesha. Because you hate yourself, because you are bored with yourself, you want something to occupy you, something to make you feel better. You want to entertain yourself. *Dö* means "wanting," or "longing," and *chak* means "glued to"; so *döchak* is "wanting to be glued to somebody or something." It's sort of like the end product of chewing gum. The word *chakpa* also means "lust."

Pride

Out of passion comes arrogance, or pride. You not only want to be entertained; you feel that you really *deserve* something good. You don't want to be scolded by your environment or your world. Arrogance, or pride, is *nga-gyal* in Tibetan. *Nga* is the word for "I," or "myself," and *gyal* means "victory"; so *nga-gyal* is "my victory," or "I-victory." With arrogance, you want to be on top, to have the upper hand. It is one-upmanship—me-upmanship.

Jealousy

The fifth klesha is jealousy, or *tragdok* in Tibetan. You become very hungry, and you begin to think that other people are getting better treatment than you. It may be purely your imagination, but other people seem to be doing better than you, so you become jealous. *Trag* means "shoulders," and *dok* means "claustrophobia," "not enough space," or "tight," so *tragdok* means "tight shoulders." The idea is that you do not have enough room to be macho. You feel so claustrophobic that you can't even extend your shoulders.

Avarice

Last, but not least, is avarice, or *serna* in Tibetan. You don't want to give anything away, you don't want to share anything. You don't want to spend your money, but you would like to hold on to whatever you have. You

become filled with avarice. *Serna* literally means “yellow nose”: *ser* means “yellow,” and *na* means “nose.” Each time you have to spend money, each time you have to extend your hospitality, you touch your nose, thinking, “Should I do this or not?” As a result, your nose becomes yellow, at least from the Tibetan point of view—maybe we should say “pink nose” for Westerners.

This list of six root kleshas is several thousand years old, if not even older. Our beloved teacher, the Lord Buddha, pointed out to us that we have these six problems. In fact, our whole samsaric existence—all our misery and all our problems—can be summed up by these six defilements. They govern our life. However, the kleshas can be overcome.

As you become more involved in the dharma, you develop greater certainty. You begin to realize that your own neurosis is no longer unreachable or incurable. By means of the sitting practice of shamatha and the awareness training of vipashyana, you have the possibility of actually getting in touch with your fundamental neurosis.

When you have committed yourself to the path and received directions for journeying on the path, you automatically experience a sense of reality. When the kleshas arise, you join your kleshas with the practice of mindfulness and awareness. You rub your awareness and your kleshas together, like rubbing two sticks together to start a fire. When you rub hard enough, you produce fire, and that flame burns both sticks at once—the awareness as well as the kleshas. So awareness is a temporary tool. Since one part does not give an inch, the other part does not receive an inch, so it is a mutual suicide. That is the basic idea of liberation, or nirvana, which comes from sitting practice. Sitting practice gives you no feedback of any kind; therefore, your kleshas don’t get any nourishment.

Even at the level of profound hinayana-wisdom, both the technique and what the technique is applied to could be used up. Because of that, you can attain shinjang. When you attain shinjang, you are not supposed to have your technique hanging out, or the result of your technique hanging out. That would be like having cotton batting with a thorn inside it. Complete shinjang is like an eiderdown quilt: everything is thorough, comfortable, and straight. Shinjang is not a fairy tale, but a real possibility.

Ideally, we actually can cut our thoughts and short-circuit our kleshas. We can begin to go beyond the kleshas and realize the possibility of egolessness. At that point, the tool and what that tool is applied to destroy

each other simultaneously, leaving us with nothing to hang on to. We realize that we do not need a savior or a “savee” or salvation. We can actually do without that extra baggage altogether. We see that individual salvation is like eating *momos*, or Tibetan dumplings: there is dough wrapped around meat, a container and what is contained, and we are supposed to eat the whole thing.

Such an inspiration can only come from the relaxation of having taken the refuge vow. As many teachers have said, if you do not take refuge, there is still the possibility of becoming sidetracked. When you take the refuge vow, you begin to find freedom. It makes you feel healthy and good. You realize that from now onward, there is only one journey. The journeyer and the journey become one single situation. You finally understand that individual salvation is indeed individual—and at the same time, it is universal.

THE ORIGIN OF SUFFERING

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The Power of Flickering Thoughts

Everything starts on a minute scale at the beginning and then expands. Things begin to swell and expand until they become very large—immeasurably large, in a lot of cases. We can experience that ourselves. Such minute shifts of attention are what create the emotions of aggression, passion, ignorance, and all the rest. Although those emotions are seemingly very heavy-handed, large-scale, and crude, they have their origin in the subtle twists that take place in our mind constantly.

SUFFERING, THE first of the four noble truths, comes from absent-mindedness; it comes from stupidity or ignorance. We are not fundamentally incapable of being mindful, but we are unable to develop exertion or striving on the path. Absentmindedness, not being aware, brings a sense of “lost and split.” That kind of basic confusion naturally brings pain. Because of that sense of dissatisfaction, of not finding your right place, you try to attack the world outside or to complain—but, actually, the complaint should be on yourself. The original problem began because you lost your awareness. You cannot lay that on someone else.

The basic quality of suffering is that you cannot behave in the proper manner. The first glimpse of suffering is a sense of clumsiness: you are unable to coordinate your body, speech, and mind. That sense of complete clumsiness can be referred to as “ape instinct.” From suffering comes the notion of irritation. Because you are not quite in accordance with your

environment, the world begins to attack you. You may sit in a very uncomfortable chair, which simply doesn't fit you, so you feel painfully cramped. You may step in some dog shit on the pavement, and suddenly you have no idea whom to blame: the dog who shat, yourself, or the uncleanness of the city. There is an ongoing bewilderment or grudge against the world. You are supposed to say something to somebody who attacks you—but you have created the inconvenience yourself, so you do not know what to do. Basically, any movement you make by not being aware creates suffering and pain. Losing track, losing context, losing a reference point of openness brings pain.

Understanding suffering is very important. The practice of meditation is not designed to develop pleasure, but to understand the truth of suffering; and in order to understand the truth of suffering, one also has to understand the truth of awareness. When true awareness takes place, suffering does not exist. Through awareness, suffering is somewhat changed in its perspective. It is not necessarily that you do not suffer, but the haunting quality that fundamentally you are in trouble is removed. It is like removing a splinter: it might hurt, and you might still feel pain, but the basic cause of that pain, the ego, has been removed.

The second noble truth is about the origin of suffering: how suffering and dissatisfaction arise. Suffering begins with very simple and ordinary flickers of thought, which derive from basic bewilderment. Before intention begins, there is a state of utter uncertainty, in the sense of a generally dull and stupefied state of mind. That uncertainty or bewilderment occurs every fraction of a second in our state of being. It goes on all the time. We don't know whether we are coming or going, perceiving or not perceiving. Due to that uncertainty, we prefer to spin in circles rather than to look around and extend outward. Our actions are colored or flavored by a kind of fundamental ape-instinct; our only guidance is our own very fermented body odor or mind odor. It is like the blind leading the blind. We are just sniffing around. In this stupefied state, you are willing to step into a corral or den, like an animal, not knowing that the consequences will be painful. In that way, you are drawn toward pain rather than toward pleasure.

That tendency toward pain comes not from either pain or pleasure, but from wanting to bury your head in yourself and smell your own wickedness. You would rather stick with your family than go out and meet strangers. You prefer to relate with your own nest, which happens to be a bad choice, and the result is pain. So you start with ignorance, which is

very self-snug, like living in a cocoon. Due to ignorance, you prefer to let a gigantic growth develop in you rather than be operated on and feel better, because the operation is too painful, and it is too big a deal to do anything about it. You even take pride in that approach. However, although you are looking for pleasure, it turns out to be pain. For you, basic goodness has not yet come up. Basic goodness is like getting up and taking a shower, which wakes you up; but you would rather not do that, even though you have a bathroom. You prefer to doze in your bed. It's less of a hassle and you don't have to sacrifice or give anything up. It is much easier just to swim around in your dirt. You don't take a shower, you don't wash, you don't go to the barber and cut your hair, you just grow a long beard and long hair and kick around with your own little pleasure. This is as close as we can get to the notion of samsara.

Within that stupidity you begin to find something, and that something is passion or lust. You don't even know what you are lusting for, but you are willing to indulge yourself. Desire or lust is that which ignites. It is based on wanting to build yourself up. But you do not need desire. You could take a walk with the desire of building yourself up, but you could also take a walk without trying to build yourself up. You could just take a walk, very simply and straightforwardly. Doing so would be very opening. There doesn't have to be a second meaning all the time, and you don't have to philosophize everything. There could be pure motivation.

The natural, instinctive yearning toward pain is known as *künjung* in Tibetan, and in Sanskrit it is *samudaya*. *Kün* means "all" or "every," and *jung* means "arising"; so *künjung* means the "origin of all." *Künjung* is an abbreviation for *nyönmong künjung*, which means the "origin of all the defilements (kleshas)." It is where all the defilements and pain are created. *Künjung* gives birth to the twelve *nidanas*—the links in the chain of causation (ignorance, formation, consciousness, name and form, the six senses, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, and death). It is the origin of the five *skandhas*, which are permeated with the *kleshas*.

According to the *abhidharma*, *künjung* can arise as flickering thoughts, and it is connected with the notion of *semjung*, the fifty-one mental events arising from the mind. *Künjung* is also associated with two forms of *drippa*, or obscuration: *pakchak kyi drippa*, the "obscuration of habitual tendencies," and *nyönmong kyi drippa*, the "obscuration of negative emotions." The flickering is *pakchak kyi drippa*, which sets off the emotions, or *nyönmong kyi drippa*. The flickering acts like the pilot light on your

stove, which is always on and sets off all the rest of the burners. Likewise, there is always some pakchak kyi drippa waiting to light any of the skandhas or kleshas, which are ready and waiting to be lit up.

The idea of *künjung*, the origin of suffering, is that it progresses. When we project ourselves into a situation or into a particular world, we begin with a very small and minute shift of attention; and from that, things become enlarged and exaggerated. According to the *abhidharma*, the connection between small ideas and large ideas is very important. For instance, sudden dramas, such as murdering somebody or creating immense chaos, begin on the level of minute concepts and tiny shifts of attention. Something large is being triggered by something quite small. The first little hint of dislike or attraction for somebody eventually escalates and brings on a much more immense scale of emotional drama or psychodrama. So everything starts on a minute scale at the beginning and then expands. Things begin to swell and expand until they become very large—immeasurably large, in a lot of cases. We can experience that ourselves. Such minute shifts of attention are what create the emotions of aggression, passion, ignorance, and all the rest. Although those emotions are seemingly very heavy-handed, large-scale, and crude, they have their origin in the subtle twists that take place in our mind constantly.

Because of that sudden shiftiness of attention, and because our mind is basically so untrained, we begin to have a sense of casualness about the whole thing. We are constantly looking for possibilities of either possessing someone, destroying someone, or conning somebody into our world. That struggle is taking place all the time. The problem is that we have not properly related with the shiftiness. We experience the arising of such thoughts right now, all the time; otherwise the second noble truth wouldn't be truth—it would just be theory.

It is possible for people who have been practicing meditation and studying the teachings, who are opened up and intrigued, to see this pattern. If you have been practicing, you are somewhat raw and unskinned, which is good; although if you are too ripe, you might want to run away or try to grow thicker skin. Being able to relate with the subtleties of mental shifts is connected with the *hinayana* principle of paying attention to every activity that we do in smaller doses. There is no such thing as sudden psychodrama without any cause and effect. Every psychodrama that takes place in our mind or in our actions has its origin in little flickering thoughts and little flickerings of attention.

Correct all wrongs with one intention.

When you experience increasing kleshas, or you are in the midst of perverse circumstances such as serious illnesses, economic or domestic crises, court cases, or resistance to practice, you should develop compassion for all sentient beings, who also suffer like this—and you should aspire to take on their suffering yourself through the practice of lojong.

The problems you experience should be overcome right when they occur. If your practice becomes good when things are good for you, but nonexistent when things are bad, that is not the way. Instead, whether situations are extremely good or extremely bad, you should continue to do your practice. You need to stamp on obstacles. Whenever you don't want to practice, whenever any bad circumstance comes up, stamp on it! With this slogan you are deliberately, immediately, and very abruptly suppressing the kleshas.

Two activities: one at the beginning, one at the end.

The point of this slogan is to begin and end each day with twofold bodhichitta. In the morning, you should remember bodhichitta and take the attitude of not separating yourself from it. At the end of the day, you should examine what you have done. If you have not separated yourself from twofold bodhichitta, you should be delighted, and you should vow to take the same attitude again the next day. If you were separated from bodhichitta, you should vow to reconnect with it the next day. In this way, your life will be sandwiched by bodhichitta.

Because of your commitment and the vow you have taken to put others before yourself, at the beginning of the day, as soon as you wake up, you promise yourself that you will work on twofold bodhichitta and develop gentleness to yourself and others. You promise not to blame the world and other sentient beings, and you promise to take their pain on yourself. And at the end of the day, when you go to bed, you do the same thing. In that way, both your sleep and the day that follows are influenced by that commitment.

Train in the three difficulties.

The three difficulties are the difficulty of recognizing your kleshas, the difficulty of overcoming them, and the difficulty of cutting through them. In order to deal with these difficulties, you need to recognize the kleshas, overcome them, and take a vow never to re-create them. So altogether there are six categories: three difficulties and three things to do about them.

Dealing with your own kleshas or neuroses is difficult. It is very difficult to recognize the point at which you are tricked by your neuroses, it is very difficult to overcome them, and it is very difficult to cut through them. So when a klesha arises, first you need to recognize it as neurosis. Secondly, you need to overcome it. Since neurosis comes from selfishness, from placing too much importance on yourself, the way to do that is to cut through your ego. Thirdly, you need to cut the continuity of the klesha, and vow never to re-create such a neurosis again. You should develop the determination to stop feeding the neurosis or being attracted to it. In order to overcome the kleshas, you need to take an abrupt approach.

Take on the three principal causes.

What causes you to be a good dharmic person or a bodhisattva? According to this slogan, the three causes are: having a good teacher, cultivating a mind and demeanor applicable to the dharma, and having the right practical circumstances for practicing the dharma.

The first cause is having a good teacher. You realize the necessity of the teacher, someone who introduces you to the dharma.

The second cause is cultivating a mind and demeanor applicable to the dharma. You realize that your mind should be tamed, but you may have all kinds of funny ambitions about your life and the dharma. You might get into the dharma in order to become a teacher, or to write a book, or to start a business. That kind of ambition was not all that prominent in the days when Jamgön Kongtrül wrote *The Great Path of Awakening*, but today

Unconditional Ground

Yeshe cuts your thoughts on the spot, so there are no thoughts. It is like the experience of eating a jalapeño: it numbs any possibilities of wandering mind. It is a one-hundred-percent experience, or even two-hundred-percent.

INDESTRUCTIBLE BEING

In tantric Buddhism, we talk about vajra existence or vajra nature, as opposed to the vajra-like samadhi that the mahayanists talk about. At the same time, none of the experiences of vajrayana can occur if you do not understand the idea of tathagatagarbha from the point of view of mahayana. Vajra nature of dorje kham refers to an indestructible quality that we maintain and possess intrinsically in our being.

Neither Beginning nor End

If you ask how egolessness and emptiness fit together with the topic of vajra indestructibility, the answer is that this intrinsic quality of our being is completely indestructible because it is not existent. If it were at the level of existence, there would be no question of indestructibility, because it would have a form, and anything that has existence or form cannot possess vajra nature. The Sanskrit word for form is *rupa*, which refers to that which has substantial existence and which could therefore be destroyed at any time. Vajra nature, on the other hand, does not have its own entity,

its own existence; therefore, it is indestructible. So vajra indestructibility equals nonexistence, because it has neither beginning nor end.

Existence and Manifesting

Samsara is nirvana, from that point of view. Whether something is garbage or a blade of grass, it is the same. Anything goes; it is all sacred. You see everything as the manifestation of the guru's world, which allows you to relax and maintain your upliftedness. Even if you are sleeping in the midst of a garbage heap, you can then build up from that and work with whatever is workable. You can clean up whatever has to be cleaned up. But before you clean anything up, the point is not to fight with the ugly or unpleasant things, because that means you are labeling them as something to get rid of, as something outside of your capable world. So charity begins at home. That is why we have maitri practice first, and compassion practice later on. Unless you have developed maitri, you cannot develop compassion.

Vajra nature is a state of complete invincibility. It is a complete state and completely invincible because you do not need an essence to work on. You are fully developed. You might ask, "Then why is it necessary to practice?" The answer is that the point of practice is to try to bring out the hang-ups of the mahayana. Although you experience and learn a lot in the mahayana, at the same time it also provides you with deceptions and hangovers of all kinds. The mahayana is enormously helpful, but its hangovers are problematic.

In order to experience the true form of vajra existence, that you are already buddha in any case, you need two aspects: *ku* and *yeshe*. *Ku*, or the body aspect, is solidity; it is the ground of sanity. *Yeshe* is the shining out or the celebrating of that particular situation. In Sanskrit, *ku* is *kaya*, as in dharmakaya, and *yeshe* is *jnana*. *Kaya* and *jnana* cannot be separated; existence and manifesting always happen together, like positive and negative electricity.

Glimpses of Vajra Nature

The vajrayanists' approach to vajra experience is that you are there already, although it may be just in a glimpse, whether a short glimpse or a long

glimpse. But even those glimpses have become arbitrary, and we do not pursue them. The idea here is that glimpses are workable, and since they exist within us already, we do not need to pursue them. In the mahayana, such glimpses have to be cultivated and brought about constantly. But in the vajrayana, they are already fully developed, although we might have to push ourselves to experience them. The only problem is in how long these gaps or glimpses could be experienced.

In the mahayana, it is also possible to experience gaps, but those gaps are clouded with conflicting emotions. In the vajrayana, they are not. In the mahayana, it is as if you have a thick shield of glass in front of you, but in the vajrayana those gaps are real, a sheer drop. At first those gaps are very quick, and then you begin to expand the gaps so that you are not dependent on just glimpses. That is how you build vajrayana insight.

The experience of vajra nature is more than perception; it is just what we have. Perception means that you perceive something, but here there is no separation between perception and perceiver. So the experience of vajra nature is not even an experience; it just happens. Vajra nature is nonconceptual and happens without perception, and without collecting further reference points or recording anything in the subconscious mind. Vajra nature just happens.

LETTING GO OF GRASPING AND FIXATION

Because we have such a wonderful foundation, we can turn to ourselves and begin to realize what happens when we surrender, when we give up our ego. When we let go of our grasping and fixation altogether, we realize that there is greater vision beyond grasping and fixation. This vision is very firm and definite, no longer just a wishy-washy idea. In fact, there is no idealism involved with this vision; it is realistic.

The absence of grasping and fixation provides something extremely firm. It is not firm in the style of grasping or fixation, but it is the firmness of pure ground. It is like flying in an airplane. We take off and we fly up, and when we rise above the clouds, we begin to realize that upstairs there is blue sky all the time. We realize that the sun is always shining, even when it is cloudy and rainy down below. There is blue sky all the time, twenty-four hours a day, whether it is light or dark, and that blue sky is free from clouds.

That kind of solidity or firmness is beyond the level of ego-clinging, because at that point, we are not harassed by our desire. For that matter, we do not hold on to our identity as such at all. When we let go of grasping and fixation, we find pure ground, which is all-pervasive and spacious. It is firm, not because there is a reference point, but because there is no reference point.

The realization of nonreference point is connected to being without hesitation; it is connected with firmness, but in this case firmness does not refer to anything solid. It could be called lucidity rather than firmness; and it could even be called shiftiness. If you look up into the middle of a completely blue cloudless sky, you could say that it is very shifty, and at the same time, that it is very firm. It is firm because the sky is blue all over. But because the sky is so vast, you cannot focus your eyes on it. You cannot focus your eyes on the blue sky because there is nothing to focus on, so it is shifty as well as firm. Any glimpses you experience become a letdown, because there is nothing to hang on to. And if you sustained your glimpses, you would be experiencing that letdown continuously.

There is nothing very mystical about this whole thing. Firmness simply means that you cannot grasp anything. If you are a lost astronaut floating in outer space, that space is very firm, because you have nothing to hang on to. So we are talking about a different kind of firmness than hanging on to a column or crushing your pillow in your arms.

GLIMPING THREEFOLD VAJRA BEING

When we are able to take off that far, we begin to catch a glimpse of what is known as the threefold vajra nature: vajra body, vajra speech, and vajra mind. I think that *vajra nature* is the wrong term, however, because nature implies something that is still embryonic. It is like tomorrow's sunshine as opposed to today's sunshine. Instead, we probably should use the term *vajra being*. Vajra being is something that is already exposed, already existing. Vajra being, or in Sanskrit, *vajrasattva*, means "vajra existence."

When you give birth in the vajrayana, you give birth to a fully grown person, not to an infant. By means of vajra vision, or your understanding of the absence of grasping and fixation, you develop vajra being. Vajra body, speech, and mind are the expressions of that complete freedom from grasping and fixation. So firmness is nonreference point, and that firmness is threefold.

THE NECESSITY OF MIND TRAINING

Threefold vajra being develops out of your lojong practice. In lojong, or mind training, the word *training* implies that effort is involved. Nothing comes out of a dream; you cannot simply expect to find gold coins in your Christmas stocking right away. So vajra body, speech, and mind are the products of exertion. They are the products of sending and taking completely. If you are truly, fully trained in lojong, your body, speech, and mind turn into vajra body, vajra speech, and vajra mind. That allows you to remain in the vajra world physically, to hear the vajra teaching, and to experience glimpses of vajra mind.

Lojong is limitless. Each time a student reaches a certain level of training, our standards get higher. Some students may think that they could go beyond the mahayana ideal when they became tantrikas, but that is completely wrong. If you do not have a good understanding of tonglen, as well as of lojong, you cannot become a good tantrika because you have not really experienced any kind of absence. When you do sending and taking, you experience absence. Nobody is actually there to do the exchanging; it just happens between space. There is a kind of enlightened confusion, in which you do not know who you are, whether you are the receiver or the sender. You have a gap, which is a very interesting point. So the study of lojong will help you to understand the vajrayana much more clearly.

The vajrayana is very definitely a product of mind training. I think that everybody in the lineage would approve of that particular remark. That is how your mind becomes one with the dharma, and the dharma becomes the path. So you could work with lojong and the mahayana slogans from the vajrayana point of view. When you actually discover your own basic gentleness, your intrinsic goodness, you begin to realize that your hesitations have gone far away. You develop a vision based on fearlessness, gentleness, compassion, spaciousness, and invincibility. Lojong begins to become a vajrayana-like situation at that point.

The basic point, which I would like to make clear, is that you have to prepare yourself first; then you can respond to what you have prepared. Natural preparation also exists outside of your own existence. That is to say, your own readiness to receive and understand the vajrayana, and the vajrayana world of the lineage, which exists outside of you, are both included. So it is a question of relating with two situations: the vajra world,

and the vajra nature that exists within you. When you put those two together, you begin to have a basic understanding of entering into the vajrayana altogether.

ATTAINING FREEDOM FROM THE KLESHAS

The meaning of tantra is continuity. There is continuity from the beginning of the journey—from when we become refugees on the hinayana path, through when we become helpers of others, or would-be bodhisattvas on the mahayana path, and through the greater sanity that arises as we go on to the vajrayana. Throughout, the point is to attain freedom from the kleshas.

This freedom is twofold: it is freedom from both samsara and nirvana. That is, we do not dwell in the peace or cessation of shamatha, nor do we dwell in ego-centered grasping and fixation. Freedom from grasping and fixation is freedom from samsara; freedom from fixed notions of peace and contentment and from pure shamatha tranquillity is freedom from absorption in nirvana. We tend to have already developed that kind of attitude when we take the bodhisattva vow and begin to practice the mahayana discipline of twofold bodhichitta.

YESHE: PRIMORDIAL WISDOM

Even at the earliest stage of the vajrayana, we have to study and understand jnana, or *yeshe* in Tibetan. The meaning of *ye* is “primordial” or “original,” or it could be “a long time ago,” and *she* means “familiarity,” “comprehension,” or “knowing”; so *yeshe* means “primordial knowing.” It could be regarded as root knowledge or basic knowledge. In the related term *ngo-she*, *ngo* means “face,” and *she* means “knowing”; so *ngo-she* means “I know somebody.” It means “I know their face,” or in other words, “I am familiar with that person, I have met them before.”

Yeshe, or primordial knowing, is the definition of wisdom. Such wisdom is a very important and intrinsic aspect of the vajrayana; it runs right through the vajrayana presentation from beginning to end. In the vajrayana, all sorts of wisdoms are discovered, introduced, and realized. So

* The knowing quality of *ngo-she* has the implication of recognizing one's true nature.

yeshe is a very important term, one that we are going to use forever and ever.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term *wise* refers to someone who comprehends knowledge. It refers to someone who is accomplished, either by training or through natural talent. But the concept of being wise is somewhat theistic; it means that you *possess* your wisdom, which is a concept we do not use in the Tibetan tradition. For instance, we do not say *yeshepa*, which would mean “one who possesses wisdom,” or a “yeshe-ist.” We do not say that, but we could use the word *chang*, which means “holding.” So we could say *yeshe changwa*, which means “one who holds wisdom,” as in *dorje chang*, which means “one who holds the vajra.” Chang, or holding, seems to be different than possessing. Holding means being adorned with or endowed with. For instance, you might hold the title of *father*.

Experiencing Reality

When we say that yeshe means fundamentally comprehending, you might ask: Comprehending what? In English, of course, we always have to qualify things. If you like, we could say comprehending the nature of reality. But what is the nature of reality? The nature of reality seems to be something that cannot be changed or manufactured by concepts or philosophical speculation. The nature of reality is without a watcher; it does not require anyone to observe it or look at it. In other words, we could say that reality is unconditional. Reality cannot be put into pigeon-holes, metaphysical categories, computer chips, or data of any kind. That cannot be done. Since the nature of reality is free from observation, it cannot be spoken of in conventional words. However, it can be experienced; it can be experienced very strongly, very thoroughly, very fully and fantastically.

Protection from Conditionality

When you experience the nature of reality, then that particular wisdom, or yeshe, has the possibility of protecting you from conditionality. It takes your mind away from further involvement with conditionality of any kind. What we have, therefore, is mantra: the protection of mind, the protection of consciousness, the protection of awareness.

Mantra is that which is able to protect itself from others, which is why it is said to be synonymous with yeshe. It is a natural situation of the mind through which your existence cannot be attacked, defeated, or overpowered. This protection could be through any one of the three principles of body, speech, or mind. So although mantra is often referred to as incantation, such as when you say a mantra, it is not necessarily just things you say. Mantra is something more than that; it is the natural vibration that exists when you have such an experience within yourself.

Mantra is protection from boundaries. It is connected with boundaries and with anything that boundaries cannot conquer. By means of mantra, you can dispel the negative forces coming from boundaries; therefore, there is protection. For instance, you could be protected from the boundaries of the three times. There is also a boundary between your experience of sanity and insanity. As you go out from where you are, your sanity becomes thinner and thinner. You begin to lose your grip on sanity, and you begin to experience insanity. You begin to question your existence and why you are practicing at all. If you go outside of that boundary, you lose your conviction and wonder why the dharma is true. Sanity is simple, and also quite terrifying in a sense, so it is easy to make that kind of choice.

The ordinary samsaric pattern is always, without exception, to maintain its existence, even on the subconscious or unconscious level. Conditional mind is a mind that constantly looks forward. It is always looking out for its own survival, and generating further possibilities of maintaining ego. But now as we look back, it makes sense that mind protection is possible. It is possible because we have understood yeshe, the unconditionality that protects us from conditionality. Mantra, which could be said to be synonymous with yeshe, is protecting a particular way of thinking in which we do not stray into ego-centeredness, and therefore do not reproduce the volitional actions of karma.

Once the wheel of karma is set in motion, it is like a potter's wheel: it goes on and on, again and again. Once we have “I” existing, we just keep on going. When a potter has a little clay sitting on their wheel, they begin to fashion it with their hands until finally it becomes a nice, neat pot. Until then, they won't stop. That is exactly how we fashion our karma, which sometimes makes us happy, sometimes makes us sad, and sometimes leads us into trouble. So mantra protects us from that; it protects our mind from conditionality.

Protection from Habitual Patterns of Transmigration

When our mind is protected from conditionality, this also tends to overcome the habitual pattern of transmigration, or *phowe pakchak* in Tibetan. *Phowa* means “transmigration,” “changing,” or “departing from one place to another,” changing *phowa* to *phowe* makes it “of that,” and *pakchak* means “habitual patterns”; so *phowe pakchak* means “habitual patterns of transmigration.”

Habitual patterns of transmigration happen to us when one thought begins to die and we start looking for the next one. For instance, when we begin to lose interest in our orange juice, we would then like to order our coffee, which is the next thing. That is precisely the pattern of habitual transmigration. As soon as we get one thing, we would like to change it to something else. Throughout our life, we keep jumping like grasshoppers in that way. We would like to exchange one thing for another.

With *phowe pakchak*, we also have the tendency to be bored. This particular type of consciousness or habitual pattern is what allows us to miss the reference point of understanding what is known as the fourth moment. The first three moments are the past, present, and future; and then there is a fourth moment that transcends all three. This moment is a pure moment that is not connected with what you have missed, what you are experiencing, or what you expect is about to happen. The fourth moment is a pure state of consciousness; it is clear and pure and free from habitual tendencies.

Phowe pakchak does not contain the fourth-moment state of mind. In other words, *phowe pakchak* allows no abruptness; it does not like shocks of any kind. You would just like to relax a little bit and take your time. You would like to have your juice and then your coffee, and maybe a cigarette afterward; you would like to just lounge around and have a pleasurable life. With *phowe pakchak*, you would just like to lead your life in accord with the habitual patterns you used to enjoy. You would like to re-create them all over again.

Phowe pakchak makes it difficult to practice patience, particularly in the vajrayana sense. The mahayana notion of patience is purely the absence of aggression, while the vajrayana notion of patience also includes the idea of waiting. You are just waiting, and by doing so, you are being the master of time. So vajrayana patience involves proper timing. There is greater precision in the experience of appropriateness: you know the time

to proceed and the time not to proceed; you know the time things are ripe and the time they are not ripe. The idea of mastering time has nothing to do with aggression; you just have to tune in to the way situations develop and mature.

Phowe pakchak is one of the outstanding problems that keep you from being able to receive proper transmission. When a student receives transmission from a vajra master, that transmission is usually abrupt. Transmission cuts thought; it cuts mind abruptly, on the spot. But the habitual tendency of *phowe pakchak* goes against that completely: you would just like to socialize a little bit more with your samsaric mind. Mantra, or *yeshe*, cuts through that.

VAJRAYANA RENUNCIATION

In order to get the pith instruction of vajrayana, you need to understand the pithiness, abruptness, and directness of shamatha and vipashyana as best and as fully as you can. This is necessary in order to understand, even for an instant, that you are not just theorizing that samsara is bad because it gives you pain, but samsara really is bad and difficult. It is not pleasurable to indulge in it even for an instant. Indulging in samsara gives you a very muddled and muddy state of mind, composed of preconceptions and habitual patterns, which together bring *kleshas* of all kinds.

We understand how bad and painful it is to be in the hungry ghost realm; how bad and painful it is to be speedy; how bad and painful it is to live in the samsaric world. But we do not seem to be able to understand or click into that properly and fully. We do not understand that we are flipping back and forth, even at this very moment. At first, the samsaric state of mind seems inviting and comfortable, and we get into it. Our preconceptions and habitual patterns seem somewhat soothing. But then that state of mind begins to engulf and smother us, and we find ourselves, for no reason, in the middle of helplessness. We find that we have lost our connections somewhere, and we begin to feel loneliness, sadness, and pain. Suddenly, in an instant, or in a second or two, we get a tremendous attack of samsaric-ness.

However, although we understand the pain of samsara, we do not see samsara as so bad that we just have to forget all about it. Instead, you might say we see it as somewhat bad. By understanding samsara, it might

teach us a lesson; we might learn how not to be in samsara. So we could study samsara the way we study poison and how it affects us. Poison is not bad, *per se*; but eating poison might be bad. Likewise, studying poison is not necessarily bad; doing so might give us more understanding about how to deal with it.

In the vajrayana, we talk about renunciation in terms of the samsaric state of mind rather than samsaric life, which we already seem to understand. It is not that the samsaric world at large is particularly bad, but it is our pleasure-oriented attraction to samsara that is the problem. The attraction of our mind to that mentality is quite shocking—and we are accustomed to re-creating that mentality again and again, constantly. The purpose of renunciation is to reverse our mind from that particular situation and tune it in to something else. This may be somewhat discomforting in the beginning, because we do not get the grandmotherly kind of comfort or reassurance that we are used to getting. Nonetheless, renunciation is much fresher. Renunciation is regarded as fresh and good, basic and excellent.

As a vajrayana student, or tantrika, you can develop this kind of renunciation by following the examples of the lineage and the vajra master. You can do so by appreciating their journey and their example, and by emulating that.

RIKPA: INSIGHT

Yeshe is that which is free from the habitual patterns of ordinary mind, or *sem* (that which projects to other), and from yeshe there arises what is known as insight, or rikpa. Rikpa is a clear way of looking at a situation, a kind of built-in perception for yeshe. It is also a seed of prajna, although prajna operates more in relationship to other, and rikpa relates more to yourself. With rikpa, you are your own disciplinarian, so you do not stray.

Rikpa is able to perceive yeshe. But we cannot call this kind of perception a watcher. It is like your own tongue: when you eat food, you cannot call your tongue the watcher of your food. There is no strain in having a tongue in your mouth while you eat food. But if you did not have one, you might have a problem with eating. Likewise, you cannot call your eyelids the watchers of your eyes because you blink. So rikpa is a built-in situation, like your tongue.

PRAJNA: CLEAR PERCEPTION

Rikpa is the basic approach we are trying to work with in order to maintain or get in touch with yeshe. But in order to realize yeshe, we also have to realize prajna; and in order to realize prajna, we have to experience vipashyana. Vipashyana gives us a quality of gentleness, so we do not become too harsh and clever and we do not stay in the higher realms alone. It brings us down to the level of compassion and softness. Yeshe is all-knowing, and prajna is the communication system that goes with yeshe. Prajna enables you to relate with your world altogether. So prajna and yeshe happen together, simultaneously. Prajna is like the limbs, and yeshe is like the body.

Prajna perceives what is there, which is not very much, so prajna is the perceiver of absence. But if you go beyond that, you have the perception of brilliance because of the absence, which is getting into yeshe. Shunyata, or emptiness, still has a slight notion of boundary. Why do you have to say “empty” once you are in the middle of it? You seem to be saying “empty of something,” so it is a somewhat defensive concept. The idea of being empty of something is a slightly early level and is connected with the path rather than the fruition. That is why in the vajrayana tradition we talk more about luminosity than emptiness, because the concept of emptiness is always crossing the boundaries of full and empty.

NO BOUNDARIES

Yeshe cuts your thoughts on the spot, so there are no thoughts. It is like the experience of eating a jalapeño: it numbs any possibilities of wandering mind. It is a one-hundred-percent experience, or even a two-hundred-percent experience. Yeshe does not have any boundaries. So you cannot exactly experience yeshe, but you are there already. It is almost as if you are without a physical body, or you had a physical body a long time ago, so you no longer need to maintain it. You do not even have to be fearful of death; it is as if you are part of the elements already.

With yeshe, the reference point—if you can call it a reference point—is that there is no experience other than *That*. *That* is the epitome of non-theism. If there are no discursive thoughts, you have intense devotion. If

there are no clouds in the sky, you have intense sunshine. But here I am not speaking from the point of view of students, but from the point of view of the climate.

With ordinary consciousness, you have gaps of unconsciousness, or ignorance. You fall asleep or go unconscious, and then that is short-circuited by consciousness, and you wake up. But after you wake up, you might relapse; it is possible to fall asleep, lose consciousness, or become forgetful. Yeshe is altogether different. The stage of yeshe is reached once you have understood or clicked into the possibility of being able to break through fundamental falsity altogether. So it is even more than indestructible; with yeshe there are no possibilities of making mistakes anymore at all. Driftwood cannot become plastic wood.

GOING BACK TO SQUARE ONE

To approach the stage of yeshe, we first have to experience the shamatha level of taming ourselves, which once again brings us back to square one. When you have tamed yourself by means of shamatha, you begin to realize that you can be more decent and genuine in expressing warmth, which in the vajrayana is connected with devotion. Shamatha is connected with humbleness. But this does not mean that you feel low and bad, belittled and uninspired. Rather, you are humble and simple because you begin to feel that you are like tilled soil, which has been plowed so many times that it feels soft and humble and ready for a seed to be sown.

Next, with vipashyana we find ourselves ready for further communication, for actually sowing a seed, which in vajrayana terms means meeting the guru. Vipashyana is also connected with hearing the dharma. When there is humbleness and tameness and the willingness to open up, you spend your energy on hearing the dharma, rather than worrying about what you should do with yourself. If there were no gentleness and no tameness, there would be no possibility of hearing and experiencing the dharma; you would become like an upside-down pot.*

* A reference to a traditional analogy in which students are compared to pots. If the pot is upside down, the teachings cannot enter; if the pot is leaky, the teachings will not stick; if the pot is dirty or poisoned, the teachings will be distorted or deadened; but when the pot is open and upright, the teachings can enter without distortion.

Dropping the Watcher

At the beginning, on the primitive shamatha level, you have to develop your watchfulness. But as you begin to master shamatha, you require less watchfulness. Your mindfulness becomes a natural pattern. And when you develop shinjang, watchfulness is no longer necessary. You do not need feedback; you just know what is happening.

As you evolve into vipashyana, you develop more of an awareness of the situation, rather than constantly having to check back and forth with headquarters. So you need less watching, and more just being on the spot. In fact, the more you keep checking back, the more you lose your vipashyana; therefore, in vipashyana you should be on the spot all the time, each time.

From there you go further, and you begin to experience shunyata. You practice tonglen and become much more intense about developing compassion, gentleness, and kindness to others. Since you are concentrating on the pain of others and on developing generosity for them, you do not have to be so watchful of yourself all the time. You do not have to congratulate yourself about what a good person you are. As you put more exertion into your practice, you need less congratulation. Instead, you need more of a one-to-one relationship with your actual experience of the meditation technique, and you need to simplify yourself. Since you are dealing with the techniques very simply, you need less commentator, which is the voice of watchfulness, and more just seeing things very clearly. You are doing that properly and fully, on the spot.

As your confidence, discipline, exertion, and patience grow further, you finally get to the level of yeshe. It seems to be quite a long way, actually. At this point, you begin to feel that there is no need for a watcher. There is not even a question of being watched. If you had a watcher, it would actually be more of an obstacle. So finally, you do not need a commentator. That is the last thing you want! You just do it. That is called *nowness*. You do not need the past or the future to mind your business, but you are right here—and the fourth moment is even more so.

This whole process of dropping the watcher is like martial arts training. You need help at the beginning to make sure that you do not hurt yourself with your sword, and to make sure that you do a good job. But at some point, your assistants begin to become obstacles because they cut down your confidence in yourself, so they need to go away.

Eventually you do not need anybody at all. You begin to pick yourself up.

BASIC GOODNESS: THE GATEWAY TO YESHE

In terms of yeshe, basic goodness is like kindling, or starter wood. The Tibetan for basic goodness is *künshi ngangluk kyi gewa*. *Künshi*, or *alaya* in Sanskrit, is the “basis of all,” *ngangluk* is “natural state,” and *gewa* is “goodness” or “virtue”; so *künshi ngangluk kyi gewa* means the “natural virtue of alaya.”

Basic goodness is a glimpse of wakefulness or reality in which unconditionality is possible; but it is still based on a certain amount of dichotomy or separate reality, on *this* and *that*. It has been said that the experience of yeshe cannot be born out of dualistic mind, or sem, because yeshe is a completely non-ego experience, while sem still involves the reference point of self and other.

Künshi ngangluk kyi gewa is inferior to yeshe, because it still has the reference point of virtue, as opposed to non-virtue. However, I am afraid that you might nonetheless have to approach yeshe through *künshi ngangluk kyi gewa*. So basic goodness might accompany you up to a certain point—but then it is not there anymore, and you are left on your own with yeshe, completely. Even the absolute bodhichitta practice of lojong, or resting the mind in the nature of alaya, is a starting point rather than the ultimate reality. It is similar to the European custom of parents putting a small measure of wine in a glass of water, and presenting it to their children at the dinner table so their children can learn how to drink. Later on, when their children learn how to drink properly, they can have a whole glass.

BEING SOAKED IN ALL THREE YANAS

When all of this has taken place, the vajrayana aspect of taming is very simple and direct. First of all, you have been already fully and thoroughly trained in the basic Buddhist tradition of hinayana. Secondly, you have also learned to develop your ability to relate with others through mahayana practicality and through tonglen. Because you have thoroughly and fully developed in those ways, any leftover habitual tendencies and remains of samsaric pre-Buddhist training have been removed without

a trace. And even if there were such a trace left over, it would not be difficult to remove the problem, because you have already been thoroughly trained or shinjanged.

It seems to be very important for a vajrayana student to be soaked in all three yanās and become thoroughly Buddhist, rather than just becoming a vajrayana practitioner alone. We are talking about how to become a real Buddhist—about how to become a real hinayanist in the fullest sense of being tamed properly and thoroughly, and how to become a real mahayanist so that you have no problem with letting go and experiencing warmth.

With that ground, you will be able to share your gratitude and devotion to people such as the guru, the lineage, and the teachers from whom you receive your teachings. When you have become quite proficient in shamatha-vipashyana and lojong, you will begin to understand and develop unconditional wisdom, or yeshe. You will be able to identify and emulate the style and mentality of the enlightened ones fully and completely. That enlightened mentality will cease to be a myth and will instead become a real living tradition.

Fundamental Magic

The world is a healthy world in its own way. Even if you are sick or unhealthy, even if your bathwater turns out to be full of rusty clogs from your pipes, still it is healthy. Because of that vajrayana approach of basic healthiness, you actually are able to cut through the original root kleshas, which is the best magic of all.

THE UNIFICATION OF EMPTINESS AND COMPASSION

Emptiness and compassion provide the basis for the student of vajrayana; as potential vajrayana persons, we are expected to have already understood shunyata, as well as karuna. We should have that much understanding to begin with in order to practice vajrayana. In vajrayana, we take the attitude that our basic nature is already in the process of full realization; we do not regard it as an essence or potentiality. Out of that, and due to our practice of the hinayana path and the bodhisattva way, we begin to experience the unification of emptiness and compassion.

LUMINOUS EMPTINESS

First comes emptiness, or shunyata. Shunyata is the emptiness of *kūntak*, or “random labeling,” and of dualistic fixations of any kind. It is also the emptiness of oneself and of one’s basic core of bewilderment. That original primordial ignorance is also empty. Understanding that quality of emptiness, or twofold egolessness, we begin to develop a quality of

brilliance. As we begin to see beyond dualistic fixations or hang-ups, we also begin to understand their absence. We realize that this absence is not empty or vacant in the ordinary sense, but there is a tremendous spark or brightness taking place. When we recognize that brightness, we develop what is known as “vajra pride” in traditional vajrayana terminology. Vajra pride is based on affirming that not only have we begun to see the emptiness or absence of all those hang-ups, but we have also begun to see the brilliance. We begin to take a fearless attitude toward all that, and we begin to hold that kind of posture.

That brightness or brilliance is very basic. It is like daylight. It shines into your life so that you develop clear perceptions. You know what to perceive, how to follow situations, and how to prevent obstacles. It is almost at the level of prajna; but in tantric language, instead of referring to it as prajna, we refer to it as luminous emptiness. It is empty because it is free from fixations and hang-ups; it is luminous because after all the fixations are removed, what is left behind is fully realized experience, which is outstanding.

So in the vajrayana, you are able to separate what should be rejected on the path from what should be accepted on the path, in the fashion of prajna. But not only are you able to discriminate what to accept and reject, you also experience brilliance, which brings delight and heartiness, and a somewhat macho style. It brings vajra pride.

Immediately after the experience of emptiness, there is a quality of fullness. So emptiness is not regarded as a loss. In the vajrayana, your experience of shunyata is not as if part of your brain or heart has been taken away, but more as if the first layer of tissue on your brain and heart has been taken away because it created an obstacle. You feel that now your brain and heart are functioning extremely well, that they are actually functioning much better. You feel that at last the whole thing is working properly and as it should.

In the vajrayana, you are not relating to emptiness as if you were a patient recovering in a hospital to regain your strength. In this case, the patient was never sick. Even though you had to go to the hospital to have some obstacles removed, fundamentally speaking you never got sick. The experience of emptiness is more like going to a barber to get a haircut when your hair is too long or needs shaping. When you get your hair cut, you come out better, but it is not an ordeal. The whole thing is straightforward and quite delightful.

COMPASSION AS TRANSCENDENTAL INDULGENCE

After emptiness comes compassion, which is soft and gentle, with an aspect of wrath. That is to say, in the vajrayana, compassion is no longer regarded as kindness in the conventional sense. It is not even kindness in the conventional mahayana sense. There is no particular norm of how to be kind in the vajrayana. Instead, compassion is an expression of the union of emptiness and luminosity.

This kind of compassion sometimes has a threatening aspect, but it is only threatening because we want to gain something from ego's point of view. It is threatening because if an unreasonable situation occurs, this kind of compassion would answer that with its own unreasonability. This makes the whole thing into a good deal; it balances both situations. It could sometimes happen the other way around, of course, but that depends on what your shunyata vision has provided for you.

Vajrayana compassion is based on fundamental lust and passion. So much warmth is expressed to fellow sentient beings and to yourself that you begin to feel almost romantic about the whole thing. In the bodhisattva path, you are not allowed to look at the romantic aspect, particularly; you are just performing good deeds all the time. You become a bridge, a highway, a ship, or a reservoir. You become whatever you possibly can in order to accommodate everything.

In mahayana compassion, there is little possibility of indulgence, but in vajrayana compassion, indulgence somehow comes back. This is quite a dangerous thing to say, I suppose, but I hope you understand what I mean. I don't want to produce any egomaniacs. In vajrayana compassion, indulgence means taking pride in your gentleness and softness, which is also harsh and flavored with aggression. But in this case, it is obviously transcendental aggression. Vajrayana compassion is like drinking milk that has been cooked over a slowly burning fire until it has begun to thicken and condense. That milk has lots of honey and sugar in it, but you then add a few drops of Tabasco sauce, which makes it both sweet and chipper, tasty, but with a reminder. You cannot just get into the smoothness and simplicity of it, but there is a touch of bitterness at the same time.

Transcendental indulgence is very simple, but you cannot understand this if you don't do it. When you have the clarity and precision of shunyata along with a feeling of compassion, then you begin to develop who

you are and what you are. Your identity, so to speak, becomes absolutely clear. What direction you should be going in and what you should be doing are certain, so you just go and do it. You proclaim yourself with no doubts and no depression. It is very simple that way. If you beat around the bush, there will be endless problems.

All of this—how to clarify this situation and actually be able to see this fully and properly—is based on the principle of devotion. When you have enough devotion and loyalty to the lineage and to your vajra master, when you actually begin to do what has been said by the teachings, this provides tremendous confirmation. You can be arrogant in the positive sense.

ABRUPTLY CUTTING THOUGHTS

There is magic in vajrayana practice and in vajrayana altogether. People often think that magic is the ability to do things like change fire into water, or float up toward the ceiling and then come down again, or make tomato ketchup into cream cheese. But we have a better understanding of magic than that; what is actually happening is better than those things. We are not talking about magic in the style of a conjuring magician on the stage, but we are talking about fundamental magic. This magic is always based on the profound effect that we have discovered from the hinayana discipline of one-pointedness and the mahayana discipline of openness and compassionate nonterritoriality. Out of that comes vajrayana magic, which is that we are able to cut our thoughts abruptly and directly. On the spot!

Trust

There seem to be several stages to that process of cutting thoughts. The first is an attitude of trust in your vajra master and in his or her wisdom. Whether your vajra master is a vajra lady or vajra lord, in any case, the vajra master becomes a source of magic to cut your thoughts. When a vajrayana student begins to think of the qualities of the vajra master, that student should have an experience of hot and cold simultaneously. You experience hot because it is so fiery that it burns every deception and doubt, and you experience cold because it puts out the fires of emotional eruptions and emotional blazes.

Cutting Discursive Thoughts

When a student has some idea of the vajra master as the author of that power to cut thoughts, the vajra master in turn begins to instruct that student and tell them how to go about this. Because the vajra master is already an accomplished yogi and has gone through this experience themselves, their teaching is much more applicable and understandable to ordinary students.

In tantric iconography, the herukas and dakinis are wearing garlands of freshly severed heads, which represents cutting through mental contents. That is the first thing we come across: cutting through our mental contents. So the truth of the matter is that first you cut the fringe thoughts, or what are known in Buddhist psychological writings or *abhidharma* literature as the mental contents. Mental contents are divided into good ones and bad ones. That is to say, some of them are virtuous, such as faith, and some of them are wicked, such as anger and laziness. Nevertheless, they are all mental contents. There are said to be fifty-one or fifty-two of these mental contents, depending on which text you follow—but there are definitely at least fifty.*

Seeing Thoughts as Unborn, Unceasing, and Completely Empty

Before you actually cut the guts of ego in yourself, first you cut the mental contents by direct measure. Following the instructions of the vajra master, you look at the mental contents and realize that they do not come from anywhere; then you experience that they do not have any content; finally, when you look at them further, you realize that they do not go anywhere. The traditional way of saying this is that thoughts are unborn, unceasing, and completely empty.

The magic of cutting your discursive thoughts or mental contents actually happens as they dissolve and you see that they do not exist, and as they arise and you see them as complete shunyata. In other words, thoughts are free from past, present, and future. Toward the end of realiz-

* In Sanskrit, *mental contents* are called *samskaras*. In English, they may also be referred to as “formations” or “concepts.” The *samskaras* are one of the five *skandhas*, or five “heaps,” that constitute the ego, and they are also one of the twelve *nidanas* in the chain of interdependent origination. See volume 1 of the *Profound Treasury*, chapter 9, “The Painful Reality of Samsara.”

ing that thoughts are free from the present, and the beginning of realizing that they are free from the future as well, there is that kind of [*snaps his fingers*]. That is definitely magic; you are able to cut your thoughts very abruptly and very precisely.

In the mahayana, you try to quell your aggression and hatred for yourself with maitri, and you quell your hatred toward others with karuna. You have already had an experience of shunyata; you have already seen things as free from concepts, and you have already seen your thoughts as transparent. In the mahayana, everything depends on attitude, and everything is done with diplomacy. But in this case, you cut thoughts abruptly, on the spot. You do not even take an attitude. Taking the bodhisattva vow is committing yourself to an attitude, but in this case you are not committing yourself to an attitude; you are committing yourself to the real thing. You just do it. It is very direct and precise. In the vajrayana, you confront thoughts right away—bang, bang, bang, on the spot. You just do it.

How to cut your thoughts in this manner would obviously be the next question. But there is no particular way to do it. The only thing I can say is that having developed genuine loyalty to the teachings of vajrayana and dedication to the vajra master, you just jump, on the spot, at your own thoughts. That is the only magic there is. No gunpowder or ingredients are involved, but cutting thoughts is the first way of blowing up the samsaric world.

This combination of abruptness and devotion and actually being able to do it is the very important first step. So when you practice vajrayana, the main point that runs through all the traditions, through every level of vajrayana practice, is that you are able to cut your mental contents directly and abruptly.

CUTTING THE CAUSE OF THOUGHTS: PASSION, AGGRESSION, AND IGNORANCE

Having cut mental contents, we go beyond that, slightly further, to cutting the cause of the mental contents.

Paralyzing Kleshas

At this point, we are basically working with passion, aggression, and ignorance: the three root kleshas, or three poisons. Cutting the three root

kleshas abruptly on the spot is much more dynamic than cutting the mental contents, which is easier. Cutting the mental contents is like a sneeze: you just pounce on your mind, you just cut it. But the three poisons are deep-rooted.

The way to work with the three root kleshas is to paralyze them. The basic bewilderment is already a paralyzed situation that is trying to spew out passion, aggression, and ignorance, so you are trying to overparalyze beyond that. You are trying to throw out a much bigger zap—[gasps sharply]—which comes from understanding the sacredness of the vajrayana world.

Experiencing Sacredness

In the vajrayana tradition, drinking, eating, sleeping, walking, sitting, and whatever we do in our whole life is sacred. It is sacred because inherently there is no reason for it not to be sacred. It is actually as simple as that. We do not have to build up reasons for why it is holy, or say, “It has been blessed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” We also do not have to say that everything is sacred because it has been blessed by a great Buddhist, like the Karmapa. We don’t have to go through any little logic like that—things are just intrinsically sacred.

When we touch an object, it is purely an object from our somewhat half-awakened point of view. We touch an object; it is an object that we are touching; therefore, it is good to touch the object. When we listen to a sound, it is good to listen to the sound. When we taste, it is good to taste. That kind of goodness is intrinsic goodness. There is no reason why it should not be, by the very fact that we are not particularly angry or pissed off at phenomena, but we actually accept our world simply as it is. The world is very definitely as it is. There is no reason either to be pissed off at it or to boost it up. It is just a simple world, which is a full world, a bright world, a shining world, a brilliant world.

The world is a healthy world in its own way. Even if you are sick or unhealthy, even if your bathwater turns out to be full of rusty clogs from your pipes, still it is healthy. Because of that vajrayana approach of basic healthiness, you actually are able to cut through the original root kleshas, which is the best magic of all. Usually passion, aggression, and ignorance occur through the inspiration of cheapness. You are angry, you are passionate, and you feel stupefied. Because you do not explore, you

do not experience any of the room around you; you do not experience any atmosphere. That is very unintelligent. It is as if you were to go to a restaurant, sit at a table and eat, and find that your plate is the only world there is. You don’t even recognize that there is salt and pepper in front of you, let alone notice the music or the decor in that particular restaurant. You just do your thing and devour your food. With that point of view, you find yourself sitting on your plate and consuming your little world. You are not even sitting on your chair.

Ransacking the Kleshas

That small-world approach of passion, aggression, and ignorance could be called setting sun, quite definitely so. And that smallness is cut by the largeness of the expanse of space outside of it. It is cut by a sense of vastness and openness, and also by a sense of accomplishment. Magic happens at the level when you begin to loot the privacy of passion, aggression, and ignorance. You begin to search and loot. You go over your whole property, open all your drawers and cabinets, and throw everything out. Then, naturally and obviously, after searching and looting, you begin to find quite good delight. You feel delight that finally you were able to loot, or to ransack, your stronghold, which has given you problems for a long time.

The process of ransacking is not like the police coming to your home and intruding, or like your enemies or the Mafia ransacking your house. In this case, ransacking is sacred activity, much more so than what you have done already. The whole thing is very sacred; it is basically sane. Whatever you do, whether you do it abruptly or slowly, it is sacred.

Complete Looting

When you cut thoughts on the spot so thoroughly, you are cutting karma. But then, because of habitual patterns and because you have not yet cut your basic alaya principle, you come up with further karmic actions. You can cut that by developing a sense of magic, or complete looting. When you have complete looting, there is not a next moment. Situations come from your own mind rather than from somebody else. When you control your mind, when you are able to loot your mind fully, then there is no other world to put garbage into your mind. There is no karma at that

point. You have cleaned up the whole thing. Everything is in here, so once you begin to clean that up, there is no problem at all. Making decisions on the spot has no karma. You cannot make a wrong decision.

Interestingly, during sitting meditation in the vajrayana, you practice the hinayana style of shamatha-vipashyana, which reinforces the state of healthiness of your mind. Then in the postmeditation experience, when you have finished your sitting practice and are going about your regular business, you can zap into that state of mind. You can always do that; it is what has traditionally been improvised. That is the only way to combine hinayana, mahayana, and vajrayana together. This means you have to be awake and aware all twenty-four hours of every day.

Particularly with beginning vajrayana practitioners, there is no relaxation at all, none whatsoever, and you cannot have a good time. But you are being fed by the energy that exists around you, which could be the equivalent of relaxation. That energy is your personal passion, aggression, and ignorance; it is the five-buddha-family principle of energy.* So you are not exactly relaxed, but you are being fed constantly by this energy. Because of that, you begin to realize that you can give up and let go very easily.

VAJRAYANA SAYINGS

In the vajrayana, there are several sayings related to the discovery of transcending habitual patterns, which might be helpful at this point.

Rikpa Free from Sem

The first saying is "Rikpa free from sem." In Tibetan it is *sem tang tral-we rikpa*. *Sem* means "mind," *tang tral-we* means "free from," and *rikpa*, again, means "insight"; so *sem tang tral-we rikpa* means "insight that has departed or separated from the mind." It means rikpa that is free from the mind. This is one of the definitions of vajrayana insight: it is insight that is free

* The five buddha-families refer to five styles of energy, which can manifest in either confused or enlightened ways. This grouping of five, arranged in the center and four cardinal directions of a circle, or mandala, is found throughout tantric teachings and iconography. For more on the five buddha-families, see chapter 26, "The Mandala of the Five Buddha-Families."

from thinking about something else, free from perceiving the other. In other words, it is nondualistic; it is just direct perception.

Buddha without Breath

The second saying is "Buddha without breath," which is rather difficult. In Tibetan it is *uk tang tral-we sang-gye*. *Uk* means "breath," *tang tral-we*, as before, means "separated from" or "without," and *sang-gye* means "buddha"; so *uk tang tral-we sang-gye* means "buddha without breath." "Buddha without breath" means that the Buddha does not gasp or become short of breath. A buddha does not depend on saying "Phew!"

This saying is connected with being wakeful. You can become a buddha whether you are dead or alive. Whether you breathe or not, you can become a buddha. So we have insight without mind, then buddha without breathing.

Meditation without Thought, but Luminous

The third saying is "Meditation without thought, but luminous or brilliant." In Tibetan it is *sella tokpa me-pe gompā*. *Sel* or *ösel* means "luminosity," *tokpa* means "thoughts," "thinking," or "discursive mind," *me-pe* means "without," and *gompā* means "meditation"; so *sel-la tokpa me-pe gompā* means "meditation without thought, but luminous."

The idea of luminosity here is opposed to just emptiness or the absence of duality alone. When we begin to look beyond duality, we see that it is not just empty and nonexistent. We begin to realize that beyond ego-hood, there is still tremendous aliveness, vitality, strength, and energy. This aliveness and energy is luminous and bright, and it contains tremendous wisdom. This is the basic point of the vajrayana approach to emptiness or egolessness: it is not purely annihilation, but it goes beyond annihilation. That is what is meant by meditation without thought, but still brilliant.

Action without Fixation or Desire

The fourth saying is "Action without fixation or desire." In Tibetan it is *dzinchak me-pe chöpa*. *Dzin* means "holding" or "fixation," *chak* means "desire," *me-pe* means "not having that," and *chöpa* means "action"; so *dzinchak me-pe chöpa* means "action without fixation or desire."

Usually when we act, we act in order to get something. We do not usually do something without getting something back. That is the sam-saric approach to action. But in this case, we are talking about spontaneous action. Spontaneous action is related with skillful means; it is related to bodhisattva activity, or working for the sake of others. This kind of action is not based on ego fixation or the desire for our own attainment of any kind of pleasure. It is action without pleasure fixation or ego fixation. Therefore, it is pure action.

View without Desire

The fifth saying is "View without desire." In Tibetan it is *shedö me-pe tawa*. *Dö* means "wanting," and *she* is another word for lo, so *shedö* means "mind of desire," *me-pe* means "without," and *tawa* means "view," referring to a metaphysical view or attitude; so *shedö me-pe tawa* means "view without desire."

These five sayings are all the blessings of the guru. The guru is the one who bestows the insight free from mind; makes you buddha without breath; teaches you the meditation without thought, but luminous; shows you the action free from fixation or desire; and shows you the view free from desire.

There are a lot of blessings here, but I do not think these blessings are regarded as a kind of zap. Rather, when students develop these qualities, the teachers can tune in to them more. And in that way, in fact, students can short-circuit their past, present, and future, and begin to see the fourth moment on the spot. That seems to be the idea of blessings here. The guru is able to control the environment, because you and the guru share a world together. Because you share the same world, you both click at the same time, which is known as the meeting of minds.

These five sayings seem to be the basic reference points of vajrayana. They are the commentary to our previous discussion of ordinary lo, transcendental lo, and freedom from habitual patterns. The idea is that when there are no habitual patterns, there is always insight free from mind; buddha without breath; meditation without thought, but still luminous; action without fixation or desire; and view without desire.

Even at the beginning of the journey, these sayings are basic reference points for how we can attain freedom from habitual patterns and mental

concepts. They are not necessarily the fruition, but they describe how we begin at the beginning, at the ground level. These sayings are more at the level of motivation. When we have such motivation, we definitely become nontheistic, because we are not really referring to ourselves. We do not say, "I want this and I want that." We begin to see through our wantingness and desire.

Wantingness and desire are the biggest problems and blockages of all. We have a problem with wanting and desire, with wanting to achieve something and wanting to refer back to our habitual patterns to make sure that what we are doing is right. On the basis of all five vajrayana sayings, and because we begin to see through our wantingness and desire, the four reminders arise: our precious human birth, free and well-favored; impermanence; the cause and effect of karma; and the suffering of samsara.*

* The practice of the *four reminders*, the first stage of vajrayana preliminary practices, is discussed in chapter 30, "The Four Reminders."