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The Approach of Mahayana Buddhism

Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX



This is the 3rd and final talk in this series. Talks 1 and 2, can be found in the May 2024 and September 2024 E-Vam newsletters respectively.

In the last two talks Rinpoche spoke about how one practices compassion in Mahayana Buddhism, what is meant by compassion and what is distinctive about the Mahayana concept of compassion. In this session Rinpoche explains how wisdom related to this approach and how wisdom is cultivated.

The six paramitas (also know as the six transcendent perfections) - generosity, ethical conduct or moral precepts, patience, diligence, meditation and wisdom or transcendental knowledge - become paramitas only if one has developed *real wisdom*. Now we may want to ask whether the paramitas would still be paramitas if we don't have wisdom, real wisdom, but a sort of proximate wisdom. For example, do we have to have genuine wisdom in order for the practice of generosity, moral precepts, patience and so on to be paramitas? Or can we have some understanding of reality and of our own nature to a level, and would that mean our actions would become transcendental?

I think the answer to that, even if one has some conceptual understanding, even if one does not have direct realisation, applying that understanding in an appropriate way, that approaches the transcendental form of the paramitas more so than if one didn't have that understanding.

In Mahayana Buddhism, to acquire wisdom we need to have what is called *prajna* which is often translated as *transcendental knowledge*. Prajna, can be conceptual or non-conceptual. First one needs to cultivate prajna and then one can acquire wisdom. Having some kind of conceptual understanding will go some way towards transforming our action into a transcendental action. Rather than just



coming from a purely moral approach to our action, we can infuse some ethically logical action – something that is edifying in a different way, because there is understanding.

So in that way we can say that with prajna, first we develop understanding and then understanding leads to experience and then experience leads to direct realisation. That is the process that one is supposed to go through in the Mahayana tradition. To reiterate, first one develops understanding and then understanding becomes converted into experience through the practice of meditation, and that experience then becomes transformed into direct realisation. Experience and realisation are not equated; they are not the same. One may have experience but may not have realisation. When one has certain experiences then one has insight, one may get some insight, and when one has direct realisation that insight turns into wisdom. This is how it is described in Mahayana Buddhism.

“From the Mahayana point of view, the reason why we have a problem generating compassion, having compassion, having any kind of compassionate sentiment, is because we have many different kinds of fixation .”

The understanding of reality is connected with compassion, because the understanding of reality allows us to see things both in terms of their relative aspect and their ultimate aspect. So from the relative aspect, if we have an understanding of reality, that allows us to see things from a non-dual perspective, from an aspect of non-duality.

From the Mahayana point of view, the reason why we have a problem generating compassion, having compassion, having any kind of compassionate sentiment, is because we have many different kinds of fixation (*dzin pa* in Tibetan). The meditational exercises that are designed to produce understanding, insight and wisdom are all about dealing with our so-called fixation.

Fixation arises from two different sources.

One source is from our emotional,

mental life, and the other arises from our intellectual, mental life. The emotional kind of fixation arises from getting fixated or seizing onto what we experience through our senses. When we see something, when we hear something, when we smell something we immediately latch onto that and then we develop emotional attachment to that or strong feelings adhere to these different kinds of stimulus. So this is one kind of fixation.

The other kind of fixation, the intellectual kind – when we say intellectual, we’re not just talking about the things that go on in our mind that are explicitly intellectual, but a more implicit kind – in this are included our tendencies to get fixated on the notion of myself, for example, thinking there is something called ‘me’ and there is something that is out there, something separate, or believing that there are physical entities, mental entities. Based on that belief we develop fixation on things, again, in terms of their intellectual orientation, in terms of the use of our conceptual categories, conceptual

framework – thinking there are, for example, discrete things and these things are separate entities. That produces the other kind of fixation.

From the Mahayana point of view, both kinds of fixation lead to conflict, both kinds of fixation lead to disturbances in the mind and they mutually feed each other. The emotional kind of fixation and the intellectual kind of fixation support and feed each other. So the stronger the intellectual fixation on things, then the stronger is the emotional arousal. For example, we may develop some strong idea in our head, we may develop some very strong ideas about certain things and those ideas then translate into strong emotions, strong feelings and strong emotional attachments. These then turn into what in Buddhist language is called ‘grasping’. So we grasp onto these things.

When the word ‘grasp’ is used it is used

much more freely than in normal circumstances. In Buddhism we grasp after things that we have aversion to as much as things that we are attracted to. So aversion arouses very strong emotions and we grasp after them in the form of deep feelings of resentment, grasp onto our feelings of resentment, disgust, hostility and so forth. And we grasp onto things in the form of strong attachment, and strong craving.

The fifth paramita *meditation* or *meditative concentration* – the Buddhist practice of meditation is geared towards teaching us how to free ourselves from the kinds of tendencies we have. Two forms of meditation are done: the first one is called shamatha meditation or tranquility meditation, which corresponds to the paramita of meditative concentration.

The sixth paramita is *wisdom* or prajna-paramita – prajna, as I mentioned, means transcendental knowledge – and this is developed through *vipashyana* meditation, also referred to as insight or analytical meditation.

According to Buddhism, to develop insight we have to have a mind that we can manage. If the mind is not put in an appropriate state then it is very difficult to develop insight – insight cannot develop without some kind of mental clarity. When the mind is too disturbed and too diffused or dispersed, scattered, as is often the case, we don’t have the luxury of being able to view the mind with some stillness or clarity, and so therefore it is difficult to have insight.

So at the beginning one has to do some kind of shamatha meditation, the meditation of tranquillity, which helps us with our tendency to grasp onto things, have strong emotional tendencies, latching onto different things, getting fixated onto certain stimuli, certain sensory stimuli, and so forth. In meditation, the senses begin to slow down and the mind becomes more quietened – this is what one is trying to do with shamatha meditation. When the mind is stabilized and becomes more calm and focused through shamatha, then with the vipashyana meditation one can gain insight into what distracts and governs the mind and emotions. So first we can begin to developing understanding of what creates disturbance, craving, distractions,



emotional upheavals and so on in the mind. When we have some direct experience it may yield some kind of insight into our mental tendencies and fixations. Then through wisdom, one develops the ability to dismantle the different forms of fixation.

The idea is that even in terms of our actions, how we conduct ourselves, if we do not have the ability to manage our own mind then we may try to be generous, patient, be vigorous, ethical and so on, but because our mind is so unruly, even if we are successful we may manage to invest only part of the mental energy into practicing the paramitas properly because we are unable to harness the mind's energy properly. That is why one practices shamatha meditation. If our mind becomes more focused then we can utilise that ability to concentrate, and combine that with the understanding and insight that we can gain through vipashyana meditation. . In our everyday meditation practice we can gradually work through the different levels of our fixations, the different kinds of fixation I mentioned just before.

How should we do this? First, we have to quieten the mind with shamatha meditation, then we have to overcome the intellectual fixations by getting rid of what are called 'wrong views' (editors note: in brief wrong view refers to nihilism and

eternalism). We do this by introducing what is called 'right view' (editors note: in brief this avoids extreme views of nihilism and eternalism). On the path we eventually seek to overcome even right view by developing non-conceptual wisdom. From this point of view, in Mahayana Buddhism we do not see any sort of contradiction in saying that the wisdom mind is non-conceptual, yet we can attain non-conceptual wisdom from the cultivation of understanding and insight through eliminating or overcoming wrong views and cultivating right view.

This actually goes back to the Buddha's time when Buddha himself spoke about the teachings being like the raft that one uses to cross the ocean of samsara. This comment is to be found in *Majjima Nikaya* in the Pali canon (*Majjima Nikaya* means middle length sayings), in the early Buddhist sutra collections. In that *sutta* (in Pali it is *sutta*; in Sanskrit it is *sutra*) the Buddha spoke about using the teachings which promote right view to correct the wrong view that is so intimately tied to our intellectual fixations – wrong views lead to these kinds of fixation.

Once we have used right view – through vipashyana meditation, for example one can realise *non-conceptual wisdom*. So one can eventually dispense with right view as well. In Mahayana teachings these are also described as

moving from gross to subtle to more subtle forms of fixations. The emotional kind of fixation that we have are the most gross kind; the intellectual fixation associated with wrong view and so forth is more subtle, and right view is more subtle than wrong view. But fixation on right view is also to be transcended ultimately. Wisdom is acquired in that way, gradually, and the main focus is on overcoming fixation.

From this we can see that wisdom is really equated with a mind which is without great fixation. The bigger the fixations we have, the more confused we are – we are bound to be more in a state of delusion. That is the Mahayana view. Meditation practices are designed to aid us in overcoming our fixations. As we overcome – moving from the most gross to the most subtle forms of fixation, as a consequence we have gradual experiences of, first, liberating experiences and then enlightening experiences. So, eventually overcoming subtle forms of fixation will lead to enlightening experiences.

Nagarjuna, speaking from the Mahayana Buddhist point of view, reiterated the Buddha's discourse. Nagarjuna was famous for introducing what is called the Middle View into Mahayana Buddhism. Middle View means the view which avoids the two extremes – the extremes of eternalism and nihilism.

Briefly, to explain what that means by



example: intellectually, in terms of our intellectual fixation, we get fixated on the concept of existence or non-existence, either something exists or something does not exist. Nagarjuna came up with the notion of the Middle View to correct that misunderstanding. He said the notion of existence/non-existence is just fabricated by our mind. Things actually do not either exist in themselves, nor not exist in themselves, because everything arises and dissipates because of causes and conditions.

Things arise and dissipate because they are not one independent thing, they are dependent. In other words, there are not individual things that come into being through a linear process of causation. Things come into being because of many different causes and conditions and they go out of existence for this reason also. So on one level we cannot say that things do not exist, because things do come into being but, on the other hand, we cannot say things do exist independently because everything arises due to varieties of causes and conditions, not because one particular thing has some kind of in-built power to come into being on its own.

From the Mahayana point of view then, to develop insight means being able to develop the correct view – the correct view or right view is the Middle View. In

Buddhism generally, Middle View is emphasised just as much as the Middle Way. We follow the Middle Way and we subscribe to the Middle View insofar as how we are supposed to relate to reality, how we are supposed to see things without embellishments or distortions.

This notion of the Middle View and the idea that things come into being due to varieties of causes and conditions is tied to the idea of not getting fixated, the importance of non-fixation. If there are no individual things or no discrete entities it does not serve us well to be excessively fixated on these things because it does not correspond to reality.

As far as Nagarjuna was concerned, if we could understand interdependence, and causes and conditions, this would also impact on our emotional life as well, such as our experiences of strong emotions because this would impact on how much we fixate on things emotionally. For example, if we can see that what makes me angry or depressed or what makes me joyous, ecstatic and so on, is not based on any particular single thing – that there is no such thing as something existing on its own independently, that automatically makes me angry or joyous or sad or whatever. There are a varieties of things coming together to produce our anger, joy, sadness, etcetera. By developing that

understanding, we can reduce our fixation on the object of our aversion or attraction and so on. With that understanding we will be able to develop a greater capacity to respond to everything in a more positive way, in a beneficial way.

Things are dependent upon causes and conditions, there are a variety of factors at play. According to Nagarjuna, not one single thing can give rise to all kinds of things because everything is *dependently arising*. Nagarjuna was convinced that doing this kind of analysis, an aspect of vipashana meditation - consideration and thinking along these lines, we can realise 'dependent arising' within our experiences. There are varieties of factors involved, including our own notion of the 'self', our own mental conditions, our own life experiences, life history and so forth, and all of the things that impact whatever 'I am' currently experiencing. In this way our tendency to get fixated will become lessened. It is Nagarjuna's view that we will be able to have some kind of experience of emptiness, insubstantiality.

What Is Emptiness?

Emptiness (in the Buddhist context) is to develop an understanding in relation to our relative experiences of the world. To have the experience of emptiness is to realise that nothing that we experience has

any kind of enduring essence. We have to really try to get the idea that when Nagarjuna is talking about everything being empty – or when Mahayana generally, is speaking about emptiness, what it really means is that things are *empty of essence*. So emptiness means that things do not have essence, things are empty of essence.

To say that things are empty is not to say things do not exist. That is why it is called the Middle View, as well. If we said things did not exist, if everything were empty in the nihilistic sense then everything would be non-existent – that is not what is meant by ‘emptiness’ or the Middle View. So we need to engender the Middle View to have the understanding of emptiness to begin with. That is how we try to develop the understanding of emptiness, by realising even in terms of our emotional life that everything that we experience is contingent on varieties of things.

According to this form of reasoning proposed by Nagarjuna and other significant Mahayana great masters, if things have some kind of individual essence then that thing should give rise to whatever effect it is supposed to give rise to, no matter what the circumstance. But it doesn’t happen like that because it is contingent on varieties of things - a range of causes and conditions. What makes me angry, depends on a range of things to arise. Such things as my own state of mind at the time, where my life is at the time, what I’m thinking about in relation to other people, what I’m thinking about that particular individual person, what my perception of that person is, my own personal values, my own sense of ethics, of right and wrong. All kinds of things like that come into play and for Nagarjuna this is very significant.

Our mental tendency is not to see that kind of complexity but to see things in a very simple manner, in a very black and white kind of way. We immediately seize onto some prominent feature about a certain life experience that we have had and just blow that up and then all the other factors are pushed out or sort of ignored or glossed over. In real life that is not what is happening. That is what Nagarjuna has said.

If we can understand things that way then we will have some understanding of emptiness. If we contemplate on that, that will then lead to some kind of direct experience of emptiness, which then does not rely on conceptuality, as we are doing now. Through that kind of contemplation, one can have genuine, direct realisation of emptiness.

To do all of this we also need the corresponding mental faculty. Often, I think, we fail to recognise this, intellectually or otherwise. We may understand something about what Nagarjuna is saying or what the Mahayanists mean by ‘emptiness’ and therefore we may think, ‘Well that is a reasonable concept’, but we may not appreciate the corresponding mental faculty needed to understand reality in this way.

My point is that if we do what the Mahayanists say, that is: if we do the meditational practice of shamatha, calming the mind, trying to get a handle on our unruly mind and so on with meditative concentration; and then vipashyana insight or analytical

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meditation, and the contemplative meditational exercise we are discussing now, such as thinking about things in terms of interdependence – relationships, networks of causes and conditions, rather than as single individual entity or instance – then we develop a totally different view. If we integrate these contemplation into our meditation, trying to have *experience* of that rather than just thinking about it, then this could gradually lead to direct realisation of emptiness. That happens only when the mind is going through corresponding changes in view.

So first we are using our ordinary, normal mental faculties with the use of conceptual categories to try to understand the interrelationship of everything, trying to grasp the notion of interdependent

arising or dependent arising. When we contemplate, when we have some kind of direct experience, the mind also becomes transformed. Our mind becomes transformed whereby we become endowed with a new kind of mental faculty. As we progress more with our meditational exercises and so on, we will become endowed with wisdom consciousness where we can directly realise emptiness.

The consciousness goes through these different stages of advancement because one is becoming freed of gross and subtle forms of mental fixation. According to Buddhism, what inhibits us from seeing things well, seeing things clearly, is fixation. We have all kinds of delusory mental states that Buddhism speaks about, but these delusions are there because of fixation, because we have this preponderance to see things in a particularly fixed way.

Nagarjuna was saying that if we see things in a different way, develop a different kind of understanding, then we will have a different emotional experience, we will have a different emotional life and

we will have different kinds of experiences, both conceptually and non-conceptually.

We can have conceptual experiences and non-conceptual experiences of reality in a totally different way, not in the way that we are used to. We are always used to seeing things from a dualistic point of view, a dualistic point of view being one of the central fixations that we have, as far as our intellectual fixation goes – seeing things in relation to self and other, or apprehender and apprehended.

From this point of view then, in relation to reality, we have to have a greater understanding of emptiness. On the subjective side, the wisdom consciousness will also be evolving – and that is a very important point. The consciousness of an ordinary person is different from the

consciousness of the different levels of a bodhisattvas, of the different levels and the consciousness of the Buddha, completely different.

I think, we can try to play that down, the additional mental powers, faculties, abilities and qualities of an enlightened mind. But these additional abilities are developed through one's practice. Through one's meditation one can develop all kinds of mental faculties to be able to see things in a proper undiluted undistorted way.

I think this is important because otherwise we could tend to think Mahayana teaches emptiness, so everything is empty at the end. Everything is empty so nothing has any real significance and whatever significance there is totally fabricated by the mind; the aim of the practice is not to see everything as a sham, as if it is all illusory. If we can see the balance between the reality pole and the pole of wisdom, if we

of autonomy, things are empty of individual essence and singularity, existing separately, apart from everything else. This is explained in many different kinds of ways – causality is one, and the 'one and many' reasoning is another.

Without going into too much details, as an example, Nagarjuna said, we think of cause and effect as being linear: one cause produces an effect, corresponding to that cause. Also, he has said we think of cause as being more primary than effect because effect arises from cause and things of that kind, so we get fixated on the cause and we get fixated on the effect and we think of cause and effect as being separate.

But Nagarjuna has said that that is not so – cause and effect are interrelated concepts. We are using the concept of causality in order to impose some kind of order on the world so we see certain things arising or following some other thing, or a certain event following some other event and so we say, 'Well, this arises

But if cause and effect are different entities – there is something called 'cause' and something called 'effect' – then that kind of notion also does not make sense. An effect that has no relationship to a cause is not an effect, because then anything could cause anything else – nothing would have any more of an intimate relationship to that than to anything else.

Through this kind of reasoning, Nagarjuna has said that with cause and effect also we realise that things come into being because of causes and conditions – varieties of factors come into play not because there is one cause and that cause brings certain effects into being. Also, in terms of things existing, things are also dependent on space and time: certain things come into being in relation to past events, in relation to present events, in terms of future events, and things are positioned relative to other things, something is to the left of some other thing, or something is to the right of something else, and so on and so forth.

Nagarjuna's point is always to point out the relationships that exist between things and not get fixated on the things themselves which is, according to him, one's failure to see varieties of things conjoining or that a conglomeration of things is what is happening. Different elements latch on to each other, come together, join together and then they disperse; they join together and then they disperse. Each individual element in itself is also made up of even finer elements and those are even finer ones and so on. So from this kind of reasoning as well, Nagarjuna has tried to show that there are no things, no individual things, existing – stating the same point but approaching it from many different angles. It comes to the same conclusion, that there is no thing, in the sense of something having some kind of essence.

Now, as far as Nagarjuna and other Mahayana teachers were concerned, having this kind of insight then leads to wisdom. It can unlock, unleash, all the mind's mental powers. Fixation is like locks that we have put on our mind; the mind is restricted in terms of what it can do, what it is capable of. We get fixated on this and we get fixated on that. Other than what we are fixated on we are incapable of

“Fixation is like locks that we have put on our mind; the mind is restricted in terms of what it can do, what it is capable of. We get fixated on this and we get fixated on that. Other than what we are fixated on we are incapable of experiencing or seeing or feeling or enjoying because we always return to the same fixations.”

can look at both then we will not be driven to that kind of nihilistic conclusion.

Of course, right from the beginning there is the notion that emptiness is not to be separated from everything that we are experiencing. In Mahayana, nothing that we experience is denied in reality. What is denied is the notion that anything that we experience has some kind of enduring essence or objective reality of its own, as if things actually exist with some kind of self-sufficiency. Nothing exists with any kind of self-sufficiency or autonomy or singularity.

bdag gcig rang dbang is used in Tibetan Buddhism. *bdag* means 'on its own', 'with its own identity' – *gcig* means 'singularity' – *rang dbang* means 'autonomy'. So when Mahayana teachings say things are empty, what is being said is that things are empty

from that'. But according to Nagarjuna, there is no linear progression like that: one thing causing another thing, one independently existing thing causing an independently existing effect. Cause and effect mutually define each other. An effect is an effect because there is a cause, and equally a cause is a cause because there is an effect. An effect is an effect because there is a cause, and visa versa.

Furthermore, he says, if we say one thing can cause another thing, if the cause and effect are the same then there will be no difference between cause and effect. And if they are different then cause and effect will have no relationship. In other words, if the cause and the effect are the same, if the effect is the manifestation, let's say, of the cause then cause and effect are the same, so then they would not be different.



experiencing or seeing or feeling or enjoying because we always return to the same fixations. We dwell on the same fixations, we entertain the same thoughts, the same ideas, the same attractions, the same aversions that constantly haunt the mind so the mind does not have the freedom to grow, to express itself.

Through dismantling these kinds of fixations, by seeing things in terms of relationships and so on, that creates the possibility for one's mental powers to arise, the mental powers associated with enlightened qualities, the qualities of the wisdom mind – *ye shes* instead of *nam shes*. So *nam shes* is characterised by varieties of fixation – *'dzin pa* in Tibetan means of all kinds, and these kinds of fixation keep us entrapped.

This point of view then, understanding that things do not have any kind of enduring essence or individual, inherent existence will allow us to see things with wisdom. We will see things with wisdom. Wisdom in Buddhism is characterised by lack of delusion, lack of what are called the two veils – the veil of conceptual confusion and the veil of emotional conflict. So the lifting of these two veils will allow us to see things with the clarity of wisdom.

In relation to the aspect of wisdom,

wisdom being non-conceptual, one apprehends and sees things, experiences things, with wisdom, in a non-conceptual way. But, does the enlightened being actually have thoughts? Can one have thoughts or does non-conceptual mean that the enlightened being does not have thoughts? These things are also discussed in Mahayana literature.

Often it is said that it does not mean the wisdom mind does not make use of thoughts, per se, but when one is in possession of wisdom mind one does not get misled by one's thoughts. According to Mahayana teachings, normally, because of the tendency to get fixated on things, our thoughts generate what is called *prapanca* (Sanskrit) or the proliferation of thoughts; and *vikalpa* (Sanskrit, *nam rtog* in Tibetan) which means discursive thoughts. So discursive thoughts, conceptual proliferation, these things are associated with our ordinary consciousness, the mind which gets fixated on things.

So discursive thoughts and conceptual proliferation disappear, they disappear from the wisdom consciousness, but that may not mean that the enlightened being does not make use of any thoughts at all, per se. In other words, thoughts themselves may not necessarily be

obscuring. That is a whole other topic for another time.

My point is, to understand Mahayana teachings allows us to understand two things basically. One is to understand how to free ourselves from the grip of our ordinary consciousness with the practice – the cultivation of loving-kindness, the practice of the paramitas and so on in Mahayana Buddhism. The other one is how to traverse the paths and stages, through the practice of the paramitas, so that one can acquire the enlightened qualities associated with development of one's own consciousness.

In Tibetan Buddhism, for example, the Buddha is called *sangs rgyas*. *sangs*, which means somebody who has been able to get rid of all the negativities, and *rgyas* means the blossoming of all the positive qualities. It is said that Buddha has attained those two: one is the attainment of freedom from all the negativities, all the constricting things; and the Buddha has been able to acquire all the qualities of a state of enlightenment.

We have to remind ourselves that these qualities are not represented purely by Buddha's mind, but in Buddha's physical being as well. So therefore from the Mahayana point of view we think of Buddha's attainment, the attainment of



the fruit of both compassion and wisdom, as not just in Buddha's outlook on life or a change in his or her state of consciousness, but in Buddha's own being, including the physical aspect of their being.

The Mahayana view is that the activities of the first four paramitas – the paramitas of generosity, moral or ethical precepts, patience and vigour – lead directly to the realisation of Buddha's physical being. The cultivation of the final two, meditation and wisdom: paramita of meditation, starting with meditative concentration, shamatha meditation, and then engaging in vipashyana meditation – analytical meditation – contemplating on the concept of emptiness, interdependent arising, and things of that kind; one develops insight and so forth and through that one realises Buddha's mental aspect, *kaya* and *jnana* (*kaya* means Buddha's physical aspect and *jnana* means Buddha's wisdom aspect), so both are realised at the end. Thus, the practice in compassion is a way of realising Buddha's physical embodiment and the practice of meditational exercises leads to the realisation of Buddha's mental faculties.

With the mental faculties, there are qualities to be found there which also come from the Buddha's cultivation of meditational exercises – meditation on the Four Brahmaviharas, meditation on the Four Immeasurables, meditation on the Seven Points of Mind Training – and all these different kinds of practices and meditational practices lead to different kinds of meditative experiences which are also described in great detail. For example, with the attainment of each level of the bodhisattva, the bodhisattva goes through tremendous change – almost like a great upheaval, that's how it is described, a complete overhaul so that much of the old stuff is abandoned and one is able to acquire new powers, new qualities.

I think it is important to see Mahayana Buddhism in that way and not think only about emptiness, not just think about compassion – and compassion in the very reduced sense of what we are normally capable of doing for each other to help each other out. The Mahayana vision is obviously much more grand.

The journey from the ordinary state of being to enlightenment is described as a

journey that involves tremendous changes within oneself and these changes are described as being very dramatic and significant. Sometimes we may tend to think of everything in terms of here and now and in terms of what we are experiencing. Although that is very important, nevertheless, from the Mahayana point of view, we are supposed to get inspired, get encouraged to go forward even though we ourselves have not had the experiences that are described on the first level of the bodhisattva or the second level of the bodhisattva (further details can be found in the English translations of Chandrakirti's *Bodhicaryavatara*).

If we think that the bodhisattvas can attain really amazing kinds of abilities and powers and so on, that may be very helpful for us to be inspired, to be enthused and perhaps it is helpful not to denigrate or think of that as being too far-fetched or something like that.

If we don't do that then, on the other hand, because in Buddhism we do not believe in a god or something like that – I think, anyway – we often tend to then fall

into the nihilistic mode and there is nothing. Especially if we have been spending too much time thinking about emptiness, impermanence, egolessness and so forth, if we are thinking too much about that kind of thing and that is not counterbalanced by the equally rich descriptions given of the different kinds of spiritual attainment that bodhisattvas of different levels can have, if we're not inspired by that – then we may despair. At least that is how it seems to me anyway.

There is the concept of emptiness, and then there is the concept of wisdom, the attainment of wisdom. Of course, compassion is the link between the two, all three are interrelated and wisdom, this notion of acquiring wisdom consciousness, has to be seen as a counterbalance to the teachings on emptiness.

The Heart Sutra is one of the most respected and admired Mahayana sutras around, very brief but extremely popular, and it is read by all the serious Mahayana practitioners irrespective of what country they are from – Tibetan, Japanese, Chinese, and so on. In that sutra it says things like there is no path, there is no enlightenment, there is no nose, there is no ear, etcetera. Nagarjuna is also talking about emptiness from the point of view of relative truth - we need to think about emptiness as representing the non-separability of the relative truth and the absolute truth. In other words, the absolute truth is the nature of the relative truth. The relative truth is not denied its existence; the nature of relative truth is also emptiness.

So what we see, smell, taste, touch, experience through our emotions, even the more lofty states of meditation, edifying experiences of various kinds on the spiritual journey – all of these things are also emptiness but on account of that, that does not mean that they are not real at all. It just means, as I said before, these things arise due to causes and conditions. They do not have any kind of enduring essence and that is why they come and go. If they had enduring essence then they would stay, be permanent; things would be very different. That is the Mahayana view.

Further, in Mahayana Buddhism, the evolution of the individual's consciousness

is described as being very rich in content. It is not like you just become a sort of kind-hearted person with some understanding that everything is empty! Sometimes we may become too reticent to entertain any kind of thought of higher states of attainment that are beyond our normal everyday life experiences. That also is probably what is hindering us from having different kinds of experiences.

Sometimes people come to Buddhist meditation, they meditate, and then after a while they think that nothing happens and they become very despondent. Even if we do not have complete conviction or genuine faith in what is being talked about, if we are following the Mahayana path, if we have some kind of respect or at least some kind of appreciation for the descriptions of the things that a bodhisattva attains even before becoming a Buddha, we may become encouraged.

There is a big gap between a bodhisattva and a Buddha and even bodhisattvas may have all kinds of qualities and attitudes that really are tremendous in comparison to our ordinary human capacities. So that

super-normal, one could say. We may glimpse something in these individuals and if that is the case then it may not be so far-fetched to think that certain individuals have certain capacities, greater capacities than normal. That is a very important thing to remember because we need to feel inspired, we need to feel encouraged when we are on the path. In Buddhism we use the ideals that are before us – there are living, breathing individuals, including the Buddha Shakyamuni himself, that we can refer to and try to get some idea as to what they, themselves, may have experienced.

Even if we do not have certain experiences ourselves, certain experiences are described in other literature which describe what certain bodhisattvas or enlightened beings can experience. Closing our minds to all those possibilities may, in itself, be the very reason why our mind is not moving forward. If we have a little bit more openness more may be possible.

That does not mean that all the qualities and so forth associated with the

“In Buddhism we use the ideals that are before us – there are living, breathing individuals, including the Buddha Shakyamuni himself, that we can refer to and try to get some idea as to what they, themselves, may have experienced.”

may be reassuring because one does not have to become a Buddha to have enlightened experiences or to be able to break out of the confinements of our egoic consciousness and enter into – I suppose for want of a better word – an altered or elevated state of consciousness.

That is a very important concept. Whatever we are doing is supported not only by this notion of compassion and our understanding of emptiness, selflessness, egolessness and so forth – but is also supported by our understanding of the power and capacity of the enlightened mind.

When we look at somebody like the Dalai Lama or Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche in the Tibetan tradition and many other beings in other traditions also, I'm sure many of us see something in them that we know to be not normal or average, but

bodhisattvas and Buddhas and so on, are to be taken completely literally – every word, every sentence, to be taken completely literally. That may be going a bit too far as well. In Mahayana literature it is admitted very clearly that hyperbole - exaggeration of certain qualities and attributes - associated with the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Still does not take away the possibility of the kernel of truth of their attainments. Even after the excessive adoration and the things that have been expressed are trimmed away, what is still left may be uplifting and exceptional. As a Mahayanist it is incumbent on us to try to make use of these descriptions of enlightened experiences as much as possible for guidance, personal enrichment, and to inspire our journey. That is to use the inspiration given by these stories for our own benefit. ■

News from E-Vam Institute



Venerable Ringu Tulku Rinpoche

2025 began with the 42nd Buddhist Summer School, highlighted by the beautiful presence of Venerable Ringu Tulku Rinpoche. Rinpoche explored themes of harmony and courage through two courses—*The Four Harmonious Friends* and *Epic Stories of Gesar of Ling*. Rinpoche's warm and relaxed presence was deeply appreciated, and we were fortunate to hear such relatable and inspiring stories.

The lineup also featured respected teachers from diverse traditions: Ekai Korematsu Roshi on Zen Master Dōgen's wisdom beyond thought; Sam Berholz on Shambhala warriorship and living a Dharmic life; and Traleg Khandro on *Transforming the Mind*, based on the teachings of Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX. Theravādin teachers Bhante Pasadika and Bhante Buddhavihāri on the Buddha's original instructions on breathing and loving kindness meditation. Teishin Shona introduced central Zen practices, while Dr Kathleen Gregory and Dr Leesa Davis explored how Buddhist philosophy and psychology apply to daily life. Thank you to all who made the Summer School such a joyful and inspiring community achievement.

Following the Summer School, the E-Vam community gathered for a working bee in preparation for Do Tulku Rinpoche's first visit to Australia. Between a community picnic and meeting

kangaroos, Rinpoche delivered engaging teachings on the Three Yanas of Tibetan Buddhism. Over one evening and a weekend, Rinpoche illuminated the complete path—from the Hinayana's personal liberation, to the Mahayana's vast vision, and Vajrayana's transformative approach. Participants also received the Bodhisattva vows and took part in a smoke puja.

Saying goodbye to Rinpoche marked the end of the New Year, and the community gathered again to welcome in the Tibetan Year of the Wood Snake with a lovely party and beautiful Chenrezig practice.



Do Tulku Rinpoche

In March, the regular programs resumed with strong attendance at Weekly Meditation sessions and the

continuation of Vajrasattva (A Chariot of Great Merit) and Chenrezig sadhana practices.

The Under 35s program returned with monthly Urban One-Day Retreats. These included shamatha meditation, Tibetan yoga, and meditation on the Four Preliminaries and the Four Immeasurables. Wisdom component including Teachings by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX's on *Transforming the Mind*.

In April, E-Vam launched Part 1 of a new Teaching and Meditation series, *Integral Buddhism: Developing All Aspects of One's Personhood*, featuring video teachings by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX alongside sitting and walking meditation. The first session, Rinpoche introduced Buddhism not simply as philosophy or meditation, but as a complete path integrating mind, ethics, and well-being.

Relating to suffering, Rinpoche described it is not caused simply because things 'change', but by our tendency to resist how things actually are:

"We do not suffer because things change... that's not the reason. We suffer because we think things ought to be different to how they are. That's why we suffer."

"So by understanding that, then we learn how to moderate, how to manage our desires and so forth."

— Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX

Part 2 of the series, focused on wisdom as the ability to see things in context and relationship:

“...wisdom comes from seeing the relationships: not perceiving everything in terms of separate entities in isolation, but trying to view a given element in relation to other components... Seeing it in that way is called ‘wisdom,’ according to Buddhism.”

— Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX

Participants showed deep dedication—meditating, listening, taking notes—such a beautiful space for learning and reflection.

In April, E-Vam held the Annual Easter Retreat at the stunning Maitripa Centre. Blessed with beautiful weather, and following the format provided by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX, the program included sitting and walking meditation, Green Tara and Chenrezig pujas, yoga,

and study sessions led by Traleg Khandro, who helped further explore the teachings.

This year’s teachings were Rinpoche’s teachings on Why Buddhism Matters. In these talks, Rinpoche expanded on a comprehensive set of “lists”—that guide the entire path. Rinpoche explained how these lists act as practical reminders of what one needs to reflect on and then through meditation apply.

“We cannot separate practice from theory and theory from practice. We cannot just simply learn more and more about Buddhist philosophy and theories and forget about the practices, and we cannot simply do the practices and then hope for the best.”

Also Rinpoche explored how the

impetus to break out of one’s delusory Samsaric mindset of the ego...

“One has to say, this is enough ... I’m going to have a new life, a more satisfying life, and a life which is devoted to enhancement of my growth. So that I can not only have a more meaningful life, but that I can also make some kind of impact in relation to other people and even in relation to the world ...”

— Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX

On behalf of E-Vam Institute, we offer our heartfelt thanks to all the teachers and volunteers who helped make this such a vibrant and meaningful Dharmic start to the year. ■

Mark Dawson

News from Maitripa Centre



Maitripa Centre has seen a lot of activity during the Summer and Spring of 2025. Along with the annual Buddhist Summer School and E-Vam Institute’s Easter Retreat, we have hosted a number of new and regular groups. Some of the new groups include Dru Australia, Mindfulness Works Australia and Legato Tai Chi. Regular groups included One Heart Projects, Divine Grace, Sparkly Yoga, Soul River, Illumine Nation, Mindfulness Training Institute, School for FM Alexander Studies and Underwood Healing.

In addition to hosting groups we have also been working on various upgrades and improvements to the property. Iris Dillow spent a good part of a week continuing work on the fountain garden beds. This has already provided an abundance of flowers, including marvellous marigolds and salvias, for retreatants to enjoy. Thank you, Iris, we are so grateful for your time and care.

Anthony Cramer, in addition to his ongoing support and help throughout the year, offered his help (and chainsaw) to advance a significant garden project

outside the Gompa. It is a staged project which we plan to continue to work on throughout the quieter winter period.

New split system air conditioners were installed in the main conference hall which has been a huge relief for many guests, including the Buddhist Summer School attendees in “Lecture Hall 2” (who no longer need to mist themselves with spray bottles and ice cubes thanks to the new A/C). Having air conditioning in both halls now has been a significant improvement to Maitripa Centre’s venue hire profile.

We would like to thank all the groups who have held their retreats at Maitripa and all their retreatants and of course the Maitripa volunteers who help us improve and maintain Traleg Rinpoche’s retreat centre here in Australia. ■

Daniel & Lisa Blaze



News from Nyima Tashi Buddhist Centre Auckland, New Zealand



Tēnā koutou, Tēnā koutou, Tēnā koutou katoa. We offer greetings to you from Nyima Tashi in Auckland Tāmaki Makaurau.

By the time you are reading this article, we will likely be in the holy month of Saga Dawa. An auspicious time for practice, culminating with Saga Dawa Düchen – the full moon on the 11th June 2025.

Düchens are the commemoration days, marking important life-events of the Buddha. As followers of the Buddha, it is imperative that we know the origin, the source of our refuge, the physician we are relying on.

It is on Düchens, when we revere the peerless teacher, the Buddha, and that we become more aware of the imperativeness of doing so. If we permit it, this special time of year brings the blessings of Buddha Sakyamuni's Birth, Awakening and Parinirvana closer to us.

It is indubitably experienced through the contemplation and veneration of our precious Lineage, so perfectly embodied by our Teachers, with whom we are so fortunate to have come into connection with.

Nyima Tashi has launched a curriculum of study and practice for both Shedra students and more seasoned practitioners. These are monthly intensive workshops based on Traleg Rinpoche's teachings. This month students took part in a series of 3 talks given by Rinpoche entitled Meditation Through the Three Yanas. The talks are followed up with students presenting on the Yanas as an oral presentation, there is also a written examination and an opportunity for debate.

It presents students with an opportunity to continue to study and to learn from Rinpoche, the hope is to not simply collect information, but to put it

to practice. We understand that duality can be quite strong in that it dominates our everyday experiences and lays the foundation for separation, hence the introduction of these workshops not only to further the education of Shedra students but to enrich the environment with skills and knowledge embedded in more senior students, a collaborative effort terms of a more integral, inclusive approach.

In the words of Rinpoche

“Stability does not come from things remaining the same, because that would only be stultifying, a form of imprisonment. We may take refuge in that inertia, but that comfort is illusory, because it is just a fabrication of our own mind. In reality, nothing stays the same, so we are better off being realistic and accepting that fact. Stability has to come from embracing that everything is in motion and subject to change.” ■

News from E-Vam Buddhist Institute U.S.



It was a strong beginning to the year welcoming Lama Jinpa (Aaron) continuing his commentary on Traleg Rinpoche's teachings from the book, *The Practice of LoJong: Cultivating Compassion through Training the Mind*. A very inspiring and practical course. Thank you Lama Jinpa.

We are so thankful to Elisha for organizing and running the Under 35's group which has really begun so strongly. Thank you for your beautiful efforts Elisha. It was wonderful to welcome more young people to our online courses and retreats.

The annual May retreat at Saranam Retreat Centre WV was a special time for all who attended. Studying Traleg Rinpoche's remarkable teachings, providing extraordinarily profound, yet entirely practical advice on approaching meditation, dealing with challenging that may arise during meditation practice and so on. Lama Jinpa gave insightful commentary on the teachings during the study sessions. As well as the daily pujas, a special Tsog Guru Yöga Puja was performed on the final evening of retreat in honor of Traleg Rinpoche, and a beautiful refuge ceremony was given for four of the retreat attendees. The retreat included Tibetan Yoga classes with Kyle Weaner. Thank you to the Saranam community, especially Barbara Weaner for welcoming E-Vam so beautifully every year. A big thank you to Julie Brefczynski Lewis for all she does throughout the year to support E-Vam's activities, as well as run her own Buddhist Study Group she provides so much help and support on retreat. Thank you to all the participants for making retreat so magical and special.

In 2026 the May retreat will be held at Vajra Vidya Retreat Centre in Crestone Colorado, near the E-Vam land. Residing over retreat will be Venerable Khenpo Lopzang Tenzin, and in assistance Lama Jinpa and Julie Brefczynski Lewis. The Saranam retreat will still be held in 2026 but in the later part of the year.

UPCOMING ONLINE PROGRAM

July – August: Distinguishing Samsara from Nirvana.
This summer Traleg Khandro (Felicity) will give commentary on Rinpoche's teachings exploring the causes of suffering and the path out of suffering.

September: Bodhisattva Maitreya & His Treatise on Buddha Nature.

In the Fall we are very lucky to welcome Anthony Bruno (Tenzin Chödrak) who will explore the historical background on Bodhisattva Maitreya teaching the treatise to his disciple Asanga, and how the treatise derives from the sutras of the Buddha's third turning of the wheel of Dharma.

October: The Neuroscience of Meditation Practice.
Neuroscientists and long time practitioner of Buddhism, Julie Brefczynski Lewis will lead a fascinating and practical course on invoking positive states of mind through meditation practice.

November: The Slogan's of LoJong to Awaken Our Compassionate Heart

Lama Jinpa will continue his exploration and commentary on the LoJong slogans. Always such a relatable and practical approach to bringing the teachings into ones daily life and into ones meditation practice.

For further details of E-Vam upcoming courses, interest in Julie Brefczynski Lewis's WV study group; and Elisha's Under 35's program please email office@evam.org.

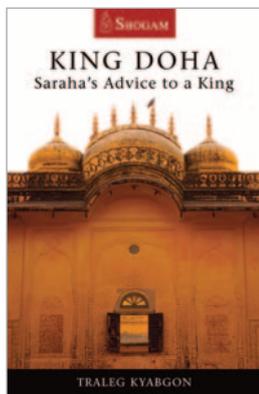
Details of the ongoing program, free teachings, kids corner and the 2026 Retreat can be found on the E-Vam website: evam.org ■

Traleg Khandro

News from Akshara Bookstore

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

King Doha: Saraha's Advice to a King Traleg Kyabgon



While on the one hand, it is said that Mahamudra is a very advanced form of meditation, on the other, if one were already advanced one would not need any instructions. Mahamudra manuals often tend to explain everything step by step as if the reader does not know anything. Obviously then, they are meant for people like us.

In the King Doha, Saraha gives a step by step account of the pitfalls a meditation practitioner can fall into and how to avoid them. With a background of practicing extensively in the tantric tradition, he gives his reasons for considering the Mahamudra approach an appropriate path. Based on a commentary by Karma Trinleypa, Traleg Rinpoche gives a straightforward and clear explanation of Saraha's message to us as practitioners of Mahamudra.

The Rain of Wisdom The Essence of the Ocean of True Meaning Chogyam Trungpa



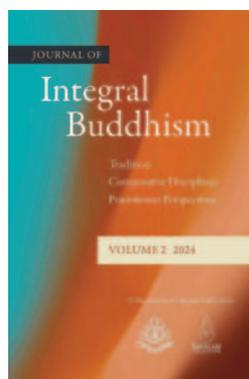
The art of composing spontaneous songs that express spiritual understanding has existed in Tibet for centuries. Over a hundred of these profound songs are found in this collection of the works of the great teachers of the Kagyü lineage, known as the Practice Lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.

Many readers are already familiar with the colorful life of the yogin Milarepa, an early figure in the Kagyü lineage, some of whose songs

are included here. Songs by over thirty other Buddhist teachers are also presented, from those of Tilopa, the father of the lineage, to those of the Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, as well as several songs by Chögyam Trungpa, the noted teacher of Buddhism in America who directed the translation of *The Rain of Wisdom*.

The diversity of the songs mirrors the richness of Tibetan Buddhism and gives us clear portraits of some of its most eminent teachers. Their longing for truth, their heartfelt devotion, and their sense of humor are all reflected. These poems share a beauty and intensity that have made them famous in Tibetan literature. With its vivid imagery and deep insight, *The Rain of Wisdom* communicates a profound and timeless understanding.

The Journal of Integral Buddhism Volume 2, 2024 Edition E-Vam Institute



The Journal of Integral Buddhism is an annual publication that presents papers by esteemed scholars, monastics, and practitioners which reflect the diversity of viewpoints from within Buddhism, as well as comparative works that engage with philosophy, psychology, and other related fields including science and other religions.

Volume 2, the 2024 edition
The Volume 2 contributors are:

- Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX of the Kagyu Nyingma traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, explains the notion of buddha-nature from a Mahamudra perspective, and provides an excellent and accessible overview of the Mahamudra path.
- Chi Kwang Sunim from the Korean Zen Buddhist tradition, writes about the ten bhūmis with the purpose of illustrating the experience of following the Buddhist path.
- Ajahn Dr Buddharakkhita from the Theravada Forest tradition of Sri Lanka discusses the potential richness and fullness of solitude and the idea of overcoming the experience of scarcity in the excessive pursuit of worldly fulfillment.
- Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche from the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism explains the Mayahana approach to building a compassionate heart and mindset that can override our fixation on the small vision of ego centeredness.
- Dr Pilar Jennings, Psychoanalyst, discusses the concept of attachment and its relationship to compassion and well-being from Buddhist and Western psychological perspectives.
- Traleg Khandro is not seeking to represent a particular school of Buddhism, but has prepared a Buddhist non-sectarian paper on the practice of meditation, reviewing the traditional instructions to meditation and their relationship to how we can work with the mind to build wisdom.

Second Hand Books!

We have many quality excellent second hand books—make sure you drop by and check what we have instore!

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



E-Vam Institute Winter Teaching Program 2025 –

Day of Meditation and Teachings Series

Day 3: Integral Buddhism – Developing All Aspects of One’s Personhood

Sunday 15th June

9.00am – 5.00 pm



An immersive day of meditation and teachings from Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX. The teachings in this series introduce the foundations of Rinpoche’s approach Integral Buddhism showing how Buddhist philosophy is not just a conceptual framework but a method for genuine self-transformation.

NEW SERIES:

Integrating Buddhism and Meditation into Daily Life

Saturdays June 21, August 16, October 18

10.00am – 12.30pm

What is Buddhism? Why do we meditate? What is the relationship between Buddhist practice and philosophy? What does it mean to be a Buddhist? How do I integrate Buddhism into my daily life?

In this Introductory series, we shall consider the essentials of the Buddhist Path. Through deepening our understanding of key Buddhist concepts and practices, we can then apply Buddhism to our lives and enrich ourselves. Led by Dechen Davies, long-term student of Traleg Rinpoche, these half-day courses offer practical guidance, relevant not only for those new to Buddhism but also provide an opportunity for anyone to refresh their practice.

Course 1: Introducing the Noble Eightfold Path

... by developing good character, and cultivating the necessary mental and spiritual faculties, we become, in fact, noble. – Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX.

Annual Winter Zen Teachings with Ekai

Korematsu Roshi

A Series of Four Talks on Zen Master Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō

Friday July 4, 11, 18 & 25.

7.30pm-9.00pm



Continuing the annual tradition as requested by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX to teach on the Shōbōgenzō, Ekai Korematsu Roshi will teach on one of the most revered chapters – *Mountains Walking, Waters Speaking* in which

Master Dōgen presents a radical vision: mountains and rivers are not simply features of the natural world — they are living expressions of awakening. The Earth itself, he teaches, is the body of the Buddha Way.

WEEKLY MEDITATION

Wednesdays 6:00pm – 6:45pm (see website for schedule)

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.



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.

UNDER 35s PROGRAM

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 important concepts of Buddhist philosophy. The Urban Retreat encourages an integrated approach to spirituality through practicing what are known as The Three Trainings of Buddhist Practice: Meditation, Wisdom, and Moral Sensitivity.



MONTHLY VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE

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

Terton Garwang Drodrul Lingpa Tsal. These sessions are suitable for beginners.

SAVE THE DATES

Annual November Retreat

Maitripa Contemplative Centre & Online

The Evening of November 6 – 11

Check our website for details and registration for our upcoming community commemoration of the 13th anniversary of the Parinirvana of The Very Venerable Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX.

The E-Vam Institute program is offered both in-person

