On the Nature of Mind

Tenzin Gyatso, The Fourteeth Dalai Lama

From *Meditation on the Nature of Mind*
By Tenzin Gyatso, Khonton Peljor Lhundrub & Jose Ignacio Cabezon

Since my remarks today are mainly based on the texts of the Buddhist tradition, I want to begin with a verse of salutation to the Buddha composed by the Indian master Nagarjuna. Homage to Gautama, who, out of his compassion and mercy, taught the holy doctrine soas to eliminate all wrong views.

My brothers and sisters—and when I say "brothers and sisters," I really mean it! Especially at this moment in our history, we are in real need of such a warmhearted spirit. Our usual concept of "us" and "them" is outdated. In its place, we need an attitude that sees all human beings as our brothers and sisters, that considers others to be part of "us." Most of the problems that we confront day to day are essentially man-made. They are unnecessary. The natural problems of life are quite enough, so what point is there in creating additional problems for ourselves? Is this wise? Certainly not. All these man-made problems ultimately derive from dividing the world in this way: "us" versus "them." We think to ourselves, "We matter; they don't." As a result, we disregard the welfare of others, at times even exploiting and cheating them. That is why I always emphasize the need for a sense of global responsibility. It is foolish to think that the interests of six billion human beings are less important than one's own. Every one of us yearns for a happy life. No one deliberately works to create problems or suffering; each of us acts with the intention to bring about happier days. But because we focus on ourselves alone, caring little about others— because we operate out of an egoistic motivation—our actions become unrealistic. We act improperly, and as a result, all kinds of unwanted problems arise, created by ourselves alone. We therefore need a healthy and proper mental attitude. I think this is very important.

By now humanity has paid adequate attention to material development. Compare our preoccupation with our material well-being with the attention we pay to our minds. Our concern with inner development and inner values pales by comparison, doesn't it? Science and technology have brought us a multitude of material advances in the twentieth century; these advances have sometimes also brought us greater fear and anxiety. Today, at the outset of the twenty-first century, we must ask ourselves: Why have these material advances, which are meant to improve the lives of human beings, failed to bring us greater contentment? Happiness and joy are mental states, feelings. The same is true of sadness and pain. These are all states of mind. And yet, we neglect the mind. Because pain and pleasure are mental states, if we do not pay attention to our minds, then no matter how intent we may be to obtain pleasure and reduce pain, we will not succeed.

I have noticed over the years that some of my wealthier friends are among the most

unhappy people I know. It is true that the rich often have more friends—although whether these friends are friends of the wealthy or of their wealth is a different question! In any case, I have seen that even with their many friends, a wealthy person may be profoundly unhappy. The search for comfort in money and power is wrongheaded and simply does not work. The more effective way of dealing with our unhappiness is to pay attention to inner values, to the inner sciences of the mind. What do you think?

STUDYING THE MIND

All major religious traditions agree about one message: the message of love and compassion, the spirit of forgiveness and tolerance. With an awareness that negative actions bring about negative consequences, the major religions also teach us to practice self-discipline. The practice of self-discipline brings us greater contentment—even someone with a strictly materialist perspective can recognize this. These basic ethical guidelines and the teaching to love one's neighbor are found in all traditions.

Loving kindness and compassion are mental qualities. By training in them, we try to reduce anger, hatred, fear, and suspicion—negative, destructive emotions that are also a part of the mind. These two things—the positive mental attitudes that bring us joy and the destructive emotions that lead to pain— are things we experience with our minds. All the major religions teach us that we should practice a method to improve our minds. In this regard, they are the same.

There are also differences between religious traditions, of course. Some religions are theistic, others nontheistic. Theistic religions emphasize the importance of faith in a creator God. Note that faith is also a mental state, or experience. That is the basic approach of theism. Nontheistic religions such as Jainism, Buddhism, and a subschool of the ancient Indian Samkhya tradition propound something like "self-creation" based on the law of causality: cause and effect. Nontheistic religions ultimately believe that we ourselves are the creator. Naturally, this creator cannot be the body. The body is important as the basis of mind: for example, the human body is the basis of human mind, and we distinguish different types of sentient beings—animals and so on—on the basis of their different bodies. And sensory consciousnesses are entirely based on physiology. But ultimately, physical actions and speech—that is, verbal actions—are driven by motivations. And when we are dealing with motivations, we are of course dealing with a nonsensory level of mind.

According to the law of causality, everything that we experience—whether pleasant or unpleasant—is ultimately linked to our motivation, to our minds. Thus, in order to live a happy and joyful life, we have to take care of our minds; we have to cultivate the right types of motivation. In order to reduce or to overcome suffering, we have to deal with our negative or destructive emotions, the ultimate causes of unwanted consequences, like pain. For this reason, nontheistic traditions place special emphasis on the mind.

Naturally, logically, to effectively deal with the mind, we must have a thorough knowledge

of what the mind is. This thing we call “mind” or “consciousness” is very complex. There are many different types of mental events that constitute it: thousands upon thousands. Many of these are destructive emotions. The only way to deal with these destructive emotions is through the mind itself—not through wealth, or injections, or surgery, but only through mental measures. Drugs and alcohol cannot reduce anger or hatred. True, sometimes when we are experiencing a great deal of inner turmoil, like anger, a pill may help us to sleep, and the next morning the anger is slightly weaker. But basically, the only way to effectively deal with negative or destructive emotions, the only way to really reduce them, is through the mind, through the application of counteractive mental states that oppose the negative emotions affecting us. First, we must understand the counteractive agent, or antidote, to be applied, and then we need to slowly increase its power. That is the only real, long-term way to reduce negative emotions. Another way of saying it is that to effectively reduce destructive emotions we need to increase the power of constructive emotions. But again, this requires that we understand the mind— that we have the ability to discern which thoughts are ultimately destructive and which are ultimately constructive.

This brings us to a big question: Is it even possible to eliminate destructive emotions? In order to answer that question we have to know what is the ultimate nature of mind—what is the basis of all these destructive emotions. For we can only determine the possibility of eliminating destructive emotions by gaining some sense of the mind’s true nature. That is why the Buddhist texts contain so much information about the emotions and about the mind generally.

LEVELS OF MIND

The tantras explain methods of manipulating the subtle physiology of the body—the channels, energies, and drops that parallel our gross nervous system. These tantric techniques are the means that allow practitioners access to successively more subtle levels of mind. This discussion is explicitly found only in the tantric texts. For example, at this very moment, it is our sensory consciousness that is fully functioning, that is most active. While our senses— our sight, hearing, and so on—are operating, thoughts are also flowing, but sensory consciousness dominates during the ordinary waking state. When we dream, however, sensory consciousness no longer functions; only thought— another, more subtle level of mind— operates during the dream state. Then, during deep sleep, sleep without dreaming, there is another, deeper level of consciousness or mind that operates. And when someone faints, at which point even the breath may stop, another, still deeper level of mind is experienced. Finally, at the time of death, all physiological processes cease in an instant: the heart stops beating, the blood stops circulating in the brain, and so forth. The neurons then cease to function, and with the cessation of the body’s grosser physical functioning, all grosser levels of mind come to a halt as well. What we ordinarily know as the human mind is no longer active. It stops. The only indication that a more subtle level of mind is still present is the fact that the bodies of some individuals remain fresh even after they have been declared clinically dead.

Let me give you some examples. The physical body of my own senior tutor remained very fresh, in the way just mentioned, even after he had been dead for thirteen days. And about a year or so ago, the body of another senior Tibetan lama, the former throne holder of Ganden, remained fresh for almost three weeks after he had died. As soon as I heard that this master's body was remaining in this naturally fresh state, I asked a medical center in Dharamsala, the village in northern India where I live, to carry out an investigation. This medical center had a simple machine for measuring brain activity. They sent a team with the machine and placed electrodes on the lama's head. Although a very detailed analysis of the results of these tests has yet to be completed, it seems that even a few days after he had been declared clinically dead, some very weak electrical signals could be detected in this lama's brain. This, I was told, is very unusual. We believe that these findings indicate that the lama's innermost subtle mind was still present and having some measurable influence on the body. This state of mind—the mind that is present at the time of death—is what we call the most subtle consciousness. In any case, the broader point is that there are many levels of mind.

The Abhidharmakosha, or Treasury of Knowledge, written by the fourth-century Indian Buddhist master Vasubandhu, explains how various moments of consciousness give rise to one another: how, for example, there can be transitions from virtuous states of mind to neutral ones, then to nonvirtuous ones, and so forth. Vasubandhu speaks about the death process in the context of this discussion. He explains that at the moment of death, consciousness can be virtuous, nonvirtuous, or neutral depending upon the individual and his or her particular situation. However, the Abhidharmasamuccaya, or Compendium of Knowledge, written by Vasubandhu's half-brother Asanga, explains that the subtle consciousness at the time of death is neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous but instead neutral. This suggests that Asanga considers the subtle consciousness at the moment of death to be more subtle. He explains that while the rougher levels of consciousness can be either virtuous or nonvirtuous, the more subtle level of consciousness at the time of death can be neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous and can only be neutral.

The tantric texts explain that through the practice of inner yoga, through meditation, one can transform that subtlest consciousness at the moment of death from a neutral state into a virtuous one, but that the subtlemost level of mind can never change into a nonvirtuous mental state. The point here is that nonvirtuous states of mind can only operate during the time that the "eighty types of conceptual thoughts," the grosser levels of consciousness, are operating. As the mind shuts down, the eighty types of conceptual thoughts cease, and through a process known as the four emptinesses, the most subtle mind manifests. Nonvirtuous thoughts cease at this stage. This means that nonvirtuous mental states are only found when the grosser levels of consciousness are active. Nonetheless, the most subtle level of consciousness, also known as the primordial innate mind, can be transformed from a neutral into a virtuous state of mind. Notice this difference: using the special methods of tantra, the most subtle level of mind can be transformed into a virtuous state, but the subtlest mind can never change into a nonvirtuous mental state.

BASIS, PATH, AND RESULT

For the reasons just explained, in order to gain a complete understanding of the mind, it is necessary to include the perspective of the tantric texts, of the Vajrayana. In one of the most important such texts, the Guhyasamaja Tantra, there is an explanation of the meaning of the word tantra. In that work, tantra is explained to mean "continuum." The Guhyasamaja further states that there are three types of continuums: (1) the continuum that is the basis, (2) the causal continuum, in which one applies various methods, and (3) the resultant continuum that is achieved using those methods. Consciousness therefore has three levels: one that is the basis, one in which we are tackling the mind so as to purify it, and the third level that is the result of dealing with mind, the state in which the mind has been completely purified. The first level corresponds to our present reality. I consider science to be the explanation of this ordinary reality. The second is an explanation of the techniques that we must apply, the method. This is Buddhist philosophy, involving Buddhist concepts. The third is the result.

These three understandings of the word tantra found in the Guhyasamaja —as basis, path, and result—are similar to the structure of the Buddha's first sermon on the four noble truths. When the Buddha first started to teach—when he taught or "turned" what we call the first wheel of the doctrine—he did so in three "repetitions," or, we might say, from three perspectives. In the first instance, he taught the actual nature of the four noble truths: the truths of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path leading to that cessation. In the second round, the Buddha explained the function of the four noble truths: what is to be abandoned and what is to be actualized—that suffering must be recognized, the origin of suffering must be eliminated, the cessation of suffering must be actualized, and the path must be cultivated. In the third round, or repetition, he explained the result that is obtained through that knowledge. We can see, therefore, that even in the first public sermon on the four noble truths, the Buddha presents, first, a theory of the nature of reality; second, the system of practice to be followed, the application of that knowledge; and third, the result achieved through the practice of the path. I usually considerthe Buddhist teachings to be of three types. The first is the Buddhist theory of reality, what I call "Buddhist science." The second, Buddhist philosophy, is based on the Buddhist theory of reality, on Buddhist science. Finally, there is Buddhist religion: because it is possible for us to eliminate all negative emotions—to achieve such a result—it is worthwhile to engage in practice.

In Khöntön Peljor Lhündrub's text, we find a similar presentation. His work has three major sections. The first is an analysis of the fundamental ground of the mind, and how one goes about identifying the innate primordial state. That corresponds to understanding the nature of reality. In his second major subdivision, he explains how, having been introduced to that reality, one puts this understanding into practice. Then in the third section, he explains how the levels of realization and experience arise on the basis of that practice.

THE DIALOGUE WITH SCIENCE

For more than twenty years now, we have had some serious discussions, or seminars, with scientists. These have taken the form of dialogues—what we might call "exercises in mutual learning." These conversations have focused on four fields: subatomic physics (such as quantum physics), cosmology, neurobiology, and psychology. The dialogue with quantum physics is really quite interesting, for there are many similarities between ideas held by Buddhists for over two thousand years and the latest findings of modern physicists.

Buddhist cosmology is basically the same as Western cosmology. However, in some Buddhist texts we find descriptions of the world that are obviously outdated: assertions, for example, that the world is flat, with a mountain called Meru at its center, and so forth. Because different Buddhist texts put forward different cosmological theories, Buddhists, in a sense, are at liberty to choose which of these theories they accept. In any case, as regards the physical universe, Buddhists can learn many things from modern science. It is really worthwhile for us to listen to what scientists have to say about cosmology and to study under them.

Next we come to neurobiology, the science that investigates the relationship between mental processes and the pattern of electrical activity in the neurons of the brain. Buddhists, particularly those who follow the Vajrayana, claim that mind and energy are related. Given this claim, it is quite interesting to investigate how the emotions function electrophysiologically at the neuronal level. As I have said, as far as the physical world is concerned, modern science is generally much more advanced. So it is very useful for us to learn from scientists. But the connection between neurons and consciousness is still not very clear. Here, some Buddhist explanations and experiences—some of the experiences of practitioners—may help us to gain a clearer picture about these relationships.

Some of my scientist friends provided us with the simple equipment to test the dying master I mentioned earlier. I think we waited for almost ten years for someone to die, in this particularly significant way, after the equipment became available. Before the machine was available, there had been quite a few occasions when such masters died, but there was no machine! Finally, last year, the two coincided. In any case, such projects where Buddhists and scientists engage in cooperative research ventures are both interesting and potentially fruitful avenues for investigating the functioning of the mind and its relation to bodily processes.

As regards the modern science of psychology, some refer to it as a "soft" science. This gives me the impression that psychology is still very young, that it is still in its infancy. The ancient Indian science of mind, by comparison, seems much more advanced. And, in fact, there is a lot of information in the Indian sciences of the mind that may be useful to modern scientists. In ancient Indian thought, for more than two or three thousand years, a distinction has been made between "sensory" and "mental" consciousness. In the course of our meetings with scientists, however, it became clear that contemporary psychology does not seem to clearly distinguish between the sensory level of experience and the mental level of experience. Such a distinction is very important. Sensory consciousness is intimately

related to the body. As I mentioned earlier, gross mental consciousness is also related to the physical constituents of the body. But as the mental consciousness gets more and more subtle, there is more and more autonomy from the body. The states of mind that motivate behavior are not sensory in nature; here we are dealing with a strictly mental level of experience. In order to understand the function and operation of this mental level, which is really what determines a lot of our experiences of the world—our happiness and unhappiness, what is helpful and what is harmful—it is not sufficient simply to focus our observation and studies on the sensory level of experience.

In my meetings and discussions with scientists, my aim is always mutual understanding. I am not seeking from science some sort of backing for Buddhism. It is simply that on certain topics not much information is to be found in Buddhist science. In this case, it is helpful to learn from our scientific colleagues. On the other hand, Buddhist and ancient Indian thought is quite rich as far as the science of mind is concerned. In this case, it is natural that we share with scientists our understanding, some information that may give them a new perspective.

NALANDA: THE SOURCE OF THE TIBETAN BUDDHIST TRADITION

Tibetan Buddhism is not the invention of Tibetans. Rather, it is quite clear that it derives from the pure lineage of the tradition of Nalanda Monastery in India, an institution founded at the beginning of the Common Era. The master Nagarjuna hailed from this institution, as did many other important philosophers and logicians. Although Tibetans became interested in Buddhism and began to study it as early as the seventh century, Buddhism did not really take hold in Tibet until a century later. A sound basis for Buddhism, the systematic establishment of Buddhist study and practice, therefore begins only in the eighth century. Two important Indian masters came to Tibet at this time at the invitation of the Tibetan emperor Trisong Detsen: Guru Padmasambhava and Shantarakshita.

Shantarakshita, who was very well known even in India, was mainly responsible for the exoteric teachings and giving monastic ordination. He was a great master, one of the great scholars of Nalanda Monastery. Shantarakshita was not only a scholar of Madhyamaka or Middle Way philosophy. His writings are still available to Tibetans in translation, and from these we can glean that he was a remarkable logician as well as a great Madhyamaka philosopher. So naturally, as one of the top scholars and one of the greatest practitioners of his day, a great monk of Nalanda, he can be considered the individual chiefly responsible for introducing the Buddhadharma to Tibet. Naturally, when the teacher is a philosopher or logician, he wants his students to follow this same trajectory. This makes sense; it is logical, is it not? Given that Buddhism was introduced into Tibet by one of the great scholars of Nalanda, it makes sense to say that the Tibetan tradition has basically followed the Nalanda tradition up to the present day. This is very clear.

When I myself began my scholarly studies of the tradition at a young age, I began by memorizing the root texts of that Nalanda tradition. In my own case, during this early

period of my life, when I was a child of six or seven years of age, I had no real interest in Buddhism or in acquiring knowledge. I am sometimes considered the reincarnation of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, but I wonder whether this is so. You see, when I was young, when I started learning these texts by heart, I had no real interest in them. I was a very reluctant student. My only interest was in playing. For this reason my tutor had to keep a whip by his side! In those days my elder brother and I—we were both monks—studied together. My tutor kept two whips. One whip was an ordinary whip, and one whip was a special, yellow whip. The yellow whip was considered a "holy" whip: the whip to be used on the holy person of the Dalai Lama. But as you can imagine, just because the whip was holy doesn't mean the pain was holy. I think the pain was the same! In any case, during those early years I continued my study of these texts, but out of fear.

All of us who have been trained in the classical, Tibetan tradition have studied these same texts, texts that we learned by heart. All of these root texts were written by the masters of Nalanda: Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Arya Asanga, Vasubandhu, and so forth. Of course, alongside the root texts, we also study commentaries. There are many Indian and Tibetan commentaries, and we also read these works, but the fundamental texts all come from Nalanda. And even when the Tibetan commentaries wish to prove some important point, they always quote the texts of one or another of the well-known Indian masters. So the influence of the Nalanda tradition on Tibet is very clear.

The other major figure responsible for introducing Buddhism into Tibet was, of course, Padmasambhava. He was chiefly responsible for introducing the tantric methods, the Vajrayana. The Tibetan canon has a section called the Tengyur that consists of some two hundred volumes. These are the texts written by various Indian masters that were translated into Tibetan. Among these works, quite a number are tantric texts or commentaries written under the names of Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, and many other teachers associated with Nalanda. Therefore, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition —both the sutra and tantric traditions— comes from the lineage of Nalanda.

Tibetan Buddhism is a complete form of Buddhism. The Vinaya, or "Discipline," is the first of the three scriptural collections known as the three baskets (Tripitaka). The Tibetan texts belonging to the Vinaya are primarily based on texts like those found in the Pali canon. The two remaining baskets of the teachings are the Sutra Basket, the "Collection of Discourses," and the Abhidharma, or "Higher Knowledge." Texts belonging to these two baskets are also found in Pali, but those that were translated into Tibetan were primarily Sanskrit texts. In any case, the broader point is that the Tibetan canon contains teachings from all of the major strands of Indian Buddhism. This is what makes it a complete form of Buddhism.

MIND ACCORDING TO THE DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM

As I have said, a complete form of Buddhism was introduced and took hold in Tibet in the eighth century, during the so-called Early Translation Period. The Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism dates to this time. From the ninth through the eleventh centuries the

Buddhadharma in Tibet went through a turbulent and difficult period. During this time, the Tibetan empire became decentralized, and Tibet became splintered into smaller kingdoms. After that, in the early part of the eleventh century, there begins the Sarma, or New Translation Period. This was the heyday of the translator Rinchen Zangpo and the time when the Indian master Atisha came to Tibet. It is during this second period of the dissemination of Buddhism that the other Tibetan traditions—for example, the Kadam, the Kagyü, and the Sakya schools—arose. The Gelug school was founded later. Each of these schools is itself a complete form of Buddhism. This means that each of these lineages contains the teachings of all the vehicles, including the Vajrayana, or tantric teachings.

To give an example of this completeness, consider the Nyingma school. The Nyingma tradition speaks of nine yanas, or "vehicles." These nine vehicles are grouped into three groups of three. The first three are the nontantric "vehicles that focus on the cause of suffering":

(1) the vehicle of the disciples, or shravakas,
(2) the vehicle of the self-enlightened ones, or pratyekabuddhas, and
(3) the great vehicle, the Mahayana, also known as the vehicle of the bodhisattvas. The second set of three, known as the "vehicles that emphasize Vediclike asceticism," are also known as the outer tantras. These are
(4) the kriya, or "action," tantra,
(5) the upa tantra, and
(6) the yoga tantra. Then, finally, there are the three "vehicles that focus on the methods of powerful transformation," also known as the inner tantras: the
(7) maha, or "great,"
(8) anu, "high," and
(9) ati, "pinnacle." The ati is also known as Dzogchen, the "great perfection."

We can see from this system of nine vehicles that a complete form of Buddhism is preserved in the Nyingma school. Dzogchen chiefly focuses on the primordial innate mind known as rigpa, or "awareness," also sometimes referred to as Samantabhadra, the "All Good." Dzogchen contains unique methods that allow the adept to distinguish between what the tradition calls "ordinary mind," sem, and "primordial awareness," rigpa. In other contexts, even ordinary mind is said to be infused with a kind of awareness. But when distinguishing between sem and rigpa, rigpa refers to gnosis or wisdom. Ordinary mental states are more adventitious, more temporary; by nature, they fluctuate. Rigpa is devoid of such fluctuation; it is ever-present and unchanging, with neither beginning nor end. So Dzogchen draws a distinction between these two kinds of minds. The Dzogchen tradition is itself quite diverse. It has many different classes or levels of teaching— for example, the three cycles of Dzogchen teachings: the cycle of mind, the cycle of space, and the cycle of instructions. Rigpa awareness, or Samantabhadra, is a primordially enlightened state, a quality of buddhahood that we all possess from beginningless time.

However, this primordial quality of buddhahood is obscured by adventitious mental factors,

our afflictions and other thought processes. Through practice, this primordial quality of buddhahood manifests. That is why, when all of the adventitious stains are cleansed, one is said to become re-awakened or re- enlightened. This is analogous to an idea found in the nontantric, Perfection of Wisdom teachings, where the nature of one's mind is referred to as natural nirvana—a state of natural, complete, and perfect nirvana that exists from beginningless time. This natural nirvana serves as the basis for the possibility of attaining the initial state of emancipation called nirvana with residue, and ultimately nirvana without residue, the final elimination of the afflictions and other obscurations in the state of enlightenment. If there were no natural nirvana, then actual nirvana would be impossible. Similarly, in Dzogchen teachings, the primordial buddhahood that we all possess is what allows for the possibility of achieving the re- awakened state, the re-attainment of buddhahood.

The nine vehicles of the Nyingma school are generally taught as a way of classifying the teachings of the Buddha. But there is a wonderful tradition where the nine vehicles are taught as different stages to be practiced by a single individual who is progressing along the spiritual path. In this more practice- oriented explanation of the nine vehicles, the meditation on the four noble truths constitutes the practice of the disciple's vehicle, the first of the nine vehicles. When the doctrine of the four noble truths is further elaborated— when the causal relationship between suffering and its origin and between cessation and the path are enlarged upon —this leads to the twelve links of dependent origination, both in their forward order (beginning with ignorance and ending with old age and death) and in reverse order. The twelve links constitute the main practice of the pratyekabuddhas, the self-enlightened ones; this is the second of the nine vehicles. Then the adept moves on to train in the generation of bodhichitta, the altruistic awakening mind, and to the practice of the six perfections, which includes shamatha, or calm abiding, and vipashyana or insight.

Here the practitioner is implementing the teachings of the bodhisattva vehicle, the causal vehicle of the perfections, which is the third vehicle. With this grounding, one then moves on to the next level, the practice of tantra, and specifically to deity yoga, where one visualizes either oneself in the form of a deity or a deity external to oneself who bestows blessings, powers, and so forth. Either way, it is through the practice of deity yoga that one progresses through the next three vehicles: kriya, upa, and yoga. Throughout these stages, one's practice of deity yoga becomes more and more clear. These so-called generation-stage practices are perfected in the maha yoga, at which point one moves on to the subtle energy practices of the anu yoga. At this point one has reached the stage of manipulating the energies within the channels of the body. When one reaches the great perfection, or ati yoga, one works to realize rigpa awareness. In this way, each stage serves as a prerequisite to the next, and together the nine vehicles comprise a holistic approach to practice in the spiritual life of a single individual.

Such an approach, where a vast body of literature is taken as individual instructions for practice, is also possible, for example, in regard to the Seven Treasuries of Longchenpa. I normally recommend that those who wish to practice Dzogchen proceed by first studying Longchenpa's Treasury of Philosophical Tenets, to follow that with study of his Treasury of the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel, and then to move to his Mind at Ease, part of his so-called Trilogy on Being at Ease. There is a custom of engaging in the study and practice of this latter text over a period of 145 days. From that point one proceeds to Longchenpa's Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle and then to his Treasury of the Ultimate Expanse. This represents a very

systematic and holistic approach to the study of Dzogchen.

My more general point here is that it is very important to have an overall understanding of the basic framework of the Buddhist path. Of course, some fortunate individuals with positive karmic imprints from previous lives may be able to generate spiritual realization spontaneously by way of a tailored instruction from an experienced master. Such individuals are called "exceptional." But generally, for most practitioners, it is better to have this broad understanding of the structure of the whole Buddhist path and to engage in specific practices on the basis of that understanding.

Next we come to the Kagyü school. The Kagyü lineage mainly comes from the Indian master Naropa and his student Marpa, an eleventh-century Tibetan master. Marpa received teachings from many Indian masters; in particular, his main source for the Madhyamaka, or Middle Way, teachings is the Indian master Maitripa. It is quite clear that Maitripa follows the Madhyamaka view of Chandrakirti. One of the key teachings of the Kagyü tradition is Mahamudra, the "great seal." Mahamudra is of two types: a strictly sutra variety and a tantric variety. Sutra Mahamudra refers to the Madhyamaka view, to the meditation on emptiness, the lack of intrinsic existence. We find a reference to the Madhyamaka view as a "seal" even in the sutra teachings known as the four seals that characterize a view as being Buddhist: that all compounded things are impermanent, and so forth. The special or "uncommon" Mahamudra, however, is the tantric form, in which the subtle mind of clear light is generated using tantric techniques. One of the so-called six Dharmas of Naropa is a meditation on the clear light. The cultivation of this practice is what is called tantric Mahamudra. Here, it is principally the primordial innate mind mentioned above that brings about the essence of yogic insight, the essence of the path.

The Sakya tradition traces its lineage of instructions to the Indian master Virupa. The key instruction of the Sakya school is known as the Lamdré, the "path and its result." These Lamdré teachings, which are tantric teachings belonging to the highest yoga tantra class, are elaborated chiefly based on the Hevajra Tantra. The Lamdré instructions are taught using a framework known as the three appearances and the three tantras. The three appearances are (1) the appearances related to afflicted mental states, (2) the impure appearances, and (3) the pure appearances that belong to yogis. These three appearances correspond to the sutra teachings found in the first three vehicles of the Nyingma school: the vehicles of the disciples, self- enlightened ones, and bodhisattvas. The latter includes the teachings on the altruistic mind of enlightenment (bodhichitta). The Sakya Lamdré system does not contain specific teachings that correspond to the next three vehicles of the Nyingma school: the kriya, upa, and yoga. Instead, being a type of practice that belongs to the highest yoga tantra class, the next section of the Lamdré teachings corresponds to the maha, anu, and ati vehicles of the Nyingma school. This is a very important point: the three tantras of the Lamdré system correspond to the three meanings of the word tantra explained in the Guhyasamaja Tantra and mentioned earlier. In the Lamdré, they are called (1) the causal tantra, (2) the tantra as method, and (3) the tantra as result.

All of us already possess within us the causal tantra, or the "tantra that serves as the basis." This causal tantra is essentially what the Dzogchen texts refer to as rigpa awareness, or Samantabhadra. What the Sakya school calls the awakening of the cause is equivalent to what the Nyingma calls the identification of rigpa awareness. Although there are undoubtedly some differences in the way that the Sakya and Nyingma traditions explain the way this basic mind is to be identified, in the end, the ultimate intention of these two schools, the key point of these teachings, is the same. The causal tantra is what is to be identified, and it is to be identified on the basis of one's own experience. In the Sakya Lamdré system, the causal tantra is also referred to as kunzhi, the "basis, or foundation, of all things."

How does one come to a realization of this causal tantra? If memory serves me, one of the texts of Sakya Pandita, a great master of the Sakya tradition, provides an explanation of this point. Sakya Pandita states that as thoughts pass through the mind, between one thought and the next, the continuum of clear light, the basic mind, is uninterrupted. Generally speaking, there are two levels of thought: rough and subtle. The subtle type of thought found between one thought and the next is not identical to gnosis or wisdom. Nonetheless, identifying the basic mind, found in the interstices between thoughts, is important. It is also a practice found in both the Gelug and the Kagyü traditions of Mahamudra. In the Mahamudra teachings one identifies this basic mind by ceasing to dwell on the past and by stopping the train of thought that anticipates the future. In this way one halts all thoughts of past and future as soon as they begin to arise. Having done so, one remains in the present moment of consciousness, a state of mind that is fresh and uncontrived. When one achieves this, one has reached the subtle level of thought. This is precisely what is meant by subtle thought.

In Dzogchen, when one really identifies rigpa awareness, or Samantabhadra, one is said to have "apprehended the Dharma body." This is also called "distinguishing between the consciousness that is the basis of all and gnosis." Now when one has reached the subtle level of mind found between thoughts, one has not yet reached this state of pure rigpa awareness spoken of in Dzogchen—the kind of rigpa that distinguishes between the consciousness that is the basis of all and gnosis. Nonetheless, even in Dzogchen there is a practice analogous to remaining in the present moment. According to Dza Patrül Rinpoché's Three Words that Hit the Mark, by making an effort to repeatedly remain at the level of subtle thought, one achieves a special state of wonderment that is transparent and free of cogitation. This state, completely unaffected by thought, is a gentle resting in the present, uncontrived, self-arisen mind. According to Dzogchen, it is on the basis of this state that one truly identifies rigpa. The full identification of rigpa is then accomplished by receiving special blessings while one remains in such a state. In the nomenclature of the Sakya Lamdré system, the identification of the causal tantra, the basis of all, is a similarly subtle state of mind. Although this is not the actual primordial innate mind of clear light, the mind of clear light is intimately related to this state.

Various different types of rigpa are mentioned in the Dzogchen tradition: (1) rigpa as

nature, (2) rigpa as the basis, and (3) the energy or effulgent expression of rigpa, called rigpé tsel. One also finds a distinction between "awareness itself," pure rigpa, and the "awareness that exists within consciousness," or rigshé. All ordinary, adventitious thoughts are said to be the "expressions of, or the effulgent manifestations of, awareness," rigpé tsel; and everything that is an "expression of awareness" is pervaded through and through by rigshé. When adventitious thoughts, like the afflicted emotions, manifest in our minds, since these are the expressions of rigpa, they are pervaded by rigshé. Because they are pervaded by, or infused with rigshé, even when the type of afflicted thought that possesses an object appears within the mind of the yogi, without following the object of that thought, without allowing the mind to be swayed by that object, the yogi, through the power of his or her experience, focuses on the ultimate, clear-light nature of the afflicted thought itself, and without having to abandon the affliction, rests within that state. This is by no means easy to achieve, but it is possible. In the terminology of the Sakya Lamdré system, first one identifies the rough form of the causal tantra, the basis of all, which is the subtle level of thought. Then, based on that, one applies the yogic techniques of meditation, which roughly corresponds to the next of the Lamdré's stages, the tantra as method, or in the nomenclature of the Guhyasamaja system, the tantra as path. Finally, through the yogic practice of the path, one achieves the tantra as result, which is the Dharma body. Hence, parallels can be drawn between Dzogchen and the Sakya Lamdré system.

The tantra in general explains that one generates the meditational deity out of the realization of emptiness. This is true in all four classes of tantra: (1) action (kriya) tantra, (2) performance (charya) tantra, (3) yoga tantra, and (4) highest yoga tantra. But in highest yoga tantra, the mind that realizes emptiness is special. It is not a rough, ordinary mind. Instead, when one practices highest yoga tantra, one should possess a strong conviction that this mind, the mind out of which the deity is generated, is the primordial innate mind of clear light. To have such conviction, it is not enough to simply recite some words as part of a ritual. Rather, one must make the clear light appear within the mind, and—with a conviction that it is this primordial innate mind that is realizing emptiness— one achieves calm abiding and insight. Hence, the process of generating the deity out of emptiness is quite different in the lower tantras and in highest yoga tantra. In highest yoga tantra, one generates the deity out of the primordial innate mind of clear light.

When one reaches the dzogrim or completion stage of highest yoga tantra, one additionally resorts to practices involving the manipulation of the energy and drops within the channels of the subtle body. As a result of this practice, the grosser levels of mind wane or "dissolve." As the rougher, ordinary mind-energies become inactive, the subtler ones become active. The perspective of Dzogchen is somewhat different. In that system, because the ordinary, grosser levels of mind-energy are pervaded by rigshé even when ordinary thoughts are fully active, when these thoughts are made the object of the yogi's experience, it is possible to identify the quality of pure awareness in a natural way, without having to resort to completion-stage techniques. But according to the New Translation schools—the Sakya, Kagyü, and Gelug traditions—the subtle levels of mind- energy cannot be accessed while the ordinary, grosser ones are active. According to those schools, the clear- light mind only

manifests after the rougher levels of consciousness have ceased. That is why the new schools emphasize the practice of the channels, energies, and drops.

The Sakya school speaks of the "union of clarity and emptiness." Clarity is the defining characteristic (Tib. ngowo) of the mind; emptiness is its nature (rangzhin). Their union, the union of clarity and emptiness, is ineffable, beyond words. Now the causal tantra, the basis of all, contains everything within it; it contains samsara, nirvana, and the spiritual paths.

How, precisely, does it contain everything? How, for example, does it contain samsara? When we speak of samsara, we must remember that we are dealing with the mindstates of ordinary beings, beings who are still in training. In this context, the causal tantra, the basis of all, contains every phenomenon that exists in samsara "by virtue of the fact that it gives the world the characteristics that it has." And this is so because it is this causal tantra that causes the world to manifest, to appear the way it does. Next, the causal tantra is said to contain all of the realizations of the paths "by virtue of the good qualities it brings about."

For example, the more one deepens one's faith, increases one's understanding of emptiness, or strengthens the practice of deity yoga, the more good qualities arise. These practices transform one. That is why the causal tantra is said to contain all the paths "by virtue of the good qualities it brings about." Finally, the causal tantra is said to contain all attainments "by virtue of the fact that it has the potential to create or generate those attainments."

Because everything is contained within the causal tantra, the basis of all, samsara and nirvara are inseparable. This inseparability of samsara and nirvana is another fundamental tenet of the Sakya Lamdré system. Perhaps this is as good a place as any to pause and take some questions.

Questions

Question: Is there some reason to prefer meditation on the nature of mind to meditation on anything else: for example, meditation on the nature of self or external phenomena?

His Holiness: The reason for emphasizing the mind is mainly to be found in tantra. As I mentioned earlier, everything ultimately depends on our motivation, and motivation is part of the mind. That is why, for example, the seventh-century Buddhist scholar Chandrakirti states:

> It has been taught that this very mind is what creates the extreme diversity
> Found in the universe of sentient beings and in their environments.
> All beings, without exception, arise from karma.
> When mind has been abandoned, then karma ceases to exist.

All of the major concepts we have been discussing—the union of clarity and emptiness, the indivisibility of awareness and emptiness, the union of bliss and emptiness—involve an

identical type of emptiness. This emptiness is no different from the emptiness of a pot or the emptiness of a sprout. Nonetheless, in tantra, the quality of the agent that is realizing the emptiness of mind—the clarity of this experience, and the way in which this mind is indivisible from its object, from emptiness—is quite different from what it is in the sutra teachings. In tantra, it is as if something's own essence were manifesting as its own realization. This can only take place when one takes the ultimate nature of mind as one's object, culminating in an indivisibility of awareness and emptiness. This is why the Indian master Aryadeva states that it is extremely important to realize the ultimate nature, or reality, of the mind, for it is the mind that is the root of samsara and nirvana. This is the way it is explained from a tantric perspective.

From a sutra perspective, it is generally said that because there is a difference in the quality of the object, one begins by meditating on the lack of self, or emptiness, of the person, because it is easier to understand the emptiness of the person than it is to understand the emptiness of phenomena. However, from the perspective of highest yoga tantra, the realization of the ultimate nature of mind must come first.

When we do certain tantric rituals, we sometimes recite a mantra: Om shunyata jñana vajra svabhava atmako ham. In this mantra, the word svabhava, which means "essence," is referring to the fact that the reality being meditated upon is the very essence, or nature, of the agent doing the meditation. The svabhava in this first mantra is different from the svabhava in another important mantra: Om svabhava shuddha sarva dharma svabhava shuddho ham. In that latter mantra, no reference is being made to reality as the essence of the agent who is meditating.

Question: I'm wondering if Your Holiness thinks it is more difficult for Americans to focus their minds and to reach enlightenment? We are a culture that thrives on stimulation, excitement, pleasure, and doing everything very quickly. I think that meditation and centering oneself is extremely difficult in American society. Do you think it would be easier for Americans if we lived in a country with a slower pace, where people took more time to be present in their daily life?

His Holiness: Basically, I don't think there is a great deal of difference. It does not matter much whether one is Asian or Western. In fact, some of my American friends, who have spent many years in meditation, have obtained quite amazing results. These are Americans and not Tibetans! This shows that we are all basically the same. We all have the same human mind. It is true that external influences—one's surroundings and so forth—are important, but ultimately the nature of mind itself is more important.

Each and every one of us has the same potential, the same mental quality. That is what I feel. However, if you, the questioner, are really serious about answering this question precisely, then you should do a thorough investigation. Interview people. Then perhaps you will get a clearer picture. From my side, I don't think there are that many differences.
Question: I try to practice mindfulness and being in the present moment, and I try to do this

in a positive way. How does one do this when one's partner is doing exactly the opposite? How does one remain mindful and positive without being judgmental and without getting emotional?

His Holiness: That is why the texts recommend that practitioners maintain the companionship of people who share the same kind of outlook. But in your case, the important thing is that your partner be a warmhearted person. If your spouse has this attitude, then there should be no problem. Occasionally, get permission from your partner and spend some time in meditation. If you can't get permission, then you need to take into consideration your spouse's wishes and feelings. Take your partner as your teacher, your master, at least in your home. You should respect your spouse, provided that he or she is a good spouse, of course! One of the consolations of being a monk, a celibate person, is that we are truly independent. The married person, of course, is very happy for a short moment, but actually half of your freedom is lost! (Laughter.)

Question: How do you feel about the use of LSD and other psychedelic drugs to attain higher states of consciousness or spirituality?

His Holiness: Of course, I have to start by saying that I have no direct experience with psychedelics. But based on what I have heard from people who have had actual, firsthand experience, it seems that using such drugs tends to bring a greater profusion of illusions.

Since we already have a lot of illusory experiences to begin with, why do we need additional illusory experiences? I think that those individuals engaged in serious practice should not rely on external substances, just simply try to cultivate the natural quality of mind. That is much better.

There is one final thing I want you to know: namely, that I am nothing special. I am just another human being, just like you. When you listen to me, you should think, "I am listening to another human being, just a human being." We all have the same potential. That is what makes one person's experience relevant to another. If you consider the Dalai Lama to be special, then my remarks become useless. If you have this idea that the Dalai Lama is extraordinary, you might say to yourself, "I can't possibly follow his advice. I can't benefit from his experience." That is just plain silly.

Some people even believe that the Dalai Lama has special healing powers. Since my surgery last year, I frequently tell people that if I really had healing powers, then my operation would not have been necessary. So my surgery is clear proof that I have no healing power! We are the same. This is very important. It is because we are the same that we can communicate, and it is because we are the same that you might derive some benefit from my words and experiences.