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The Approach of Mahayana Buddhism

Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX



This is the second talk of a three session course that Traleg Rinpoche gave discussing Mahayana Buddhism, touching on the three principal concepts of Mahayana – compassion, wisdom and emptiness; given at the Buddhist Summer School in Melbourne 2006. Talk One can be found in the May 2024 newsletter, and the final talk will appear in a future newsletter.



We will be continuing with our discussion on the topic of Mahayana Buddhism. The discussions focus mainly on three main concepts of Mahayana Buddhism, namely, compassion, emptiness, and wisdom. These three concepts that are related.

In the last talk I gave a general overview of Mahayana. We are not talking about simply being a follower of Mahayana. A follower of the *path* of Mahayana is not somebody who simply follows the Mahayana traditions, believes in Mahayana teachings, supports Mahayana institutions, may sponsor publication of Mahayana texts, goes and visits Mahayana temples and so on and may do some practice as well.

Somebody who is truly following the Mahayana path has to go further than that. It is somebody who has embarked on the

Mahayana path, not to simply follow the Mahayana teachings or Mahayana traditions. It is to have the interest to become enlightened. Mahayana has provided a variety of different approaches on the path so one can follow the Mahayana teachings in many different ways. These approaches need to be integrated. It is with this integrated approach that includes an intention to become a Buddha that makes one a follower of the path of Mahayana.

To become a Buddha one has to develop insight; without insight one cannot become enlightened. Insight is needed because one has to have insight into reality to be enlightened. Somebody who has not had insight into reality is not an enlightened person. Also, from the Mahayana point of view, if one has not gained insight into reality then even from the moral point of view, in

terms of the moral dimension, the individual's capacity to lead an ethical life is limited due to that lack of insight, lack of wisdom.

In that way, the Mahayana teachings emphasize the integration of these three - compassion, emptiness, and wisdom. In this second talk of this course I will focus on the compassion aspect, and in the final talk I will concentrate more on the emptiness and wisdom aspect of the discussion.

Mahayana says, in order to follow the path properly, it is ideal to become a bodhisattva. There are many different kinds of bodhisattvas. 'Bodhisattva' means somebody who has generated bodhicitta or enlightened heart and has embarked on the path. A Bodhisattva is the tantric (or esoteric Mahayana Buddhist) concept of a siddha, a realised being.

There are many different kinds of images of bodhisattvas – bodhisattvas who are monastics; laypeople; tantric yogis. These are depicted as bodhisattvas

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that have taken a human form - that are portrayed as a human embodiment. Then there are those that are idealised images of the bodhisattva such as Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezig) - the bodhisattva of compassion; Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom; Prajnaparamita, the bodhisattva of emptiness and wisdom; and Vajrapani, the bodhisattva of will and power. All these different kinds of bodhisattvas are utilized as objects of one's devotion and aspiration within the Mahayana context of the path.

In Mahayana Buddhism, as part of one's practice, as one is following the path, one seeks to become a bodhisattva oneself. We can use all these different kinds of role models – bodhisattvas that are lay individuals, ordained monastics, and so forth - for inspiration. If one is a follower of Tibetan Buddhism and especially specifically following some form of tantric

or esoteric Mahayana Buddhism then one may wish to include images of tantric mahasiddhas such as Saraha, Naropa, Maitripa and so on.

Then, while one is on the path, one may invoke more abstract kinds of images of bodhisattvahood as well, represented by such bodhisattva deities as Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. In Mahayana Buddhism, while one is doing these meditational practices, including cultivating compassion and other practices, there is room for faith, to be inspired. There is room for devotion in Mahayana Buddhism.

Therefore, when one is extremely stressed or going through a very difficult period in one's life and one's practice is not progressing very well, and one feels even spiritually at a loss and confused, in Mahayana Buddhism we try to invoke the images of bodhisattvas and Buddhas. We try to establish some kind of relationship with them and then try to receive some

help or assistance from these Bodhisattvas as well.

As part of Mahayana, our practice of meditation, developing as a bodhisattva; practices of loving-kindness (such as Lojong) to generate compassion and so forth, all these practices still leave room for the notion of interacting with other beings that are at a higher plane than we are ourselves. This is seen as a very important part of our practice. We may follow all the guidelines and instructions of our meditation practices, but our practice may not go according to plan. Or due to life circumstances we may go through difficult times. We may feel lost or we may feel an extreme sense of danger, anxiety or fear or something of that sort. In Mahayana Buddhism it is completely reasonable to be seeking some help from an outside source such as a deity such as Avalokiteshvara.

Even though it is a non-theistic religion, nevertheless there is the notion of establishing some kind of relationship or rapport with an outside enlightened being (symbolic or otherwise) who represents the state of enlightenment, the enlightened mind. Different bodhisattvas display their unique characteristics. Whether it is compassion or wisdom, or another enlightened quality, whatever we think we are in need of, we can seek out that bodhisattva for help. This is one important aspect of Mahayana Buddhism to keep in mind.

Whenever we open a book on Mahayana Buddhism we will come across the importance of the concept of bodhicitta, enlightened heart, and this is mentioned in varieties of contexts. Bodhicitta is a Sanskrit word – *byang chub sems* in Tibetan. *Byang chub* in Tibetan means bodhi (Sanskrit) and *sems* means citta (Sanskrit) so *byang chub kyi sems* (bodhicitta) literally means enlightened heart. The combination of these two words, bodhi and citta, represents the inevitable union of wisdom and compassion. If one wishes to follow the Mahayana path, right from the beginning one should engender bodhicitta, to cultivate an enlightened heart, which is the essence of a wise and compassionate way to deal with every situation that one finds oneself in.

In Mahayana Buddhism we talk about relative bodhicitta and absolute bodhicitta.

In the first talk we spoke about non-referential or non-directional compassion and directional compassion. What is called absolute bodhicitta represents that non-directional compassion, which is imbued with the quality of wisdom. Relative bodhicitta, on the other hand, is the physical expression of the absolute bodhicitta. Relative bodhicitta finds its expression through what we do, through how we conduct ourselves. The absolute bodhicitta is that non-directional compassion which is imbued with wisdom. In order to realise that, we have to work with relative bodhicitta in every day life.

In Mahayana Buddhism, we cultivate compassion because we seek to gradually realise our absolute bodhicitta. Absolute

bodhicitta also represents our inner state of being and our state of enlightenment, our innate Buddha Nature. To realise our inner state of being we need to cultivate relative bodhicitta. Relative bodhicitta is cultivated through what we call in Mahayana, the six transcendental actions or the six paramitas, also referred to as the six perfections.

The emotion of compassion is not as simple as we might think. It does not just mean we should be kind to our neighbor or we should just try to do something to alleviate somebody's suffering in a very concrete way. It does mean that too, but more than that, the six transcendental actions entail the injunction for the practitioner to be generous, patient, compassionate and so on, in such a way that whatever one does it is done from a transcendental perspective. That is why they are called the six transcendental actions or paramitas. Paramitas or *pha phyin* in Tibetan means transcendental. The six paramitas are generosity, ethical conduct, patience, vigor or diligence, meditation and wisdom.

From the Mahayana point of view, when we are developing compassion and trying to be compassionate, that arises from insight. Compassion has to be based on insight and if there is insight then it becomes transcendental. If one does not have insight then it just becomes a normal, ordinary form of good conduct or some kind of morally commendable form of action to take. However it does not constitute the transcendental action of a Mahayana practitioner.

How one should try to turn one's normal everyday actions into transcendental actions is by following the six paramitas, the six transcendental actions, particularly with the last two of the six paramitas – meditation and wisdom. This will enable one to perform actions in the Mahayana transcendental way and that will then lead to enlightenment – it will allow us to overcome our delusory mental states and go beyond creating a karmic chain reaction.

For example, let's say we practice generosity, we do this very sincerely, we try to be a good person and so on – we may



manage to create good karma out of that sincere activity. Generosity has the potential to yield more positive experiences. It can bring about positive fruits, ripening of good karma for oneself, but if one performs generosity from a transcendental point of view that not only leads to a state of freedom, but to a state of enlightenment.

In Mahayana Buddhism the aim of one's practice is not just to free ourselves from some unpleasantness, from this or that unpleasant experience, discomfort or the cause of anxiety, stress, and so on. The aim of the practice is to bring about not just a state of freedom, freedom from this or that kind of plight or that state of constriction or bondage, but a state of what is called acquirement. We can learn to let go of certain negativities and we can try to refrain from doing harmful things and learn to be more helpful to ourselves, but from that alone one will not acquire the qualities of enlightenment, the qualities of the wisdom consciousness (*referred to in talk one*).

If we perform the six paramitas, particularly the first four paramitas, while keeping the last two in mind

The first four paramitas are generosity, moral precept, patience, and vigour. If these four are supported by the last two paramita of meditative concentration and wisdom then not only are we able to free ourselves from the disturbing experiences

that come with being entangled in the samsaric condition, or being interminably caught up in cyclic existence but we will be blessed or endowed with all the positive qualities associated or necessary for our spiritual evolution.

It is said that up to the advent of Mahayana Buddhism, Buddhism put its emphasis more on becoming freed from, or how we should escape from samsaric suffering. That was the main focus. With the advent of Mahayana Buddhism and the flourishing of its teachings, the emphasis shifted somewhat towards a description of the various stages of enlightenment.

Regarding the ten stages of the bodhisattva. With the attainment of each stage of the bodhisattva one acquires new abilities, new insights, new qualities and attributes associated with the evolving wisdom consciousness. As the wisdom consciousness evolves the ordinary ignorant consciousness becomes weaker and weaker and then gradually the wisdom consciousness asserts its dominance. Gradually, then, as the evolving enlightened consciousness finds its fulfilment in the state of Buddhahood then the ordinary, the old consciousness disappears.

When one practices the first four paramitas with the last two in mind the wisdom consciousness strengthens. Only with the paramita of meditative concentration and the paramita of insight



and wisdom would one be able to bring about that kind of change – then one will evolve.

It is a great thing if we can work with our positive states of mind and our negative states of mind, but the main aim, our ultimate aim is to transcend our ordinary states of consciousness, of mind. By acquiring new states of consciousness then we gradually learn to separate ourselves from the old, previous states of samsaric, cyclic consciousness.

To effect that, in the beginning we may generate and work with positive states of mind to help us work with our negative states of mind. But whether we are dealing with positive states of mind or negative states of mind, we are still working with the same old ordinary deluded consciousness, or *vijnana* (Sanskrit), *nam shes* (Tibetan), not *ye shes* – *nam shes* (see talk one in this series). Based on positive states of mind we may be able to do something positive, but that is not what being transcendental means. This is important and can be very helpful but it does not lead to further evolution on the path; we are not advancing on the path per se. We may reach higher levels of consciousness, or we may be plunged to lower levels of consciousness within our own ordinary normal consciousness.

This is a very important concept to

understand from the Mahayana point of view, because when we say ordinary consciousness we are not simply talking about ordinary consciousness as we understand it, how we normally experience our consciousness. Even things that we do not experience yet, even if we achieve certain higher or more rarified states of consciousness, that may still be part of ordinary consciousness – *vijnana* or *nam shes*, and it may have nothing to do with wisdom consciousness.

How is that so? If there is no prajna or insight, if there is no transcendental knowledge then even if one achieves certain sorts of rarified states of consciousness from having cultivated positive states of mind or having engaged in positive forms of action, that does not necessarily lead to some kind of breakthrough without the experience of insight. Based on this understanding we can discuss the paramitas, the transcendental actions themselves:

Generosity or *dana* paramita in Sanskrit, *sbyin pa* in Tibetan meaning generosity, or a gift. So there is the transcendental action of generosity. From the Mahayana point of view we can practice generosity on many different levels. There is not one single way to practice generosity.

In Mahayana we have this notion that, first we learn to do things in a proper way from the conventional mundane point of view and then gradually we learn how to do things from the transcendental point of view, and then how we practice generosity is also going to reflect that.

The first form of generosity is called the practice of generosity using material goods, something that everybody can practice easily. That is how one trains oneself on the Mahayana path at the beginning. In order to practice generosity we learn to be generous with our material things, because what we are most attached to is often things. So giving things away, according to Mahayana Buddhism, is how one should start.

But the material form of generosity is rated as being not as profound as other forms of generosity. As the bodhisattva, the practitioner of Mahayana, evolves - from an ordinary person to becoming more like the Dalai Lama or another great master - how one practices generosity also evolves and changes, and that reflects the bodhisattva's development.

When we say a bodhisattva practices generosity, it doesn't mean all bodhisattvas practice generosity in the same way. Different bodhisattvas practice generosity differently because different bodhisattvas are at different levels. It depends on the

depth or level of insight the bodhisattva has into both their own condition and into the nature reality. So first one starts with the material form of generosity, which is called *zang zing gi sbyin pa* in Tibetan. This then is followed by other forms of generosity.

The generosity of protection – more difficult than being generous with material things is trying to save someone's life. If somebody's life is in danger then by trying to give protection to that individual, one may be putting one's own life at risk, potentially inviting some kind of punishment or difficulty. In Mahayana this is also seen as part of the practice of generosity. Seen as harder to do than parting with an amount of money or the giving or providing some kind of material comfort, and fulfilling those types of needs.

The third form of generosity is seen as the highest form of generosity because only somebody who has some real insight can help others on that level. Helping others by providing material things or giving protection and so on is extremely good and this means that one will incur merit – which is a Buddhist concept: every time we do something positive we incur merit (developing a positive habitual tendency). But, here, one is able to perform the third form of generosity, which has to do with the sharing of one's spiritual understanding with others.

The idea is that if one has certain insights – let's say somebody has been doing a great deal of spiritual practice and following the Mahayana path, not only is that person's mind less disturbed by delusory mental states but they have acquired certain insights and developed an amount of wisdom. That individual would then be able to share that insight and wisdom with others. In some way they would be able to instruct others who are in a state of confusion and assist them to find their way out of that confusion. In this way they could give some kind of encouragement, understanding, comfort, guidance and so on. So having a capacity to give spiritual guidance is considered the most difficult form of generosity to do effectively, according to Mahayana teachings.

The bodhisattva who has embarked on

the bodhisattva path, and is trying to practice generosity from a transcendental point of view, in that way. What is distinctive about the bodhisattva form of generosity? Even with the practice of the material form of generosity one would bring a degree of understanding, of insight, even if only conceptually to assist others, even if one has not yet gained direct insight into one's own true nature, or into the nature of reality. Even if one has not had direct experience of one's true nature or of reality, nevertheless one should still bring some kind of conceptual understanding into one's practice of generosity.

How should one do that, according to Mahayana teachings? One should think that the 'person who I am being generous to' is not some kind of autonomous individual being who exists on their own accord. They are not totally separate, something unitary, some kind of individual being. 'I myself, as the giver' do not exist as something separate, something completely self-enclosed, detached or separated from everything

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else. In other words, we are not discrete egos, different egos encased within the parameters of our physical extremities. The act of generosity itself, what is called the action of generosity – is also not something that is separate, free-floating, existing by itself.

In other words, the giver, the receiver and the gift are not three completely separate things. *This will be explained in more detail in the 3rd talk of this series on wisdom.*

The idea of interdependency is one aspect of how we should try to bring wisdom to the practice of generosity. In this way the expression of generosity becomes transcendental. It does not become transcendental if we are thinking,

'Oh, this poor thing needs some help and I'm giving help to this person', thus, reinforcing one's own sense of ego, one's own sense of individuality and reifying the concept of other, self and other – I as self, the giver, and the other person as the receiver, as if the receiver and the giver are totally separate and not interdependent.

If we are thinking in this way we should still practice generosity which will generate positive karma. Because that action is devoid of insight it will not bring about any real lasting or fundamental change within us. There will be some change: a stingy person may learn to be more generous but there will be no real change in terms of how one views oneself and others, in a more fundamental sense.

Duality and Fixation – According to the Mahayana way of thinking, all of our conflicts, our problems, arise from too much fixation on this concept of self and other, or “I” and other, me and other. Even when we are trying to establish some kind of friendship or trying to be helpful to others, that idea often gets reinforced rather than diminished. So true

compassion manifests in the form of this transcendental form of generosity whereby one rises above what we call the three-term relationship – the three-term relationship: *khor gsum* in Tibetan – which means seeing the giver, the given and the gift as not being separate.

This is a very important concept. It is said that we should be thinking that - 'because there is somebody who is in need, that is why I have been given this opportunity to practice such a wonderful thing as generosity, given an opportunity to be of help, and this opportunity exists only because that other individual exists. If that individual didn't exist, then I wouldn't have the opportunity to practice generosity. So the existence of that

individual allows me to practice generosity and this generosity itself would not come to materialization if I and the other individual did not come into contact.’

Interdependency – Therefore, from developing just a simple understanding like that, we already have gained some insight. So insight means developing more understanding like that. Rather than always thinking that individual beings are completely discrete and independent, with their own distinct egos etcetera. Rather, we see the interdependency – *rten drel* in Tibetan, *pratityasamutpada* in Sanskrit. These types of consideration give us a whole new way of looking at everything and this applies to the practice of generosity as well. So if that applies to the practice of material generosity then, of course, it will apply to the generosity of giving protection and the generosity of imparting counsel, and that goes without saying.

“In Mahayana Buddhism, encouraging positivity is even more important than refraining ourselves from negativity or that which demeans. What is more important is trying to be understanding, compassionate and so on. It is more helpful than over-obsessing about the problem of anger that one may have, or something of that sort.”

As discussed in the first session of this course (see *May 2024 Wheel Of Times newsletter*), compassion generally – and this applies to the paramitas as well – there is the gross form and then more and more subtle forms of that same concept. From material generosity which is material, physical, tangible, to the more subtle forms. Giving protection is more subtle – protecting somebody from fear, from an external or internal perceived threat is more subtle than physical deprivation or privation. The mental torment of confusion is even more subtle and the corresponding generosity that one presents in the form of counsel and so forth is even more subtle.

It does not mean that the bodhisattva first begins with the material form of generosity and then moves on to the second form of generosity and then the

third form of generosity. It is not the case that as one supersedes one the earlier form of generosity it is forgotten. The bodhisattva practices generosity, all of them, all three forms of generosity together. At the beginning one may only have the capacity to be generous on the material level. Then one may be able to extend that to include protection. As one progresses, one does not then dispense with the older forms of generosity, and this of course applies to the other paramitas as well.

The second paramita is Moral Precept, *shila* paramita in Sanskrit, *tsbul kbrims* in Tibetan. The first type of Moral Precept practice is the easiest to practice. The second and third forms of Moral Precept practice become consecutively more challenging and more subtle.

The first connotation has to do with restraint – so trying to restrain oneself from all the negative impulses, trying to nip things in the bud, as it is said. If we

notice a certain thought popping up or something we know to not be a good thing to do, then we restrain it and avoid allowing that to take root as a habit. This is one aspect.

There is the concept often used in Buddhist teachings of planting seeds in one’s mind. According to Buddhist teachings, our thoughts have a way of taking root. Whether it is positive or negative, whatever thought or action that we perform, it can take root often very easily. So making sure, particularly when we are thinking about unhelpful or negative demeaning things, that we avoid them taking route or flourishing. This is extremely important – as important, if not more important than refraining from things, is to discourage unhelpful or self-destructive mental activity.

In this context, in Mahayana Buddhism,

we have to realise that Mahayana thinking says that whatever is harmful to oneself is automatically harmful to others; or whatever is harmful to others is automatically harmful to oneself. So therefore we try to reduce the negativities that have already found some kind of home or some kind of hold on us, we try to do what we can do to get rid of or defuse them.

The second component of Moral Precept is to do whatever is positive. So if we find ourselves thinking some little thing, some insignificant thought, but that thought happens to be a good one we learn to encourage that more and more. Instead of letting it just go past, we try to encourage ourselves to think a little bit more like that, try to allow those kinds of thoughts to take root. And if we find ourselves doing something that is helpful then we try to encourage that as well.

In Mahayana Buddhism, encouraging positivity is even more important than refraining ourselves from negativity or that which demeans. What is more important is trying to be understanding, compassionate and so on. It is more helpful than over-obsessing about the problem of anger that one may have, or something of that sort.

So the idea in Mahayana Buddhism is that if we try to cultivate the opposite of the negative – which as samsaric beings is a ubiquitous problem we have – then automatically the problem that we have will become diminished of its own accord. But if we are obsessing with the very negative thing that we are trying to free ourselves from, without giving any thought to cultivating the opposite of that, that often only reinforces the very negative experience that we are having.

This is why in Mahayana Buddhism we do the meditations of the Four *Brahmaviharas* or the Four Immeasurables – meditation on love, compassion, joy, and equanimity; and other such practices of that type. The more we spend time thinking about those kinds of things then, gradually – at least while we have those thoughts – we don’t have time to be feeling angry, hostile, resentful or whatever the case might be. Instead of fretting about ‘the problems that I have with anger’ for example,

instead if one is thinking about loving-kindness and generating other similar enriching qualities in meditation, then gradually those kinds of thoughts begin to take root.

Those are two of the ways we can practice developing the second paramita of moral precepts, *shila* paramita. In summary, refraining ourselves from negativity and negative thoughts, and then trying to do whatever is beneficial by positively engage in doing things that are helpful.

The is a third practice associated with the Moral Precepts is called the gathering of virtuous thoughts. The gathering of virtuous thoughts is like the practice of the Four Immeasurables and the Seven Points of Mind Training known as Lojong, contemplations that cultivate compassion; and Tonglen practice, of giving and taking (also referred to as the practice of sending and receiving; or exchanging oneself for others).

Many people say compassion is about action; you don’t practice compassion thinking about it. Mahayana Buddhism has a completely different view to that. Mahayana Buddhism says compassion, the real compassion, will come from having genuine compassionate thoughts. The idea is that we become what we think about, the sorts of things we think. If we do not practice these kinds of practices, such as Lojong, the Four Immeasurables and so on, our negative thought patterns and obsessions, even though we may want to be helpful rather than harmful, will impede us.

How can we overcome our habits? According to Mahayana, we can overcome strong tendencies in ourselves by thinking about all the different things that would counteract our habitual tendencies. The power of thought, the power of thinking, is taken very seriously. When we are doing Lojong practice, Tonglen practice, the Four Immeasurables and so on we are not just wasting time thinking about good thoughts. According to Mahayana, we will become that which we are thinking and contemplating on; this will seep into our being as we continue along with our practice.



As it is said in the teachings, we don’t have any problem understanding that our negativities, our negative way of thinking and of seeing things, doing negative things, these types of thoughts can turn us into very negative people. So if we can accept that, then of course it stands to reason that if we do the opposite, the same thing will happen. We can’t simply say, ‘Oh, well, okay, now I’m going to start to harbour a more positive way of thinking.’ Due to our entrenched habit, we need to set aside some time to create a better more uplifted inner environment. In our meditations we can deliberately create an artificial environment whereby we are thinking about positive, generous, altruistic, loving, compassionate thoughts by doing practices such as Lojong and other such practices and contemplations to create a real change or transformation within ourselves.

Practicing in those types of ways is know as *the gathering of virtuous thoughts* – if we try to gather these virtuous thoughts then they are like seeds and these seeds begin to blossom later on. It can change our whole character in due course.

The third paramita is patience, which is called *ksanti* paramita in sanskrit.

The first type of practice to generate

more genuine Patience is the easiest to practice. Easier than the second and third form of patience, which has to do with not flinching from the experience of suffering and pain.

Like the other paramitas, patience does not simply mean that we should not be impatient, in the sense of wanting things to happen very quickly or having a very low level of tolerance. That is part of it. More than that, within Mahayana, the teachings basically say that patience is not about submitting to the inevitable. Passively submitting to whatever is going to happen is not the point.

In Mahayana Buddhism it is said very clearly that if one is responding to situations in that way then that may seem to be an expression of patience, but it is not genuine patience. Genuine patience is active, an active response to our life experiences. Therefore, the defeatist attitude is not encouraged and this is shown very clearly in what is said in terms of the different forms of patience that one can practice.

With the first form of patience, a bodhisattva or Mahayana practitioner who is following the Mahayana path has to realise that life brings many difficulties and one will encounter individuals who may wish to do harm – this can happen, harmful situations can arise. Even if one



has not done anything to deserve it or invite it, even so one may be put in such a situation.

According to Mahayana teachings, whether one is harmed by that harmful situation is dependent not upon others, not the situation, but oneself. Therefore, according to Mahayana Buddhism, one should think, 'My response, how I handle this situation, is

going to determine whether the situation is going to have a detrimental effect on me or if it will simply be inconvenient or some kind of upset. That is to say, one's response can help to ensure that the experience does not have any lasting detrimental effect on oneself or one's well-being.'

'How am I going to handle this situation?' That is what one should be thinking. 'How am I going to respond to this? How am I going to deal with it?' Skillfully handling the situation is more important than the fact that something that has happened has turned out to be harmful or a source of some kind of threat or upset. That is seen as a very important part of the practice of patience.

According to Mahayana Buddhism, with the second more subtle form of patience it says that if we want to lead our life fully and not be too timid, not to find any little discomfort to be a source of an insurmountable problem, not to be too sensitive, because any comment that somebody makes or any situation that one finds oneself in – even if one imagines certain things – becomes a source of suffering and pain for oneself. We should not expect our life to be pain-free. This is seen as a very important part of the practice of Patience, and realising that through Mahayana practice there are ways to deal with one's pain. If pain arises, if one responds to pain in a negative way then the pain has a negative impact on oneself, which then produces further pain and suffering. But if one experiences pain in a different way, in a much more positive kind of way, then pain can lead to liberation, it is said.

So one can look at one's physical and mental pain and anguish in different ways. So again we see, learning to change one's attitude, trying to see things differently, trying to think differently - all of that is

very helpful. There are many different kinds of examples, but one comes to mind, if one is going through some kind of physical sickness or something like that, instead of just wallowing in one's pain, it is said that if one does some kind of meditation, as it is mentioned in Lojong practice, for example – if one thinks, 'Because of my suffering, may others not have to go through this kind of pain' or something of that sort, because one has shifted one's attitude, one's focus, in fact, this serves two purposes, it is said:

- (1) It will immediately make our pain a little bit more bearable – this is the practical outcome of it, an immediate benefit we may get, some kind of relief. Instead of thinking, 'Oh, I find it so painful, I find it so difficult, it is unbearable' and so on, just churning out more and more negative thoughts, if one thinks, 'Because of my pain may others not have to go through a similar kind of thing'. When one is already thinking about somebody else one is not so focused on one's own experience. So therefore, there is immediate relief.
- (2) According to Mahayana Buddhism such effort creates positive mental imprints. Those imprints can take root and these will have beneficial effects on oneself, on one's own well-being into the future. But if one is continuously harping on about the same old stuff then that only provides further fuel for the painful experiences that we are experiencing and will continue to experience in the future.

So generating these kinds of attitudes and approaches to difficulty are mentioned generally, and also in respect to the practice of patience. As we can see, a lot of it is dependent not on what we experience, but how we experience what we experience and what we are doing with that experience. That is what counts.

Mahayana Buddhism is constantly saying that we always get caught up with the object of our experiences. We are unskilled, due to lack of insight and so forth, and often find it difficult to really respond to things in a way which would be helpful and beneficial. So, in other words, even when bad things happen,

good results can come out of it if we know how to harvest the fruit; and good things may happen but if we treat respond to the situation badly, if we don't handle it well, then even good things produce a bad harvest.

The third form of patience is *patience in respect to our spiritual development*. So the idea is that one should do one's best and not be too expectant. – We should not be anticipating all kinds of unbelievably rewarding spiritual experiences. That is also seen as an obstacle. The more we expect great things, the greater the disappointment.

Our spiritual experiences will also fluctuate. Sometimes we have good meditative experiences, sometimes we find it easier to be compassionate and caring and to have an other-regarding attitude rather than a self-regarding attitude. But at other times we may feel very selfish or we may feel like we are getting too caught up in our own misery and self-concerns and so forth. The idea is that we should try to ride through that and not allow ourselves to be distracted by ups and downs. Ups and downs on the spiritual path are part of it, just as it is in life generally.

It becomes easier to practice patience when something harmful happens, we simply try to respond as positively as we can - this is the first form of patience practice.. The second form is to really deal with suffering, and this is more difficult, and is more subtle. To practise patience in respect to our spiritual development, the third form is even more difficult and subtle, according to Mahayana Buddhism. So we try and develop these three forms of patience.

The fourth Paramita is Effort or Vigour, or *virya* paramita in Sanskrit. Virya paramita, the transcendental action of vigour. According to Mahayana teachings, what we need to be generous, to be patient, to really abide by moral precepts and so forth, is eagerness. We need to have the energy and the eagerness. If we do not have the energy or eagerness or determination and resolve we will not be sufficiently committed on the spiritual path. We may think, 'Oh, this is a good idea' or 'I think this will be helpful' or something of that sort, but if we are not feeling energised, if we are not feeling

committed and if we don't really have resolve then it is very easy to become distracted. Therefore the paramita of vigour is emphasised.

The first one is called *the vigour of armour*. It is said that it is very easy to become discouraged in life and with spiritual practice. When difficulties come up we get discouraged, we lose interest, we don't have the enthusiasm that we used to have. That is one source of loss of interest or determination. Even after thinking that something or other is a good idea we don't follow through – when some little thing happens we feel discouraged.

Here is a somewhat silly example of losing vigour: if somebody goes into the gym and one is feeling enthusiastic and wanting to keep fit and suddenly somebody comes along who is in top shape, you take one look at this person and you think, 'Forget it, this is not for me.' So seek to not get discouraged easily, so we wear the armour of vigour, it is said. That means, the little voices in our head we may be hearing, is not to give ear to that, don't listen to it. These types of

“According to Mahayana teachings, what we need to be generous, to be patient, to really abide by moral precepts and so forth, is eagerness. We need to have the energy and the eagerness. If we do not have the energy or eagerness or determination and resolve we will not be sufficiently committed on the spiritual path.”

discouragements can gradually chip away our resolve; they can be constantly nagging at us and slowly we can feel worn down. So we seek not to allow that, by erecting some kind of defence, like armour, so that we don't give any weight to these discouraging noises or whispers in our heads or discouraging words from other sources - individuals or from certain adverse circumstances and situations. Once one has resolved oneself to pursue something then one should stick to do that and not then start allowing too much doubt in or allow oneself to get confused.

As with the earlier paramitas, this first form of practicing vigour, is the easiest form. So every time we catch ourselves listening to those discouraging voices,

'No, you can't do it, you won't pull through, you don't have it' or whatever it is, should seek not to give too much credence to that sort of thing.

The second and more challenging practice of vigour one is called *the vigour of application*, which means that enthusiasm has to come from not constantly evaluating and saying, 'Oh, is this working?' 'Am I getting the benefit it has promised me?', 'Am I getting anywhere?' Of course, we have to re-evaluate and assess what we are doing, but not constantly. The main focus should be on the application: Am I doing it or not? – not on whether I am getting results from what I'm doing. So if we simply focus our mental and physical energy to do what we need to do, and not waste mental energy and focus on constantly evaluating, constantly checking up on the progress or lack of progress, or whatever it is that one is concerned with. We should try not over evaluate, but rather try to do whatever one can do consistently and with vigour, that in itself is seen as an energising and invigorating approach.

Vigour begets vigour. If the mental energy and mental focus is not allowed to escape and disperse – which often happens – if the whole of the energy is channelled into doing whatever it is that we need to do, that we know to be beneficial, worth doing and is extremely good, then one should realise that that is reason enough. That means we do not need to constantly think about whether we are getting any benefit or not. We know that the action itself, that particular action is a good thing to do, so doing it is already self-validating and self-authenticating and we do not need to do something extra on top of that. So that is called the vigour of application. Application is what counts, which is again

a little bit more difficult to do than the previous type of vigour practice.

The third vigour is used as an antidote to *self-effacing attitudes*. *Zhum med kyi brtson 'grus* in Tibetan – *zhum* means to feel like I'm nothing, I don't have the capacity, I'm not bright enough, I don't have this or I don't have that to take on the task at hand. Using vigour to squash that kind of idea. It is necessary to squash these self-effacing attitudes using vigour, the *virya* paramita. If one is constantly dogged by self-doubt that will frustrate any project we take on. Half-way through – or we may even find it difficult to initiate a project to begin with. If we have started a project or new initiative we may find it difficult to bring it to a conclusion, to fruition, or at any point we may give up if we have too much self doubt.

Not to harbour self-doubt in that way is to encourage and have genuine self-confidence – not derived egotistically, of course. It is challenging not to feed confidence with egoism, and so therefore this kind of vigour is more difficult to practice. As a bodhisattva or the Mahayana practitioner who is a bodhisattva aspirant, one needs to think in this way and work with oneself in a subtle way to develop genuine self-confidence.

From the Mahayana point of view then, to practice compassion we need to have all of these ingredients, for want of a better word. When Mahayana Buddhism says we should practise compassion, we should cultivate bodhicitta through performing the six transcendental actions, it means we should practice compassion in relation to these four early paramitas with the support of the last two that will allow us to develop the necessary insight and wisdom (*this will be discuss in more detail in the final talk in this series, included in a future newsletter*) In this session, I am focusing on the four early paramitas as they directly relate to the notion of the cultivation of compassion - why compassion is necessary, and how we should develop compassion.

Compassion or loving kindness is not simply about having warm, fuzzy feelings directed towards imaginary beings such as deities or people somewhere on some distant land, but it is something very concrete and something that we have to

apply on a daily basis as we interact with our friends, our family members, our colleagues at work and so on. It is a daily practice, a daily challenge – we try to practice the paramitas of generosity, moral precepts, patience, moral precepts, vigour.

The four - generosity, moral precepts, patience, and vigour are seen as essential ingredients of compassion in Mahayana. Often we may associate the practice of generosity or something of that kind to be the essence of compassion, but from the Mahayana Buddhist point of view it's actually not like that.

Often in the teachings it says the reason why the paramita of moral precepts is mentioned after generosity, the reason why patience is mentioned after moral precepts, why vigour is mentioned after patience is, because when we embark on the Mahayana path, as we progress, as we are evolving; first we realise dana paramita, the paramita of generosity, we perfect that; then we perfect the moral precepts; then patience; then vigour, and so on, so obviously vigour is much more difficult.

“Generosity, moral precepts, patience, and vigour are seen as essential ingredients of compassion in Mahayana. Often we may associate the practice of generosity or something of that kind to be the essence of compassion, but from the Mahayana Buddhist point of view it's actually not like that.”

They are ordered in this way due to their level of importance, it is said. Regarding the final two, meditative concentration and wisdom, wisdom is the most important paramita because without it all the others will remain just mundane forms of good actions but will not become or develop into a paramita. It becomes a paramita only when it is imbued with wisdom.

So in that way we can see that with wisdom then, we are able to practise generosity in the manner that we mentioned – the giver, the receiver and the gift are seen as interdependent. According to Mahayana, everything is arising and dynamic. This notion that there is something fixed - a receiver, a giver, a gift - is a misconception that we cling on to. This misconception does not

hold water, it does not reflect reality. The same applies to moral precepts. For example, when we are trying to refrain from certain actions or seeking to not do harm to somebody we should not be objectifying the 'other' and thinking: Oh, this person may be harmed by my actions – I as this or that person, by doing such and such a thing, would harm that person – as if discrete individual entities; but rather we seek to understand it in terms of relationships, interdependence. This will be discussed in more detail in the final talk.

Finally I will say, thinking along those lines is extremely important, and that is something that we will discuss in the next session.

Finally, I wish to say that the paramitas are also ordered in this way to correspond to the bodhisattva levels, thus generosity is realised first. The perfections are attained consecutively corresponding to the ten stages. Generosity is realised at the first level, the first bhumi, then moral precepts at the second bhumi, and so on.

That is the general outline of the main

Mahayana Buddhist practice in terms of how we practise compassion in relation to directional compassion (*see talk one in newsletter May 2024 for discussion on directional and non-directional compassion*). Directional and non-directional compassion, or compassion with a reference point and compassion without a reference point – *dmigs bcas kyi snying rje* and *dmigs med snying rje*. *Dmigs bcas* means reference. So compassion is directed towards somebody or something. Our generosity is directed towards somebody or something and there is the intention behind the action. The intention for our actions to be serving some purpose. That is, we are performing generosity with the purpose of bringing about whatever it is that we desire that will be of benefit. ■

Update from the E-Vam Institute Board of Directors



It is with great delight that we welcome our Nyima Gelek La to the E-Vam Board. From everyone on the Board we wish to welcome Nyima La whole-heartedly and look forward to his many contributions and the unique perspective and skill set he will bring to his new position.

The E-Vam Institute Board also wish to thank Ani Jangchup Lhamo for making the trip to spend time with Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche 10th in July this year. Here is a brief and compelling account of her trip. Thank you Ani La for sharing this account with us all.

Ani Jangchub Lhamo's visit with Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche 10th

At the age of 12 years, Rinpoche has all the hallmarks of an extraordinary being with qualities that go beyond his youthful appearance. For many of us, we did not have the good fortune to know the 9th Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche in his early years as

a child growing up, but we now have the opportunity to witness the unfolding and maturing nature of His Eminence The 10th Traleg Yangsi Rinpoche.

Although Rinpoche has a very studious mind, there are other interests that have captivated his attention – he has developed an enthusiasm for space, aviation and technology. I asked Rinpoche if he had any time for himself, and he simply said:

"At the moment I am young and there is much that I do not know, so when I get older and am more learned, then I might find some time for myself but not now"

Traleg Yangsi Rinpoche is surrounded by a wealth of tutors, but at the centre of his heart is his enduring affection, love and respect for his Principal Guardian, Drupon Rinchen Tseling-la who has been charged with the principal care and education of Traleg Yangsi. Before I left Rinpoche kindly bestowed long-life blessings, and protector prayers for myself and Nyima Tashi.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Jangchub Lhamo

Annual
BUDDHIST
SUMMER
SCHOOL

11-15th January 2025

We are pleased to announce Ringu Tulku Rinpoche will be teaching.
Full program details coming soon.

The 88 Temple Tour of Shikoku

David MacAdams



How did I find myself in May of this year, biking around Shikoku Island in Japan, to undertake the 88 Temple Pilgrimage? I first heard of it from a Sangha member at a retreat in Colorado in 2015. The 88 Temple Tour is inspired by Kobo Daishi (“Kokai”), the Patron Bodhisattva monk of Shikoku. Kokai was born in the 8th century on Shikoku, where he practiced, became enlightened, and even trapped several vengeful fire breathing dragons in caves there. He is the founder of the Shingon school of esoteric Buddhism and is said to rest in eternal meditation in a mausoleum in the magical city of Koyasan which became the seat of the Shingon School. Undertaking the 88 Temple pilgrimage is a tradition in Japan, often Japanese will spend their 2 weeks’ vacation visiting a number of Temples, returning each year until they complete the full Tour. Some, mostly men, retire and complete the tour by foot, in the same manner as Kobo Daishi did when he traversed the wilds of this mountainous island. It is also true that many pilgrims now travel by car between Temples or on tour buses.

Back in Melbourne, I had come across

several E-Vam Sangha members who had also completed the Pilgrimage by foot. Unkindly, I said to myself and others “if they can do it surely anyone can do it!” This was the first of many lessons: “It isn’t the dog in the fight, it’s the fight in the dog.” That is, willpower and determination are more important than physical fitness. It was on the last day of a Jikishoan retreat in November 2023, where Ekai Roshi asked us all to share something we had planned to do in the future after the retreat ended. Perhaps it was the retreat atmosphere and the loss of my usual filters, but I blurted out “I want to complete the Tour of Shikoku by bicycle.” There it was, I’d never said it out loud, immediately I wanted to get the words back. Roshi smiled broadly “that’s a great idea,” he said. Then Roshi said, “it’s about 1400 km,” and I realized in that moment, that in fact, I knew absolutely nothing about this Pilgrimage, 1400 KILOMETERES, what was I thinking! One of my fellow retreatants immediately began to ask me logistical question with great enthusiasm... I hadn’t considered any of these things: the distances to travel, what kind of bike, accommodation. I wondered if I just said nothing and did nothing, if

everyone might just forget the whole thing but I knew from that moment, I was bound and determined to try and ride around Shikoku. A few weeks later, after the retreat, I began to research biking options for the Temple Tour. There was only a handful of sentences in a hiking guide and one E-book by a fellow who had used a folding bike, not an option I wanted to take. My plan was to use my own road bike. This meant I would have to ride the whole way; in Japan one can’t take non-folding bikes on public transport. Further, I would need to plan the entire thing myself with only occasional references to the hiking guide and an extensive reliance and study of Google Maps. Another issue is that being a Coeliac person in Japan meant 99% of all the foods in restaurants would be contaminated with gluten because all the sauces: soy, fish etc., have wheat additives. I had encountered this on my previous trip to Japan and knew from the start, I would have to eat from Comibini stores almost exclusively. Comibini stores, a noble Japanese tradition, are chain convenience stores; 7-11, Lawsons and Family Mart, open 24 hours a day selling package noodles, rice balls and a predictable array of fast foods and snacks, enough snacks to fill in for a meal when not at home. These would be my feeding spots. Luckily, Google Maps references all these places, so all my daily navigations would also take into account the presence or lack of Comibini stores, as well as distance and elevation changes.

I decided to produce Google map ‘snips’ of Temple-to-Temple routes and for the daily Templeto- guesthouse trip. By calculating distance, elevation gains and number of Temples to visit in a day, I was able to produce a small map-based itinerary from which I could predict roughly where to book accommodation each night. Thus, over a 2-month period I planned and booked 35 odd places to stay from guesthouses, business hotels, and the odd Airbnb. Feeling chuffed with myself for my preparation work, I did not realize what a monster I had created. Missing one

night’s accommodation meant having to cancel and rebook all the unused stops ahead. Using online platforms meant that 3 or 4 days before a stay, you pass the non-refundable cancellation point. So any cancellation came with a monetary and planning sting.

That said, this straight jacket approach to my trip worked out in the end, I didn’t miss or cancel a single night, but it did add another layer of stress, to a trip that



became a veritable festival of stress! Armed with my own route map and aided by two published walking guides, I was ready to follow the breadcrumbs through the forests, hills and coastal roads of Shikoku to complete my journey. I pushed off from Tokushima absurdly confident in my skills of navigating and route planning. Sometimes there were days where my plans and the route chosen were in perfect sync with the days ride. There were also days when I fled panic stricken from Temple to Temple having become completely disoriented and losing hours in fruitless searches, or let down by a Google Maps, that thinks overhead cable cars, a narrow lane between rice paddies and a superhighway are somehow equivalent routes to take to your destination on a bike. The Temples of Shikoku are largely similar in their quiet dignity and beauty and trying to recall individual temples is difficult. However, the ritual of the Pilgrimage does not leave me. Once one enters a sacred Temple complex, one strikes a huge gong to announce your arrival to the guardians of the Temple. Next purification, washing hands and mouth using the pleasing water scoops at the well, then donning the Henro kit to remind oneself that this is a

pilgrimage. Then offering a lit candle and incense to the Buddha’s and Bodhisattvas of the main Temple and the same to the Kobo Daishi Temple. Then come the ritual incantations and prayers, which have their own magic. But the most memorable Temple activity is the offering of a prayer written on a thin piece of paper made for this purpose.

On the front of the stamped slip, you add your name, nationality and the date. On the other side, you write a specific prayer. Before offering the prayer, there is another sequence of bell ringing, coin offering, and quiet reflection as you offer this prayer for the benefit of one or many depending on your mood and the day. The comfort of this pleasing ritual and the heartfelt wish as you offer the prayer, that it might be fulfilled, and the object of your wish may receive these blessings. Feelings of connection and compassionate intentions to others enacted by prayer in these moments seem to me the point of this journey. If I try and reflect on the things I learned on the 88 Temple Tour, they are mostly personal. However, I did also acquire a vast amount of practical information about roads, approaches to Temples, riding routes, and where to stay and what to avoid, but these seem to me not to be the key point of the pilgrimage. So, what then is the point and what could I pass on to someone who is interested in this Pilgrimage? I think if I bundle them under three banners, familiar to most

Buddhists, I will say there are outer, inner and secret experiences.

Outer:

The exhilarating moments of descending down a steep winding forest road on the bike, after long periods of pushing that same loaded bike up steep ramps to a remote Mountain Temple top. The prayer and the rituals complete, fatigue from the steep climb has been forgotten. Then on the descent, the loaded bike gathers speed effortlessly flowing down the mountain road and you burst out of the forest and glide for kilometers down the valley alongside a rushing river. The next few kilometers slip by without effort, passing rice fields, houses and outbuildings with the roar of the blue green river in your ears, riding without effort. Often passing a solitary

figure out in the rice field ankle deep in rice planting, or working in a vegetable garden near a house, or a striking white crane hunting along the river, everything in its place as it seems it has always been this way.

There is also the tedium of grinding up a long pass with a medium gradient of 5-8 % churning through tunnels, often on busy two-lane highways with scarcely any shoulder to ride on. Going over the pass and racing down into the next valley only to be confronted by another long slow grind up another mountain road heading for yet another pass; this experience at times could be truly mind numbing. But eventually, as you race down from another pass, the view suddenly opens onto a stunning coastline of bays and islands stretching into the distance as far as the eye can see. Rolling along the east coast of Shikoku there are numerous wide bays with surfers waiting, rain or shine, out on the rocky breaks catching waves as they roll in. This coast road also offers up numerous little fishing villages where 10-meter concrete breakwaters have created a series of quiet, calm fishing ports, enough for 20 or so little fishing boats. One can see them plying their trade a kilometer or two off the coast. Or large breakwaters have been added to the



natural protection of rocky outcrops and islands to create larger ports serving bigger towns.

Seeing the intensity of the aquaculture along the east coast: pearl farming, fish farms, shell fishing, crab pots, seaweed farms, and many more enterprises than I can imagine. In this hub of fishing and sea farming, fisher folk seemingly paid no attention to anything other than their tasks at hand. Unloading their catch, preparing their pots and mending their nets, it seemed these activities have been going on forever and new equipment and

technology has seamlessly integrated itself within these seafaring traditions. Another pleasurable experience was to roll up to the evening's guesthouse, having identified which is the correct building amongst several possible candidates. Often having to rely on a tiny, weathered sign (are they trying to hide them?) identifying this as the place for the night. A sense of great relief would sweep over me when the manager/owner agreed "yes this is the place." Then unloading, the-always-too-much gear, from the bike bags (why oh



why did I bring this much stuff.) Then finding my room, stringing up layers of clothes wet from rain, sweat or both, that turned my tiny bedroom into a laundry. On would go the heater and after eating a few snacks, it's then time for the Japanese bathing tradition. This oasis-like experience never failed to restore a sense of order and pleasure to the day.

No matter how lost I'd been, or cold, wet and worried, or how many issues with food, the bike, or the road. No matter how long I'd spent grinding up steep ramps to a Mountain Temple, sinking into a deep hot bath after a cleansing shower, always made the day right. I began to ponder the fact that all day I could be wet, cold and miserable and then suddenly be wet, hot and happy, yet the difference was just a matter of degrees in temperature. Soon enough, the bath becomes too hot and uncomfortable, you have to get out, so wet and too cold and then too hot; same same, yet I always yearned for one and not the other! I also recall the simple pleasure of finding a Combini store with seats inside, out of the weather, where I could enjoy my morning coffee break with my new

favorite snacks, candied sweet potato fries. Many Combini stores would have a small area with seats where noodles can be cooked and eaten or coffee downed, somewhere between a takeaway and a restaurant. Here, I could settle my nerves, eating sweet comfort food, nursing a, "not too bad at all if you don't mind" cup of coffee. Maybe text home to my "anxious to hear I was still alive wife," who had to debrief me morning and night as I poured out the highs and the woes of the last few hours.

Inner:

If those experiences were the outer, then the inner experiences were more of what I learned about myself, when thrown into the intensity of the seemingly never-to-end pilgrimage. At some point, after countless internal dialogues with myself, I realized I wanted something from the Japanese themselves. This notion revealed itself through the long hours of cycling uphill. It involved some sort of desire for recognition of me, by the natives of Shikoku. I was on their grounds, participating in a Pilgrimage they revere. Deep inside, I felt a kindred spirit to the way the Japanese conduct themselves: their quiet patience and their awareness of others around them and the situation at hand. I seemed to want a stamp of approval that I got their way of life.

Yet I also knew one cannot just have the imagined comfort of being Japanese in terms of the order and simplicity I observed, without that is, a lifetime of that order and simplicity. How can one arrive at this sense of order without growing up to hear the music played over loudspeakers in the morning, noon and evening, breaking up the day into its constituent parts? I mean I couldn't even keep the damn slipper tradition right! My Father used to say, "a place for everything and everything in its place," the Japanese embody this. I imagined a sense of contentment from parking a little car in the tiny, allotted space on your property each day, as I also chafed under the notion that I would never lose the clumsiness that is so much a part of the Australian way of life.

Another thing I learned was the role anxiety played on my travels. I became increasingly

anxious over the course of my journey.

Anxious about the weather, the distance to go, the height to climb, the state of the road, the number of Temples still to visit, where to find the next guesthouse, the wind, the rain, the temperature, the trucks, the tunnels, the lack of road shoulder to ride or cry upon. I had no idea this vast ocean of uncertainty and disquiet lurked inside, but it all welled up within and without me at different points of the Pilgrimage. Where does it go to when I'm at home in Melbourne? Does it just sink beneath the soothing routines of everyday life, a blanket laid over a messy bed, a dressing gown over my pyjamas. I'm happy to report the seething pool of anxiety has slipped beneath the surface under the ordinariness of everyday life but that didn't seem a certain outcome when I was moving through the wilds of Shikoku. I'm not even sure that it's receding is a good thing, perhaps it's better if it were more like the tide and it would be possible to get used to the ebb and flow of it. Just as I recall watching the tidal waters at the guesthouse Amy Monbos, on the penultimate day of the Pilgrimage.



Secret:

So, is there a secret learning or secret perspective? I'm not sure. If there is, it's still in process. May be the tide never comes back in and I lose the thread of it all. This secret is not given easily to the shape of words, it's more akin to a mood than an idea. More like the climate than the weather, a process moving through, still forming and dissipating, perhaps it will never reveal itself fully to me. It may be that one can only do so much in such an arena before needing to rest in the shade until another day. Oddly enough, after becoming so unsettled, so knocked off my perch, I find myself daydreaming of being back on the Isle of Shikoku, leaving one Temple pushing off into the light on the way somewhere. ■



The end of autumn saw E-Vam Institute's monthly program begin with the beautiful practices of Vajrasattva and Chenrezig. The monthly Urban Under 35 retreats recommenced, focusing on integrated training in meditation, wisdom, and ethics. Additionally, E-Vam Institute's "Weekly Meditation" sessions commenced drawing both new and familiar practitioners coming together for group practice. These courses continued through the winter and brought many people together helping to foster spiritual practice.

The community, both in person and online, came together to commemorate the 12th Anniversary of the Parinirvana of the Very Venerable Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX. The day began with a beautiful Green Tara practice, led by Traleg Khandro and E-Vam staff, and continued into the afternoon with a heartfelt commemoration in honour of our beloved teacher. This meaningful occasion was marked by watching an inspiring video of Rinpoche's teachings, which felt particularly resonant and relevant. This was followed by a feast offering and a group practice of Traleg Rinpoche's "Guru Yoga." The event was deeply resonant, bringing together people of all ages in a beautiful, unifying yet personal experience.

In June, we were extremely fortunate to have Do Tulku Rinpoche return to continue teaching "The Way of the



Bodhisattva" by Shantideva. This year's teachings felt more dynamic than ever, with Rinpoche's honesty bringing a sense of urgency, emotion, and the reality of the chapter "vigilant introspection."

"And thus the outer course of things I myself cannot restrain. But let me just restrain my mind, And what is left to be restrained?"

— Shāntideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*

We are deeply grateful to Rinpoche for continuing to teach this text. For those new to The Way of the Bodhisattva or to Do Tulku Rinpoche, here is a video link to Rinpoche discussing this profoundly influential text:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKcQygGFd8c>



In June, Traleg Khandro graciously led a teaching on "The Practice of Green Tara: The Meaning and Inspiration of the Puja." Building on the growing enthusiasm for this practice, we were fortunate that Traleg Khandro dedicated her time

to help deepen our understanding and relationship with Green Tara. It was heartwarming to see so many people participating both online and in the Gompa. We continue practising together on a monthly basis, and we are fortunate to have Traleg Khandro offering further discussions to deepen our engagement with this meaningful practice.

The Meditation and Teachings Series featured two courses from "Towards the Psychology of Buddhism," held respectively in June and August. During these sessions, participants engaged in meditation while listening to audio teachings by Traleg Rinpoche. Rinpoche explored "Meditation and Emotions" through the profound and concise lens of the Abhidharma, which Rinpoche explained offers a perspective uniquely distinct from Western psychological theories. By elucidating the nuances of Buddhist psychology, Rinpoche unpacked the complexity and interconnectivity of both positive and negative mental states, highlighting various dynamic factors involved. Rather than presenting dry "lists" of mental states, Rinpoche emphasized the importance of understanding the interrelationship of conceptual, emotional, physical, and mental factors, which, combined with meditation, fosters deeper self and other understanding.

"We may think of meditation practice as a way to cultivate mindfulness, awareness, and greater concentration, and if we do that, we will automatically overcome negative states of mind. This is only partly true. While that is emphasized in Buddhist practice, it is done in the context of having gained some understanding of the mind and how it works—that is, the psychology of meditation presented in the Abhidharma literature." *Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX*

Always a highlight of the year, E-Vam Institute was extremely proud to host The Winter Zen Teachings with Ekai Korematsu Roshi. Teaching on Master Dogen's "Introduction to Fukanzazengi – Principles of Seated Meditation," Ekai Roshi guided participants through a

profoundly hearty exploration of the text and various features of a non-duality/non-conceptual approach, with implications in sitting meditation, both on and off the cushion.

“Body and mind will drop away of themselves, and your original face will appear. If you want such a state, urgently work at such a state.”

– Master Dogen



Thank you, Ekai Korematsu Roshi, for giving us the opportunity to spend time with this text over the course of a month and for teaching once again at E-Vam Institute.

Thank you to all who have come together to support the program, whether through volunteering or by fostering your interest in the Dharma. Your involvement is truly inspiring, and we look forward to a wonderful and Dharma-rich year ahead! ■

Mark Dawson

News from Maitripa Centre

Maitripa Centre has hosted a few groups this winter including One Heart Yoga & Meditation, Ananda Marga and Ikon Institute of Australia. The quieter winter months have been utilised to attend to various repairs and renovations. Of note, work has commenced on completing the stone retaining wall around the fountain area, with thanks to Andrew McMillan, Anthony Cramer and David Macadams. We also want to thank Sue Howes for refreshing the zafus and Ani Zangmo for assisting with food provisions for solo retreat.

We are looking forward to a busy retreat season, especially E-Vam’s 5 day October retreat and the annual Buddhist Summer School. Take care, best wishes with your practice & study. We hope to see each of you soon. ■

Daniel and Lisa Blaze



News from Nyima Tashi Buddhist Centre Auckland, New Zealand



as providing an update on current activities at the Centre.

Our Tuesday night meditation class has recently wrapped up a series of talks on the nine stages of Shamatha, with the group opting to move into studying the Four Brahmaviharas.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa dear friends. We hope that you are all well and happy. Spring is here – the days are noticeably warmer here in Tāmaki Makaurau-Auckland. In this newsletter we are really honoured and delighted that we can share Ani Jangchub Lhamo’s recent visit to the 10th Traleg Yangsi Rinpoche. We are also very pleased to announce some upcoming events at Nyima Tashi, as well

There has been an upsurge of interest in study from the group, which includes those who are dedicated to just sitting, as well as those who are interested in developing a genuine sense of wellbeing – with many new students diligently coming along to this weekly class, no matter whether the weather is cold and inclement – a real sign of commitment!

From 23rd – 26th January 2025, Nyima Tashi will host the 14th Annual

Auckland Buddhist Summer School. We are delighted to confirm the first four Teachers, with more to be announced shortly. The Teaching panel will feature Ekai Korematsu Roshi, Khenpo Ngawang Sangye, Lopön Chandra Easton and Francesca Fremantle. It will be possible to join the Summer School via Zoom, so keep an eye out for the programme which will be available in the coming month or so.

We are also so joyful to be welcoming Lama Chonam and Sangye Khandro to Auckland in less than one month’s time for a long-awaited retreat on Troma Nagmo Chöd from the Dudjom Tersar tradition. We are looking forward to greeting students who are travelling from all over the world to join us here in Auckland for the retreat. It is a truly exceptional opportunity for many of us.

Details of Ani Jangchub Lhasa’s trip can be found in the update from the E-Vam Institute Board of Directors article in this newsletter. ■

Meaghan Duffy

News from E-Vam Buddhist Institute U.S.



Kids Corner online

A new feature of the evam.org website is a section of fun and things for children to sing along to, read or download. Kids Corner at <https://evam.org/kids-corner/> includes free access to a sing along book, written by Julie Brefczynski Lewis, prayers, an explanation of the 6 Paramitas and more. We will be building up resources for kids and families online over time and we hope that children and adults alike will visit “Kids Corner” from time to time.



Online Course Activities

We completed a five week online course on Cultivating Freedom in Meditation in August/September, discussing the integrated approach to practice from a Mahayana perspective, based on the “Approaching Mahayana” course currently being featured in the E-Vam newsletter. It was a very interesting and helpful exploration into enriching ones inner life in order to be of greater benefit to others, the gentle process of releasing our minds from excessive fixation, and not over psychologizing ourselves and our experiences. Many insights were gained, and has proved very helpful for our approach to meditation practice.

Coming up in October

We will be continuing study on the LoJong teachings and slogans – developing an enlightened heart, which will also be conducted online. For more information please contact office@evam.org for course details. Attendance is by donation.

Under 35’s Meditation and Buddhism Sessions – West Virginia

Long time participant in Julie Brefczynski Lewis’s Buddhist Discussion Group, Elisha Rush will be holding a series of Under 35 sessions in West Virginia beginning this summer. Thank you Elisha for organizing and running these sessions. Thanks to Matthew Hassett from the Melbourne sangha for sharing some ideas for the sessions.

For information on the new Under 35’s group or Julie Brefczynski Lewis’s Buddhist Study group contact office@evam.org and the message will be passed on.

Save the Dates In Person Retreats 2025 and 2026

The Path of Mahamudra Meditation Annual Retreat

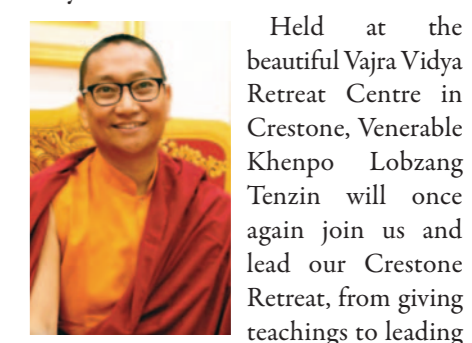
17 - 20 May 2025 – West Virginia

Within a picturesque environment at Saranam Retreat Centre, North - Central West Virginia, each day includes audio of Buddhist teachings by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX, discussions referencing the text of Moonbeams of Mahamudra, led by

senior students. Also included will be daily Puja’s – Green Tara and Chenrezig and gentle Yoga and Pranayama sessions.



The Path of Mahamudra Meditation Annual Retreat May 24 - 30 2026 – Crestone Colorado



Held at the beautiful Vajra Vidya Retreat Centre in Crestone, Venerable Khenpo Lobzang Tenzin will once again join us and lead our Crestone Retreat, from giving teachings to leading

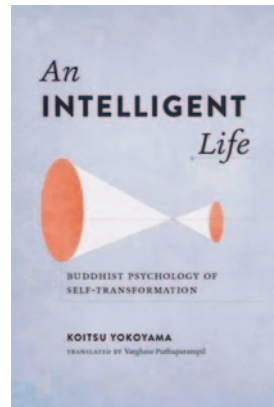
meditation sessions and pujas. As well, we will have wonderful audio teachings by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX and study group discussions led by senior students. For more information on any of the E-Vam courses and activities and for information and to book for retreat in 2025 and or 2026 please contact E-Vam at office@evam.org. ■

Traleg Khandro

Akshara Bookstore continues to provide excellent Dharmic titles here are just a few...

An Intelligent Life: Buddhist Psychology of Self-Transformation

Koitsu Yokoyama and Varghese Puthuparampil



A systematic approach to making intelligent use of our lives: forget the self, live more fully for others, and find happiness deep within.

The idea that our experiences in life are shaped by our own minds is fundamental to Buddhist philosophy. An Intelligent Life uses the principles of Buddhist philosophy to explore how best to make use of our lives in order to benefit ourselves and others.

Building on the foundation of core

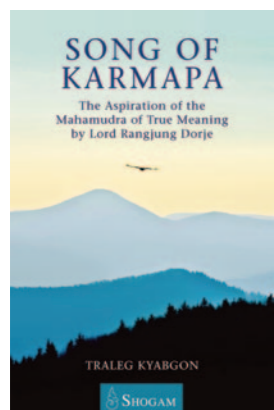
Buddhist concepts like the ego, interdependence, and karma, Professor Yokoyama presents a uniquely practical application of Buddhist philosophy.

By understanding how intimately our own habits of mind are related to the world that we experience, we begin to see how many of our everyday actions are founded on ignorance rather than intelligence. If you steadily work to transform your everyday habits, through meditation and reflection on the true nature of your experiences, you will come to forget your ego, feel more closely related to others, and gain access to the inestimable well of happiness and health that rests within. Learning to see ourselves and the world for what they truly are, we learn how to live truly intelligent lives.

“This welcome new voice in American publishing demonstrates with sparkling clarity how Buddhist wisdom can address life’s most pressing questions.”

— “Publishers Weekly”

Song of Karmapa: The Aspiration of the Mahamudra of True Meaning by Lord Rangjung Dorje Traleg Kyabgon



Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche’s oral translation of the ancient text “Song of Karmapa” explains the path of resting within and transforming the mind. This song was originally written by Rangjung Dorje, one of the most important teachers within the Tibetan tradition. In this book Traleg unwraps each cryptic verse revealing its hidden meaning. An enlightening journey into ways of

developing insight, compassion, and wisdom, and reducing suffering, key components within the Buddhist tradition.

The Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, is probably the most influential of all the Karmapas, renowned not just within the Karma Kamtsang but highly respected by other Kagyü traditions and by different lineages such as the Nyingma and Jonang. His composition Aspiration of the Mahamudra of True Meaning is a complete guide to the practice of Mahamudra. It clearly explains the view of Mahamudra, the ground, the path and the result, based on the experience of a fully realized master.

—Ogyen Trinley Dorje

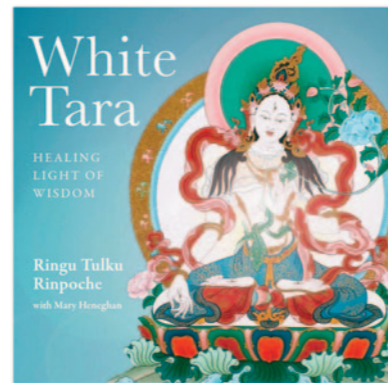
17th Karmapa

“Many people have the understanding that Tibetan Buddhism, particularly in relation to the Kagyü and Nyingma schools, always has to do with some kind of visualization practice. That is, however, not true.

The Mahamudra practice within the Kagyi tradition and the Dzogchen practice within the Nyingma tradition emphasize the importance of simplicity. In this way, the Mahamudra prayer by Rangjung Dorje explains the teachings of Mahamudra in a very direct and also very simple manner.”

—Traleg Kyabgon

White Tara Ringu Tulku Rinpoche



This volume gives Ringu Tulku’s teachings on the practice of White Tara. He describes how the formal sadhana practice incorporates all aspects of practice; including shamatha, vipassana and Mahamudra. The teachings are based on the short sadhana of White Tara written by

Tenga Rinpoche, with a new English translation of the text. Many questions and answers are included to clarify the practice; and Ringu Tulku’s characteristic descriptions, which relate the practice firmly back to ourselves and our lives, as we are right now, are invaluable.

Second Hand Books!

Recently we accumulated many quality excellent second hand books—make sure you drop by and check what we have in store!

For all these and other titles contact Akshara Bookstore: 03 9387 0422 or info@evaminstitute.org ■



WEEKLY MEDITATION

Thursday September 5, 2024 - January 23, 2025
6:00pm – 6:45pm

The weekly sessions offer the opportunity to begin or renew your meditation practice in a welcoming and supportive environment. With meditation instructions as provided by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX, these sessions can nourish our motivation to practice by practicing with others..



THE PRACTICE OF EQUANIMITY, LOVE, COMPASSION & JOY ONLINE COURSE WITH KHENPO CHONYI RANGDROL

Friday September 13 & 20
September 7.30-9.00pm

In his annual teaching series, this year Khenpo Chonyi Rangdrol will teach on the Four Brahmaviharas or Four Immeasurables, known as the central virtues of Buddhism. The practice of the Four Immeasurables are a gateway to a positive, caring outlook which in turn, will lead us to have a more positive and skilful impact in the real world. Khenpo-la serves as Abbot of Thrangu Tara Abbey Nunnery and is valued for his clear and direct teaching.



GREEN TARA PUJA: MONTHLY SUNDAY PRACTICE

Saturday September 21
11:00am-12:30pm

Following the Green Tara course with Traleg Khandro, we are pleased to offer Green Tara puja practice sessions. These sessions are designed for those who wish to deepen their understanding and familiarity with the chanting and associated ritual practices. This final session for the year, provides a great opportunity to gain familiarity with the practice before the upcoming October retreat where Green Tara puja is practiced each morning.

LUJONG – TIBETAN YOGA AND PRANAYAMA COURSE WITH TRALEG KHANDRO

Saturday October 5 10:30am - 3:30pm

In this one-day course, Traleg Khandro will demonstrate and explain a pre-tantric Tibetan Yoga sequence “Chime Palter”, literally translated as exercises to extend one’s life. The Chime Palter exercise sequence is also designed to assist in stabilising the mind for meditation. Under Traleg Rinpoche’s instructions, Khandro-la received the traditional LuJong training after having qualified as a Hatha Yoga instructor. These classes are accessible to all.

OCTOBER RETREAT – UNDERSTANDING MAHAMUDRA, UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

Tuesday October 22 to Sunday October 27
Maitripa Contemplative Centre & Online

The second annual retreat focuses on Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX’s teachings on *Mahamudra*, the essential approach of the Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism. During this retreat, Rinpoche elaborates on how “*Mahamudra* teachings say that we need to trust and believe in ourselves” as spiritual practitioners. Upholding the retreat schedule provided by Rinpoche, the retreat includes structured time for meditation practice, teachings, yoga, and incorporates daily Green Tara and Chenrezig pujas.



CHENREZIG PUJA

First Friday of every month
7.30-8.30pm

In times of great confusion and suffering in the world, gathering together to invoke Chenrezig who embodies compassion, is a means to care for both others and ourselves from the spiritual point of view.

PLAN AHEAD:

Annual Buddhist Summer School | 1-15th January 2025.

We are pleased to announce Ringu Tulku Rinpoche will be teaching.

Program details coming soon.

UNDER 35s PROGRAM

30% off General course

The Under 35’s initiative was founded by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX, who wished to provide opportunities and encouragement to younger people sincerely interested in Buddhism and the practice of Dharma. All Under 35’s students receive a 30% discount on general courses, excluding Under 35 events.

UNDER 35s URBAN RETREAT:

Every last Saturday of the Month, 9.30am - 4.30pm

Offering a warm and inviting environment, E-Vam Institute welcomes people under 35 with the unique opportunity to join us to learn from key meditation practices and delve deeply into understand key concepts of Buddhist philosophy.

Rather than only being about meditation or philosophy the Urban Retreat encourages an integrated approach to spirituality through practicing what are know as The Three Trainings of Buddhist Practice: Meditation, Wisdom, and Moral Sensitivity.



MONTHLY VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE FOR UNDER 35s:

First Sunday of Every Month
10am-1pm

For those curious about practice within the Tibetan Buddhist system, we offer a monthly practice of Vajrasattva entitled “A Chariot of Great Merit”, a Vajrasattva Sadhana of the Dudjom Tersar Tradition revealed by the Tertön Garwang Drodruk Lingpa Tsal. These sessions are suitable for beginners.

