



MINDROLLING INTERNATIONAL

JETSÜN KHANDRO RINPOCHE

Transcripts & Documents

The Profound Essence of Spiritual Practice

On October 20, 1998, within the first few years of travel to the US, the young Jetsün Khandro Rinpoche gave this public teaching at the New York City Shambhala Center.

I'm very happy to have this opportunity to return to New York, after three or four years. I believe many of you here are practitioners, meditators, either from this particular Shambhala Center or from other buddhist centers. This is very nice to see. In seeing some of the dharma centers around the world today, we can really begin to feel the growth of Buddhist meditation and philosophy. It's always nice to see that the profound teachings are spreading and flourishing, and that a growing number of people are practicing.



And I feel that we need to really appreciate the hard work of so many students, so many practitioners, for the teachings and [dharma] materials that are available to the western world today. And—while the modern world can be harmful in many ways—we also need to appreciate how much the media and modern technologies have truly helped in transferring the teachings [to the West]. It took so many hundreds of years for Buddhism to travel from India to Tibet; today, the same amount of work has been accomplished in the westernization of Buddhism in, roughly, forty years. So, a great deal of appreciation and encouragement and confidence arises seeing practitioners practice very sincerely and well.

There is also [however] one concern among all of us. Something as profound as the philosophy and teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha needs to be completely understood as an inner growth practice; with individual responsibility to practice [in order] to truly understand the meaning and main motivation, or main intention, behind such a practice.

As I said before, media and modern technology can be harmful in some ways because of how things become popular. Because of popularity, when a person chooses a spiritual path—even as profound or pure a path as the buddhist tradition—we find that certain faults, or difficulties, arise. And so anyone who chooses to be on a spiritual path [and to] actually pursue and study buddhadharma, must do so realizing what its true meaning is. If your spiritual

practice is only for some kind of temporary benefit or temporary relief, it's far better to waste your time somewhere else. (Laughter.)

Spiritual Practice

So spiritual practice must be completely understood. And perhaps many people do understand it properly, nevertheless this is not only for beginners. Buddhist practitioners who have spent many years in meditation and study talk constantly about absolute truth and the emptiness nature of inner and outer phenomena; yet we find they are still not able to "be" that person, that genuine person, who should arise out of any spiritual path—especially if one's claiming to be a buddhist meditator.

The entire philosophy of Buddhism rests in, first of all, being able to truly realize the responsibility of being a human being. Then, through understanding the interdependence of all sentient beings, we're able to develop some sanity in life, some common sense. Using our brains, or common sense, and perfecting that [understanding], we can live our lives fully and have sensible lives, lives that are a little different. If we're going to call ourselves the most intelligent of all species, then [we should] show some example that that's so. (Laughter.)

So the spiritual path needs to be understood as something very simple, rather than making it as complicated or complex as we want it to be—and not recognizing the true meaning, or true nature, of what's being taught.

Learning What Needs to Be Abandoned and What Needs to Be Cultivated

Now most of you who have studied buddhist texts – especially those who have read *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* by Patrul Rinpoche – realize that the essence of all the teachings is something that points out certain faults. Most of this text seems to very strongly criticize or find faults in practitioners—and I think rightly so. Atisha's instructions within this text talk about the kindness of one who is truly able to point out our hidden faults, [and how] that enables us to truly learn what needs to be abandoned and what needs to be cultivated.

This text—and the general buddhist point of view—begin most instructions with the intention of developing [more] openness and mindfulness within ourselves. If we sit down and think about it carefully, we human beings live our entire lives indulging in activities that do not really make that much sense or are that useful. When I examine my own self, I say "thirty years of my life, and what has this life

attained that is really beneficial or useful?" There is nothing to show, nothing much that actually says "this is the true essence of having lived so many years."

So, with our pride and our egos and mainly our mental assumptions that we have done something, we tend to fabricate that examination. And out of that fabrication, or pretense, we may assume that we've lived full lives, that we've touched people's lives, that we've said this and done that. But this is mainly a kind of condolence we give ourselves to satisfy ourselves.

When I open my own diaries, I say, "Oh, in 1996 things were done, almost all the pages are full." And we take great pride in that. And nowadays most of us buddhist teachers—who are said to be renunciates—talk about "what are we going to do...," and "will we have time in July...," and things like that. In this way we are said to be practicing. Nevertheless, if you truly examine this, there's a real hollowness in terms of seeing a human life and its true meaning. Apart from some kind of thought or mental assumption [about] essence, or true depth of meaning, not many of us are really able to do [it].

Therefore, [let's] examine and see how we're ending up as human beings. We're doing things from early morning until we crash into our beds [at night]. With our bodies we try to accumulate, to do, various physical actions; our speech is always very busy; and our thoughts are always very busy with some form of activity or other. Nevertheless, if at this moment anyone of us were to die, sit down and examine what truly remains. About *what* could you say "this is the essence," "this is what I've achieved," or "this is what I can give to somebody else"? Whether you've lived thirty or sixty or seventy years, if it's condensed down to the one happiness, or one valuable opportunity, or one really helpful thing that you leave behind for another sentient being—other than a lot of mental assumptions of having done this or that—in reality, we don't end up accumulating anything.

That is one way to look at it: examining [our lives], we find "unnecessary-ness." There isn't much meaning, or essence, which is *nyingpo* in Tibetan; in terms of "essence," there isn't much of value. And so, it's very necessary to understand that when we talk philosophically about "illusory-like existence," [we are talking about] this way of living where so many of our activities have no truly meaningful essence. Yet we end up being busy our entire lives and having no time.

We hear this all the time: "I have no time, I have no time." If we ask Buddhist meditators if they meditate, they say "I have no time." If we ask parents, they say

"I have no time for the children," and children have no time for their parents. Friends have no time for one another, we have no time on the job, and we have no time at home. (Laughter.) So in running from one place to another, it seems, an entire life passes away.

In the middle of all that, we find that nothing actually stops. The movement of life continues, the movement of time continues, and so with time and our lives, some kind of action is being accumulated. When we talk about this from a buddhist contemplative point of view, we talk about four main thoughts, or reminders.

The Four Reminders

In *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Patrul Rinpoche talks about four main thoughts that should precede every meditation, every moment of contemplation: first, the preciousness of human existence; second, impermanence; third, the suffering of samsara; and fourth, karma, or cause and effect. These four reminders are said to be the main foundation of contemplation. Contemplating them, the meditator is truly able to remain without fabrication, or fabricated beliefs about his or her own spiritual path and spiritual motivation. They should truly enable practitioners to be completely honest with themselves.

In spiritual practices, we sometimes talk about benefiting sentient beings, or making life more meaningful, or being able to truly do something that is good. In the beginning, our motivation may be very clear, but very soon our habitual patterns return. These habitual tendencies re-create the same patterns of living, thinking, doing, or saying things. Because of this—[while] we may be doing a lot of meditation or contemplation in our hearts, and we may have a very pure intention to help sentient beings or to do something beneficial—the pull of our habitual patterns, or tendencies, does not allow us to remain in touch with that pure motivation, with what is really beneficial and good. To overcome such tendencies, the Four Reminders, again, are very beneficial.

The Four Noble Truths

The first reminder talks about the preciousness of human existence. Now when we study Buddhist doctrine, the first teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha are the Four Noble Truths. And he talks, first, about the noble truth of suffering. As meditators, we are able to understand that all sentient beings have some form of suffering. Because of that suffering, it's necessary to contemplate how interdependent we are with all sentient beings. With all the different layers and

masks we put on ourselves and others, we tend not to feel how much sameness, how much interdependence, we have among ourselves.

First Noble Truth of Suffering

The first noble truth of suffering is an effective way of allowing mind to settle down in the very beginning—and to understand that you are not the only one who wants to be happy. Happiness is desired by all sentient beings; any living being who has senses desires the same happiness and does not want suffering. If we sit down and think about that, what is it that we call "happiness"? What is "suffering"? And what causes that suffering?

We should also question why we think about it in this way. If a spiritual path is one that we can follow in a general, simple way, then being a sensible human being shouldn't [have to] come from an eastern philosophy about feeling happiness and knowing the cause of happiness, or feeling suffering and knowing the cause of suffering. Common sense should enable us to sit down and understand that. However, if [it makes] you comfortable, if you feel the need of inspiration from a philosophy or spiritual path to understand that, that is why spiritual paths and philosophies arise and spread.

When we talk about Buddhism—which is just a title, a name—much has to do with mind: how to use that common sense in the intellect, how to truly fulfill the responsibilities of being an ordinary human being—and how to work with that responsibility. We can call it "buddhist thought" or simply "human thought," as long as its purpose is to sit down and understand what suffering is, and what the cause of suffering is. And then knowing that just as much as we don't want [suffering], similarly no other sentient being wants it either. So what is it that does not allow us to cut through the tendency to inflict harm on another sentient being, to inflict pain on another sentient being—most of the time, unintentionally?

We call ourselves "human beings," with a spiritual base that we could call "buddha nature," or "primordial wisdom"—or simply "common sense."

With that as our basis, logically speaking we should have some amount of control over our own bodies, our speech, and our minds. Mind is contained within the body; this mind and body function together all the time. If there is such a thing as mind with which we are thinking, those thoughts are generated by ourselves. It shouldn't be that difficult to control, or to discipline, our thoughts. And our speech is very much our own, [as are] the actions of our bodies. Since wanting happiness and not wanting suffering is the same for all

sentient beings, logically speaking it shouldn't be difficult not to harm someone else physically; and not to say things that are not truthful, that we're not sure of, or that may be exaggerated, harmful, or painful to someone else.

If we are going to call ourselves "skeptics"—as most Buddhists are trained to be—we must only believe in the most absolute truth, and not believe in anything that may be just a dream, a mirage, or an illusion. To have so much faith in a formless thought that we let a single thought rule our lives, and to make it such a big, important issue that we spend entire lives meditating to dissolve that thought, that's a little bit... (laughter). If we look at it carefully, that's what meditation is all about.

Buddhists take great pride in saying that one should be "nontheistic," and not believe things like a creator or being born in a heaven. Yet our meditation doesn't seem to reflect that at all. We sit in meditation still hoping something will happen from the outside, [still] believing so many extraordinary things will happen. These are the same people who are supposed to be meditating on nature of emptiness! (Laughter.) But within the nature of emptiness, we try to find form, we try to see things, hope for things.

We all know that nirvana, or enlightenment, is no other than mind; and that from cutting through all tendencies of fabrication—when illusion is completely shattered—from that arises primordial wisdom. Yet we [still] have some hope and expectation that *we* might be the exception, the chosen one who can actually enjoy the splendors of nirvana, then turn back to people who are still ignorant saying "I'm going to save you all." In this way, a kind of duality arises within the spiritual path. No matter how many years such a person has mediated, he or she has never understood the noble truth of suffering, from the very beginning.

Most of us just end up very lucky, very fortunate. Someone like me, for example, might never understand what suffering is: being born in a very good family, raised up in this particular way, much of our knowledge of suffering is book knowledge, intellectual knowledge. But then, all of us have some difficulty in our lives, [and] suffering is not so different for us. If we sit down and count [them], most of us have quite a lot of difficulties—divorces, loss of jobs, children growing up not according to our wishes, or simply [living in] New York City (VKR laughs; laughter). There are all different forms of difficulties. But the noble truth of suffering is talking about something else entirely.

Most of our lives are very comfortable and, while there may be difficulties, if we count them, there are more happy moments and fewer moments of suffering. Because of that [our] aversion to samsara—the great wish to actually be free from this existence—is not very strong.

Now traditional buddhist texts, such as *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, talk about a variety of existences, or Six Realms, where each realm has its own difficulties or sufferings. In the Human Realm—this particular existence in which we live—they talk about birth, old age, sickness, and death, and the various sufferings that arise. Yet from the inner sense of meditation and contemplation, [we could] look at our lives simply, as we said before.

How very solid, how very fixated, how very attached we become to things that are not as useful or solid as we assume they are. When we look at the moments of our lives—especially in terms of our emotions and feelings—most of the things we hold on to are based on some kind of mental assumption.

I always think of this example: let's say I tell you that we're going to do an elaborate ceremony to demonstrate the power of my horns. And I say "Look at my horns. Only those with great devotion will be able to see them; only those fortunate enough will be able to see the magnificent quality of my horns, which are from the East, and which I've carried with me throughout many lifetimes. How beautiful they are, how sharp, how bejeweled, how very nice they are!" If I go on like this, those of you sitting there might soon come to some understanding that there *are* no horns, no horns at all! And yet I could go on and on, making them as solid, as important, as magnificent or as valuable as I want them to be. And, just as there are no horns to be totally convinced of, similarly I could go on with my emotions: my anger, my desire, my hatred, my jealousy, and so forth.

In examining and dissecting thoughts, all of us who've done a little meditation will be able to see that those thoughts we fixate on are none other than the horns I'm talking about. They don't have any form or solidity. What arises, however, when we meddle with them, fiddle with them, then becomes important. Just as I could describe my horns, similarly I could sit here and describe why my anger came [up], why it's so important, why it needs to be demonstrated, who is to blame for it, how powerful it is, how stagnant, how it doesn't go away, and what needs to be done about it, and the nature of its antidotes (laughter). We could go on and on—but the fact is that it doesn't exist. It exists only as much as we hold or grasp onto it.

And the rest of our existence is the same: we make meaning out of meaningless things. Trying to see the essence and the use of things, we spend our entire lives [driven by] a kind of force which we call "karma," or "habitual pattern." When we take the time to sit down quietly, look around us and think, [we see] an entire world system functioning in this way. Nobody is telling us to do things, yet we all do them; nobody is telling us to say things, but we all say them; nobody teaches us what anger is and how to demonstrate it, yet [there is] so much manifestation of anger. [We live] entire lives doing, saying, and reacting to things in the same ways; protecting, defending, and holding onto the same things; and then moving along in the same ways, day in and day out. [This is how] we live our lives!

Suffering is very much being able to know this. We have a body, and yet how much control [do we have]; we have speech, but how much control [do we have of our] speech; we have minds, and how much [are they] under control?

The lives of human beings—which are very difficult to attain—can be so very beneficial, if used properly. Understanding their potential, [our lives can] make life happy and peaceful for as many as come in contact with us. For what reason [then, do we] hold onto things that don't even have form, that don't have any kind of existence other than our own grasping mind? [For what reason do we] allow them to become so very important, so very necessary, that then we have to rely on 84,000 tenets to teach us how to be kind, how to truly let go of useless anger?

Spiritual development, within this relative existence, is so very beneficial for all of us. It is also a very clear reflection, like a mirror that we should keep in front of us, to see that which is so easy to do. And yet we do not *want* to see that. Because of our strong attraction and grasping to complexities, we tend to attach ourselves to those things that are more complicated.

Emptiness Nature

Buddhist philosophy talks about illusory nature, or emptiness; and again and again, its texts go into deeper understanding of "emptiness nature." But emptiness nature doesn't need to be understood in a complicated way. It simply says that everything we hold to be true, real, or solid is, in fact, composite and doesn't have any independent existence on its own.

We can look at outer objects or we can look at ourselves—at that strongest of attachments, [our] sense of "I." The ego, or I, is always there. Most of you are

familiar with how analytical meditation pinpoints that certain thing called "I." We find that wherever we look—outside or inside, in any part of our body or organs—no matter where we search, in reality we cannot find anything that is independent, [nothing] that can be called an independent "self," or "I."

So we walk around with a false notion that "I" in some way exists. Logically, we gather together the compositeness of body, as well as mind and consciousness, karma, and habitual patterns, and we assume there's an "I." And yet [when we] really examine it, "I" and our strong grasping to its self existence is no different than the notion of the existence of my horns. So we can see that "emptiness nature" is simply talking about that nature which is "empty," and yet with its composite quality, has the [potential for] action, for some kind of activity.

All the texts talk about resting the mind in the absolute true nature, the true nature of emptiness. And within the Buddhist tradition, we find 84,000 tenet teachings [on emptiness]. Then over the last 2,600 years of Buddhism, we find more explanations and texts expounding different details of these 84,000 tenets. So hundreds of thousands of teachings are available on emptiness. I think nowhere in the history of any civilization is there a more complicated method to explain what emptiness is! (Laughter.) [It is] a clear example of how our mind really wants something to be there (laughter).

We find every teacher trying to explain what emptiness is and talking about the same things over and over: no shape, no color, no form, no feeling, no touch—no nothing (laughter). I sometimes feel tremendously touched and grateful to all of these teachers: in no other way could anyone explain more kindly what emptiness is. When a teacher sits and sees no form, no feeling, no touch, no sensation, no color, no shape—there's really no other way to support that in speech than to try and explain about not making it complicated, keeping it simple.

When complexity is added, illusion grows, [and] things become more trapped in action and reaction, in cause and fruition. Illusion—whatever we may call it—simply grows out of making [emptiness] complex, making it difficult. Spiritual practice, such as buddhist meditation, should lead towards cutting through complexity and resting the mind in an understanding of absolute truth. Then something can be understood. And today's meditators—especially in the West where so much practice is going on—need to understand that.

When [absolute truth] is understood, then you will really be practicing sincerely. If you can remain with that understanding, the spiritual path has some meaning—without any pretense of being a meditator, or of being on any particular path of practice. From the moment you sit in meditation, you realize that what you're trying to achieve is simply the first basic responsibility of being a human being, being honest to yourself and honest towards others.

From that honesty, you're able to understand complete genuineness in every action. If you have a body, you fulfill the responsibilities of having a human body, and [you] do not harm anyone else. If you achieve some happiness for yourself, in the midst of your own happiness, you generate as much or greater happiness as you can for others. If you have speech, you're responsible for your speech and you don't hurt or inflict harm on anyone else through speech. And you take care of your own mind, generating thoughts that are useful. Simple common sense tells us that if a thought is useless, meaningless, or harmful, and not at all good for anyone else, you shouldn't generate that [thought]. So, you're able to really train your body, speech, and mind—and you are able to see what is left.

If you do not harm anyone with your body, speech, or mind, what else remains? That remaining nature is a spiritual meditator. You may not be very busy doing very intricate, complicated things, but even if you were doing the most complex studies of Buddhism, you should end up that way. And, if a beginning meditator can begin that way and that is the end [result], if you choose to go through all the 84,000 tenets for millions of years to reach that same point, it's very much your own choice! (Laughter.) The more you practice in this way, the more you understand Buddhism. I think it is necessary to do that.

I recall times when we would go to our teachers, [wanting] to receive the most complicated teachings, the most challenging instructions, and heart essence teachings. These were always very tempting. But when teachers would talk on the Four Reminders, most of the time we wouldn't attend. We knew them already: we knew human life was very precious, we knew impermanence was there (laughter), we knew about cause and effect and the suffering of sentient beings. So we would wait for the most challenging topics to come up. But if we think about it, all of those challenging, complicated philosophies, views, meditations, and different paths of practices are meant to [make us] really tired of doing them, really tired of trying to see. (Laughter.) So [while] there's real benefit from them, in some sense they're ways to tame the really untamed ones.

The way to [practice] is to truly come back and understand that within the First Noble Truth—the truth of suffering—is the entirety of all the teachings of all three yanas. One who doesn't understand and appreciate this human life, who never realizes its potential for so much goodness, who is unable to fulfill all of its responsibilities, and doesn't understand the value of human life—such a person cannot truly generate any compassion for [other] sentient beings.

Questions & Answers

On Working with Form/Emptiness

Q. Is it possible to be a good buddhist by cleaning your room? (Laughter.) I ask that in all seriousness. I'm trying to help somebody learn how to clean their room; and if it's all an illusion, if it doesn't really matter, would you say... ?

A. No, no, no, no. I think to be a good buddhist, you have to know how to clean your room. (Laughter)

Q. So I can tell my friend that...

A. I think so. [Then] the mind can rest in the absolute, true nature of emptiness, in the absolute true quality innately within each sentient being. [We] get stuck in relative existence for such a long time, believing in it for so many lifetimes—and for those who only see as far as one lifetime, even in this one lifetime we're so very stuck in our own fixations, on what seems so real. Although the innate quality of emptiness is there, we haven't realized it, so we're still stuck with form. And as long as we're stuck with form, *talking* about emptiness does not at all mean that we've realized it. Until then, our responsibility—even to clean up clutter—is necessary.

Q. So, sometimes in order to shatter illusion, you have to do some work.

A. Look at this shrine room, look at the forms we have, look at where I am sitting. (Laughter.) As long as this is real then, yes, we have to clean the shrine room, and make sure that there's always someone sitting on these brocades—although it looks a little bit odd in some cases.

Q. Is it real to you?

A. It shouldn't be; that's my practice.

Q. It *shouldn't* be?

A. It shouldn't be; but as long as it's necessary, then it's necessary.

Q. (inaudible) When we talk about dealing with depression, we [may] realize that everything around us is an illusion, that it's all complete nonsense, it doesn't exist, it's all mind. But what if you have a certain type of karma that you have to deal with every day, like a disability? And you're told not to be depressed about it, not to get really sad or anything, and you realize that you actually create it yourself. But you still get depressed. What do you do in that situation?

A. It's a good question, in the sense that that's why form becomes necessary, as I said in relation to the first question. But we cannot say "this form is good," or "that form is not good." Often we try to cut through one fixed, or rigid, form, thinking "[that's] not the right thing to do" or "I should be more flexible," [and we] develop another path. But over the ages that path, again, becomes one more form. So many forms arise out of trying to cut through existing forms.

In the same way, Buddhism has been formulated as a philosophy and path of practice: different yanas, different levels, different do's and don'ts, and levels of practice, things that some can see and some cannot, some can do and some cannot. And then there has to be someone sitting to judge whether this person is qualified to do this or not qualified to do that. In the beginning, none of those rigid forms arose as a necessity at all. They were never talked about.

Through time, human beings handle *even* something as profound as buddhist philosophy [this way]. We begin to use our own interpretations and our own minds to give rise to certain ideas, thinking they're really beneficial. We say, "truly, because it worked for me, it will work for you." And sometimes it does, but sometimes we just get stuck with another system. In trying to overcome one system, or form, we create another.

Students of a particular teacher become teachers themselves and, for them, their teacher is the most excellent teacher. They assume that what worked for them should work for everyone. And it's a good thought; but out of it, again, come two [warring] factions, saying, "my lineage is better than your lineage," "my school is better than your school." And again we have form.

Looking at it in terms of meditation, illusion needs to be understood to lessen our grasping and attachment; but on the other hand, [we must] always appreciate relative existence.

When talking about emptiness, always remember that suffering is part of it. The Buddhist teachings do not begin with "everything is emptiness"; they begin with "everything is by nature suffering." [They] acknowledge relativity, first, and then emptiness nature as the core essence of relative experience. The life of a human being need not be stuck in relativity; and that relativity need not be so bad or concrete. When we realize its core essence of emptiness, we balance relativity and emptiness, rather than rejecting one [or the other]. If we reject the relative and remain stuck in emptiness, we can never be ordinary, compassionate human beings; if we forget emptiness and remain stuck in relativity, then we end up as selfish human beings.

On Letting Go

Q. (inaudible: re feeling an emotion and letting it go)... If something very painful happened to somebody early on, and they experience a numbness growing up regarding that type of experience, do they not have to *feel* what happened in order to release it?

A. I think a person is very lucky [to have] only experienced one kind of difficult experience in life. (Laughter.) To relive [it] so that one can recognize how painful it was and then get over it, sounds quite logical and practical. But life [continues to be] full of difficulties—even though we think we've only experienced one major suffering. And I don't think it's necessary to relive or re-experience it, or to try and go back into it again. In a few exceptional cases, people are not able to deal with a major crisis. They're in some kind of denial, not able to even acknowledge it, and bottling up their emotions. On the other hand, some people work hard at generating a problem—which is unnecessary.

Every individual's difficulties and problems are different. It would be very unfair to generalize emotional distress or difficult experiences. People experience difficulties that you can't even dream of, and you must appreciate what happens to people. On the other hand, it's best, as much as possible, not to make it harder on yourself by making it more real, or letting it overcome [you] again and again and again. This is really not necessary.

Within the levels of meditative teachings and instructions, we first spend a fair amount of time recognizing and examining what anger is (or desire, or ignorance, or hatred, or jealousy). On the hinayana path, we simply look at it as something entirely negative, destructive—and abandon it completely. From a mahayana perspective, we talk about transforming it into something beneficial by applying an antidote: whenever anger comes up, we immediately try to

counteract that angry emotion by generating tolerance or peacefulness; or if some kind of desire or attachment comes up, we develop generosity or apply another antidote. [Then] vajrayana Buddhism talks about transcending, [transforming] it into its pure essence by recognizing its true nature. As soon as anger comes up, we're able to say "what is the nature of anger?" Then we dissolve it—not as an illusion but rather by seeing that, other than our own grasping mind, there is no anger by its own self. Nothing says "I am Mr. Anger, I will go into her mouth or mind and generate anger." (Laughter.) There's no such thing. So transcending talks about it in that way.

If we see the three [levels] together, however, they're all talking about the same thing. Because people have different potential, different causes and conditions, different aptitudes and likes, [they] feel attracted to the paths that seems most skillful [to them]. For some, transcending works very well; for some, transformation works very well; and for some, abandoning works very well. Ultimately it's the anger that has to go, isn't it? (Laughter.)

So, you can sit and visualize your teacher in front [of you] radiating light into your heart center and dispelling all anger. That's one effective method. But, ultimately, you learn there's neither teacher, nor you, nor your anger—therefore it was an unnecessary thing to do. (Laughter.) From a hinayana point of view, when anger comes up, you might simply abandon it, drop it. That's it! It's a way of seeing that all the unfortunate emotions or difficulties we experience in our lives will remain as long as we make them [do so]. This does not in any way mean that we don't appreciate the difficulties that people experience. But the wise person is one who's able to let go and not drag it on too long, because it's not beneficial to oneself or anyone else. So making this story very long is also your own choice (laughter), and being able to end it is also up to you. The logical way of looking at it is the more beneficial way of doing it.

On Personal Investigation

Q. (inaudible)

A. With all of our different explanations and our common sense—even in terms of absolute truth—we try to achieve understanding based on somebody else's hard work. [Even] sitting in meditation, we're very much working with the hard work of somebody else's experience. Reading these two texts, we understand and say "this is true, this really strikes my heart"—but that's actually somebody else's experience, somebody else's logic. Even [your] sitting here, trying to understand or agree with me that a pot is empty by nature, is based on my own experience.

When we try to gain conviction based on somebody else's hard work, it doesn't work very well. Because our conviction is not based on our own examination, it's very weak. So [as soon as] something more solid comes up, our weak conviction is actually subdued by whatever is more apparent. When relativity is more apparent, [when] anger is more apparent, you forget what Khandro Rinpoche said about thoughts being empty by nature.

Nothing is more effective than spending time in personal investigation and examination, taking the time to truly examine things such as impermanence or suffering. You can spend considerable time saying "that strikes me as being true," but when you examine it [yourself], you're completely convinced. In Buddhism, we talk about the importance of devotion, but faith and devotion are not merely agreeing with what somebody else says. The Buddha taught, in the first place, that [everything] has to be based on your personal investigation. It's very much like the analogy of tasting honey: [when you taste] honey, you know it's sweet. If somebody comes along and says, "I'm going to kill you if you do not say honey is salty," you may say that it's salty—but deep down, you can't do much about the mind that says it is sweet anyway. (Laughter.)

Similarly, [when you] spend time in personal investigative meditation, analyzing and examining whether something is true or not, then you experience [it] for yourself. Looking at something from all ten directions, you see that it's truly baseless and, therefore, useless to hold onto. Whether you call it "devotion," "faith," or whatever, it's very much the same thing. The strength of that allows us to cut through whatever habitual tendencies need to be cut through.

Guidelines for Basic Meditation

Q. (re Concentrative Meditation)

A. I think the best concentrative meditation is always shamatha, [which has] different levels of guidelines.

If you find that concentration is really difficult in the beginning, and your thoughts are very scattered, it's important to use some outer or inner support for meditation. If you have a meditation instructor, you can talk about this. If you don't, an outer support is usually any external object you take as a focus. If you're spiritually oriented, [you can] take an image of the Buddha, a seed syllable, or something [like that] as the focus. If you're not spiritually inclined, you can take a pencil, a mug, a vase, a flower, or whatever you want as your focus. Then, not thinking about anything in particular, simply look at it, and let all your six senses gather into one alignment. With some amount of focus on the

object, remain there completely. The idea is to become more focused, with all six senses coming together completely, complementing one another, and [becoming] one. This is very much the basic meditation.

Gradually, it's essential [for the meditation to become] more formless, while still having a focus. [Then] you can take your breathing as a focus. Breathing is the essential quality within you, the life force: [it's] the first activity you do when you are born, and the last activity you do as a live person. It's also said that the breath is the generator, that everything rides the breath. So as you breathe in and out—two very simple activities—focus on that as you would focus on an outer object. Gather all your concentration into breathing gently in and gently out, making sure that inhaling and exhaling are of the same time span. You can begin by [saying to yourself] "one, two, three" as you're breathe in, and "one, two, three" as you breathe out; or, more spiritually, "Om, Ah, Hum," "Om, Ah, Hum."

Once you become used to this, stop counting and simply remain [with your] breathing. Breathe gently in and out, without concentrating very much on anything other than your breath; and then gradually lose your sense of breathing in, and just concentrate on breathing out. Then let the mind rest. These are very effective methods for getting the mind to focus on oneness, rather than being scattered in various kinds of distracted thoughts.

On Mutual Appreciation

Q. (inaudible)... [I]n the midst of meditating and finding something true for myself, I've come into a lot of resistance from people I love ...

A. I think practitioners, especially buddhist practitioners, *must* remember that to talk about something, it has to be given a certain name. [For example] what began with Shakyamuni Buddha was then taught in a certain way, emphasizing certain qualities and so forth, and so we talk about "being buddhist" or "Buddhism." Other than that necessity, it is not really important to call oneself "buddhist"—as long as the practices are being done and we're really able to work with them.

It is not important to try so hard to convince people that what you're doing is better or different or whatever. Every good thing can be explained without [making] it religious or philosophical, if it is able to be practiced completely and sincerely. It's really not necessary to call it "Buddhism" or say "Buddha said" or "Buddhistically speaking." (Laughter.) So, if you really feel that you're a practitioner, a meditator, [you can] work skillfully in this way and keep your

practices to yourself—without any intention of changing or transforming another person where it's not necessary.

Explaining these things in a very simple way might be much more effective and helpful to others. We always feel it would be good if all our family members appreciated the same things that we do. That's a nice thing, if it happens. If it doesn't happen, it's far more important for a buddhist to accommodate [others] and not to use buddhist terminology where it's not necessary—and not to actually expect another person to change [while] you remain the same. That's not important at all. Being skillful so that the things that are [mutually] appreciated can be talked about, without making them formal or a kind of system, is OK.

On Positive and Negative Karma

Q. [Are you talking] about getting beyond karma, in a way? Because I've read about purifying negative karma and getting good karma, but then you end up in the god realm. (inaudible...) So I guess I'm just a little confused about what it means to "get beyond karma"—if, in fact, that's what you're saying.

A. Essentially, yes. And going beyond karma includes good karma too, because *everything* is an illusion. This form we give to Buddhism is also an illusion. But some things are necessary as tools; and some tools, or causes, are [closer] to absolute truth and realization. Positive karma, for example, is much easier to work with than negative karma, [which] creates more distance between us and [the] cutting through [of] illusion. That's the greater obstacle. Negative karma—such as killing or other negative actions—creates a very big obstacle, or barrier, in our path of understanding and even to the possibility of a human life. Whereas positive karma—which is also difficult, nevertheless—creates more of a balance of something good. With more goodness and whiteness, more openness and spaciousness, it's much easier for something good and less distracting to happen.

As long as we're dependent on existing in a relative world, then creating something good, something spacious in the foundation is more sensible than creating something negative. That's why accumulating positive karma and abandoning negative karma is an important part of practice. Ultimately, [however], when we talk about letting go of grasping, we're talking about grasping to any kind of illusion—both positive as well as negative karma.

I think we can stop here. Thank you all very, very much. I would especially like to thank all the people who have worked hard in the New York Shambhala Center for a long, long time, as well as all the senior practitioners who've stayed

together to really make it possible for people to have a good place of practice.
Deep appreciation. Thank you very much.

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