

GATSAL

TEACHING

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on

37 Practices of a Bodhisattva

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21. *Sense pleasures and desirable things are like saltwater – The more one tastes them, the more one's thirst increases. To abandon promptly all objects which arouse attachment, is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

The Buddha himself said that greed is like salty water, the more we drink, the thirstier we become - even if we drink the whole ocean we would still be thirsty. Of course this has been shown by our modern consumer society. People now have so much beyond what they could have imagined even 50 years ago and yet they are still not satisfied. Just endlessly grasping - and for what? The point is that it all becomes counterproductive after a while. We get one car and it is exciting, but the second car is somehow less interesting, by the time we get to our fifth or sixth, who cares? We have just got to worry about where to park it. But even though the more one tastes, the more one's thirst increases yet this desire has diminishing returns. We are always hoping to regain that initial sense of satisfaction. There is a moment of feeling real pleasure and then it is gone. Like ice cream that is delicious but if we keep eating then we feel sick.

After the initial moment of pleasure the feeling of satisfaction lessens, so then we try something else and always something more. It is like pornography that gets increasingly explicit, gross and vicious in order to regain that frisson of excitement and pleasure. There always has to be more and more and one is enslaved. It becomes an obsession, an addiction, which is very sad.

Sometimes greed seems innocent compared with hatred and jealousy. Around the world people are always asking how to get rid of anger, but few people ask how to overcome greed, because greed appears innocuous and seems quite pleasurable. Anger on the other hand doesn't give real enjoyment and angry people are unpopular. Being greedy and attached appears natural and the way to happiness. But the root of *duhkha*, of suffering, is *not* anger. The root of suffering is clinging and attachment. Think about it, we think that attachment is what gives us satisfaction; actually it is the

root of our suffering. But it appears quite innocent, and can even seem like something good.

When I lived in Lahoul outside the front of my cave there was a flat space, like a small patio made of stamped earth, but after snow or rain this turned into mud. I decided to put down flagstones so it wouldn't be all muddy. I collected many flat stones. Now on this hard earth patio grew little clusters of pale pink flowers with yellow centres, *very pretty*. I thought that in order to lay the flagstones I had better pull up these little flowers because otherwise the stones would not be able to settle properly. First, I tried just pulling them up but they wouldn't come because the roots were deep, so I started digging to find the tap roots. I dug and I dug and I realized, after several days of work, that all these little flower clusters were connected underneath by a deep root system - thick roots spreading deep and wide in all directions. Yet on the surface all one saw were these pretty little flowers. At the time I thought that this is like greed and desire. It looks so innocent on the surface but underneath in the psyche it has very deep, thick roots reaching throughout all the levels of our consciousness. Because it is underground - buried in the subconscious or store-consciousness, we don't recognize it. But this is why it is *so* difficult to uproot. The Buddha said the clinging mind is the cause of our suffering. Anger is relatively easy to deal with because we don't like it and so we are happy to work on trying to overcome it. But greed is very difficult to uproot because we are attached to attachment.

Most people don't even understand what it means to transform attachment into genuine love. To uproot attachment doesn't mean that we stop loving. Our love becomes purified because it is not tied up with attachment. Mostly what we think of as love is really just grasping or clinging and it is this grasping mind which causes us suffering. It is *very* deeply embedded in our psyche. This doesn't mean that we have to give up everything in terms of outer renunciation, but inwardly we can renounce. We can have possessions

and appreciate and enjoy them, but if we lose them, we don't care much and we are happy to give to others. The test of whether we are attached or not is if we heard we had lost that thing or that person, how would we feel? Because truly on the wheel of birth and death, there are no chains, there are no ropes. We are holding on with both hands. All we have to do is let go. Inwardly let go. We grasp so tightly and this is our problem.

There is a story about a way of capturing monkeys in Indonesia – whether true or not I don't know. Fixed to a tree is a coconut with a small little hole bored in it, just big enough for a monkey to put its hand through. Inside there is some sweetened coconut. The monkey comes along, smells the coconut, puts its hand through and grasps the coconut sweet. So now it has made a fist and the hole is too small for the fist to pull through. Then the hunter comes and the monkey is terrified but the *greed* in the monkey's mind overcomes its fear and it still cannot let go. The monkey wants *desperately* to escape but it wants to have the coconut sweet too. He is caught. That is our predicament, isn't it? Yes, absolutely we want to be free - but we want to take everything with us too.

To abandon all objects which arouse attachment, doesn't mean that we have necessarily to give away everything, but it does mean that we should look carefully at what we are really attached to. There is nothing wrong with appreciating and enjoying something. Likewise, with people, to love and care for them and do one's best to make them happy, that is not the problem. It is the grasping that is the problem. The idea that now they are *mine*. So, the easiest way is just to let it all go, like the Buddha did. We leave our homes and families and off we go. The more subtle way is not to leave but to work on the ability to hold things gently and caringly - but without grasping. That is much more difficult but if we can do that, then inwardly we become free. Somebody said that if there were one mantra in Buddhism it is *Let go*. Inwardly let go. Outwardly we can have everything. It is not the things, they themselves are innocent. They are not a problem; it is our attitude to the things which is the problem.

This is why in Buddhism, to help us ordinary worldly people, the first *Paramita* is generosity, because this starts the process of sharing, the pleasure received from giving to others. In Asia, the main Buddhist practice really is generosity. It is a striking distinction between the West and Asia. In the West the emphasis in Dharma circles is on meditation, and in fact Buddhism and meditation are often regarded as the same thing. But in Asia few people actually meditate, even amongst the monks. It is considered a specialized or professional thing to do. Probably the only Asian country where ordinary people seriously practice would be Burma. For various historical reasons the Burmese have in the last 150 years taken up formal meditation practice, so that ordinary village people and army officers and anybody can practise.

But in most of Asia the qualities most cultivated in Buddhism are generosity and devotion, so people take great delight in giving. They *rejoice* and there are many

opportunities for people to cultivate generosity. Early morning in the Theravada countries laypeople kneel in the street with food they have cooked to offer to the monks as they go by. There are regular gatherings where they can make offerings – to the Temple or to each other, they love to make offerings at every opportunity. The joy of giving is important because generosity is one of the main antidotes to grasping. If we have something and we are happy to share it with others then there is nothing wrong with having it.

This quality of delight in giving to others is important and this is why it is placed at the beginning of our spiritual training. Because even if our ethical conduct is a bit suspect; we get bad tempered quite often; we never meditate and our diligence is very weak, *still* we can be generous and learn to give beyond what feels like the safety zone. We can practise giving away things we actually like, not just stuff that we have outworn and we want to get rid of anyway - or something that an aunt gave us last Christmas and we were wondering what to do with it. Open hands are important because open hands lead to an open heart.

Some years ago, I knew a Swami or Hindu renunciate who lived very simply in his Ashram built with mud bricks and bamboo. Now this Swami had a number of affluent disciples who would offer him a lot of fancy goods. He would look and be so interested and examine the article - then next thing he had given it to somebody else. He didn't have sticky fingers and when he died he left nothing, but he was always happy. He was pleased that people gave him nice things because then in his mind he was thinking '*Oh this is really nice, so who would like this? Who can I give this to?*'

So, developing that kind of intention is a good thing: the delight in having so that we can share it with others, and this also helps to break down our total absorption in our own pleasure and happiness. It helps to begin loosening those fingers which are grasping at the Wheel, which is why the Buddha himself always encouraged people to be generous and kind. It opens up the heart.

Recently a group of Vietnamese people who live in Australia came to visit us. It was their first trip to India and I had previously met them in Australia when I gave a talk at their Temple. Since I had left, which was some years ago, they had been saving up to come to India, to go on Pilgrimage and make offerings everywhere. Their whole idea was that coming to India would give them an opportunity to go to certain monasteries to make offerings to all the monks. Therefore, they had happily deprived themselves of all sorts of things for years, just so they could all come to India together and make offerings. It is beautiful. They weren't planning to save hard so they could stay in 5-star hotels, they were just thinking to do fundraising to make more money for offerings.

This is a direct antidote to our greedy grasping mind thinking *what's in it for me?* Along with the idea that if we accumulate more and more somehow we'll feel satisfied, instead we recognise that if we give away more and more we'll feel lighter and deeply content.

22. *All that appears is the work of one's own mind;
The nature of mind is primordially free from conceptual
limitations.
To recognize this nature, and not to entertain concepts of
subject and object,
is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

Here we are dealing with two aspects of the mind: our ordinary conceptual thinking and the ultimate nature of the mind, which is non-dual primordial pure awareness.

Normally as ordinary sentient beings, we are mostly aware of the conceptual level of the mind which means our thoughts and emotions, our memories, our judgments and our ideas and beliefs. If we ask ourselves, "Who am I?" then we will recall our name and maybe our nationality, racial type, gender, maybe our class or caste - and we think "This is who I am." We might think of where we were born, where we grew up. We might include our profession or our marital status. We are somebody's child and perhaps someone else's parent. Sometimes we are the boss but at other times we are the servant.

We are playing many different roles - including male and female - which we think defines who we are even though we are changing all the time, from the moment we were born. We see a small child and in a year's time, we won't recognize him - every single cell of his body will have changed. But still we think it is the same boy.

Every cell in our body changes and our thoughts are changing moment to moment. New cells in our brain are coming into being while others are dying away, but still we say, "I am me". We have a strong sense that there is a unique and autonomous I at the centre of ourselves that never changes, that is always me, whether we are two months old, two years, twenty, fifty or a hundred and twenty. It is still "me". My opinions, my ideas, my beliefs, my memories: this is who I am.

And that is the level of consciousness on which we live. Normally when we meditate, that is the level of consciousness which we are dealing with - trying to tame, to train, to transform.

From a Buddhist point of view, this concept of an autonomous I is a fundamental delusion. It is the big mistake which keeps us trapped in Samsara. Samsara doesn't exist except through the conceptual mind. So, all of this work which we have been going through, all these verses, are written from the point of view of a mind which from the very beginning is mistaking the rope for a snake.

Therefore, this verse is important, in the middle of the text, suddenly - BOOM, he lands a bombshell there.

When the Buddha said that there is no Self [Anatman], he didn't mean that we don't exist. Of course we exist. But fundamentally we do not exist in the way we conceive ourselves to exist. Just as if there is a table made of wood and this table is solid. Look tomorrow and it will still be a table and it will still be solid. Nonetheless we know that from the point of view of quantum physics for example, the table does not exist at all as it appears. In fact it is energy/space. When we analyse the *tableness* of the table, we can never find it.

I remember when I was a schoolgirl studying physics for the first time. I was really interested in what remained when everything was reduced to its ultimate level. What is the final reality when we keep reducing everything down? When I asked

the physics teacher, and she went on about protons and neutrons. But I thought, no, if there are protons or neutrons then those must be capable of being split further, so then what? I lost interest in physics at that point. I might have become a physicist but my enthusiasm was quenched at the age of 11 when I decided to look elsewhere for the answer! But of course quantum physicists are intrigued by this question: when we keep reducing everything down, ultimately, what do we get? Apparently, they can't find any ultimate. Waves or particles, energy or space, but then what is space? Ultimately there seems to be light and energy: matter is not really solid. So what they *don't* end up with is a solid table, and yet it is definitely a table supporting things and would give deep bruises if it was thrown at us. On the *ultimate* level the table is not as we perceive it through our sense doors, on this vibrational level where we experience the world.

There are these two aspects the whole time. When the Buddha said that, ultimately, we have no self, it doesn't mean that we don't exist. But when we look for this self - this hard-core sense of me at the centre of our being - when we search for it, we never can find it. It is like peeling the layers of an onion, we can peel layer after layer but we never find a core.

As far as the mind goes, we can uncover layer after layer of the mind until we get down to the substrata consciousness which in Sanskrit is called the *alayavijñana*. Here our consciousness becomes vast and spacious and we feel one with everything. Although profound, that kind of feeling is not the ultimate. Through shamatha meditation we can reach that deep level which is beyond conceptual thinking: the mind feels clear, vast and blissful so we can think that we are liberated.

When the Buddha first left his palace he went to a teacher who taught him how to attain the various *rupa dhyanas*, or levels of meditative concentration which become increasingly subtle. Then his second teacher taught him the formless concentrations or *arupa dhyanas* leading to ultimate nothingness, vast and spacious consciousness which in his day was regarded as liberation. Even today many people attain this level of meditative absorption and believe they are liberated since it is blissful and spacious. However, Buddha realised that since one has to come back down from that level it is also impermanent just like everything else.

The levels of the mind can be very subtle but they are still caught within this same cycle of Samsara. So, when the Buddha said there is no Self, perhaps what he was saying was that this thinking mind and all these levels of meditative absorptions are still caught up within the realm of birth and death. They are not liberation. Because when we emerge from that blissful state - here we are again!

So, what to do? Therefore, *all that appears are the workings of one's own mind*. We only perceive what is received through the sense doors. Normally we believe that objects and people are existing out there, more or less how we perceive them. Our senses - especially our eyes and our ears - receive information of what is happening out there and the brain decodes it nicely so we then can decide how we feel about it. Everything seems just how it appears to be.

Only it is not. It is very hard for us to realise this. Intellectually it is fairly easy to comprehend, but to actually experience this way of being is difficult because we are already pre-programmed.

As a simple example, supposing we happen to be colour

blind. I worked for a short time in a government office which arranged for candidates to receive vocational training. If someone was going to train to be an electrician, they had to know the difference between the red and green wires. There was a book devised by a Japanese expert which showed circles of red and green in certain formations. When one looked it was obvious that the circles formed an “A” or a “K”. However, in the office was a young man who was colour blind and so we were discussing this book. He only saw whorls of coloured circles. He could not make out any letters. There was a girl in the office wearing a fire-engine red sweater. I said, “What colour is she wearing?” Long pause. “I think it must be.... red?” In fact, he saw a kind of mud colour.

That is an example, depending on our ocular perception, of how we observe things differently. If the colour which appears to a normal eyesight were actually red and green *in itself*, then everybody would have to see the same thing. In other words, the colour is not inherent in the thing itself, but has to do with its vibrational frequencies and the vision of the perceiver. Apparently, an eminent neuroscientist in England has stated that what we actually see is a very blurred image of something, which is instantly interpreted by the brain depending on prior associations. This gives us a picture which we think is truly representative of what we’re perceiving. He said that only about a small percentage is received through the sense doors and the majority of what we think we perceive is actually made up by the brain.

Thus “*all that appears is the work of one’s own mind.*” We see things and we think that is exactly how they are, but of course, it’s only how *we* see it. A dog perceives things very differently, for instance they have a vastly greater capacity of olfactory experience than we do, which is why dogs are so fascinated by smell. Their sense of smell is so acute that they live in a world of scent, which we don’t share at all.

Some have extremely acute hearing and then there are other beings who don’t have the colour range we have, and those who maybe have even more colour range than we have. We only perceive what our senses can receive and like a computer, the brain interprets rapidly, works it all out and comes up with a picture for us. Moreover, what *is* actually out there, we can never know since it all *depends* on the kind of sense organs and brain mechanism which as human beings we share.

The rest is just our preconceptions, our judgments and tastes - meaning what we like and what we don’t like. Sometimes things which a while back were considered so beautiful and aesthetically pleasing are now considered ridiculous. We look at old photos and exclaim, “Goodness, did I really wear that?!”

The fact is that we don’t really know what is out there definitively. We only know what we perceive with the limited senses that we have. If we had different kinds of senses, or extra senses or less senses, the picture would change. Even scientists are only using the kind of senses and brains which - as human beings - they have and so they also have their limitations. We can’t imagine what other kinds of senses might be like because we have never had them.

Therefore, on one level everything which we perceive is our own inner movie show. In fact we don’t even know what is going on in here, not to speak of what is going on out there! So all our perceptions are gathered and interpreted by the thinking mind,

our conceptual mind. But our conceptual mind is dualistic by its very nature. That means it naturally makes a division into subject and object.

When I went to get my first meditation instruction from an old Yogi called Togden Choelek Rinpoche, he said to me, “This table, is it empty?”

I said, “... Yes!” He asked, “Do you see it as empty?” “Noooo...”

“The mind. Is it empty?” So I said, with a bit more confidence, “Yes!”

“Do you see it as empty?” “No.”

“Which do you think is easier, to see the table as empty or your mind as empty?”

I said, “Oh, the mind.” Then he said, “Okay, you belong to us.” Next I asked, “If I had said ‘the table?’” “Then I’d have sent you to Sera monastery down the road!” In other words, the scholastic approach is to analyse the emptiness of external phenomena while the yogic tradition is to examine the emptiness of mind. The mind is empty by its nature. What does it mean?

The classical description is that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence. Which means that we cannot find anything existing independently and say that this is the thing in itself, whether a “table” or “the mind” or anything. We can never find the actual thing in itself. Everything is made up of bits and pieces and space, put together and labeled.

Where is the *tableness* of a table? It cannot be found. After all, anything can be used as a table if it is slightly flat. Yesterday maybe it was a box, today it is a table.

Even though that is a simplistic explanation of a profound understanding, it carries an important meaning because we do label everything and then believe our labels instead of recognizing that this is merely a label, just a convenience.

The Buddha said, “I, too, use conceptual language, but I am not fooled by it.”

And that is the difference: we *are* fooled by it and we think that if we give something a name, it exists. And unlike the Buddha, we tend to believe everything we label as truly existing.

But here we are dealing specifically with the mind, not tables, and so the point is, what is the mind? Why is the mind empty?

First of all, the mind is empty because our thoughts are flowing endlessly, like bubbles swept along in a stream, and we cannot pick one up and say, “This is the mind” or even “this is a thought” because the moment we identify it, it is gone! Anyone who has tried looking at the mind can see that we say, “thinking” but we never can find the thought in itself. It is like a movie projector with all the transparent frames moving across so fast that they seem to project out this whole drama. Each individual frame is moving too fast to be identified. By the time we have noticed it, it is gone.

The mind’s emptiness also connotes its spacious quality. The mind is empty but also luminous and cognizant. Mind is not something graspable — it is something vast and open, luminous, clear and knowing. The nature of the mind is compared to the sky. If we look at our mind, we realise that there are two processes going on: one is the thoughts coming up and disappearing, moment to moment, just flowing past. But then there is awareness, the mindfulness which observes that.

Now, that observation is already a step forward. Normally we are just engulfed in the flow of thinking and swept along by our thoughts. But now, we are stepping back and observing the

thoughts - so then there is a space between the observer and the thoughts.

However that is still a dualistic situation, because there is the observer and the observed. So, this observing mind is called “mindfulness”. We are now conscious of our mind and in being more conscious, we are no longer so completely enslaved. We can begin to see that all these feelings, these thoughts, these ideas, these beliefs, these memories, prejudices, judgments and clinging - are just thoughts. Merely thoughts.

So here we are, observing the mind. Watching the thoughts as they go past, recognizing that thought moments come and go. In the beginning the stream of thoughts are like a waterfall cascading down. Then it becomes like a fast-flowing river gradually moving more slowly as the mind quiets down until eventually it enters the ocean of Samadhi.

This is the conventional mind. That mindfulness which watches is also the conventional mind. Think of the clouds in the sky during the monsoon season. The sky is completely covered by clouds, only clouds are visible. Likewise the nature of the mind is covered by all our conceptual thinking and, therefore, when we look at the mind, all we see are the clouds of conceptual thought.

But those clouds could not exist if it were not for the sky. The clouds come from the sky, they vanish back into the sky again. But we usually identify with the clouds and forget about the sky. If the clouds part, we see the sky. It is rather like if we go travelling during monsoon in a plane. There are thick clouds and then suddenly the plane ascends and we are above the clouds and there is this vast blue expanse with the clouds below.

So clouds float within this open spaciousness which is empty. It is empty insofar as we cannot grasp it, it cannot be seen. Yet without space nothing would exist. Space is everywhere. Where is space not?

If we are asked to describe a room then we will refer to the furniture, ornaments and any people present. But what is really there is space. Yet we usually don't notice that. However without the space there could not be the furnishings, there could not be the people. They can only exist because there is space.

Also the people and the furniture are ultimately space. Every cell in our body is space. If the physical body is reduced infinitely there are perhaps just vibrations of light. We are all space. There is nowhere that space is not. It is all-encompassing.

So, therefore, the nature of the mind is compared to space, is likened to the sky. Mindfulness is a good step in advance of being completely engulfed in our thinking - yet even our mindfulness is based on the sense of *my* mindfulness. It has not transcended the subject and object duality. There is mindfulness and something to be mindful of and someone being mindful.

But the ultimate nature of the mind is like the sky because it cannot be divided. There is no centre, there is no end.

When we talk about ‘buddha-nature’ it could sound like everybody has got little buddhas sitting inside them. ‘This is *my* Buddha.’ ‘Keep *your* Buddha to yourself.’ ‘Actually, my Buddha is rather a special Buddha compared with ordinary people’s Buddhas!’ Of course it is not like that. It is not like everybody has a little buddha-nature sitting inside them. That would just be another ego projection.

Buddha-nature is empty. Buddha-nature is like space. We can't grasp space. We can fight over our particular seat in a room,

but we cannot argue about the air. We are all breathing in and breathing out the same air. I cannot say, “Excuse *me*, I don't want you breathing my air!” Even if we were the most bitter enemies, fighting and shouting at each other, we are actually intimately connected because we are breathing in and breathing out the same air which descends deep into our lungs.

We cannot own air. Air is something shared by all the beings on this planet - not just human beings. The animals and the trees and the plants, fortunately they are also breathing in and breathing out, helping us to live on this planet. Space has no centre, it has no boundaries, it just is: vast empty space like the nature of our mind. But, unlike the sky, which is just empty, the nature of the mind is also cognizant. It *knows*.

The nature of the mind is empty - meaning it is spacious, open and unimpeded and ungraspable. At the same time the mind is clear and luminous. The mind is naturally cognizant. Otherwise we could not know anything, we could not be aware - but we all know. Therefore the term for this in Tibetan is *rigpa* meaning ‘to know’ [Sanskrit *vidya*]. Usually this is translated as pure awareness, primordial awareness, but the root means ‘to know’. It is the fact that we *know* and that knowing is unimpeded, spacious, clear and luminous - and it is who we are.

But that knowing quality of the mind, which we *all* possess - right here all the time - that quality of mind is beyond duality, meaning when we are in a state of Rigpa there is no sense of ‘I’ and ‘others’. Such duality just does not pertain. It is not that we are spaced out, it is more like waking up. The word Buddha of course is from the root *Buddh* which means “to awaken”. So, it is just like *that* - we suddenly wake up.

Whatever we see or hear is because we are conscious, we have awareness. But when we hear something, we immediately superimpose our ideas and judgments so that the underlying clarity is obscured. It is always present, but we cover it up with all our thinking. We don't allow our mind to remain in its nakedness. We cover it up the whole time. Therefore it is called naked awareness ... before we clothe it in all our concepts.

Consciousness is not something which can be measured on machines, just as space cannot be seen. Everything exists because there *is* space, but we cannot see space in itself. We can't grasp it and say ‘Hey, look, I've got a fistful of space’. And yet without it nothing would exist. Everything *is* it. This is like the mind. Without this underlying awareness we couldn't exist. But we are so busy thinking, comparing, conceiving, judging, talking to ourselves - that we don't recognise it.

So the aim is to recognise - not create something because we have always got it - but to recognise this fundamental quality of the mind. My lama said to me, “Once you recognize the nature of the mind then you can *start* to meditate.” - meaning until then we are just playing mind games.

Once we experience the initial break-through we understand what we are trying to do. Then building on that, we learn how to stabilize that realization. Normally, even if we recognize the nature of the mind, then immediately ‘*Hold on! That's it! Finally I've got it - now I'm almost enlightened!*’ - the ego immediately grabs onto the experience and wants to reproduce it. Many people when they first start to meditate have no preconceptions: their minds are innocent. They have no ideas about what is supposed to happen and they just sit there. They have been told to recite a mantra or watch their breath or whatever and

because their mind is so relaxed, with no expectations and no goals, some experiences might spontaneously happen. It seems so easy! They go 'Wow – *that's fantastic! Let's do that again*' ... and then it doesn't come because now the mind is grasping and wanting to replay that experience again. As soon as the mind has expectations and grasps at hopes and fears – that will shut the door. That is what can make this type of meditation difficult. The way to recognize the nature of the mind is to completely relax but at the same time remain focused.

Great masters who even as children had received deep experiences and understanding, nonetheless spent the rest of their lives practising. It is necessary not just to recognize the nature of the mind, but then to rest within that awareness under all circumstances. Not just when we are in retreat, but in all situations, wherever we are and whatever we are doing.

When one can stay in a state of pure awareness at all times, including during sleep, then the practice is stable. Of course many great practitioners of all traditions at the time of death go into state that is called *Tukdam*. This means that although their body is dead, the brain is dead, yet the very subtle consciousness, the clear light nature, remains in the body at the heart centre. The body does not decay or collapse - it doesn't go into rigor mortis. Actually, it often becomes more beautiful. Practitioners stay in that state for hours, days and sometimes weeks. This is really quite common – in fact it is expected of people who have really done any kind of practice - that at the time of death they will at least go into a state of *tukdam*.

The clear light nature of the mind appears very powerfully at the time of death, and these practitioners have united completely with that, because they are already familiar with this clear light through their prior practice. They say it's like a son recognizing its mother. If we are not familiar then when the clear light nature of death arises, we are startled, and then we have lost it.

Anyway, the point is that ultimately most of this text is dealing with how to deal with the mind on a relative level – how to deal with our ordinary conceptual thoughts and responses and emotions under difficult circumstances. But then Thogmé suddenly comes up with this verse on the *ultimate* nature of the mind.

All that appears is the work of one's own mind.

This idea that people are hostile to us, are friendly to us, are saying nasty things about us or not being grateful for how kind we have been to them – ultimately it is all the work of our own mind It is all about how we see it. Our ordinary conceptual thinking narrows everything, puts everything into boxes. But the *nature* of the mind is far beyond all that - it cannot be put into a box. The nature of the mind is primordially *free* from conceptual limitations, just like space.

We need to recognize this nature, not just think about it. In fact we can't really think about the non-conceptual because that is still conceptual thinking. This is another point which we should remember - that it is very difficult to think about something which by its very nature is beyond thought.

Once I saw an interview with a Russian orthodox priest - and he said the first thing they were taught at the novitiate is that anything they say or think about God – it is not that. I thought 'right on', because even the unthinkable we try to put into

thoughts. This is why in Tibetan poetry they sometimes start by declaring *Emaho!* 'Oh – how fantastic! How wonderful!' That expresses the wonder- and then the rest is back to conceptual language as they try to express the inexpressible. After all they wrote book after book concerning the inexpressible and then more commentaries on top of that.

It is said to be like a dumb person talking about the taste of honey – they can't. We taste the honey, we know what honey tastes like, but - being mute- we have no language to describe it. Another example is a documentary about a film team who went to a small island somewhere where they grow cocoa beans. The people there grow cocoa beans which they sell to companies who make chocolate. They have never themselves tasted chocolate. They were puzzled because the companies pay quite a lot for these cocoa beans, so they had tried eating the beans but the beans were bitter and nasty. So the team asked, 'Well what do you think chocolate is?' 'I don't know but they say it's very nice; they say it's sweet and delicious'. Then the film crew gave these islanders some actual chocolate, and in the documentary, it showed their faces as for the first time they ate this delicious chocolate. Of course, they looked amazed, '*Oh that's what it's all about!*'. Now they knew for themselves. No need to say anything. The experience says it all.

So, it is like that, we can talk and talk about how sweet and creamy chocolate tastes but all the description has nothing to do with the taste of chocolate when we actually eat it.

And that is rather like the nature of mind. We can talk about it, but we are only using conceptual language - to talk about something beyond concepts. It is like the Zen saying about the finger pointing at the moon. People get very fascinated with the finger but it has got nothing to do with the moon. Nonetheless, if we follow the direction the finger is pointing – there is the moon.

So, all Buddhist practice is trying to direct us back to the ultimate nature of the mind – which is uncontrived and inexpressible. The Buddha hardly ever described Nirvana except by negatives. He didn't talk much about it because the experience is beyond words. If we start talking about something, the mind grasps on to it and then it thinks it actually *knows* because intellectually it can discuss. But we can analyze chocolate, study all the chemical formulae and investigate how it is made and what it looks like. But we can't really describe its actual taste. The only way to know it is to eat it and have the firsthand experience.

Therefore, this text spends a lot of time on dealing with our ordinary mind, the way it is now and how we can work with our mind skillfully. Then from time to time Thogmé just reminds us that our ordinary conceptual mind is not the ultimate - that there is something beyond. And this appears to make everything which was said before slightly irrelevant. But it is not completely irrelevant because, as said before, when my Lama wanted to give a final teaching to his Yogis he taught Lojong.

The two work together, like two wings of the bird – the wisdom aspect and the compassion/skillful means aspect. It is not that once we realize the empty luminous nature of the mind then we have to forget all this other training in compassion and patience. The two go together. But in case we start grasping on to the idea that this conventional mind training is the only thing we have to do, there comes the reminder that ultimately it is all empty. As the Prajñāparamita says, although we vow to

save countless sentient beings – actually there are no sentient beings to be saved. And because there are no sentient beings to be saved, we work to save them – and who are we to save them since we are not even sentient beings either!

There is always that play between the two, neither side is to be discarded, we keep them both like the wings of a bird. A bird can't fly with just one wing.

*23. When encountering objects which please us,
To view them like rainbows in summer,
Not ultimately real, however beautiful they appear,
And to relinquish craving and attachment,
is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

So continuing with the fact that things are not the way they appear to us, not only do we have to deal with unpleasant circumstances, we also have to be skillful in coping with pleasant appearances and circumstances. When we see something which displeases us, we react with anger and rejection. The text has been advising us how to deal with those situations. Now we are considering how to deal with things which are pleasing to us, so that we don't just grasp and get attached.

So therefore:

When encountering objects which please us

Again, there is nothing wrong with liking things which are beautiful. That is not the point. We see a beautiful rainbow and say, 'That's so beautiful!' But we don't grasp it or try to own it. It is not **my** rainbow and we know that in a few minutes it will be gone. We know that rainbows are made water moisture in the air and the sun reflecting through space in a certain direction. When all these causes and conditions come together a rainbow appears. We can never find it – we can see it is there, we can photograph it and yet it is ephemeral. It will last for as long as the causes and conditions come together – and when they are finished it will fade. We think it is very beautiful and we can appreciate it. In many cultures the appearance of a rainbow at certain times is regarded as being auspicious. But we don't try to possess it to show to just a few friends. We can't take out a copyright. A rainbow is there for everybody and part of its beauty is its ephemeral nature.

Likewise, we should try to view all pleasing objects as if they were like rainbows. They are not ultimately real. Although these objects may be beautiful and pleasing, we don't need to grasp or crave. We can just appreciate. 'How beautiful!' – and that is enough. Otherwise we are not the owners - the objects own us.

The kind of mind which sees something just with appreciation and joy is an innocent mind. However, when we get ideas of ownership and wanting to keep it for ourselves, thinking, 'This is mine' *That is* when the problem comes. Even if it is something which might be useful so we buy it, nonetheless we should recognize that everything in its nature is impermanent so we don't really *own* anything.

We may say 'This is *mine*' but ultimately what do we own? We don't even own selves, so how can we own anything else? How can we possess anyone else? At the end of life we leave it all behind anyway. Then what does it matter? It is this grasping mind which is the problem. Not beauty.

Objects are innocent. Objects are just themselves. They have not done anything. It is the aroused feelings in our avaricious minds which are the problem. It is not that we cannot appreciate things. It is not that we cannot delight in things. But, it is the next step which creates difficulties, where we reach out and say 'I have to have it now!' And once acquired it definitely becomes '*mine and belongs to me*'. That is always the problem – it is not the things but the people.

We know we should hold everything lightly. This doesn't mean we cannot own anything – but it means that we hold it all gently. We appreciate but we don't grasp. It is the grasping mind which causes a lot of pain.

So just as we have to deal skillfully with those things which cause us hurt and anger and upset, so likewise we have to also deal skillfully with those things which give us pleasure and delight and joy. We need to learn to hold everything lightly and gently and just let be as it is, allowing things to flow.

This is why generosity is a beautiful quality. Usually we hold on tightly to objects that we like. With generosity we can either hand it on to another – or maybe keep it – but without that grasping. Then everything becomes lighter – our whole life becomes much lighter. It is amazing how much we grasp at things. One minute it is just an object, next minute we've bought it, so now it is *mine* – and our attitude has changed completely.

For instance, if we are in an optician's shop and some glasses fall on the ground and break, then we feel indifferent. But when we discover it is *our* glasses that fell on the floor and broke "Oh no!!!!" – and we are upset, 'How could somebody have broken *my* glasses?'. As long as it is just glasses it doesn't matter – but when they are *my* glasses, then it is a whole different matter. It is just that little pronoun 'my'.

So, we should be more conscious. The first step is just to be aware – this is why mindfulness is very helpful. Because mindfulness makes us much more conscious of all this stupid thinking that goes on in our minds which we normally accept without examining. Gradually we become more conscious and more discriminating.

We carry our minds with us everywhere we go. Even if we went to Mars or Jupiter it is the same mind we take with us. This is the mind that we live with, we sleep with, we have chattering to us constantly. It is our most constant companion, staying with us the whole time. Therefore, doesn't it make sense to have a companion who is charming to live with? Would we want a friend who is endlessly complaining the whole time either about other people or telling us how useless we are and how we can't do anything right and are never going to achieve anything anyway? What kind of friend is that?

From that point of view, it would be helpful to make friends with our mind. Shantideva praises self-confidence as an indispensable aid for the bodhisattva path. Taming the mind is not only making the mind calm and focused but also friendly and amenable to being trained.

Here we are in our minds which we could think of like a room where usually the doors and the windows are kept closed. Many people live inwardly with the curtains drawn or shades down, so very little light comes in from outside. Meanwhile this mental room is endlessly filling up with lots and lots of junk: the garbage heap of other people's opinions that are constantly aired on television, through newspapers, books and

magazines – all this gets dumped in and just piles up in there. It is rarely sifted through and sorted. Almost nothing is ever thrown out. The mind just becomes like a great junk heap – and we live in the middle of a garbage pile. Never cleaning or dusting, never opening the door or the windows, never letting in fresh air..... and then we decide we are going to invite the Dalai Lama home for tea!

Now, if we are going to entertain His Holiness inside, we cannot invite him into a junk heap – so we have to start clearing out. We begin sifting through all this rubbish and deciding what is necessary and what is really not worthwhile keeping. We start throwing out. Open the doors, open the windows, *clean*. Throw out some of this garbage, ‘What am I doing with all this rubbish in my mind?’ Just useless! All these judgments, opinions, daydreams, memories a waste of time. Why am I regurgitating all this drama again and again?

One of the things discovered early on when we start watching our minds is how boring the mind can be. In the beginning it may seem interesting to observe our stream of thoughts but then it is like watching the same dull soap opera again and again – yet *another* rerun of Casablanca. Our minds are very repetitious, quite boring actually, most of the time. The mind rarely thinks up something fresh and new and exciting. Mostly it is just the same old material, repeated again and again. The same old grievances and memories: the happy memories, the sad memories; our opinions, ideas, plans, fantasies and fears. If we start to observe our mind, we see how unoriginal it usually is. Our ordinary conceptual mind is not really very bright. There is a lot of junk in there that could just as well be thrown out because His Holiness is coming.

Now, we start to clean away some of the grime and we begin to decorate with good thoughts, with beautiful thoughts, with original clear nice thinking. When our mental room is reasonably in order and looking more pleasant, then we can invite His Holiness in. This means we can invite wisdom into our hearts. We can invite wisdom and compassion to come and dwell within us. Actually, His Holiness - the Bodhisattva of Compassion - doesn't live outside, He lives within us and is the nature of who we really are.

The good news is that we are not this junk, we really are not, and we don't have to always live in a garbage pile. Because that is not our nature. We are all of us so much better than we give ourselves credit for. As the Buddha said, ‘If it was not possible to do this I would not ask you to do it. But because it is possible, I'm saying: do it!’. We don't just depend on external authority to encourage us. Of course, as with any skill we need guidance and teachers, but ultimately we ourselves must walk the path. At the end of the Guru Yoga practice, after praying to the Lama for blessings, we dissolve the Lama into ourselves, recognizing that their mind and our own mind are the same - like water poured into water.

So, we receive the outer formal direction in order to recognize that the true guide is always within us. We should not think that for the rest of our lives we need to always rely on external guidance. Take the word *Lama*. *La* means superior and *Ma* means mother, so a ‘superior mother’ – that is the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit word *Guru*.

When we are a little child, our mother takes care of us, trains

us, teaches us and brings us up. Without a mother it is very hard for a child. But, once we have become more an adult, if we still are always relying on Mummy to do everything for us and tell us what we should do... that was not a good mother. The mother should be training the child to become autonomous and independent. Even though as an adult we still love our mother, are very grateful and when we have a lot of problems we may go to our mother for her advice, but we don't depend on her for everything. A good mother does not encourage us to become more dependent on her and unable to make our own decisions. A superior mother is someone who trains her children to be good, responsible, intelligent and independent adults.

So it is likewise on the spiritual path. Yes, we need guidance –we need instruction, because we are spiritually children. But, at a certain point, as our understanding deepens, we begin to inwardly grow up and we need to start trusting our own inner wisdom. There is something within us that *knows*. Usually it is covered up by all our conceptual thinking. We are so busy talking to ourselves that we can't hear the voice of silence. Therefore, it is important to come back to our original wisdom –and trust our own innate knowledge.

While we are still children we rely on our mother and that is important. We shouldn't try to break away from mother too soon. For example, when I was about six years old, I had this idea when I travelled with my mother on the bus that I wanted to sit separately from her, to show I was independent. My mother always allowed me to sit by myself but, of course, she would be seated where she could keep an eye on me. Even though she allowed me to pretend I was separate and grown up, yet I knew that she was always there for me. However, in time there was a certain point when I really did want to be separate – and she let me go.

So likewise with gurus. While we are just spiritually children we need their guidance, we need their help, but nonetheless the good guru, the true Lama, is training their students not to remain endlessly dependent on the teacher but to learn how to rely on themselves – on their own inner wisdom. If we look at the histories of the great masters of the past, at some point they sent their disciples away. Like Milarepa was sent away by Marpa he was told to get on with it. Milarepa continued to pray to Marpa, but he didn't see him again except in occasional visions.

So be cautious of Lamas who always want to have their disciples around them forever and thirty years down the road they have still got all their old disciples – the same ones. The disciples can't make any decision without running to the Lama for his advice or consent. That sounds to me psychologically not very wholesome. Does the disciple need the Lama or does the Lama need the disciples?

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