

*This booklet is part of the series on  
The Basic Teachings of Buddhism*

***Buddhist Conduct:  
The Ten Virtuous Actions***

by

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### ***Note:***

We have italicized the technical words the first time they are used to alert the reader that they may be found in the Glossary.

Tibetan words are given as they are pronounced, not spelled in Tibetan.

# Chapter 1

## *An Introduction to Buddhist Conduct*

The practice of Buddhism can be divided into the view, meditation, and conduct. In this booklet we will examine Buddhist conduct.

Tibetan Buddhism encompasses practices of all three vehicles: The *Hinayana*, the *Mahayana*, and the *Vajrayana*. In Tibet all three of these vehicles are practiced. For each of these levels of practice there is a different set of vows or standards of conduct. First there are the vows of individual liberation or *Pratimosksha vows* of the Hinayana which are practiced by ordained monks and nuns; these consist of following several hundred rules. Then there is the conduct of the *bodhisattvas* who are practitioners on the Mahayana path who have taken the vow to help all beings reach enlightenment before they themselves reach this state. Finally, there is the conduct of the Vajrayana practitioner which is based on vows and commitments to do certain practices.

Whatever type of vows we undertake there are ten things to be avoided and ten things to practice. We avoid the ten negative or unvirtuous actions because they are harmful to us and harmful to others. We practice the ten positive or virtuous actions because they are beneficial to us and beneficial to others.

These ten virtuous and unvirtuous actions are divided into three levels of conduct: those of body, those of speech, and those of mind. There are what is called “the simple practices of good conduct of body, speech, and mind” and what are called “the special practices of good conduct of body, speech, and mind.” The simple practice of good conduct is when we realize the faults of doing negative actions and simply refrain from doing these negative actions. The special practice of good conduct is when we not only refrain from doing negative actions but also practice the positive actions. In terms of simple good conduct, we abstain from the three negative actions of the body, the four negative actions of the speech, and the three negative actions of the mind.

### ***Summary of the Ten Virtuous Actions***

As a practical meditation exercise, one can take a vow to not do these for a day, three days, a week, a month, etc. Ordained individuals take all ten vows (for as long as they are ordained). If one takes a vow and keeps it, one derives the positive karma from this action. If one simply doesn't do the negative action, such as not killing and doesn't take the vow, then one doesn't derive any positive karma from it (but obviously one also doesn't get any negative karma from killing).

#### **The Ten Virtuous Actions**

- 1. Not to take a life**
- 2. Not to take what is not given**
- 3. Avoid sexual misconduct**
- 4. Not to deceive**
- 5. Avoid slander of others**
- 6. Avoid harsh words**
- 7. Avoid empty speech**
- 8. Avoid greedy thoughts**
- 9. Not to be malicious**
- 10. Avoid the wrong view**

## Chapter 2

### *The Virtuous Actions of Body*

#### **THE FIRST VIRTUOUS ACTION: *NOT TO TAKE LIFE***

The first negative action of the body is killing; one must give up the taking of life.

For an action to be unvirtuous and lead to negative karma four conditions have to be present. These four conditions are: (1) there has to be an object of the action, (2) there has to be a negative intention, (3) one has to actually do the action, and (4) the action has to be completed. If these four aspects of an action aren't all present then it is not necessarily a negative action.

##### 1. THE OBJECT OF THE ACTION

In order for the act of killing to occur, there must be the actual object or being who will be killed. It can be any kind of living being from a small insect to a large animal. It must be a being capable of experiencing sensations and sufferings. There are religions (such as the Jains) who teach that plants have a mind and therefore they consider plants as sentient beings who should not be killed. But the Buddha taught that this is not so. In the Buddhist teachings "sentient being" refers only to beings who have a mind and can therefore experience suffering, not to plants or inanimate things such as stones. So, for an act of killing to be a completely negative act, the act must be directed against a true living being who has a mind.

##### 2. THE INTENTION

For the act of killing to occur, a second factor must be present: the intention. One must have the motivation to harm a sentient being. For example, if we think, "This person or animal is going to harm

me” or “It is dangerous and therefore I wish to kill it” we are killing out of the *obscuring emotion* of anger and the desire to cause harm. We can also kill through the motivation of desire by thinking for example, “If I kill this being, then I will have food, clothing, pleasure and enjoyment.” One then intentionally kills that being. Or one can kill through the motivation of ignorance such as sacrificing an animal for religious reasons, thinking, “If I kill this being, then the act will be good and beneficial because the Hindu scriptures say that sacrifices are all right.” Nevertheless, this is not a good intention because the motivation is ignorance. If one does not realize that one is killing a being, then there is no negative result or karma. For the act to be considered killing, one has to have the knowledge and intention to kill.

On rare occasions killing is done through a good motivation, in which case there will be no negative result. For example, in the sutras there is an account of a previous life of the Buddha when he was a sea captain. At that time one could make a great fortune by selling jewels gotten from islands in the ocean outside of India. But it was also very dangerous, so one could return either wealthy or not at all. If one set out to sea, one needed a guide with experience to sail the ship. The Buddha was such a sea captain and his actual name in that lifetime was Courage. He led 500 merchants in a ship to obtain jewels but there was a very evil person on that ship who became very angry with everyone else. This man thought that if he made a hole in the bottom of the boat, it would sink and all the merchants would die. He didn’t care if it killed him too. But Captain Courage saw this and thought, “If I kill him, then it will save the other merchants. The negative result of killing will come to me, but it doesn’t matter what happens to me. I have to save the 500 merchants and also the man who would do this act and prevent him from accumulating such negative karma.” With this motivation, Captain Courage hit this evil man on the head with an ax and he died. Because of the good motivation, this act did not lead to negative karma. He did kill one man but saved the lives of 500 people; therefore it was a positive action instead of a negative one. Though the act may be an act of killing, it may not be a negative action. This is because of the motivation that was involved.

### 3. THE ACTION ITSELF

In addition to having the object and the motivation, there must be a third factor of actually undertaking of the action of killing. This means that although one may have the intention of killing someone, one has to carry it out for it to be the negative act of killing. One has to take a sword and attack someone, or one has to get poison and give it to someone and so on. This point is actually carrying out the act of killing someone. One does not need to do this action oneself; one can make someone else do it by instructing and paying him to kill another being. When that person has done the action, one feels happy, "Oh, it is good that person is killed." Even though it is not one's own action, but only carried out according to one's instructions, it is still one's own negative action of killing because one is responsible for having made someone else do it. So, as well as the motivation to kill, there is the actual act of killing, whether done by oneself or done according to one's wishes.

### 4. THE COMPLETED ACTION

Finally, the fourth factor is called "completion." For an act to reap the negative karma of the action there has to be an actual result of the action. For an act of true killing the being must actually die. So, one might have the intention to kill someone and one might carry out the action, but it might happen that the victim does not die in spite of one's having done one's best to kill him. While this is obviously a negative act, it does not count as a real act of killing. Also, if one has ordered someone else to kill somebody and he disobeys or fails in his job, it is not an actual act of killing. Clearly, one's attempt is a negative action that leads to negative karma; but if one's action fails in its goal, then it does not become the very serious negative action of killing.<sup>1</sup> All four factors must be present for it to be a true act of killing.

This means that one can avoid the act of killing by avoiding an action that has all four factors present. If one avoids these, one is practicing good conduct.

THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:  
TO SAVE OTHERS' LIVES

There is also special good conduct, in which case one does not just avoid killing other beings, but one actually saves the lives of other beings whose lives are in danger. The special practice is to actually try to save the lives of other beings. It is special and superior in relation to the simple practice of good conduct. Avoiding killing and saving the lives of other beings is the first of the ten good actions.

THE REASON

Generally, killing is a very negative action. The reason for this is that sentient beings cling to their own body and life. All appearances in this world are present due to their having a life. If their life ceases, then all appearances of the world (their wealth and possessions) will be lost for them. For that reason an individual's life is very precious to him. To lose this causes great suffering and therefore killing is a serious action.

**THE SECOND VIRTUOUS ACTION:  
*NOT TAKING WHAT IS NOT GIVEN***

The most precious thing for a sentient being is his or her life. Wealth and possessions are the second most important thing. Since life is very important, a human being will go through a lot of hardships and difficulties for the sake of his possessions and to stay alive. This is true for animals too. Although animals have no attachment to gold and jewels, they still have strong attachment to food and other things they perceive as necessary in order to live. They fear that without those things they will not be able to live and therefore think that they must have food and other things. We see that some beings have greater attachment to things than others do. We should use the things that are our own possessions and not take possessions from others by force or by deceiving them. If one deprives others of their possessions, it will cause suffering and harm to them. Also it causes harm to one's self because the result of one's actions will definitely come back to oneself. For this

reason one should avoid stealing and accomplish the good action of not stealing.

There are many categories of stealing or taking what is not given. As explained in relation to not killing, there are four aspects to this action: the object, the motivation, the act, and the completion.

### 1. THE OBJECT

The object of the negative action of stealing is taking something which is possessed by someone else. The object must have an owner who has to have the thought that “The object is mine. It belongs to me and is my property.” The object also has to be of a certain value. If it has no value to a person and losing it makes no difference to that person, then taking it is not a negative act. Or if it is something not owned by anyone, then taking it is not negative or harmful. In the past, there were some religions in India that said that if one obtains something, it must be given to you by someone else. So they taught that if you are in an isolated valley and drink some water, that is stealing because you are taking something that is not given to you. But the Buddha said that this is not a negative action. He said it is only a negative action if you obtain something that is a possession of someone else and you take it without that person’s permission.

### 2. THE INTENTION

To have the motivation to steal something we have to think, “There is this thing that belongs to someone else and I am going to get it without them seeing it.” Or, “I want that object, so I am going to use force to take it from him, even though he doesn’t want me to have it.” Or, “I want this thing, so I will deceive the owner to obtain it. I will tell him all sorts of lies and use various methods so that I can get the object from that person.” In this last case we do not steal directly, but rather we obtain something from another person indirectly using deceit. These are the thoughts one has when the action is unvirtuous.

If the motivation is absent, it is not a harmful action resulting in negative karma. One might take something that isn’t yours because they’re two objects that look very similar and we

mistakenly go off with someone else's things. This is not a negative action because the motivation was not there. Or we might think, "This belongs to my friend who is not here now. He is my very good friend and he won't mind if I take it." Taking that object is also not a negative action because there is no motivation to steal. Or we might think, "This is so insignificant and nobody really cares whether they have it or not, so it does not matter if I take it." If we have that motivation, it is not a negative action.

The motivation must be present for stealing to be a negative action. If we can abandon such thoughts, then we are accomplishing the good act of avoiding the motivation of stealing.

### 3. THE ACTION ITSELF

The third characteristic of a complete negative action is the actual application of the action itself, where one carries out the intention to steal something either by force or by deception.

As in the case of the act of killing, there are three kinds of negative acts involved in stealing too: stealing yourself, having somebody else steal for you, or rejoicing in hearing that somebody else steals without being personally involved or benefiting from the action in any way.

### 4. THE COMPLETED ACTION

The fourth factor is actually completing the action. We might have the motivation to steal and carry out the action, but we may fail to steal the object. If we are not able to complete what we intended to do, we do not get the full negative result from our action. If, on the other hand, we have been able to get what we want and we think, "I have robbed this object through force or deception," there is the completion of the act and we receive the negative result from the action.

If we have failed to complete the action and this thought does not arise in the mind, the result is less negative. If all factors are present, then the negative action is done. If we can avoid and give up this complete negative action, we accomplish the simple practice of good action, in this case not stealing.

THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:  
TO GIVE TO OTHERS

The special practice is not only to give up the act of stealing, but also to do the special action of giving to others. This can be of two kinds: pure and impure. The pure act of giving is a good action and the giving is really beneficial to the person involved. The impure act of giving seems to be a good action, but in fact it is not because it has a harmful result. For example, when one has an impure motivation, one gives something to someone but the thought one has is, "This will cause harm to the person I am giving this to." This is a negative motivation, which makes it an impure act of giving. Or the actual object given may be impure; for example, one may give a weapon or poison to someone. Such things are impure objects because through their use they will cause harm to the recipient or others. For instance, if one gives such things to a person and thinks, "Due to my giving, it will be beneficial for that being's future," that thought is good. But if it results in unhappiness and suffering, the object is impure.

Also, the object one gives should be one's own possession. It may be the case that other people may also have the right to decide what should be done with an object. If you decide for yourself, "Yes, I think it is all right if I give this away," the other person who also has rights will be unhappy. That is also an improper object of generosity. For an action to be a good object of giving, the motivation has to be pure and the object has to be pure too, so that it will not harm or hurt others. This concerns inanimate objects. If it is a living being, the act should be beneficial. If all aspects are correct, then it is a special and good action of giving.

**THE THIRD VIRTUOUS ACTION:  
*TO AVOID SEXUAL MISCONDUCT***

It is said that the most important thing for a living being is his life. What is very important for human beings is their possessions. Following, what is most important for them is the companion they love. One has to avoid harming a person by harming his life; one must avoid causing them suffering by taking their possessions. If the loved companion is made unhappy, it is not good either. Or if

the companion of someone else is made to suffer, it is also not good. So one has to avoid causing others suffering and sadness through one's sexual misconduct.

The analysis is the same as for the discussed acts: there is the object of the action, which is someone who is not one's own companion. There is the motivation, which in this case is to satisfy one's own desires, of wishing to cause harm or a mental state of ignorance out of which the action is done. Third is actually carrying out the action. The fourth factor is that if the act is done with the motivation of desire, the wish to harm, or through ignorance, then one will experience the results of having committed a negative action.

Therefore one should avoid sexual misconduct. Then one's own partner will not be unhappy and worry but will have peace of mind, and other people will not have suffering, difficulties and worries. In this life one will not encounter difficulties and problems and also in the next life one will not encounter difficulties and problems as a result of one's action. Instead there will be peace and happiness.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE SPECIAL PRACTICE: TO TAKE THE VOW

Taking the vow not to engage in sexual misconduct is the special practice concerning sex.<sup>3</sup>

#### THE RESULTS OF ENGAGING IN GOOD CONDUCT OF BODY

Avoidance of the three physical negative acts of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct are classified as "discipline," or *shila* in Sanskrit which means "coolness." It is very hot in India, so coolness is considered as very pleasant there. Following correct conduct means that one has to be careful and restrain one's actions. The result is that one experiences peace; the mind becomes very relaxed and at ease. It is a very pleasant state. If one maintains correct conduct, one does not encounter difficulties and problems from engaging in negative conduct. Because one's mind is at peace, relaxed and open, one also feels relaxed and comfortable physically.

## Chapter 3

### *The Virtuous Actions of Speech*

#### **THE FOURTH VIRTUOUS ACTION: *NOT TO LIE***

We might think that by lying to somebody we can easily get what we want through deception. In fact, it only creates problems for oneself in this life and in future lives. The Sakya Pandita said that when a person lies, he thinks that he is deceiving somebody else, but, in fact, he isn't deceiving anybody else but himself. If you lie to others and think, "Oh, now I have deceived them," they will not trust what you say in the future when they realize that you have lied. When you later say things to others, they will not listen but they will think, "There is no point in listening to what that person says because he has lied to me before." If someone always tells the truth, others think, "I must listen to what he says because it is true, meaningful, and beneficial." If one lies, others will think, "There is no point in listening because it is meaningless and not beneficial at all. There is not as much point in listening to him."

Also, if you are going to lie, then whom do you lie to? You do not lie to someone who doesn't have any faith in you and would not believe you anyway. The person you lie to is someone who trusts you, someone who likes you, someone who thinks that what you say is the truth. That is the only person you can lie to because he or she believes in you and is actually deceived. Afterwards that person will realize that you have deceived him and this means that you will lose that person's trust. So, in the future that person will not believe what you say but will think, "I used to believe what he said, but he only lied to me. There is no point in listening." In this way, you only deceive yourself because you lose the trust of others. If you want to accomplish something, you will not be able to do so because people will not trust what you say.

## THE FOUR FACTORS

Again, the four factors that make an act negative need to be avoided:

The object of the action of lying must be a person or being who understands what you say, not an animal or stone.

The motivation does not refer to saying things out of fun or to have a laugh; rather, it is the motivation of intending to deceive somebody.

The actual act is saying a lie with the motivation of deceiving somebody. If one lies out of ignorance, thinking something was true and telling this to somebody else, it is not a lie because the motivation has to be intentional.

The completion of the act is when you say something deceptive, whether the person who hears and believes what you say to be true or not. The action is done and there will be the negative effect of having lied.

So by avoiding the action of telling a lie, one performs the ordinary good action.

THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:  
TO TELL THE TRUTH

One must have a very clear understanding and wisdom in order to engage in the special practice of telling the truth. Generally speaking, telling the truth is very important and good. Sometimes telling the truth can cause problems and difficulties for people. In such cases, it is important not to tell the truth. If one has the good motivation and tells someone the truth, it can cause that person to become angry; it can cause a division between people or harm them. Therefore, one should not tell the truth in those situations. Instead, one should tell a lie but with the motivation to benefit and help the person you are lying to or, on the basis of that untruth being told, that it will benefit someone else or a great number of people. The situation of telling a lie with the motivation to help someone is not a negative action. Whereas, if one tells a lie in order to deceive someone, it is a negative action. This applies to telling the truth too. If you tell the truth with a negative motivation, it will cause harm to people and is not a good action.

**THE FIFTH VIRTUOUS ACTION:  
*TO AVOID SLANDER***

There may be two people who like each other and through the motivation of pride, anger, or envy a third person wishes to say something which will turn them against each other. This is the action of slander or divisive speech.

The object of that action is two people who are friendly with each other.

The motivation is pride, anger, or envy and the wish to turn people against each other because one thinks it will benefit oneself.

The actual action is saying something to turn people against each other.

The completion of the action occurs when a conflict between those persons arises.

This is an action that one should avoid. Giving up speech that turns people against each other is the simple practice.

**THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:  
TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER**

Bringing people together or removing conflicts is the special practice. Two people may be in conflict and one reconciles them by saying, "This person does not mean to harm you and it will be very good if you are friends again." Bringing people together with speech is the special good action in relation to the act of slander or divisive speech.

**THE SIXTH VIRTUOUS ACTION  
*TO AVOID HARSH WORDS***

The sixth negative action is to avoid using harsh or unkind words.

The object of the action of using harsh words is a person who can understand what you say.

The motivation to using harsh words is usually envy or anger.

So actually saying harsh words to others, whether true or not, whether you say it directly or imply it, is the act.

The completion of the act is when the other person hears what you say and is upset or unhappy.

The result of having said harsh words to someone is that he or she will come to dislike you in the future. So one should avoid speaking harsh words, which is the simple good action.

THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:  
TO USE PLEASANT WORDS

The special practice of this point is using pleasant and gentle words, which make other people happy.

There is an exception here. Some people may say something harsh to someone with a good motivation because gentle speech does not stop the person from negative conduct. With the motivation of helping someone not to do something negative, one must speak harshly to them. If this is done with a good motivation and if that person stops doing negative things and learns control, it is a beneficial action. If the motivation is not for one's own benefit but for the benefit of others, harsh words are beneficial.

If one has a good motivation to help and one uses harsh words but it doesn't help or affect the other person, then it is better not to use harsh words at all. But if one can actually benefit somebody by using harsh words, then it is a good action.

**THE SEVENTH VIRTUOUS ACTION:  
*TO AVOID EMPTY SPEECH***

The object of empty or idle speech is somebody who can understand what you say. In other words there has to be a person who understand you for it to be slander.

The motivation is having an irresistible desire to keep on talking or to be angry, envious, or proud so that one speaks negatively about someone and praises oneself. Or through the motivation of desire one praises oneself.

The actual activity is to actually say useless or idle words.

The completion is that the other person understands what you say, whether he accepts it or not.

If the person accepts what you say, then when it is something said through anger, it can increase that person's anger. If it is something being said through desire, it can increase that person's desire and that person's envy and so on. Even if that person doesn't accept what you say, it will increase their emotions so that it

has a harmful result, which creates negative circumstances. If one can avoid this kind of talk, then it avoids creating harm and negative circumstances.

There may be something which seems like empty speech but which may not be a negative action. For example, when you meet a person who is sad and you want to cheer them up, you may say things that seem to be unnecessary. This is done with a motivation to benefit the person. If one talks about “this and that” with a good motivation and it has a beneficial effect, it is not a negative action; it is a good action. Even if it is not just to benefit others but just to please them and make them happy, it is good. One of the actions of a Bodhisattva is to speak pleasantly and nicely to people, to hold a conversation with them that makes them happy. One of the activities of a Bodhisattva is the four actions to draw people into the *dharma*. The second of these is to speak pleasantly, in such a way that it makes them feel happy. Therefore, if one says whatever is necessary to please people and make them happy, then this is not a negative action; this is a good action.

To avoid the use of unnecessary speech is the simple or ordinary action.

THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:  
TO USE MEANINGFUL SPEECH

The special good action related to unnecessary speech is that when one speaks one doesn't say meaningless things, rather one's speech is always meaningful. So the special good action associated with this is that what one says should be meaningful.

## The Nine Obstructions to Liberation

(The obstructions are not discussed in the text, but are part of another system. These are the unwholesome qualities one can have and why they are negative.)

<b>Obstruction</b>	<b>Fault It Obstructs</b>
1. Passion	Desire to leave samsara
2. Anger or aggression	Equanimity of mind
3. Pride	Seeing self as having faults.
4. Ignorance	Seeing true nature of phenomena
5. Incorrect view	Realization of egolessness of self
6. Having negative behavior	Entering the genuine path.
7. Indecisive mind	Entering the correct path
8. Envy or jealousy	Helping other sentient beings.
9. Stinginess	Generosity on the path.

## Chapter 4

### *The Virtuous Actions of Mind*

#### **THE EIGHTH VIRTUOUS ACTION: *TO AVOID AVARICIOUS THOUGHTS***

Avarice is the desire for things that one sees which belong to other people. One may see another person who has possessions, wealth, or even desirable qualities. They look good and attractive and one thinks, "I want to have these. They could be mine." That is the cause for this negative action of avarice.

The motivation and action of avarice are the same thing because they are both of the mind.

Increasing the negative motivation of wanting things that belong to others becomes the basis for all kinds of negative actions because this thought is expressed in one's actions and speech through anger, desire, and so on.

It causes harm and unhappiness for the person who owns the things one wants to possess. It also causes trouble for oneself. One should see that there is no real benefit in getting any of the things one desires because there is no end to satisfying desire; when one wants one thing and gets it, then one will want two and more. There is never an end to desire and as a result one performs actions that cause trouble for oneself and for other people. One should think, "Well, I am attracted to things that others have, but it won't do me any good because desire can never be satisfied and I will always want more. I will create unhappiness with this desire. Then that other person will also create difficulties for me." By realizing this, one sees that the best thing to do is to avoid avarice.

When one realizes that avarice is something wrong and gives it up, then this is the simple good action. There is also the special good action.

**THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:  
TO BE CONTENT**

The special practice to overcome greed is to be content with what you have. If you are content with whatever you have, then you can easily accomplish whatever you want to do. Furthermore, if you are content, you will not trouble other people.

**THE NINTH VIRTUOUS ACTION:  
*NOT TO BE MALICIOUS***

The second practice of the mind is not to be malicious. For instance, in a state of anger or envy one wishes for harm to come to somebody, that they suffer and have difficulties. One wishes, "May they have problems." Either wishing to harm them oneself or having others harm them is a negative motivation, which leads to increasing harm. Because one does not have a pure motivation, other people will perceive this motivation and one's malice and they will begin to dislike you, turn against you, and become your enemy. You will find that you will lose your friends and will no longer have friends to help you. This motivation is negative for oneself and for others. If one has the wish that harm come to others, it leads to the involvement with all sorts of methods by which harm can be brought to other people. This motivation always leads to a negative result, the reason why one should avoid malice.

Avarice and malice are included within desire and anger. They are negative actions. Even so, it can be the case that one has the desire to obtain wealth and possessions for the sake of benefiting other people. In that case, desire for possessions is not negative but positive. In terms of harming someone, it may be someone who causes a lot of harm to other people and one has the wish to get rid of him in one way or another, to expel him to another place, have him arrested and put away. This is being done for the sake of helping a great number of people. Then the wish to harm such an individual is not a negative action.

**THE TENTH VIRTUOUS ACTION:  
TO AVOID THE WRONG VIEW**

The tenth negative action to be avoided is mistaken belief or wrong view. This is when one has a mistaken opinion concerning special things, such as the Three Jewels (the Buddha, the dharma and the *sangha*). It may not just be about the dharma teachings, but someone may have a good motivation and give good advice, saying, “What you are doing is wrong. You shouldn’t do this,” and so on. If one understands that the person has a good motivation and the advice is beneficial, then it will be beneficial to oneself. But if one thinks, “He doesn’t like me and is saying something very unpleasant to me; he is trying to make things bad for me,” it is an error and you have a mistaken perception. In this case, the good motivation of that person is wasted and his advice cannot help. In fact, it becomes a source of harm in that one has interpreted it as being something harmful for oneself. Therefore, if one is given advice, one shouldn’t just simply think, “This is bad or wrong.” One shouldn’t allow oneself to easily fall into this misconception, but one should examine it very carefully to see whether it is beneficial and said with a good motivation.

One should avoid misconceptions and mistaken beliefs.

**THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:  
TO EXAMINE, AND LEARN TO UNDERSTAND**

Examining, analyzing, and understanding the truth and the real nature of phenomena is the special practice in association with mistaken views.<sup>4</sup>

**CONCLUSION**

In brief, there are the three negative actions of the body, the four negative actions of the speech and the three negative actions of the mind. These make the ten negative actions, and there are the three positive actions of the body, the four positive actions of the speech and the three positive actions of the mind, which make the ten good actions. If we practice the ten negative actions, it will cause harm for others and will be harmful for us. Therefore they should

be avoided. Whereas, if we practice the ten positive actions, it will be beneficial for us and others. By practicing the ten good actions, everything will go well; we will be in harmony with others. So, if we practice in accordance with the dharma teachings, this will not run counter to our ordinary human life and will cause no harm. In fact, in acting in harmony with the dharma, our ordinary human life will go very well and we will cause no problems. Following the good actions and acting according to the dharma will be very beneficial. If we practice the good conduct, it is beneficial for this life and the next life.

Good conduct is called *shila* in Sanskrit which means “pleasant coolness.” We will not get this pleasant coolness through practicing negative actions. For example, in terms of killing, we may have an enemy and think, “Well, if I can kill that enemy, then things will be very pleasant. It will be very good.” But if we kill the enemy, we discover that happiness does not come. We may have killed that enemy, but he or she has friends and relatives who will also become our enemies. So, our enemies increase in number rather than diminish. If we engage in good conduct and do not kill that enemy, there is no way that the number of enemies we have will increase. Following conduct that is in harmony with the dharma means that this life will have pleasant coolness and will also create good prospects for one’s future life.

Of course, it is important to practice meditation and the dharma. This is important because it enables us to overcome the *emotional obscurations* and we can obtain liberation. So the practice of dharma is very important. What is the foundation of the practice of dharma? It is good conduct of our body and speech. One should therefore try to follow the correct conduct of body and speech. It is very difficult to have the complete and perfect aspects of correct conduct, but we should try to have as much correct conduct as we can for the sake of our dharma practice. That completes the teachings on the ten virtuous actions.

### ***Questions***

**Question:** What is it if one person is threatening another person’s life and is about to kill him and you intervene and kill the person to save the life of another?

**Rinpoche:** This depends upon the circumstances, particularly your motivation. For example, if the person who is in danger is a relative or friend we wish to save by killing another person, it can have a bad result. If the person in danger of being killed is somebody who can benefit many people and the one who is going to kill him is not of any benefit to anybody, then we may think, "It is much better if he dies than the other one." That motivation is good because the person whose life is in danger would help many beings. If we kill the bad person it would not be a negative action, so it depends upon the motivation.

**Question:** In practice, then, one would have to have the insight of a Bodhisattva to decide which way to act? I have all sorts of ideas of people who I feel would be beneficial to eliminate on the spot. I get scared, first of all for myself and secondly because I am not completely confident that my insight into the truth of the matter or the far-reaching consequences is at all true.

**Rinpoche:** There is a danger involved in that one needs to have the wisdom that can see, "Well, if I get rid of this person, then it will be very beneficial. It will bring happiness to many people and prevent a great deal of harm being caused." If one could really see that this is so and got rid of that person, it would not be a bad action. But, if one thinks, "Probably this will be good if this person was killed," it is not good enough. One cannot really be sure that if one kills a general of an army that he will not be replaced by another person who will do the same things. That would be a pointless action without any positive results. One really has to have the full wisdom to *know* that it is beneficial and not just the thought that it is *probably* beneficial.

**Question:** What is the karmic result of an accidental killing, for example, if someone is driving a car and another person stepped out and was run over?

**Rinpoche:** I don't think the negative karma would come from accidentally killing someone in a car because one does not have the intention to kill. The motivation is not there. Also, one has not carried out an act designed to kill another person, rather one has made a mistake. Therefore, there should not be a bad result. One might be driving along and someone crosses the road. If one gets angry, shouting, "What is he doing on the road?" and hits the pedestrian, a bad result will come because there is the motivation of anger.

**Question:** Rinpoche, what do you think about someone asking to be killed when he is very sick?

**Rinpoche:** A negative result would come from that because that person is experiencing great suffering through his illness but the person still hopes that he might get better and find happiness in the future. Killing him will be an act done out of ignorance; it would be killing without being aware that there is still the hope that he may free themselves from that suffering. Someone may be very depressed and say, “Please kill me.” It may seem that killing this person is beneficial at that moment. But there is always a chance this person might be cured and find happiness in the future. Even though the person had the wish, he might change his mind as you kill him, “Oh, I think I made a mistake”—and then it is too late.

**Question:** But there are a lot of cases where people are really old; it is very certain that they have only two or three months left and there is no chance that they can recover from cancer or something else. If they ask for something to kill themselves with, what should we do?

**Rinpoche:** They want to die but inside everyone has attachment to life and still has hope to continue living. For example, there is a story of an old man who was very ill and felt that it would be better if he died. He led a long and good life and thought, “It would be best if I died now.” He asked for a divination to see whether he might die now. They did the divination and the answer was, “It looks like you are going to die.” When he heard that he was very upset. It would be a negative effect, like from committing suicide. This person had the knowledge of what would happen within the next few weeks and a way of avoiding that experience. With that knowledge, it would not have the negative effect like suicide.

**Question:** Do people who do negative actions have bad karma?

**Rinpoche:** With impure motivation, the negative actions and the bad completion they will have a result that comes from the action, a bad karma that will ripen. But it is said that there are four kinds of karma:

First is the evident result of one’s actions. One does a powerful and bad action and within that very lifetime the result will be experienced.

The second kind of karmic result is where the karma is not so strong and the result is experienced after rebirth. Somebody may

do bad things but not experience the result in this life, but in the next lifetime he will experience much suffering.

The third kind of karmic result comes from actions which are less strong and will be experienced in a future lifetime, i.e. the result is not experienced in this life or the next, but in some future life.

The fourth kind is called “the indefinite karmic result” that comes in minor negative actions. One may experience the result some time in the future or one may not experience the result. It is uncertain.

If one has done a negative action, then the result will come in accordance with the strength of the action; a negative result from a negative action and similarly a good result in a good action.

**Question:** How can one purify negative karma?”

**Rinpoche:** Through the four powers of purification:

The first power is that of repudiation, rejection of one’s actions, i.e. thinking, “What I did was wrong and negative.” One regrets that one has done that action, the first power of purification.

The second power is that of remedy, where one regrets and applies oneself to doing good actions in order to counteract the negative actions.

The third power is that of reliance, in which case one prays to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas for the purification of the negative actions one regrets.

The fourth power is that of not repeating the action. One thinks, “I did this negative action, regret it and I am not ever going to do it again.” By applying those powers, one can purify the karma of a negative action which one has done.

**Question:** I remember Rinpoche saying that the karmic result achieved is from a karmic trace being left. I had always understood this to be a mental trace. There seems to be a contradiction here between the four powers of a negative action in that a mental trace can be left where the most important part seems to be the intention. Supposing I bashed somebody on the head and I think that he is dying, am glad and I go home. However, he recovers and I do not know anything about it. From the point of view of the mental trace, that should be enough to complete the whole thing. I mean, whether he recovers or not, that’s not the point from the view of the mental trace.

**Rinpoche:** There is a phase in which karmic results come about, called “fruitful ripening of karmic result” and then there is also what is called “the corresponding result,” meaning the result corresponding with the cause. There are two kinds of corresponding results or effects: a corresponding result which is experienced and a corresponding result which continues. For example, if one has killed someone, then in the next lifetime one will experience various unpleasant things with the ripening result of this action. A corresponding result could be that one experiences a short life in the next lifetime from having killed somebody. So various results correspond with the action and that is the corresponding result which is experienced.

The second corresponding result which continues is that if one has killed in this lifetime, the result is that in the next lifetime one still has the tendency and will want to spontaneously kill again. Or if one steals in this lifetime, one will continue stealing in the next lifetime and so on. Even as a child, one will like stealing or killing.

So, if one hits someone on the head and thinks he has died but he hasn’t, then a strong karmic trace is not left within oneself because one thought he was dead and afterwards finds out that he wasn’t. Even if one doesn’t find out that he is not dead, such a strong karmic trace is not left because one might find out that he hasn’t been killed and this can be known through an external power in the object itself; so it doesn’t just involve the mind.

**Question:** In other words, ignorance is the unconscious part of the killer’s mind, which perceives, although the conscious mind doesn’t hear? Is that what you mean?

**Rinpoche:** Yes, it is like that. In terms of the eight consciousnesses, it is the sixth consciousness thinks, “Yes, he is dead. He has been killed.” But in the eighth consciousness, which is the ground consciousness, the karmic trace or imprint of having killed someone cannot take place.<sup>5</sup>

**Question:** If you do a negative act, you reap negative karma. But I don’t understand how you can undo that karma with regret.

**Rinpoche:** Normally, in doing negative actions and accumulating negative karma, there is an enjoyment of doing the act; for example, one steals and likes stealing, so one carries on and does as much as one is able to. But if one has regret, it means you dislike it and don’t want to do it any more. That puts an end to it; from then on you avoid it. Because there is dislike for the action and regret, it

causes a transformation in the karmic traces or latencies in oneself. Due to that, that harmfulness of the negative karma gradually diminishes.

**Question:** In Rinpoche's monastery what does he do with somebody who is cheating, stealing, or lying?

**Rinpoche:** There are many different monasteries and each has its own way of managing things. My view is that if somebody is stealing, it is good to meditate on patience. But if one finds that meditating on patience does not work, then it is important to find out the truth. Who really supervises truth? It is the government. So, the best thing is to hand this matter over to the police. They can work out what is right and what is wrong.

**Question:** I have two questions: If somebody lies out of fear, what would your view be?

**Rinpoche:** If someone acts negatively out of fear, then I think there is little harm from that. If a person is in danger, to be free from that danger he tells lies. I think there is little harm from that.

**Question:** I did not quite understand what you meant by wrong view.

**Rinpoche:** Wrong view is a negative action through the fact that it prevents a benefit from coming to oneself. There may be something beneficial but because of one's mistaken view one prevents it from benefiting oneself. There may be someone who is giving us beneficial advice because we have a fault. We can have lots of problems because of that fault. Someone tells us to remove that fault, which is beneficial advice given to us. But we have to examine this advice that we received to see that it is beneficial and not make an immediate judgment, "Oh, he is just criticizing me and saying there are things wrong with me," feeling anger instead. Because one has a mistaken belief that he is not trying to benefit, the mistaken belief hinders accepting the beneficial advice. On the contrary, one thinks he is being nasty and harsh, thus misinterpreting the advice. Thus, one does not get the benefit.

Similarly, in terms of the wrong view towards the Three Jewels, they are not something that intentionally is going to harm someone. It depends upon one's own attitude whether they are beneficial for oneself or not. If one has the wrong view about them, then one prevents their good from benefiting oneself. This is why wrong view is to be avoided.

**Question:** Does a bodhisattva have the power to cancel the bad karma produced by a sentient being?

**Rinpoche:** The law of karma is a natural law of cause and effect. Everybody has his own karma which depends on previous deeds. Sentient beings have to exhaust their own karma by themselves. No one else is really able to change a person's karma. One can't do anything about it. A bodhisattva, for example, can teach a method of how to purify bad karma; a way of practicing, a way to gather the accumulation of merit, or by showing the benefits of bodhichitta and how to develop bodhichitta, and so on. Then if the individual, having received these teachings, practices it, develops bodhichitta, and so on, that individual can affect his or her own karma. So a person doesn't have the power to directly change someone else's karma but he or she can help by teaching the methods whereby that person eliminates the bad karma. It's as if someone has, for example, killed someone's father, the son will want revenge. So one is in danger of experiencing also being killed; but then, if one has as a companion a great warrior, one can stay near him and then one will be safe. Similarly, if one has bad karma and has done bad things in the past, if one has the companionship of the development of the bodhichitta, one may be able to escape from that suffering and not have to experience that suffering. In that way, it is possible to change things so one doesn't have to experience the results of one's bad karma.

**Question:** If one has insight into the emptiness of phenomena, does that not mean that karma has stopped?

**Rinpoche:** If one has realized emptiness, then gradually karma will be exhausted. One will not be creating any new karma. But it does not mean that one will immediately cease to experience karmic results.

**Question:** I am confused about the view that the Buddha-qualities have no cause and the statement that the element has no creator but is given this name because it retains its own characteristics. Are characteristics and qualities the same?

**Rinpoche:** This first statement, that there's no creator, is not the same as the view of there is no cause. Saying there is no cause in the context of what I taught is saying that the seed of the Buddha qualities has always been there; whereas the wrong view says that there is no Buddha-essence, that the qualities arise as something

new and they weren't there before that they arise without there being a cause for them is incorrect.

**Question:** I have a question about the commitments for the bodhisattva vow. In Germany there are different groups belonging to the Kagyu, the Gelug and so on. What should I do?

**Rinpoche:** The main thing is to have good motivation and good understanding. If one sees someone is making a mistake or error, one thinks, "This is wrong what he's doing." If one also thinks that if one tells that person that it's a mistake, and if doing so would actually help the person, then with that good motivation of thinking of the other person's welfare, one should correct that person. But if one sees that someone is making a mistake or error, and telling them that it's a mistake will only create more faults rather than develop into anything positive, one should not say anything; one just leaves it. The main thing is to analyze the situation in terms of one's own motivation. This is in relation to someone belonging to another group or to one's own group, or whatever. So one looks at one's own motivation, whether one really has the motivation of thinking of the welfare of other people and whether it is actually going to be of any benefit to the other person.

If what one is going to do is really going to benefit others, then one can do anything that is forbidden. You know, all the things in the Buddha's teachings it says you should not do; these things are forbidden, but one can do any of these if it is really going to be of help. An example given for that is the story of Captain Courageous. At that time there was an island with many jewels on it. If you went there and collected these jewels, you would get a lot of wealth. You only have to make one trip and, if you came back, you'd be very wealthy. That is, if you came back, because it was a very dangerous journey. So you might end up becoming wealthy or you might be lost at sea. But to go this island, you needed to find someone who had the experience, who was reliable, very intelligent, captain of the expedition. At that time, there were five hundred merchants, and they got this Captain Courageous to lead their expedition to the island. Amongst the merchants on the ship there was one who wanted to kill all of the people on the boat. Boats in those days were not like the boats we have nowadays; it was much more of a makeshift kind of boat. He thought that what he would do would make a hole in the boat so that all the water would come in, the boat would sink and everybody would die. He was working on

drilling this hole when Captain Courageous saw him. Captain Courageous thought, “If he makes this hole, that will kill all of these people, and as a result of that, he will be reborn in the lower realms, whereas if I kill him, that will save all these people. It doesn’t matter if I go to the lower realms.” So with that selfless motivation, he took an ax and killed the wicked man. But instead of accumulating bad karma, he accumulated a great deal of merit through doing that action. So if one really has a completely selfless motivation, the wish to benefit other beings, then one can do anything that will really help people.

## Chapter 5

### *Karma and the Accumulation of Merit*

In general, the vows of conduct have special virtue and the power of accumulation of merit and virtue is based on one's commitment. There is a difference, for example, between simply not killing and not killing after having taken the vow of not killing. When we simply abandon the action of not killing, it will not result in the fruition of not killing. For example, if a dog at the moment is not killing anything, then that dog is not violating the vow of not killing, but it also is not accumulating the virtue of not killing because it has not taken the vow. The reason for this is that, at present, the cause for killing is not present so the dog is not killing anything. But later when the cause for killing turns up, the dog may then kill something. Likewise, if we have not taken the vow not to kill, then even if we do not kill, we will gain no merit. But if we have taken the vow, then when we do not kill, we are also gaining the virtue of not killing since we have the motivation of refraining from the act of killing. So, we obtain the virtue of not killing because of our strong motivation not to kill. The difference between a dog and a man who has taken the vow not to kill is that the man will accumulate virtue whereas the dog will not. For instance, if we take the vow at six in the morning, then at seven o'clock we will have accumulated the virtue of not killing for one hour, at eight o'clock, for two hours and so on.

When we chant *mantras*, we accumulate virtue with each mantra that we chant. So once we have taken the vow, we then accumulate the virtue of the vow. When we take the vow of not killing, we are refraining from killing not just one man but are refraining from killing all sentient beings and so the accumulation of virtue grows. Since we have the strong motivation that is constantly growing, then the accumulation of virtues continues whether we are playing,

eating, or sleeping. But if our motivation for not killing is somehow broken, then from that time on the virtues cease to accumulate.

How do we cultivate the virtues even when we are asleep? If a man who has not taken the vow of not killing awakens from sleep, then he might commit the crime of killing depending on whether conditions are favorable or unfavorable for killing. On the other hand, if a man who has taken the vow awakens from sleep, he has the strong motivation not to kill, so he will refrain from killing and accumulates the virtue for the period of time while he was sleeping. Thus, if we maintain the five precepts, we are accumulating the merit of these five each minute. If we preserve ten precepts each minute, we are accumulating the merit of ten precepts. After having taken the vows, we may not see how the virtues are increasing within ourselves, but nevertheless from the moment of taking the vow onwards, the merit of preserving the vow will develop. For this reason, the Buddha emphasized moral discipline.

The ultimate effect of the accumulation of merit is enlightenment. The Tibetan word for the Buddha is *sang gay*. The syllable *sang* means “awakened” from the sleep of ignorance and *gay* means “to open up” like a flower. So *sanggay* means awakened from all the emotional disturbances, all the delusions. When we eradicate all the emotional and cognitive obscurations, the good qualities will blossom forth. All sentient beings already have the essence of enlightenment within them, so they possess all the qualities which are ready to blossom. It is like the sky. When the sun is obscured by clouds, we cannot see the rays of the sun. Likewise, we have the qualities of the essence of enlightenment within us but they are obscured by the defilements and negativities. Just as when clouds clear away, we can see the sun’s rays, so when the obscurations are cleared away, the qualities of Buddhahood will blossom forth. That is why it is important to clear away all the defilements.

The nature of the disturbing emotions is like salty water. If we drink salty water, we become more and more thirsty and this causes us to drink even more salty water. In the same way, if we carry out the action of these disturbing emotions, it leads us to want to act again and again in the same way and so the disturbing emotions increase. The Tibetan *panditas* and *siddhas* have compared this to a pig entering a garden . As soon as the pig comes into the garden, one should hit it on the nose with a stick so that it won’t go into the garden again. But if it is already in the garden and has started to

eat the vegetables, then it is not so easy to get the pig out of the garden. Likewise, one should try to stop the disturbing emotions when they first arise in the mind; just as we hit the pig on the nose when it first starts to enter the garden.

Since beginningless time we have become habituated to working with the disturbing emotions. We shouldn't try to stop the disturbing emotions but when they first arise in the mind we should not follow them with our body and our speech. If we do not follow the disturbing emotions, then gradually our mind will be rid of the defilements. When our disturbing emotions decrease, our meditation practice will automatically progress. In this way, all the benefits are accomplished.

According to some Western psychologists, if we suppress our thoughts then the mind will be damaged and so we should immediately do whatever comes to our mind. For example, when we feel aggressive, we should tear up a piece of paper and not wait for the aggression to build up in ourselves. Someone once told me that when he gets angry, it helps him to beat his pillow. Maybe that's true.

Maybe when a thought arises, we should just wait and see what happens to that thought. But that is not the way to preserve the vows. For instance, if a man puts sweets on the table and then says to his children: "Don't eat these sweets" his children will develop a strong desire to eat the sweets. But in our case, preserving the vows, is quite different. It is like a man putting poison on the table and telling people: "Don't eat that poison, otherwise you will die." No one has the motivation to eat the poison; rather they have the motivation to abandon the poison and will try to find a way to throw the poison away.

The Buddha taught that one should refrain from the disturbing emotions because following them will cause us suffering. That is why we refrain from negative actions and also accumulate the benefits of eliminating negative actions.

It is not true that without taking the vows we cannot attain higher state of mind. In fact, in the Kagyu tradition, Tilopa, Naropa, Gampopa, and Milarepa did not take the vows, but yet by their great diligence and wisdom, they were able to control their defilements and that served the same purpose as taking the vows. Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, and Milarepa are the most perfect teachers

and lineage holders of our tradition and were able to attain Buddhahood in one lifetime.

### **Questions**

**Question:** Rinpoche, what does it mean to accumulate virtue?

**Rinpoche:** Accumulation of virtue is the karma of action of body, speech, and mind. Action has two aspects: virtuous and unvirtuous. So virtue consists of whatever virtuous karma is accumulated through the virtuous actions of body, speech, and mind. Conversely, unvirtuous karma is whatever karma is accumulated through unvirtuous actions of body, speech, and mind.

**Question:** In terms of karmic situations, by maintaining the precepts, are we just not creating further karma, or are we repairing old karma as well?

**Rinpoche:** In terms of preserving the precepts, when negative karma is abandoned, then good karma can increase and the result is virtue. Karma is like a job. Our mundane life is based on what kind of job we have. If we have a good job then we can have a good life more or less, and if we don't have a good job we may not have such a good life. So by practicing positive karma through our body, speech, and mind, we can attain Buddhahood.

**Question:** My understanding is that cutting through the chain of karma brings us to Buddhahood, not the accumulation of good or bad karma, since we are still in samsara, accumulating good or bad karma.

**Rinpoche:** Here is a very old example for this. Long ago, in order to make fire, one had to rub two sticks together very vigorously and when the fire ignites and it burns up both sticks. At the time of accumulating good karma, bad karma is abandoned and good karma is developed. Slowly all the defilements are controlled. By this process, all negativities are gradually destroyed and karma stops automatically. During the time of practicing, we try to accomplish good karma and abandon bad karma. It's like the two sticks rubbing together. Gradually we are able to destroy all the negativities and karma stops by itself.

**Question:** Would you say something about the ripening of karma and how the practitioner experiences that?

**Rinpoche:** Generally, the explanation of ripening of karma is very subjective and hard to understand. The idea can be understood

only through clear wisdom. But if we try to examine it by way of examples, then it is quite easy to understand. For instance, I was born in Tibet and if I think, “Why was I born in Tibet and why wasn’t I born in America?” I can’t think about that. The fact is simply that because of my previous karma I had to be born in Tibet. I may think why was I born in the year 1931 and why did I not die before 1959 so I wouldn’t have to endure the suffering of the Chinese invasion. I get the same answer: everything that happened was due to my own past karma. If I want to come to America, I need a visa. But if you wonder why you were born in America, who gave you the visa? Your karma gave you the visa.

**Question:** It sounds like it is the responsibility of the individual to shape his or her own karma. But I wonder about freedom of decision. Karmapa seems to be the knower of the three times and Padmasambhava made predictions about what’s happening in the future. How can you predict the future if karma is based on freedom?

**Rinpoche:** Clairvoyance cannot be conceived in ordinary terms. For example, a man may predict that in the future somebody will come here to build a factory and start a business. At the time of making the prediction, he will not know whether that person will come in the future or not, whether he will have the idea of building the factory or not. Also, in Tibet, prophecies were made that, in the future, a certain person will come and will have to undergo certain kinds of suffering. That is his karma that he is to undergo, but that can be predicted.

**Question:** But doesn’t that contradict freedom, the power of free decision, to decide in which direction you will go?

**Rinpoche:** That is not contradictory to make a decision for oneself because when a prediction is made that someone is going to do such and such in the future, freedom of decision has not been taken away. Instead, what is being said is that someone is going to do that in the future.

**Question:** Karma sounds sometimes as if it always comes from the past. But could it come from a vision of a desirable future. For example, if I see a vision to build Gampo Abbey (this is the retreat center in Canada which Thrangu Rinpoche is Abbot of), therefore it’s part of my karma and part of my power is to be able to fulfill that vision. I’m trying to resolve karma and freedom in my mind. What’s happening now to any one of us is simply the result of the

past. Maybe it's the result of a vision of the future. You said that Padmasambhava made a prediction. Maybe that prediction is his vision of a desirable future and he sees it is possible that it could be that way, so he makes that prediction.

**Rinpoche:** When Padmasambhava came to Tibet in the eighth century, he predicted that in the future the iron bird would fly west and that the dharma would flourish in that country. At that time there were no airplanes, no iron birds, but now we have them. So there doesn't seem to be any contradiction in predicting the future even if it doesn't exist at the present time.

**Question:** Rinpoche emphasized the importance of taking the vow to do virtuous activity so that there would be an effective accumulation of merit. It seems to me there are two aspects to say not killing: realization that there is no need to be angry and also the understanding of how to respond in a compassionate way in the situation.

**Rinpoche:** For example, if we vow not to kill, we have the strong motivation not to kill then if thoughts of killing arises in our mind and our bodily action will not go along with the thought of killing. Then slowly we will become accustomed to the thought of refraining from killing, and thus the defilements of the mind will slowly be purified. Body and speech support the mind. If bodily actions always follow after the mind, then the mind becomes stronger and stronger. But if actions of body and speech stop, then the mind is no longer supported by body and speech and the mind grows weaker and weaker.

**Question:** It seems that there may be times when one has to do an unskillful action when there are enemies who are trying to destroy the dharma or harm the guru. How do you do that without violating your bodhisattva vow and your precepts?

## *Notes*

1. The negative karma from wanting to do harm to someone is less than that of killing which could easily result in one ending up in the hell realms or anywhere else.
2. As with Christianity sexual misconduct can be interpreted either quite strictly, in which case many sexual practices such as premarital sex, masturbation, and homosexuality are considered inappropriate. In Tibet there are also taboos such as having intercourse with a woman while she is menstruating. These are all considered sexual misconduct in the traditional literature. The other interpretation is to take a more liberal interpretation, which is often done by Thrangu Rinpoche, which is that the sexual practice must lead to harm being done to someone (whether they are formally married or not). In other teachings he has also spoken specifically against incest and adultery because these practices obviously harm the child in incest and the wife in adultery.
3. During special practices such as the *nyungne* practice or during retreats of a set of teachings, Thrangu Rinpoche offers participants to take the five basic vows of (1) not killing, (2) not stealing, (3) not lying (4) not taking intoxicants, and (5) not engaging in sexual misconduct. One can take these vows for one day, one week, one month, one year, or a lifetime (as nuns and monks do). If one doesn't take these vows each day, but follows them, one does not derive any positive karma from them. However, if one takes the vow and follows them, one derives positive karma from them.
4. Buddhist believe the outside world as we see it with its rocks and trees is not the true nature of phenomena, but rather more like an illusion. This is a complex argument and may be found in Thrangu Rinpoche's *Transcending Ego: Distinguishing Consciousness and Wisdom* (Namo Buddha Publications) and *The Third Karmapa's Treatise on Buddha-essence* (Namo Buddha Publications). The looking into the true nature of reality is done in vipashyana meditation.
5. For more detail on the eight consciousnesses see Thrangu Rinpoche's *Transcending Ego: Distinguishing Consciousness from Wisdom*. Basically, the sixth mental consciousness is the discursive mind that we use for all our thinking. For something to produce a latent negative karmic seed (Tib. *chag pak*), it has to enter the eighth or alaya consciousness which continues into the next lifetime. What Thrangu Rinpoche is saying here is that this karmic latency is more than a stored thought because karma connects all beings on a much higher level. In other words, we are connected to every being on a much higher level in the alaya consciousness and so "being one with the universe" is not just a catchy

phrase, but is literally true. Spiritual development becomes one of seeing beyond the appearances of “I” and “other.”

### ***A Brief Biography of Thrangu Rinpoche***

Thrangu Rinpoche was born in Kham in 1933. At the age of five he was formally recognized by the Sixteenth Karmapa and the previous Situ Rinpoche as the incarnation of the great Thrangu tulku. Entering Thrangu monastery, from the ages of seven to sixteen he studied reading, writing, grammar, poetry, and astrology, memorized ritual texts, and completed two preliminary retreats. At sixteen under the direction of Khenpo Lodro Rabsel he began the study of the three vehicles of Buddhism while staying in retreat.

At twenty-three he received full ordination from the Karmapa. When he was twenty-seven Rinpoche left Tibet for India at the time of the Chinese military takeover. He was called to Rumtek, Sikkim, where the Karmapa had his seat in exile. At thirty-five he took the geshe examination before 1500 monks at Buxador monastic refugee camp in Bengal, and was awarded the degree of Geshe Lharampa. On his return to Rumtek he was named Abbot of Rumtek monastery and the Nalanda Institute for Higher Buddhist studies at Rumtek. He has been the personal teacher of the four principal Karma Kagyu tulkus: Shamar Rinpoche, Situ Rinpoche, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, and Gyaltsab Rinpoche.

Thrangu Rinpoche has traveled extensively throughout Europe, the Far East and the USA and is the abbot of Gampo Abbey, Nova Scotia, Canada. In 1984 he spent several months in Tibet where he ordained over 100 monks and nuns and visited several monasteries. In Nepal Rinpoche has also founded a monastery, Thrangu Tashi Choling in Bodhanath, a retreat center and college at Namo Buddha, east of the Katmandu Valley, and has established a school in Bodhanath for the general education of lay children and young monks. He also has built in Katmandu Tara Abbey offering a full dharma education for nuns. He has also completed a beautiful monastery in Sarnath, India a few minutes walking distance from where the Buddha gave his first teaching on the Four Noble Truths. Presently, Rinpoche has begun planning a retreat center for his Western students in Colorado, USA.

More recently, because of his vast knowledge of the Dharma, he was appointed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be the personal tutor for the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa.

## *Conduct*

Many people study and practice the dharma diligently, but they do not achieve any results.

Many lamas are unhappy that they have not been able to engender realization in their pupils; the pupils are also unhappy, thinking, "I haven't been able to gain realization." The reason for this is that many lamas emphasize view and meditation but do not emphasize proper conduct. They then pass this attitude on to their pupils, who also see view and meditation as important and conduct as not so important. These lamas teach the accumulation of wisdom and the accumulation of merit, but the accumulation of wisdom is emphasized and given much attention while the accumulation of merit is regarded as insignificant.

This is the reason why results in meditation are not achieved.

--- *Thrangu Rinpoche in The Rangtong and Shentong View of Emptiness*

Even if your view is higher than the sky, it is vital that your behavior regarding cause and effect be finer than barley flour.

-- *Gampopa*

## *Glossary*

**bodhisattva** Literally, one who exhibits the mind of enlightenment.

An individual who is committed to the mahayana path of practicing compassion and the six paramitas in order to achieve Buddhahood and free all beings from samsara. More specifically, those with a motivation to achieve liberation from samsara and are on one of the ten bodhisattva levels that culminates in Buddhahood.

**dharma** This has three main meanings: Any truth such as the sky is blue and secondly, as used in this text, the teachings of the Buddha (also called Buddha-dharma) and the ultimate truth of nature of the mind is also called the dharmakaya.

**disturbing emotion** (Skt. *klesha*) The emotional obscurations (in contrast to intellectual obscurations) which are also translated as “afflictions” or “poisons.” The three main disturbing emotions are (passion or attachment), (aggression or anger); and (ignorance or delusion). The five disturbing emotions are the three above plus pride and (envy or jealousy).

**emotional obscurations** There are two main obscurations to enlightenment: emotional obscurations which are the disturbing emotions of attachment, anger, ignorance, pride and jealousy and the cognitive obscurations which is a misunderstanding of the empty quality of phenomena.

**Hinayana** Literally, the “lesser vehicle.” The term refers to the first teachings of the Buddha which emphasized the careful examination of mind and its confusion. Also known as the Theravada path.

**karma** Literally “action.” Karma is a universal law that when one does a wholesome action one’s circumstances will improve and when one does an unwholesome action negative results will eventually occur from the act.

**Karmapa** The title of seventeen successive incarnations of Dusum Khyenpa who has headed the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism.

**Kagyü** One of the four major schools of Buddhism in Tibet. It was founded by Marpa. The other three are the Nyingma, the Sakya, and the Gelug schools.

**Mahayana** Literally, the “great vehicle.” These are the teachings of the second turning of the wheel of dharma, which emphasize shunyata, compassion, and universal Buddha-nature.

**Milarepa** (1040-1123 C.E.) Milarepa was a student of Marpa who attained enlightenment in one lifetime. His student Gampopa founded the (Dagpo) Kagyu lineage.

**Naropa** (956-1040 C.E.) An Indian master who is best known for transmitting many vajrayana teachings to Marpa who took these back to Tibet before the Moslem invasion of India.

**Nungne retreat** This is a purification retreat commonly undertaken during the first two weeks of Vaishakha (4th Tibetan month) commemorating the time when the Buddha was born, reached Buddhahood and passed into parinirvana. Usually involves fasting a all day meditation and prayer.

**Padmasambhava** (Tib. *Guru Rinpoche*) He was invited to Tibet in the ninth century C.E. and is known for pacifying the nonBuddhist forces and founding the Nyingma lineage.

**pandita** A great scholar.

**Pratimoksha vows** The vows of not killing, stealing, lying, etc. which are taken by monks and nuns.

**samsara** Conditioned existence of ordinary life in which suffering occurs because one still possesses attachment, aggression, and ignorance. It is contrasted to nirvana.

**sangha** These are the companions on the path. They may be all the persons on the path or the noble sangha, which are the realized ones.

**siddha** An accomplished Buddhist practitioner.

**Tilopa** (928-1009 C.E.) One of the eighty-four mahasiddhas who became the guru of Naropa who transmitted his teachings to the Kagyu lineage in Tibet.

**Vajrayana** The Vajrayana is based on the tantras and emphasizes the clarity aspect of phenomena and is mainly practiced in Tibet.

### *The Basic Teachings on Buddhism Series*

The literature in Buddhism is vast. Often the student doesn't know where to start or how to gain a grasp of the underlying principles of Buddhism.

This series of booklets is designed to provide the reader with an overview of the fundamental topics of Buddhism by Thrangu Rinpoche, the foremost scholar of the Kagyu lineage, who has been teaching Buddhism for the last forty years and Westerners for the last two decades.

We would suggest the booklets in roughly the following order.

#### **SERIES A**

1. ***The Life of the Buddha and the Four Noble Truths.*** A brief summary of the life of the Buddha followed by a teaching on the Four Noble Truths which was the first teaching the Buddha gave which lays out the foundation of Buddhism.
2. ***A Guide to Shamatha Meditation.*** The fundamental meditation done by all sects of Buddhism is basic sitting or shamatha meditation. The booklet contains practical hands on information for the meditator.
3. ***The Ten Virtuous Actions.*** To make any progress on the Buddhist path one must actually conduct oneself in a positive manner. This booklet describes this conduct and describes the conditions for incurring positive and negative karma.
4. ***The Twelve Links of Interdependent Origination.*** The Buddha said that there was no god or gods creating or directing the world, rather everything comes about because of Interdependent Origination. This booklet on this topic has been used in many dharma classes.
5. ***The Four Dharmas of Gampopa.*** These four dharmas are a summary of the whole Buddhist path by the great Tibetan meditation master Gampopa. These four lines are studied in Tibet to augment the Four Noble Truths.

#### **SERIES B**

6. ***The Five Buddha Families and Eight Consciousnesses.*** Thrangu Rinpoche describes the Five Buddha Families which are prominent in Vajrayana Buddhism. Also included is a summary of the Eight Consciousnesses and how they function.
7. ***A Guide to Mahamudra Meditation.*** Mahamudra is the principle meditation of the Kagyu lineage. Unlike Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation, Mahamudra meditation can be done in during the daily life activities and involves techniques of looking directly into the mind.
8. ***An Aspirational Prayer for Mahamudra.*** The Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje wrote a very concise teaching summarizing all the aspects of Mahamudra Meditation. This booklet gives the root verses of Rangjung Dorje as well as a comprehensive explanation by Thrangu Rinpoche.

**PAPERBACK BOOKS BY THRANGU RINPOCHE  
FOUNDATION BOOKS**

*The Three Vehicles of Buddhist Practice.* This book gives an overview of the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana as it was practiced in Tibet. Boulder: Namo Buddha Publications, 1998.

*The Four Foundations of Buddhist Practice.* There are four thoughts one should contemplate before practicing precious human birth, impermanence, karma, and the downfalls of samsara. Boulder: Namo Buddha Publications, 2001.

*The Middle-way Meditation Instructions of Mipham Rinpoche.* This great Tibetan scholar who actually stayed for a while with the previous Thrangu Rinpoche at his monastery describes how one develops compassion and then expands this to bodhicitta and eventually develops prajna or wisdom. Boulder: Namo Buddha Publications, 2000.

*The Practice of Tranquillity and Insight.* This book is a practical guide to the two types of meditation that form the core of Buddhist spiritual practice. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1993.

*Buddha Nature.* This text is an overview of Buddha-essence. Buddha-essence is possessed by all sentient beings and it is this essence which makes it possible for beings to reach enlightenment. In this book Rinpoche gives a good overview of Buddha-essence and its characteristics.