

THE TRANSCRIPT OF
HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA TEACHING
ON THE EIGHT VERSES OF MIND TRAINING
BOSTON MA - OCTOBER 30, 2014

Hosted by the Prajna Upadesa Foundation, the Vietnamese Community and Spiritual Friends



Photo © Prajna Upadesa Foundation

Morning Session

I will not recite the whole Tibetan version of the Heart Sutra but I will recite the one stanza at the beginning which is a salutation to the Perfection of Wisdom composed by Buddha's son Rahula. Then this will be followed by three repetitions of the Heart Sutra's mantra Om Tadyata. After this I will say two separate stanzas of salutations. One from Maitreya's Ornament of Clear Realization which is a very important text that explains the implicit meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom teachings, implicit meanings as presented within the framework of what is called the Seventy Points and Maitreya's text is the classic authority on this. So I will recite the salutation from that text. This will be followed by a salutation verse from Nagarjuna's Fundamental Wisdom on the Middle Way. Again the Nagarjuna's writings and particularly this text presents the explicit subject matter – the Perfection of Wisdom teachings – which is the teaching on emptiness.

Thank you. Spiritual brothers and sisters, I feel great honor having this opportunity and thank you for inviting me for this talk or teachings. And also this hat, very useful! (Laughs and laughter.) If other people who also have this, face this same sort of

problem, too much light, then you can wear this hat - very good protection for your eyes.

Within the Vietnamese communities in different countries, many people are refugees like the Tibetans. And although they are quite well settled, they carry their own culture, including their own religions and Buddhist tradition, which is different than the Sanskrit tradition. The Vietnamese showed real determination to preserve their own culture. That is very important. Lifestyles are more or less universal now. But culture, especially traditional culture, is something very valuable. The development of any culture is not decided from above, but formed from a specific environment, out of which you will gradually see a certain way of life, a certain way of surviving, and way of thinking. That is what we call culture. Well then, Vietnamese people are quite tough, which can certainly be seen during the Vietnam war.

But toughness in the sense of violence is not good, though toughness in preservation of meaningful culture, including meaningful Buddhadharma is very good. The proper way to preserve Buddhadharma is not just making one temple and a Buddha statue, and always sitting in silence. The proper way for preservation of Buddhadharma is through infinite love, altruism combined with human intelligence, wonderful human intelligence. The Heart Sutra is talking about something which only we human beings can understand. So therefore the proper way of preservation of the Buddhadharma is study. In order to transform our emotions, our mind, we need conviction. Not to simply to carry on with tradition but to see reasons, values, then develop enthusiasm and conviction. This is what we call "analytical meditation" - analyze, analyze! Buddha himself expressed, "All my followers – monks, scholars, should not accept my teaching out of faith, out of devotion but rather thorough investigation and experimentation. Then, once you are convinced, then you accept." So therefore, all those Nalanda masters, such as Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti, they really follow Buddha's advice. They investigate, even Buddha's own word. If in Buddha's own word, through investigation, they find some contradictions with our experience, then we have the right to reject.

So we are now in the 21st Century. I think altruism, infinite altruism, is highly relevant in today's world. In today's world there is a lot of violence, cheating, and bullying. So altruism is very important. As far as a compassionate attitude of altruism, many major religious traditions carry the same message. Now the goal of Buddhadharma is to utilize human intelligence in the maximum way. Since Buddhism, particularly the Sanskrit tradition, places much emphasis on investigation, our contact with scientists has been very helpful. Their approach is also investigation, experimentation. So therefore, study is very important. I am always telling every Buddhist, we should be 21st Century

Buddhists.

In the past, sometimes we simply carried Buddhadharma with blind faith. When we chant:

Buddham saranam gacchami (I go for refuge to the Buddha)

Dhammam saranam gacchami (I go for refuge to the Dharma)

Sangham saranam gacchami (I go for refuge to the Sangha)

We repeat without knowing what is Buddha, what is Dharma, what is Sangha. In the past, the public education was poor, and the way of thinking was quite simple, so blind faith was fine. But today, every country, every people, emphasizes the importance of education. Similarly, education about Buddhism is equally important. Study is very important – that I am always saying. So whether we believe or accept Buddhism, that is up to the individual. With any religion, whether to accept or reject is up to the individual. But once we accept any religion, then we must be serious and sincere with genuine enthusiasm and conviction.

Eight Verses of Mind Training is a text mainly about altruism. But first, I want to say a few words regarding the Heart Sutra since the text is available.

According to the Sanskrit tradition, the Buddha accumulated wisdom and merit over a period of three innumerable eons and ultimately attained enlightenment in the form of the Nirmanakaya, emanation body. Then he turned the Wheel of Dharma. The First Wheel of Dharma is the public sermon on the Four Noble Truths. The sermon of the Four Noble Truths is so important in that it lays the basic framework of the entire Buddhist path to enlightenment.

If you look at the teachings of the Four Noble Truths, the essence of the teachings is really the presentation of the law of cause and effect. If you look among the Indian religious traditions, they often were theistic traditions whose explanations of the origin of the world is based upon the idea of God's creation. In contrast, the non-theistic Indian traditions such as one branch of the Samkhya school and Jainism and Buddhism do not accept any notion of creation or an eternal God as creator. According to these spiritual traditions, the understanding of the evolution of the entire world, including sentient beings, including our diverse experience of pain and pleasure, has to be understood in terms of the law of cause and effect. All of these arise on the basis of their own causes and conditions. This principle is presented in the Four Noble Truths.

If you look at the Four Noble Truths, there are the

1) Truth of Suffering; 2) Truth of its Origin; 3) Truth of Cessation; 4) and Truth of the Path. The Suffering and Cessation are the two results, or effects. The Path and the Origin are the two causes. Thus there are two sets of causes and effects. The teachings of the Four Noble Truths directly relate to our basic aspirations as sentient creatures, which are our

drive to seek happiness and our instinct to avoid suffering. Suffering is something that we instinctively shun, avoid. Happiness is something we instinctively seek.

Suffering comes from its origins, and this is where the Second Noble Truth comes into the picture. Suffering does not come from nowhere. It comes from a specific set of causes and conditions, which are identified as the origin of suffering. The Buddha also presents the possibility of cessation. Cessation is not just any ordinary state of experience or happiness, but rather is a permanent, lasting happiness which can only be attained through seeking its own causes and conditions. This is the Fourth Noble Truth, the Truth of the Path. In brief, the Four Noble Truths teachings are the explanation of the law of cause and effect in relation to what we as sentient beings instinctively aspire for, happiness, and avoid, suffering.

The teachings on the Four Noble Truths, the turning of the Wheel of Dharma, is something that is universal to all the Buddhist traditions. But in the Sanskrit tradition, there is also a reference to what are known as the Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma. And this terminology of Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma can be found, for example, in one of the Mahayana sutras, Samdhinirmochana Sutra, Sutra Unraveling the Intent of the Buddha. The Four Noble Truths teaching is identified as the First Turning. Then the Perfection of Wisdom teachings, all of which were given at Vulture's Peak, are identified as belonging to the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma. The Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma includes the Samdhinirmochana Sutra, which presents a way of interpreting the Perfection of Wisdom teachings.

The Perfection of Wisdom teachings at the Second Turning of Wheel of Dharma presents the teaching on actions and characteristics. And the Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma presents the clear differentiation of the meaning of the second turning. In this particular Samdhinirmochana Sutra, a distinction is made interpreting Buddha's teaching on emptiness so that emptiness or the absence of identity, is not extended across the board, but is contextually in relation to phenomena that are dependent, that are imputed and then the ultimate nature. That is to say, the teachings on emptiness is presented contextually in relation to different categories of phenomena. This is one of the main texts belonging to the Third Turning of the Wheel.

However, there is also a second category of texts belonging to the Third Turning of the Wheel which has to do with teachings on the Buddha Nature, the Tathagatagarbha, and those teachings do not contextualize the teachings of emptiness. Those teachings present the teachings on emptiness as definitive and literal. What is unique about the Tathagatagarbha or the Buddha Nature sutras is that in addition to the presentation of the emptiness of all phenomena, those sutras also present luminosity, the luminous nature

of the subjective experience. There is the objective luminosity which is the emptiness, but also the subjective luminosity which is the actual cognition or wisdom that experiences the emptiness. So in that respect the Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma has two kinds of texts. One is the interpretive one, the other one is the definitive one that deals with the Buddha Nature theory.

The Heart Sutra belongs to the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma. It is part of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras. And there are many different Perfection of Wisdom scriptures, an extensive one, a middle-length, and the short version. And even within the extensive one itself there are three different versions and so on, some of which have not been translated into Tibetan. So the point is that the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra that belongs to the second category has many different scriptures and the Heart Sutra is one of the shorter ones. And the Diamond Sutra is also a shorter one, sometimes known as the Seven Hundred Verse Sutra. The Heart Sutra is sometimes also known as the Twenty-five Verse Sutra. The shortest Perfection of Wisdom sutra is a single syllable sutra which is just Ah. And Ah is the Sanskrit word for negation and it literally means “no” or “none.” This is in fact considered a complete sutra in its own right. The essence of the emptiness teachings is to really bring to our awareness to the emptiness of all phenomena. When we relate to the phenomena that we experience, whether it is external reality such as sensory and material objects, or whether it is the internal world of our experience of pain and pleasure, we perceive them as if they have some kind of objective independent reality of their own. The emptiness teaching, within the Perfection of Wisdom teaching, reveals to us that this kind of projected reality has no basis and the ultimate nature is in fact empty. So therefore even a single syllable Ah is considered to be a complete sutra in itself, the shortest version.

In the Heart Sutra and the Perfection of Wisdom teachings in general, one of the key principles that is being presented is the teaching on dependent origination, which is a further elaboration on the teachings of the Four Noble Truths, where, as it has been explained before, the law of causality is the central principle. Dependent origination is the further development of that idea and so it is through understanding the ultimate nature of reality that we are finally able to understand how causation is possible.

When we talk about the law of cause and effect, there is no dispute. All of us through our everyday experience can discern some kind of causal relations between events and facts. Up to a point, even animals are capable of inferring causal connections between facts. So the fact that we can impute causal relation is beyond dispute. But the point is that if we push this understanding of dependence (one event depending on another), according to Buddhist teachings, not only do things come into origination due to their causes and conditions, but also the very existence of things and their identity is

thoroughly dependent upon others. We all know effects depend upon cause, but if you push this understanding of dependence, we will also recognize that there is a reverse dependence as well. In fact, causes are dependent upon effects because the very identity of a cause presupposes its relationship with an effect. Just as effects depend upon cause, causes also depend upon effects. So in this way, if you push this, we will come to understand a thoroughly contingent and dependent nature of reality.

Not only are we talking about things coming into being as a result of causes and conditions, but even the very identity and existence of things are thoroughly contingent and dependent. And it is this absence of an independent existence that is being presented in the Perfection of Wisdom sutras. In our naïve perception of the world, we divide up the world into causes, effects and things themselves. That is one way of looking at it. When we think about something and its cause and its effect, we tend to have a kind of a presupposition that the thing itself is different from its cause, different from its effect. And when we talk about effect we see it as something having some kind of objective basis that makes it an effect. Similarly when we think about something as a cause, we imagine that to have some kind of objective basis that makes it a cause. And of course, the things themselves, we define them. We act as if there is a self-enclosed, self-defined entity out there that is a thing itself.

Furthermore, if you think about things themselves, their causes and effects, we are also using temporal projections onto our relationship with the world because when we say “things themselves” we think of something being present, when we think about its causes, we think about something that is past. And when we think about its effects, we are projecting something about it into the future. Now if we examine those temporal stages, between past and future and present, present is at the interface of past and future. And if you push further, even the present cannot be found objectively because there is always a dimension that moves into the past and then a dimension that is somehow relates to the future.

So in this way, in our naïve perception, we tend to act as if all of these have objective bases, but in reality they are interdependent and thoroughly dependent and contingent. There is no real objective basis. So this is what the teachings of the Perfection of Wisdom sutra is telling us. It is revealing the problematic nature of our everyday perception of the world.

And now the question is: “Why do we care?” What is the significance, what is the point of trying to delve deeply into this kind of understanding of emptiness, the deeper nature of reality? I often tell people, partly as a joke, that Nagarjuna was not trying to show people that he was great and clever when he wrote his text on emptiness. We cannot

think of Nagarjuna's writings as a professor who is interested in presenting a noble idea through writing a thesis to impress someone. That is not Nagarjuna's motive.

The point of the teaching of emptiness is to really get to the bottom of understanding the origin of suffering in the Four Noble Truths, which is identified as karma and the afflictions. At the root of afflictions is ignorance, fundamental ignorance pertaining to the nature of reality. There are two kinds of ignorance. One is a simple not knowing. Then there is a more active kind of ignorance which is a distorted way of knowing. Fundamental ignorance pertains to a distorted way of perceiving the world. And the teaching on emptiness is really targeting this ignorance and trying to deconstruct and dismantle it. That's why in the Buddhist teachings, one of the central objects of meditation is the cultivation of the wisdom of no-self. This is all represented in the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma in the Four Noble Truths.

The First Truth of Suffering has four characteristics: impermanence, dissatisfaction, emptiness and no-self. No-self is one of the key aspect of the Buddha's teaching. In fact, one could say the teachings on emptiness and no-self are the defining characteristics that make Buddhism unique. If we look at the ancient Indian traditions, other than Buddhism, all the other traditions, including Jainism, subscribe to some notion of Atman, an eternal principle that is the self. They believe that the person who creates karma has to experience the consequences of that karma and there is an Atman or a self that connects the creator of the karma and the experience of the consequences of that karma. These other schools believe in some kind of eternal principle that is self, called Atman. Buddhism rejects this belief, and instead teaches no-self. In brief, what we find in the Perfection of Wisdom teachings/sutras is the very detailed exposition of this concept of dependent origination and emptiness. Therefore, for example, when we look at the Heart Sutra, the text is riddled with negation. No eye, no nose, all of this negation. The main point is to try to undermine the solidity of our everyday perception. The text is not saying that these things don't exist at all. It is not propounding a nihilistic position that negates or rejects everything. The Heart Sutra itself ends with a statement that all the Buddhas of the three times attain Enlightenment on the basis of practicing the Perfection of Wisdom. So if nothing exists, then where would all those Buddhas of the three times be? What is the Perfection of Wisdom which is the method? And what is the state that they have attained? Therefore the negations have to be understood in the right way.

So as we read the Heart Sutra we could take the meaning of the word Heart Sutra as a very "Hard" Sutra (His Holiness laughs)

In the Heart Sutra there is a very important passage that says “Form is empty, Emptiness is form” or “Matter is empty, Emptiness is matter”. When we look at these kind of statements “Form is empty, matter is empty” what do we mean? Does the Buddha mean that what we call matter or form does not exist at all? That can’t be the case, because our own empirical evidence of our experience is so incontrovertible. The pain is real, suffering is real, happiness is real. But then the question is why is there such emphasis on negation? Why is there this emphasis on emptiness? And here I think it is important to recognize, as explained before, that the purpose of the teaching of emptiness is really to dismantle the object of our fundamental ignorance. And this is why, even in the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma, the Buddha talked about grasping at the self as being at the root of our unenlightened existence.

In the sermon on the Four Noble Truths, the presentation of the self, no-self, ignorance and the thirty-seven aspects of the Path is still at a coarse level. But in the Perfection of Wisdom sutra, these teachings are really brought to a deep level. For example, when we say “Form is empty,” it is not referring to the point that when you look for some kind of objective basis you don’t find form, although that is part of the process. The Buddha said “Form is empty” because when you subject something like matter or form to inquiry, what you find is the unfindability of that object. And so therefore, it would make no sense to say “Form is matter.” Therefore the statement is made that “it is empty.”

If you look at the interpretation of the Buddha’s teaching on emptiness in commentary literature, there are many different forms of reasoning. However, the most important and effective interpretation is that of dependent origination. There are two levels of understanding of dependent origination. One is dependent origination in terms of causes and conditions: things come into being as a result of their own causes and conditions. The second level of understanding has to do with dependent designation, how even the identity of things are dependent upon other factors. That is to say, without other factors, the identity of things would not make any sense.

If you use dependent origination as a way of inquiring into the ultimate nature of reality, as a way of understanding emptiness, then what it suggests is that when you try to find something like the objective basis of something like matter or form, what you find is its own unfindability. But does that suggest that it does not exist at all? Your own personal direct experience would confirm that things do exist, they have effects. Something can cause you harm, something can cause you pain, something can make you happy. There are real effects to things and events.

The question is not whether or not these things exist, but rather how do we understand their existence? In what manner can we say they exist? This is where dependent origination explains that the only way in which we can understand the existence of things is simply as dependent phenomena. Therefore, form is empty and the meaning here is not that form does not exist, but that form is empty of a state of existence that has some kind of independent objective reality. The form is empty of independent existence. When you understand it in this way, then the second statement, "Emptiness is form" makes sense. For example, in one of the sutras, the Buddha says that "whatever arises from conditions, that is explained as unborn." That thing does not possess any intrinsic arising. Therefore, anything that is dependent upon conditions is explained as emptiness and he who understands emptiness attains a tranquility, a peace."

In these teachings, the main emphasis is on understanding the dependent nature of existence and understanding emptiness by means of dependent origination. When we meditate on, for example, a passage from Heart Sutra that "Form is emptiness and Emptiness is form," it is sometimes more effective if we substitute form with our own self, saying "I am empty, emptiness is me." That has a more immediate effect because you are now taking your own personal identity as the object of inquiry and trying to understand emptiness in relation to yourself, rather than some external objective existence. And in this way, if you really think about it, in Nagarjuna's writings, he really brings out this particular approach of understanding emptiness by means of dependent origination. This is particularly explained in great detail in his Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā).

If you use your own personal identity as an object of meditation, your understanding of the true nature of yourself gives rise to a kind of new way of understanding your own existence and your own reality.

"Form is none other than emptiness and Emptiness is none other than form". These two statements show the intimate connection between both the emptiness and the thing. In other words, it explains the single unity of the two truths, the ultimate truth which is emptiness, and the conventional truth which is the phenomena. The phenomena and their emptiness are not two different things, but two natures of the same reality. When we say "Form is empty" we should not have the idea that there is something that exists called "emptiness" which is the absolute truth out there. We are talking about the ultimate nature of form itself. In this way, we understand the ultimate truth and the conventional truth as not being two separate entities, but being two aspects of one and the same reality.

When you subject something like matter or form to this kind of analysis and you do not find any objective basis, your method of approaching and dissecting and deconstructing is very similar to the kind of approach that you find in quantum physics where the macroscopic level of physical matter is deconstructed to the constituent elements at the atomic level. When you go further and further, ultimately you do not find any objective basis for what we call material phenomena.

One might ask the question: “What is the point of doing all this hard work trying to understand emptiness?” In Nagarjuna’s Fundamental Wisdom/Stanzas on the Middle Way, it is explained that if we reflect on emptiness, we will recognize that all of our strong negative emotional reactions arise on the basis of some kind of projection of an objective existence of matter and form. For example, if you examine something like attachment, underlying that strong emotion is a certain way of thinking, a distorted thinking that exaggerates the desirable attributes of that object. And if you go beyond that, that attribution is really grounded upon some kind of presupposition of there being a real objective independent thing out there to which we latch on to. Similarly when we think of a strong emotion like hatred, we see that hatred arises on the basis of some kind of distorted view of the undesirable attributes of the object of hate. Again, this belief is underpinned by a presupposition that there exists an objective thing out there with which we feel anger toward. Although there may be some basis for anger, 90% of the attributes that we feel strongly about are purely mental projection. This is why it becomes crucial to somehow undo this way of thinking.

Nagarjuna explains in his Hymns to the Ultimate Expanse, that meditations on impermanence, dissatisfactions and so on, are preparatory paths. They help prepare the mind for the real antidote to suffering which is meditation on emptiness. As the result of deeper reflection on emptiness as it relates to your own personal experience, you will begin to appreciate the teaching on emptiness. Through practice, once you begin to have a glimpse of emptiness and can actually taste what it feels like to understand of emptiness, then you will begin to experience a sense of joy when you think about emptiness. This is where the actual path to enlightenment begins.

The Heart Sutra mantra “Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhisvaha” presents the stage by stage progression of the five stages on the path. Having a deep understanding of emptiness allows you to appreciate the possibility of bringing the whole nexus of suffering and its origins to an end. You begin to appreciate the possibility of cessation and develop an aspiration to attain liberation, this is the first step of the five stages, the path of accumulation, the first “Gate”. As you deepen your understanding of emptiness, pushing it beyond the level of intellect and becoming experiential, meditatively derived experience of emptiness, realization of the truth, then you have gone to the second

“Gate” which is the path of preparation or the path linking.

At the point when your realization of emptiness becomes unmediated and direct, then you have gone to the next level which is the “Paragate” which is the path of seeing. When your direct realization of emptiness becomes a powerful antidote to start destroying the latent dispositions toward grasping, then you have gone to “Parasamgate” which is the path of meditation. Eventually you attain “Bodhisvaha” which is the attainment of true liberation.

When progression on the path is accompanied by the cultivation of bodhicitta, the altruistic aspiration to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings, then you travel through the five stages path of the Mahayana leading toward full enlightenment, full Buddhahood. When you recite the Heart Sutra mantra, it is necessary to understand all aspects of the path for the mantra to have significance. Similarly, when you recite “For the benefit all beings, may I generate the mind of enlightenment”, we need to have some understanding of what enlightenment is in order to generate bodhicitta, the aspiration to attain that enlightenment. The Tibetan word for Buddha is composed of two syllable “sang gye”. “sang” means total dispelling of all faults and afflictions and “ge” connotes a meaning of blossoming of all qualities, enlightenment qualities. Most Buddhists on a daily basis chant the refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, but without a true understanding of what Buddha is, the words have no meaning. This basic knowledge is important, which is the reason behind this large background introduction to Buddhism. It sets the stage for the Eight Verses of Mind Training.

Presented in the framework of three turnings of the Wheel of Dharma, the first turning of the wheel is the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha lays down the overall general framework of the Buddhist path. In the teaching of the Perfection of Wisdom sutra, the second turning of the wheel of Dharma, the Buddha teaches emptiness. The third turning of the Dharma explains the subjective dimension of the wisdom presenting Buddha nature teachings of the Tathagathagarbha Sutra.

So you understand not only the possibility of the attainment of Buddhahood through the teaching on emptiness, but also through the teaching on Buddha-nature where essential nature of mind is luminous. Although it is tainted by the afflictions, but the essential nature of the mind itself is pure. So there is that possibility of elimination of all the faults that obscure it. Based on the basis of the teachings on emptiness and the Buddha nature, you generally will come to recognize the real possibility of attaining enlightenment and when we say Mahabodhi which is the full enlightenment, then it would make real sense in relation to your own personal aspirations. That is why I want

to give you this larger background before the teaching on the Eight Verses on Mind Training.

So now time for lunch (laughter) while we are talking emptiness, emptiness, but the real emptiness is here now, so food is more important .(laughter)Thank you, thank you.

Evening Session

First, as a human beings, we have experience, constructive emotion, and mind. Human mind which can develop wisdom which we call prajna. And then we all have the same Buddha nature.

So, there is one thing that I want to share with you, before the actual teaching. One of the main objectives that I have is to promote better understanding and relationship across the practitioners of all the religious traditions. Of course, all of us are at the fundamental level of human beings. At that level, we are all exactly the same, but at the same time, at the secondary level, each of us have our own individual identities and in philosophical language. In Buddhist philosophy, we talk about one reality having many different aspects. Earlier we talked about how the two truths, conventional and ultimate truths, are two aspects of one and the same reality. Similarly, in Dharmakirti's text, he makes the point that any single thing has multiple identities in relation to other things. So defined in relationship to many other different things you can have multiple identities attributed to one thing. For example in my own case, at the fundamental level, I am a human being like all of you. But at the secondary level, I am a religious person; I'm a Buddhist. That identity of being a Buddhist, being a religious person, also comes with a certain responsibility that is to promote better understanding and harmony among the world's different religious traditions.

There are two main reasons behind this. One is to respect the diversity that exists among people when it comes to spiritual inclinations and also mental dispositions. The diversity of approaches that we see in the different religious traditions really serve the needs of a much larger community. If you have only one religion, with only one philosophy, then its ability to serve a large number of people will be much more limited. If you look at the Buddha's own example, the Buddha emphasizes in his teachings the sensitivity to the mentality of his disciples, to the sort of natural dispositions, the mentalities, and inclinations of the individuals and the teaching must be presented in consonant with those diverse needs that individuate all of us.

Therefore even in the Buddha's own scriptures, he has taught many different philosophical views in order to serve the needs of his large number of disciples. For example, although the teaching on no-self is a defining characteristic of the Buddha Dharma, sometimes you do find statements which almost suggest that he propounds the notion of a self. There is a line which says that the five skhandas, the five aggregates are the burdens carried by the carrier of that burden. This suggests that there is a personal self that carries the burden. Even in the Buddha's own teaching, sometimes there are divergent teachings presented in accordance with the needs of his disciples. Therefore it is very important to appreciate the richness and the value of the diversity of spiritual traditions approaches that we see in the world. That is one important reason why we need to respect all the diverse traditions and appreciate their value.

The second reason that respecting other belief systems is important is that historically and even today, the differences in religions have served as the basis for division and conflict within human society. From that point of view, it is very important for religious people to try to contribute to the promotion of better understanding and harmony. In the terms of individual, concept of one religion is relevant. In the terms of community, of course at the humanity level, concept of several religions is very good. So for individuals to have a single-pointed faith in one's own religion is good but just because you have chosen one spiritual path for yourself, you should not be making the next jump, suggesting that everybody should do the same.

Even the Buddha, in his main philosophy of no-self did not impose on his disciples. As mentioned earlier, he taught different methods according to the disciples' mental disposition. So if the enlightened and powerful Buddha impose demands then we more or less have to follow (HH laughs) but he didn't do that. He taught according to different mental dispositions. This fact actually raises the question: "Oh, Buddha's own mind is not very certain, one day he taught something and another day he taught something different else".

Some people might feel that Buddha's own mind was not clear [laughs], that the Buddha was confused!! (laughs) or he deliberately tried to create confusion among his followers - NO! So therefore, we learned from the Buddha that we must respect people from different faiths and religions. It is very important that people also must follow their own tradition seriously and sincerely. On that basis we can develop genuine harmony. I think India is the one living example where all major world religious traditions live together. So it is possible. Therefore whenever I give teachings in the West about Buddhism, I always emphasize that it is better for the Westerners who are traditionally not Buddhist, not of the Buddhist tradition to keep your own tradition. Then the Vietnamese, who traditionally are Buddhists, as I mentioned this morning, it is also

important to keep one's own tradition.

Today I think perhaps two or three thousand people here so first please keep in mind that as a human being we should try to promote human values in order to be happy human being, have happy family, happy society, and happy humanity on a global level. Second, as a believer, please make effort to promote religious harmony with others.

In Buddhism also, the first Dharma wheel teaching, the Four Noble Truths, the "Mahayana" and "Hinayana" share the common monastic system called Vinaya, then the practice of the Six Paramitas. Then, within the "Mahayana" system, you see at least two major different school of thought – one Cittamatra and the other Madhyamaka. Within each of these school, they also have different subdivisions. It's like that, there are many differences.

Then there is the Tibetan tradition. Buddhism first reached Tibet in I think the 7th Century. Initially the coming of Buddhism to Tibet may have been more of an influence from the marriage of the 7th century Tibetan emperor to a Nepalese princess and a Chinese princess. Each princess came from a Buddhist society and each brought an image of the Buddha. Then you see construction of Buddhist temples in Central Tibet.

But the serious development of Tibetan Buddhism came from the 8th Century. The Tibetan emperor, in the 8th Century invited the best scholar and a great master of Nalanda – Shantarakshita – a bhikhsu, great philosopher, and a great logician. From his own writing, we can see such marvelous luminosity, brain and a sharp mind.

According to Indian history, Shantarakshita accepted the invitation although he was already over 70 years old. He came, and stayed for the rest his life. I don't know how many years he spent in Tibet. Perhaps twenty-three years? So he took the full responsibility for introducing Buddhism and establishing the Buddhadharma translation in the Tibetan script. He suggested that the study of Buddhism, particularly Buddhist philosophy, should be in your own language. So he very much encouraged translation. Then he gave ordination and teach philosophy and logic.

As far as Buddhist logic is concerned, I think the Tibetan tradition, have kept quite well. All major writing from the great Nalanda Indian Buddhist logicians and epistemologists such as Dignaga and Dharmakirti are available in Tibetan translations but not in Chinese language. So obviously in Chinese tradition, Buddhist logic is not very extensive. For example: the primary principal work of Dignaga which is *Pramanasamuccaya* exists in Tibetan translation but not in Chinese. Then the seven texts of Dharmakirti which really

is the foundation of all Buddhist epistemology are available in Tibetan translation but not in Chinese.

There was a lot of development of Buddhist epistemological thinking in Tibetan language in the 8th Century which arose from the availability of the major classical Indian texts on Buddhist epistemology from Shantarakshita and Kamalashila (student of Shantarakshita) who wrote a major commentary on Shantarakshita. Because of that there were indigenous Tibetan thinkers like Sakya Pandita who wrote a particular text on epistemology called Treasury of Reasoning and similarly in the 11th Century.

Chabye Tsuguey Chinge developed the debating system and developed indigenous Tibetan kind of debate and logic. Since then there evolved in Tibet a tremendous kind of sophistication in the use of reasoning and dialectical method of inquiry. It became almost part of the main discourse and scholarly methodology. So one can see the throwing of consequence and the demonstration of contradiction, inconsistency of position and so on (from the Tibetan monastery debate court). The language itself became very fluid in operating in these kind of dialectical ways. Of course, that tradition wasn't there in China, Chinese language. Now from translations from Tibetan texts, it's gradually being evolved in the Chinese language and in Hindi, probably not yet and in English. Of course, people are beginning to bring this out, still struggling, but we might get there.

Then Tantrayana. Nalanda masters such as Nagarjuna, Aryadeva and Chandrakirti wrote about tantrayana. Modern Indian Sanskrit scholars really are recognizing them to be authentic writings of the same Indian masters. And then most obvious writing from Shantarakshita, the great Indian scholar who came to Tibet, he himself has authored a short text on Vajrayana. Similarly in Dipamkara Srijnana Atisha, the Indian Bengali master who came to Tibet in the 11th Century, in his text, The Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment Up to Awakening, there is an explicit section on the Vajrayana path.

In general, historically, even around the time of Nagarjuna and before that there have been some individuals within the Buddhist world, who questioned the authenticity of the Mahayana scriptures as being Buddha's teachings. Similar questions have also been raised about the authenticity of the tantric scriptures, the Vajrayana scriptures, in the past as well as in modern times as well.

So you see in Nagarjuna's writings, a series of presentations that establishes the authenticity of Mahayana's scriptures as Buddha's teaching. And Nagarjuna did not do that by citing another scripture, because if you cite another scripture, then you would need another scripture to authenticate that, yet another scripture and so it goes on. So

the only way one can establish the authenticity is by looking at the actual content of the teaching. Nagarjuna really authenticates the Mahayana scriptures by pointing out the content of the Mahayana teachings by really elaborate further the Buddha's teaching on no self. So we can use the same approach to authenticating Vajrayana scriptures as authentic teachings of the Buddha, by looking at the content, by looking at the subject matter.

Similarly in Dharmakirti's Exposition of the Valid Cognition, in the 2nd chapter, Pramanavartika, when we look at his presentation of the understanding of the Four Noble Truths and how each of the individual characteristics of each of the truths are presented, you really get a sense of deeper understanding and conviction and the interrelations. Whereas if you simply read the sutra which presents the Four Noble Truths, then it is more like a statement. There is no substantiation of a further explanation.

The point I was trying to make earlier is that, in the Tibetan tradition you see the comprehensive Buddhist tradition. All the essential teachings of the Theravada schools, the Mahayana teachings as well as the Vajrayana teachings. So there is this comprehensive nature to the Tibetan tradition. Historically too in the 8th Century two main figures who promote the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet were Shantarakshita and Padmasambhava. They seem to have divided their roles in the establishment of the Dharma in Tibet. Shantarakshita took the primary responsibility for establishing the monastic tradition, the monastic vows as well as expounding and establishing the basis of philosophical studies including Madhyamaka teachings on emptiness as well as epistemological tradition on a mainstream basis. Padmasambhava, on the other hand, seemed to have taken the responsibility of teaching the Vajrayana instructions, not in a large scale public manner but more in an esoteric way (HH laughs).

Because of the activities of these two great masters, which was completely unprecedented in any other Buddhist countries, was the emergence of two Sangha communities, one is a sangha community of monastic red robed monks; the other is a sangha community of white robed mantrikas, tantric practitioners. And this was completely unprecedented and only in Tibet and it was due to the activities of Shantarakshita and Padmasambhava.

And His Holiness was saying that sometimes because of this and also there is a general understanding that in terms of hierarchical vows and precepts. The Vajrayana precepts and vows are considered to be highest and the individual liberation vows, the Pratimoksha vows are considered to be the foundation and the basis. Sometimes people make the suggestion therefore in terms of hierarchical seating, the tantric practitioners,

the lay people should be seating at the head, and the monastics at the end. That of course, demonstrates a total lack of understanding of the Buddhist tradition as a whole. Because there is a scripture where the Buddha says that wherever there exists the rituals associated with the monastic vows, I feel pleased and where they are present, my teaching, my Dharma is present. Where they are absent, my Dharma is not fully present. So even in the Buddha's time, the emphasis really has been on the establishment of the monastic tradition which is really the foundation. And so Padmasambhava has really taught the Vajrayana path and instructions in sort of a hidden manner.

Through this emerged both strands of the Mahayana traditions inside Tibet. So up until the period of Losang Rinchen Sangpo, that period is referred to the early diffusion of Buddhadharma into Tibet and the school that is associated with this is known as the Old Translation School or the Nyingma School and then from Rinchen Sangpo onwards in the 11th Century there evolved the New Translation School including the school of Kagyu which is based on the activities and teachings of Marpa Lotsawa who studied at the feet of many great Indian masters including the great Nalanda master Naropa. And from Marpa came his disciples Milarepa, from Milarepa, Gampopa. And Marpa, Mila and Gampopa. The three of them are really recognized as the founding fathers of the Kagyu tradition.

Similarly, the Sakya tradition traces back to the instructions of Virupa or Virvapa who in his monastic life was Dharmapala, a great master of Nalanda tradition. Virvapa's instructions came through Sakya Kunga Nyingpo and subsequently led to the emergence of the Sakya tradition.

And then the Kadampa tradition which emerged from Atisha Dipamkara Srijnana. Based on the Kadampa teachings and instructions, Tsongkhapa added the Vajrayana dimension particularly the instructions and the practices associated with the Guhyasamaja practice and others which then evolved as the Geluk' school. So if you look at all of these teachings and then there was the Chonam tradition which really emerged on the basis of special emphasis on the completion stage practice, the Six Branch Yoga of the Kalachakra tantra, then the Chonam tradition emerged.

So if you look at the origins of all of these major Tibetan traditions, they all are traced back to the instructions and teachings of the Nalanda masters. This is their shared commonality. I think it is important to recognize this shared commonality. And at the foundation of all of these is the monastic commitment and the monastic teaching commitment to the Mahayana teachings as well as the philosophical perspectives of Madhyamaka, Middle Way School. These are all foundational shared heritage and it is

important to recognize this because sometimes there emerges the tendency to really try to differentiate the major schools. And if you really forget the commonality of the Indian roots of these traditions and then focus only on specific tantric instructions which are emphasized in different Tibetan traditions, then you will only see differences. So I think it is important to recognize that shared heritage.

This way of thinking is actually contrary to the basic Buddhist attitude. The Buddha says that tragedy or adverse situations can always be attributed to one's own karma, and not a spirit or naga. The scripture explicitly says that the Buddha never attributes adversity to some kind of external force or a misalignment of building construction or other such things. This is important to remember, because if you start going down that path, Buddhism gets reduced to a very primitive form that is not helpful.

The text that we are going to read, the Eight Verses comes from the Kadampa tradition. The Kadam tradition emerged from the teachings of Atisha in the 11th Century. Atisha's main disciple was Dromtonpa. Dromtonga has three main disciples. Potowa was a major disciple of the three who combined the teachings of Lamrim with the study and practice of the great Indian Buddhist classics. They were referred to as the three brothers of the Kadampa although they were not actually blood related. And among Potowa's disciples were two prominent teachers - Sharawa and Langri Tangpa. The text we are reading was authored by Langri Tangpa who was a student of Potowa.

So the Kadam instructions really evolved into the three lineages of the Kadam teachings. I- One is the Potowa's lineage that emphasizes the combination of Lamrim practices and instructions with understanding and study of the great Indian classics. It focuses on six main Buddhist classical texts. This is known as the Kadam lineage of treatises.

1) Asanga's Bodhisattva Bhumi which is an extensive text and the studying and practicing that in combination with 2) Maitreya's Sutra Lankara (Ornament of Mahayana Scriptures). When the two are combined it becomes a very comprehensive resource for studying the Perfection of Wisdom teachings. Then the two other combined texts are the 3) Jataka Tales, the Buddha's previous life stories, and 4) the collection of aphorisms. Then finally 5) Shantideva's Bodhicaryavatara - The Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, and 6) Siksasamuccaya, The Compendium of Training. When these two texts are combined in addition to the bodhisattva practices, much of the philosophy of Madhyamaka, the Middle Way teachings on emptiness become part of that. So you can see how the Lamrim practices and teachings are understood in the context of this kind of study, how rich the approach could be.

II- The second is the Kadam lineage of Lamrim where the instruction is based on Lamrim texts.

III- Finally there is a Kadam lineage of oral instructions where the emphasis is based on a very small text and personal instructions.

So the personal oral instruction approach is only good if it can provide adequate basis of understanding for the individuals. Otherwise it becomes a short cut and then you end up simply making statements and preaching. Therefore there is a danger of scaring people off, because when you talk about karma and the consequences of karma, you may end up just scaring the devotees. This reminds me of a story from a person from Karpa area, from Kham. I met him once and he told me a story from that region (HH laughs).

This approach of personal instructions can sometimes also take an abusive form particularly preying upon the vulnerability of the devotees, especially if they're feeling ill or they've been through a tough time then in addition to just giving a simple karma teaching you might even say that "Oh, there is some harms coming from this spirit or that spirit or that naga or this naga." And then scaring even further. And then making even the suggestion "I have the rituals to counter this so make offerings to me." So there is that danger.

So the story goes, one day a devotee came to see the Abbot of the monastery and the abbot wasn't home....

So here is a large number of Vietnamese Buddhists. Maybe even among the Vietnamese they share the same kind of attitude as Tibetans as being suspicious of harms coming from all sorts of directions such as this spirit or that naga. This way of thinking is actually contrary to the basic Buddhist attitude. There is in fact an explicit statement in one of the scriptures.

The Buddha says that tragedy or adverse situations can always be attributed to one's own karma, and not a spirit or naga. The scripture explicitly says that the Buddha never attributes adversity to some kind of external force or a misalignment of building construction or other such things. This is important to remember, because if you start going down that path, Buddhism gets reduced to a very primitive form that is not helpful.

So let me finish the story [audience laughter]. So this devotee came to see the abbot of the monastery, the abbot was not in residence, and the devotee asked the attendant of the abbot, "Where is the abbot? Where has he gone?" And the attendant told the devotee, "Oh yeah, he went to the town, to the village to scare off some of the old people, the elderly people in the village." (audience laughter).

In Tibet, the propitiation of spirits was a widespread part of the culture and there was one medium and a spirit associated with that medium in the village. So when the medium was in a trance, the medium in possession, told one of the attendants “You know when you tie up your boot laces sometimes you feel a little bit of pain, I am the one that is responsible for that! (audience laughter).

The same medium apparently had seen quite a well-developed horse standing at the entrance of the house in this devotee’s residence. While in trance, he made a prophecy, “I predict that you will have a wonderful fowl from this horse that is tied in front of your house.” Then one of the sponsors, benefactors replied “But that is a horse. But then the medium said, “Even if it is a horse, I’ll predict there will be a fowl.” (laughter). So it’s really important for the Buddhist to take to heart this idea that the boundary, the determining line is really karma.

What the principle of karma states is that if you do something good, you will reap the benefits of that experience and if you do something harmful or evil, you will face the consequences of that action. But how do we determine what is good and what is evil? The only way we can is to define them in relation to their consequences and the motivation behind the action. If the consequence is negative for yourself or others, then the action is deemed evil. If the consequence is beneficial, particularly to other people, then the action is good. There is no absolute criteria for good or bad karma independent of human experience. The karma depends on whether it causes harm or benefit to other people. So in the end, the principle of karma really puts the responsibility back on our own shoulder.

The main subject matter of the text Eight Verses on Mind Training is the two bodhicittas: the ultimate bodhicitta and the conventional bodhicitta – the conventional awakening mind and the ultimate awakening mind.

By ultimate awakening mind, we are referring to a direct realization of emptiness, the wisdom that directly realizes emptiness that is grounded in the ultimate bodhicitta, the altruistic motivation to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.

The objective of the spiritual practitioner should be the aspiration to attain ultimate Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings being grounded in bodhicitta, the altruistic intention. I have received the transmission of this instruction from both of my two tutors, Ling Rinpoche as well as Trijang Rinpoche.

Stanza 1 reads

With the determination to achieve the highest aim
For the benefit of all sentient beings,

The translation is on page 26.

Which surpasses even the wish-fulfilling gem,
May I hold them dear at all times.

The text begins with the instruction on how to cultivate altruistic awakening mind, conventional bodhicitta. Traditionally there were two main methods of cultivating bodhicitta. One is the Seven Part Cause & Effect method, the other one is the Exchanging and Equalizing oneself and others. If you look at Nagarjuna's writings, Precious Garland and his Commentary on Awakening Mind, and Shantideva's Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life then the method of Exchanging and equalizing oneself and others approach is emphasized as a profound method of cultivating bodhicitta.

Although the Eight Verses of Mind Training text is a wonderful foundation text for the practice of bodhicitta, you cannot really develop a full understanding of bodhicitta on the basis of this text. You will need many other supporting material.

For example, we begin in the first stanza on cultivating bodhicitta but if you reflect more deeply, bodhicitta arises only when the foundation of great compassion exists. Therefore first, you need to cultivate compassion. How do we define compassion? Compassion is the sentiment that expresses itself in the form of empathetic connection with the sufferings of others in the form of not being able to bear the sight of others' suffering,

There are two main aspects to this compassion. One is a sense of feeling unbearable to the sufferings of the sentient beings. The other is the wish to see that sentient beings be free from that suffering. So these two components need to be cultivated separately.

In the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha taught that we must recognize the nature of suffering, the first truth. When the Buddha talks about the importance of recognizing the nature of suffering, he is not really talking about the everyday experience of pain and unhappiness known as suffering of suffering, because this first type of suffering is something we already know from our own personal experience.

The Buddha isn't even talking about second level of suffering of change which all of us, ordinary people aspire for. We tend to seek the worldly pleasurable experiences which are constantly changing thus lead to dissatisfaction and pain. This is known as suffering of change. But the Buddha is referring to a much deeper level of suffering known as

suffering of conditions. At this third level, the Buddha speaks about the very conditional nature of our existence which is conditioned by karma and afflictions. This existence itself is a source of dissatisfaction. From an evolutionary perspective, we come into the world pre-equipped with the biological impulses for aggression, attachment, anger and so on. From the Buddhist point of view, we see that as conditioned by our karma, and therefore as part of our very existence.

After understanding suffering, the second factor for cultivating universal great compassion is the attitude of cherishing the well-being of all sentient beings. Traditionally, there are two approaches for doing this. The first is to use the visualization technique to visualize all beings as one's mother. In this way, compassion can be cultivated. In the Perfection of Wisdom Scriptures, the twenty-five thousand lines, there is an explicit statement on this method of cultivating compassion by contemplating that others are your father, mother, siblings and so on.

The second approach, which is found in Shantideva's text, is to reflect on the benefits of cherishing others versus the cons of a self-cherishing attitude. On this basis, you create a sense of connection and empathy with others.

We spoke about the need to have a deeper understanding of the nature of suffering, the recognition of the truth of suffering. In order to develop this understanding we need to have a sense of aversion to suffering or pain. Another way is to meditate on impermanence and mortality. Meditating upon death and the unpredictability of life makes you take the teachings on karma more seriously because according to scripture, one's karma determines one's future state after death. These are preparation stages of the path and part of the Lamrim teachings.

For example, In Aryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas there is a line where Aryadeva says that if you observe the lifestyle and activities of ordinary people, the karma created by afflicted behavior and thoughts, you can see that these negative karma which will likely lead them to lower realms. There are seven billion human beings on this planet, we can guess where most of us will likely be heading at the end of their lives. Now how do we protect ourselves against that kind of eventuality? By cultivating the path of morality. The first practical step, for a Dharma practitioner is to restrain from negative karma, negative actions and by cultivating the path of morality, abstaining from ten negative actions and cultivating ten positive actions.

The second step, is to turn away from self - grasping. Here the practice of cultivation of the wisdom of no-self will begin to undo our vulnerability to afflictions. This second stage is about the views and understanding of no-self.

Finally, Aryadeva says all the views must be dismantled. Here Aryadeva is talking about the teaching on emptiness combined with the cultivation of bodhicitta which will lead to attainment of full Buddhahood. Realizing emptiness along with great compassion will eliminate both the afflictive obscurations and subtle cognitive obscurations.

So it is by understanding, by preparing our mind through these preliminary practices we will then be able to be ready for the actual practice which is the cultivation of bodhicitta, altruistic awakening mind.

These three steps, the morality stage, cultivation of the view of no-self, and the approach of emptiness combined with the cultivation of bodhicitta, are the steps suggested Indian Buddhist sources including Atisha's Lamp on the Path of Awakening. It is in this gradual way that one prepares one's mind and moves toward the cultivation of bodhicitta. So you need the above background and foundation first, then you can recite the Eight Verses of Mind Training as a reminder on a daily basis.

Associated with the Eight Verses are other Kadampa texts such as the Seven Point Mind Training by Chekawa. Chekawa was the principal student of Sharawa who was a contemporary of the author of these Eight Verses. Chekawa in his own writing explains how he was deeply moved coming face to face with the eight sentiments expressed in the Eight Verses. This led to his development of the lojong mind-training teachings which he presented in the Seven Point Mind Training text.

The method of exchanging and equalizing self and others is the principal approach to cultivating bodhicitta in both the Eight Verses, as well as the Seven Point. For example, in the Seven Point Mind Training, Chekawa says, "Banish all the blames to that single source. Towards others meditate upon their kindness, contemplate upon their kindness." What Chekawa is saying is that the source of all our problems and afflictions is really a self-cherishing attitude. So the blames must be banished to that source, not to others. But when it comes to thinking about relationship with others, we should view them as a source of kindness. That is the instruction on the practice of exchanging and equalizing self and others.

To deepen our understanding of bodhicitta, particularly based on the method of exchanging and equalizing self and others we need to engage with some profound stanzas in Shantideva's text.

For example, Shantideva writes that
"whatever happiness there is in the world, comes from an attitude of cherishing the

well-being of others.”

whatever problems there exist in the world, comes from an attitude of cherishing one’s own self-centered interest”

if I failed exchanging my own self with that of others, let alone the attainment of Buddhahood,

even while in samsara, there will be no room for happiness.” .

This is an important point. If we are stuck in a perpetual self-focus and self-centered attitude, it closes the door to the possibility of real happiness. Whereas on the other hand, if we are able to change that perspective and start to open up to the attitude that cherishes the well-being of other sentient beings, then this becomes a source of happiness in everyday life.

Even with respect to the practice of morality, say for example, abstaining from killing, one could do this from a self-centered point of view, out of fear of the karmic consequences of killing, or from compassion, a real sense of concern for others’ well-being. Because of the difference in initial motivation, there is a tremendous difference in the amount of merit that one earns from this single act, even if the act itself is the same. As Shantideva explains, cherishing the well-being of other sentient beings is not only the foundation of Buddhahood, but also for attainment of happiness in this lifetime.

Once you habituate yourself with this kind of thinking, make yourself familiar with the sentiment and cultivate it, you can then really appreciate Shantideva’s quotes:

“therefore, without any sense of weariness or tiredness
you should ride the horse of the bodhicitta
and travel from a place of joy to joy
and what discerning person would shy away
from embarking on such a journey!”

When you are able to deeply appreciate the value of altruistic intention and the compassionate concern for others, and are able to cultivate that, the door to happiness is opened for you. In some sense, from the moment you have developed a simulated cultivation of bodhicitta, you are on the right track leading to Buddhahood, based on your understanding and practice, even though you have not yet realized a genuine bodhicitta. So the cultivation of bodhicitta, the altruistic intention determines whether you are on the right track to enlightenment.

Even in my own case, although I am not claiming that I have the realization of bodhicitta, I can say that I feel or taste a sense of what Shantideva says when he says

that when you develop a genuine bodhicitta, it offers you a kind of respite, a true relaxed kind of freedom, because in a sense you are freed from the prisonment of self-concern. That is a genuine kind of freedom. Once you combine this with a deep understanding of emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality, your mind really begins the transformation.

It will impact the way you see and relate to the world positively. And also, when you start to contemplate on texts like the Eight Verses, then the meaning from the texts will come to life to support your own practice and experience.

In the first of eight stanzas, the author explains the need to cultivate the right positive attitude toward all beings, cherishing them and their well-being. In the second stanza he elaborates on how to do this. Sometimes when you care for someone, there may be a sense of superiority on your part. You may tend to look down on others. In the second stanza, he writes: “whenever I interact with someone, may I view myself as the lowest of all, and from the very depths of my heart, respectfully hold others as superior.” He emphasizes that we should not involve a sense of pity towards others when we cultivate compassion. This can lead to a feeling of superiority, which is contrary to the teachings. There needs to be a genuine respect.

When he talks about viewing oneself as inferior to others, he is of course speaking in contextual terms. Someone who is a monastic member might think they have a lot of ground to feel superior to others, but from other perspectives, they can still be inferior. For example, if we look at insects killing each other, there is nothing surprising about it. An insect does not know the law of karma so we wouldn't expect it to be observing morality. Therefore if we, who have been exposed to the dharma, commit the same harmful action as an insect, we are in a sense inferior to the insect. It is with a relative perspective that the author is explaining the way in which we should respect and hold others as superior.

In this first stanza, the author explains the need to cultivate the right positive attitude toward all beings, cherishing them and their well-being.

In the second stanza he elaborates on how to do this. Sometimes when you care for someone, there may be a sense of superiority on your part. You may feel pity and tend to look down on others.

In the second stanza, he writes: “whenever I interact with someone, may I view myself as the lowest of all, and from the very depths of my heart, respectfully hold others as superior.” He emphasizes that we should not involve a sense of pity towards others

when we cultivate compassion. This can lead to a feeling of superiority, which is contrary to the teachings. There needs to be a genuine respect.

When he talks about viewing oneself as inferior to others, he is of course speaking in contextual terms. Someone who is a monastic member, who has been exposed to the Buddhadharma might think they have a lot of ground to feel superior to others, but from other perspectives, they can still be inferior. For example, if we look at insects killing each other, there is nothing surprising about it. An insect does not know the law of karma so we wouldn't expect it to be observing morality.

Whereas if those who have been exposed to the Dharma, have taken the vows, sometimes lose control and create negative karma, then, one could say that those are inferior and worse than the insect. So it is a comparative perspective that the author is explaining that the way in which we should cherish and hold others as superior. It should not involve a sense of superiority but should be a genuine respect.

The third stanza reads

"In all my deeds, may I probe into my mind,
And as soon as mental and emotional afflictions arise,
As they endanger myself and others,
May I strongly confront them and avert them."

When on the path, one has to deal with obstacles such as afflictions that will arise naturally in us. When these arise, we need to be vigilant and take them seriously. There is a Tibetan saying: "don't make friends with 'it will be okay, it will be okay,'" because if you say "it will be okay," then you tend to not take things seriously. There is another Tibetan saying that if you allow a space for a small pin to get in, there will soon be a bigger rod coming in.

Whenever mental and emotional affliction arises, one needs to confront them immediately. This should not be taken lightly. If you don't take even a small infraction seriously, the next time a bigger one occurs you might not take it seriously either. It is a slippery slope. As a practitioner one needs to be vigilant and constantly guarding your mind.

For example, with respect to dealing with anger and hatred, in Guide to a Bodhisattva's Way of Life, Shantideva says that it is very difficult to bring an immediate antidote when anger is full blown. It is hard to get into a state of loving kindness. Therefore what we need to do is to cultivate our minds so that we are able to catch ourselves before emotions become full blown. In the case of anger, he talks about the need to deal with the sources of anger which are the dissatisfactions and frustrations with a particular

situation. If we are able to recognize the sources of our frustration we will be able to prevent the development of anger.

To cultivate our minds we need to equip ourselves with ways to deal with adverse situations whenever they arise. We need to think about what could happen in order to prepare ourselves for situations in which bad things may happen. In this way we will be better equipped to deal with them calmly. That also suggests that you need to have a right kind of a mindset in dealing with problems and tragedies. For example, the Kadampa master Dromtampa says that if someone is disparaging you, you can calmly think, “well at least he didn’t hit me.” (laughter from audience). If someone beats you up, instead of getting worked up, you could think, “Well, at least he didn’t kill me!” The point he is making is we need to find a way to creatively relate to adversity so that it doesn’t fuel negative emotions. In other words, these kinds of methodology allow us to insure that our intolerance, our ability to forbear adversity is not undermined.

Here I would like to mention about this coconut. My second home is India is also the land of coconut...particularly in South India

There is an expression in Tibetan that says “adversity is opportunities”. So with the right attitude an adverse situation can be an opportunity to practice. Similarly in the mind training teachings, there is an instruction on how to turn adversities into your own factors of the path of practice.

The next stanza reads:

“When I see beings of unpleasant character
Oppressed by strong negativity and suffering.
May I hold them dear – for they are rare to find -
As if I have discovered a jewel treasure!”

In this stanza, the author is emphasizing the point that practitioners of bodhicitta need to develop a special attention to the needy. When he says “needy” he refers to people who may suffer from some kind of disease or negative temperament that causes people to shun them or otherwise dislike them. Bodhicitta practitioners should not also ignore these people, but in fact pay more attention to help them.

In the next stanza reads

When others, out of jealousy,
Treat me wrongly with abuse, slander and scorn,
May I take upon myself the defeat

And offer to others the victory.

Here the author is explaining that when you find yourself in a situation where others are treating you unjustly or against you, as a bodhicitta practitioner, you should be able to develop a sense of forbearance and not negatively react. This is of course only if the unjust action is targeted at you. If the wrongdoings involve the well-being of the larger community as a whole, you would need another approach. But in so far as your own interest is concerned, if others treat you in this manner, you should be able to have a greater sense of patience and offer others the victory.

The next stanza reads:

“When someone whom I have helped,
Or in whom I have placed great hopes,
Mistreats me in extremely hurtful ways,
May I regard him still as my precious teacher.”

This stanza echoes something that Shantideva says in *The Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, that for the practitioner of bodhicitta, the cultivation of patience and forbearance is crucial. In that way, the activities of one's adversary, the so-called enemy, actually offers an opportunity to cultivate and strengthen our patience and tolerance. Shantideva advises us that we should view our enemies as our spiritual teachers.

The next stanza reads

“In brief, may I offer benefit and joy
To all my mothers, both directly and indirectly,
May I quietly take upon myself
All hurts and pains of my mothers.”

This explains the practice of Tonglen, giving and receiving. The Tonglen practice encapsulates both the practice of loving kindness and the cultivation of compassion. Receiving suffering and pain from others focuses on the cultivation of compassion, and offering others joy, virtues and happiness emphasizes the aspect of loving kindness. When you engage in the practice of Tonglen, taking on yourself the suffering of others and offering them your happiness, you may not see the actual or direct effects on the person to whom you are offering your happiness, except in situations which you have an exceptional strong karmic connection with the recipient, but the impact on your own mind is undeniable.

The final two lines read:

“And may I, recognizing all things as illusion,
Devoid of clinging, be released from bondage.”

These lines present the idea of meditating on emptiness to cultivate the ultimate awakening mind. There is a reference to seeing all things as illusory, which is a common perspective in many spiritual practices, including Buddhism. Here, when we talk about a meditation on emptiness, we are talking about the actual formal sitting component where the emphasis is on having a complete sense of absence, a negation of intrinsic existence. It is only when you are able to negate everything that the perception of illusion will appear.

This requires negating the solid independent existence of things so that when you rise out of meditation and reengage with the world, your perception will be colored by the understanding of emptiness. While it may seem to you as if objects possess objective reality, because of your meditation on emptiness you will be able to relate to them with an awareness that although they seem real, they do not exist as they appear. After much meditation on emptiness, you will be able to alter your mental state in a way that will allow you to view the world in a new and light free of illusion.

So in the final stanza we read:

“May all this remain undefiled
By the stains of the eight mundane concerns;”

These two lines emphasize that all the preceding practices should be motivated by the wish to cultivate bodhicitta, and should not be tainted by mundane concerns of fame, wealth, longevity, success, and so on. Practitioners need to be careful to not let these kinds of concerns creep into spiritual practice.

Then the second two lines, the final two lines, which reads:

“And may I, recognizing all things as illusion,
Devoid of clinging, be released from bondage.”

These lines present the idea of meditating on emptiness to cultivate the ultimate awakening mind. There is a reference to seeing all things as illusory like. Here, when we talk about a meditation on emptiness, we are talking about the actual formal sitting component where the emphasis is on having a complete sense of absence, a negation of intrinsic existence.

It is referred to as “space-like”. In this meditative equipoise, you are able to negate the intrinsic existence of everything.

It is only when you are able to negate true existence of everything that the perception of illusion will appear. This requires negating the solid independent existence of things so that when you rise out of meditation and reengage with the world, your perception will be colored by the understanding of emptiness. While it may seem to you as if objects possess objective reality, because of your meditation on emptiness you will be able to relate to them with an awareness that although they seem real, they do not exist as they appear.

As a consequence of meditation on emptiness you will gradually be awoken to the experience and understanding of emptiness. With the awareness of the world appearing like an illusion, practitioners should reinforce the bodhicitta, engage in generosity, observe moral discipline, and cultivate forbearance and all the other practice from the six perfections.

As far as instructions on how to cultivate bodhicitta, there is still no greater authority than Shantideva's text Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, which was composed in the 8th century.

The fundamental texts on cultivating the view of emptiness is Nagarjuna's Fundamental Stanzas on the Middle Way (Mulamadhyamaka Karikas), as well as Chandrakirti's Entering the Middle Way (Madhyamakavatara).

Nagarjuna's Fundamental Stanzas on the Middle Way (Mulamadhyamaka Karikas) has been translated into Chinese in the 3rd or 4th Century. In fact, recently I had the opportunity to teach this to a Chinese Buddhist group. This text is also available in Vietnamese as well.

The other important text on the view of emptiness is Chandrakirti's Entering the Middle Way (Madhyamakavatara) which exists in Tibetan translation and now is being translated to Vietnamese as well. So these texts are very important. So whenever you have time, you should try and read them.

Generating the Mind of Awakening Ceremony:

So next we will generate the ceremony for generating the Awakening Mind.

So for the ceremony of the bodhicitta, on your part, you should visualize where the thangka is, the Buddha Shakyamuni is depicted there, and on that side you should

imagine there being a real Buddha in life, present and Buddha is surrounded by his immediate disciples like Ananda and Kashyapa and so on.

And around this small circle of Buddha's disciples are the bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri and so on, the bodhisattva disciples. And around them are the great Indian masters of the past such as Nagarjuna, Asanga and so on.

And then for the Vietnamese Buddhist community, you should also imagine the presence of the great Vietnamese masters who have been important for the dissemination of the compassion and altruistic tradition in your own history.

And for the Tibetans, imagine the great Tibetan masters who have been important for the lineage. And so it is at the presence of this congregation you are generating the bodhicitta. The actual ceremony will take the form of reciting three stanzas. The first stanza has to do with taking refuge in the Three Jewels, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The second stanza is the actual generation of bodhicitta. The third stanza which is from Shantideva's Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, then you are affirming that pledge you have made to generate bodhicitta. I think the text is going to be displayed on the screen out there. Can you read the text on the screen?

Ok, very good then. So for this, as explained before, we will do the actual recitation in English and Tibetan separately. For this purpose, as explained before, you should really visualize in front of you the presence of the Buddha and what makes Buddha a valid teacher is primarily two qualities – his great compassion for all beings and his realization of the ultimate nature of reality, the view of emptiness. And this is as explained in great detail in Dignaga's opening salutation to his text *Pramanasamuccaya*. So you should reflect upon the Buddha and also reflect upon the Dharma and Sangha and their presence which you have visualized, you are taking the refuge and also you are generating the mind of enlightenment. And especially when you recite the third stanza which is from Shantideva's text you should really try to cultivate a deep sense of enthusiasm for the altruistic aspiration and also develop a deep sense of conviction that yes, I now recognize that altruism and altruistic attitude really is the source of happiness, the source of all happiness and all joys and I should uphold it with all my dedication and single pointedness.

So we will read the English together so can you read

With the wish to free all beings,
I shall always go for refuge, to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha
Until I reach the heart of Awakening.

Okay, now let's read the second stanza –
Enthused by wisdom and compassion
Today in the Buddha's presence
I shall generate the mind for full awakening
For the sake of all sentient beings

The third is the stanza where you are trying to cultivate this genuine courage and enthusiasm. So let's read this final stanza.

As long as space remains
As long as sentient beings remain
Until then may I too remain
And help dispel the miseries of the world

So we will do the second repetition, all three stanzas in one go.

With the wish to free all beings
I shall always go for refuge
To the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha
Until I reach the heart of awakening.

Enthused by wisdom and compassion
Today in the Buddha's presence
I shall generate the mind for full awakening
For the sake of all sentient beings.

As long as space remains
As long as sentient beings remain
Until then may I too remain
And help dispel the miseries of the world.

So when we finish the last line of the second stanza, at that point you should really reinforce your determination to generate altruistic aspiration to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings and say that I shall seek enlightenment and I shall help liberate all beings. Then the final stanza is to really strengthen that and generate enthusiasm for that altruistic ideal. So let's repeat the three verses together now.

With the wish to free all beings
I shall always go for refuge
To the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha
Until I reach the heart of awakening.

Enthused by wisdom and compassion
Today in the Buddha's presence
I shall generate the mind for full awakening
For the sake of all sentient beings.

As long as space remains
As long as sentient beings remain
Until then may I too remain
And help dispel the miseries of the world.

Thank you! The teaching is now completed. So, it is important in our daily life to practice bodhicitta. If we only thinking about bodhicitta for a short period, but the remaining of the day, have not much concern for others, then there will be not much effect. So concentrate, pay full attention on the practice, then carry on all day. More and more you will be familiar with it, then even during dreamtime, the impact would still remain. So that is the way to practice twenty four hours. Then weeks, months, years, decades. Then through centuries, life after life. Through that way, eons. So that really give us inner strength, having determination is important.

So now, you have something to say?

Completed on June 9, 2015. Prajna Upadesa Editorial team.