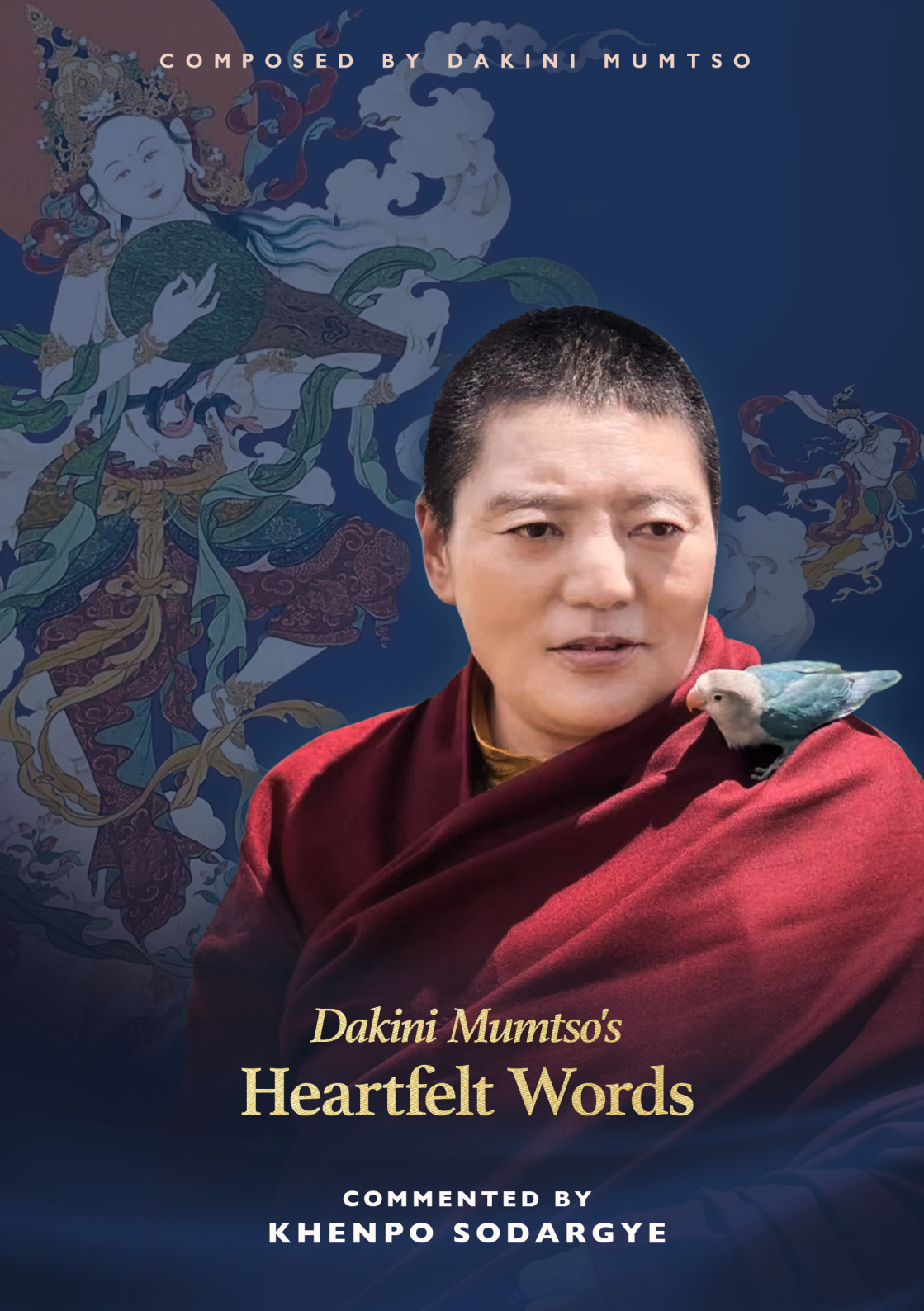


A portrait of a woman, Dakini Mumtso, with short dark hair, wearing a red shawl over a yellow garment. A small green and white parrot is perched on her right shoulder. The background is a deep blue with a faint, stylized Tibetan Buddhist painting of a deity with multiple arms and a halo. The text is overlaid on the image.

COMPOSED BY DAKINI MUMTSO

Dakini Mumtso's
Heartfelt Words

COMMENTED BY
KHENPO SODARGYE

Dakini Mumtso's
HEARTFELT WORDS

Composed by Dakini Mumtso

Commented by Khenpo Sodargye

2025

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INTRODUCTION

Dakini Mumtso—recognized as the reincarnation of Jetsün Mingyur Paldrön of Mindrolling Monastery—is the niece and lifelong closest disciple of His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, and is widely regarded as one of the foremost female masters of our time. This volume brings together three of her teachings, composed at different points over the past three decades and now published together for the first time: *The Melody of the White Dharma Conch*, written for her Han Chinese disciples; *Words to Devout Laymen and Laywomen*, composed for practitioners in the Land of Snows; and *Guidance That Lights the Way to Liberation*, delivered to the monastic sangha of Mindrolling.

Each teaching is accompanied by a detailed commentary from Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche, who has been at Lama Mumtso's side since 1985. His reflections are rooted in decades of shared history: traveling with her and His Holiness in the winter of 1986 through the monasteries of Garze, Nyarong, and Drango; joining them on teaching journeys to India, the United States, and Southeast Asia in the 1990s; and witnessing her enthronement at Mindrolling in 1998.

Khenpo Sodargye is, by his own account, among those who have spent the most time in her company outside her immediate family, and it is from this firsthand vantage—rather than reputation or hearsay—that his commentary speaks.

What he describes in these pages is an extraordinary life. At the time of her ordination, taking monastic vows was still widely regarded as a path for Tibetan women with few other prospects. Lama Mumtso took her vows regardless, and by the age of seventeen, she had already begun guiding disciples and teaching in her own right—a path Khenpo Sodargye credits with helping to elevate the status of ordained women across the Land of Tibet. His Holiness began instructing her before she turned ten, even during the years when Buddhism was most severely restricted. Consequently, by the time of his parinirvana, she had received his complete transmission, sutra and tantra alike, more fully than any other living disciple. Her practice has been equally steadfast: she has completed the ngöndro preliminaries five times, and her mantra recitations, begun in childhood and never interrupted, now exceed one billion.

Then there is the matter of her temper, or rather, its complete absence. Khenpo Sodargye is candid that this was not something he took on faith. Upon first reading of this quality in her biography, he admits he wondered if it might be an affectionate exaggeration

from close attendants—it seemed nearly impossible that anyone could truly never feel irritation. Yet, through forty years of personal observation, he reached a conclusion he no longer doubts: “In all that time, I have no memory of Lama Mumtso ever losing her temper or even showing the slightest displeasure.”

He offers a brief story to illustrate this. On the journey back from her 1998 enthronement, Khenpo shared a car with the abbot of Mindrolling that overturned in the Yarlung Zangbo River. Later, back at Larung Gar, His Holiness joked to the assembly: “Mumtso’s trip to Mindrolling went quite well—no major obstacles, except that Khenpo Sodargye lost a shoe!” It is a slight, almost throwaway anecdote, but it points to a profound reality: amidst the disruptions of travel and the hazards of the road, the person at the center of the journey remained entirely unruffled.

Elsewhere in the book, Khenpo Sodargye asks his own students how many consecutive days they can go without losing their temper. In one group practice devoted to forbearance, the goal was set at one hundred days; by his account, most who attempted it fell short. Against the backdrop of that common struggle, he remarks that a lifetime of unbroken composure is “beyond imagination” to those who have not witnessed it—and that is precisely what four decades at her side allowed him to do.

Khenpo Sodargye admits he rarely spoke of her qualities in his classes, “for from her words and actions we know she is modest and dislikes praise.” It was only the confluence of translating her biography and these three texts that made the occasion “especially appropriate” to share her story. This reluctance is itself noteworthy: nothing in this book was assembled to build a reputation. It exists because the teachings, and the life that embodies them, are too valuable to remain unrecorded.

Though concise, these three texts present a complete arc of practice—from the fundamentals of ethical conduct and the law of cause and effect, to the cultivation of faith, compassion, and renunciation, and finally to the direct recognition of the nature of mind in Dzogchen. In his commentary, Khenpo Sodargye draws on his own memories—empowerments he witnessed her confer and journeys shared with His Holiness—to explain each passage in terms contemporary readers can readily grasp.

His Holiness has passed, and the masters who shaped a generation are, one by one, entering their later years. For those who seek to carry the lineage forward, the words of a teacher like Dakini Mumtso are of uncommon value. They are offered here not as historical curiosities, but as a living lifeline: how to conduct oneself with decency, how to soften a proud heart, how to face death

without fear, and how to sustain faith when the world gives every reason for it to dim. As Khenpo Sodargye says: “The best and most essential way to rely on her is to receive her teachings and internalize their meaning.”

May all who read this book form a genuine connection with Lama Mumtso, take her instructions to heart, and proceed steadily along the path she illuminates here.



ROOT TEXT

by Dakini Mumtso

**THE MELODY OF THE WHITE DHARMA CONCH:
MY HEARTFELT ADVICE FOR THE BENEFIT OF HAN CHINESE**

Your compassionate activity is always directed
Toward all the fortunate disciples in the Han regions of China.
The supreme and noble deity Manjughosha,
To you who dispel the darkness of ignorance, I respectfully
prostrate.

Whatever befalls me, be it happiness or sorrow, good or bad,
Except for the incomparable guru, the wish-fulfilling jewel,
I have no one else to turn to.
O protector, grant your blessings so that this advice may be
carried out!

To those who possess faith in the sacred dharma,
Especially long for the Secret Mantrayana, the pinnacle vehicle,
And also delight in me and regard me with respect,
I offer these words on what to adopt and what to abandon,
illuminating the excellent path.

We all will not remain long in this human world.
Like those who came before us,

We too will one day depart for the next life.

Those who fail to contemplate this are truly ignorant.

Although death cannot be avoided,

If, as the great masters of the past have done,

We recognize the appearances of birth and death as dreamlike,

This becomes a skillful means for freedom from suffering.

The ultimate essence of the oceanic teachings of Sutrayana and
Mantrayana

Is emptiness and dependent origination.

If you realize the illusory nature of their union,

You will transcend all suffering in samsara.

The clear appearance of the deity in generation stage requires this.

The meditation on luminosity in completion stage requires this.

The view and meditation of the Great Perfection require this.

Without this, there is no hope for liberation.

It is easy to speak of emptiness with the mouth,

Yet few let its meaning truly arise in the mind.

It is easy to meditate on a contrived notion of emptiness,

Yet few thoroughly cut through misconceptions.

The way to practice this profound path is:

At the beginning, complete the five hundred thousand preliminaries to accumulate merit and purify obscurations,

In the middle, apply the two expedient methods—

Invoking the blessings of the lineage gurus and analyzing through scriptures and logical reasoning.

You Han Chinese are very intelligent,

As you are disciples of the compassionate deity Manjughosha.

You should reflect on various logical reasonings

That clarify the illusory nature of appearance and emptiness.

In the very beginning, it is difficult to attain realization through analytical study.

The deeper you contemplate, the more your doubts increase.

The more doubts you have, the more evident it becomes

That your analysis has reached genuine depth.

Thinking, “It is so because the Buddha said so,”

Or “It is definitely true because the guru said so,” is not the right way.

Relying on your own in-depth reflection,

You will cut through misconceptions from within and give rise to certainty.

If you are unable to dispel all doubts
Yet believe you have gained certainty at the beginning,
And deem experiences in the fabricated mind as signs of
enlightenment,
That is a grave mistake.

In the preliminary practices, take refuge and arouse bodhicitta;
In the main practice, contemplate the meaning of emptiness;
In the conclusion, seal the practice with profound aspirations—
These are the key points of the unmistaken path.

Not to mention gaining certainty about the nature of reality,
Even a few reasonable doubts you bring about
Will tear the root of three existences.
So do not underestimate it, but continually reflect on it.

Meditating on the emptiness of appearing objects is Madhyamaka;
Meditating on the emptiness of your own mind is Mahamudra
and Dzogchen.

Without understanding that the true nature of everything
is emptiness,
You cannot master the view of the Great Perfection.

In the lineage of the noble masters of the past,
Relying on gurus who were equal to actual buddhas,

And letting the blessings of the gurus' wisdom merge with the
disciples' minds,
Many realized the nature of mind instantaneously.

In these days when the teachings are declining,
The meeting of a realized and accomplished vidyadhara
And a karmically connected disciple of great faith and devotion,
As occurred in the past, has become rare.

Nevertheless, toward the root guru
Who bestows authentic empowerment, guidance, and instructions,
Cultivate faith and devotion, seeing the guru as the actual
buddha, and
Merge your mind inseparably with the guru's wisdom mind,
thereby abiding in samadhi.

At this time, let stirring thoughts of analysis subside,
And remain like an ocean without waves.
Through this skillful method of receiving the guru's blessings,
The fortunate will realize the true nature as it is.

Thus, analyzing through profound and subtle reasoning,
And practicing guru yoga,
Are the two expedient methods for realizing the nature of mind.
Alternate these two practices and never abandon them.

People differ in age—young and old alike—
And in their interests.
Even if you cannot train properly in this way,
Opportunities to practice the sacred dharma are never lacking.

The essence of the Great Vehicle's teachings
Is said to be loving-kindness and compassion.
Toward beings of all stations, inferior or superior,
Always cultivate an altruistic heart—of all virtues, this is supreme.

Among the lowly, suffering arises from craving;
Among the exalted, from worry and fear.
All are tormented by birth, aging, sickness, and death—
Within samsara, there is nowhere free from suffering.

Generating the compassionate wish
To free a single being from suffering even once
Can purify negative karma as great as Mount Meru,
And yield merit as boundless as the ocean.

Nothing in this world
Is more precious than one's own life.
So always release fish and other animals whose lives are in danger,
And you will find happiness in present and future lives.

Happiness and suffering, good and bad, always alternate.
Such is the nature of samsara and cannot be altered.
Therefore, pray continually to the Three Jewels.
If your faith and devotion are not weak or lax, they will certainly
protect you.

From now on and throughout all future lives,
You must have a deity to whom you can direct your mind.
It is meritorious to meditate on the inseparability of deity and guru
While reciting the deity's mantra as much as possible.

When the time of death arrives,
You will migrate from this world.
So constantly maintain a clear visualization of Amitabha,
And yearn for the realm of Sukhavati.

At the time of death, things will not be as they are today.
Many teachings will be difficult to put into practice.
Therefore, hold this instruction firmly in your mind and never
forget it,
For it is the supreme method for closing the gate to
the lower realms.

The heartfelt advice presented above
Is the heart-essence of all Sutrayana and Mantrayana teachings.

Practiced properly with sincere faith,
It becomes a supreme instruction that truly benefits you.

What we call profound or non-profound teachings
Depends only on whether they suit one's mindstream,
In their essential nature, there is no difference.
Understanding this, apply the dharma in your actual practice.

By the merit of offering this advice,
May those who read, recite, contemplate, or keep it in mind,
Supported by the blessings of the peerless guru,
Have the light of the authentic path to liberation shine brightly
within them.

This advice was composed on the tenth day of the fourth lunar month of the Water Tiger year (2022) of the Tibetan calendar, in response to repeated requests from devoted Han Chinese disciples who expressed their sincere hope that I might offer advice to benefit their minds. At the Palace of the Spontaneously Accomplished Four Activities in Chengdu, the Shakya nun Mumtso composed the text, and Khenpo Yeshe Phuntsok of Dule Namgyal Ling (Victorious Mara-Subduing Land) at Larung Gar recorded it. May it be virtuous!

WORDS TO DEVOUT LAYMEN AND LAYWOMEN

You constantly see with your wisdom eyes
The happiness and suffering of all beings in the Land of Snows.
Sole refuge in this degenerate age, Great Guru of Oddiyana,
From the depths of my heart I pray: Care for me with
your compassion.

To you faithful devotees, who take birth into this human world
In the same way in accordance with your shared karma,
I, with a good heart, offer this straightforward advice
That appears naturally in my mind.

When you are in the company of others in the human world,
If you are in harmony with everyone, you will be happy.
So refrain from the evil conduct that is a disgrace
In the eyes of all people—superior, inferior, or in-between.

In particular, those activities that harm your health,
Such as drinking alcohol, smoking, taking drugs,
And gambling, which brings you no benefit but invites
others' ridicule—

All such unwholesome deeds should be given up forever.

By the force of karma from previous lives,
Some are rich and some poor, which is not equal.
But you should be content with whatever you can afford.
If your mind is always happy, you are the greatest of the rich.

Look at people around, though they have nothing to gain or find,
They remain lost in desire throughout this life.
Without even a day's leisure to recover,
They pass on to their next lives.

Once you are born in this place of cyclic existence,
There is no path but the road toward death.
When you reach the end of that road,
If you are happy and at peace, you are the great wise.

When you are a child, heed the advice of your elders.
When you are an adult, embrace the teachings on cause and effect.
In all your actions, reflect on yourself.
If you are satisfied with your own conduct, others will be pleased
with you too.

When the flower of youth is in bloom,
Do not chase every desire that arises in your mind.
When your hair has turned white with age,
You will enjoy happiness with your own mind as witness.

Just as a dense forest contains trees of every description,
The world is filled with people of varied dispositions.
If you cannot adapt to others' needs,
Thorns will obstruct your life's path.

There is a proper limit to using fire for warmth.
Likewise, do not be too close to a friend.
There is a proper limit to using moxibustion to heal.
Likewise, do not be too cruel to an enemy.

Those connected to you—parents, relatives,
Dogs at your door, cattle in your yard—
Have become one family through the force of karma.
Be kind and care for them all. This is the way.

These teachings are much needed by worldly people.
When keeping company with friends, foes, or those in-between,
If they do not know the proper code of conduct,
They will be unhappy themselves and make others suffer.

There are many negative actions to forsake.
Those who harm the lives of weak and feeble animals,
Who steal, break vows, and scold their parents,
Will experience ripening effects not only in future lives but also in
this one.

When you have moderate food and possessions
That are needed by people of your kind,
Do not accumulate negative karma but follow the law of cause
and effect.

Do this and you will be happy in this and all future lives.

Although there are many ways to practice virtue,
The essence of the noble dharma is faith and compassion.
If your faith is firm, steadfast, and unshakable,
You can obtain the sacred dharma free of error.

If you pray to one deity with sincere devotion,
And recite a considerable number of his mantra
With steadfast faith, neither too tense nor too relaxed,
You will definitely be protected when obstacles arise.

Although there are many sentient beings in this world,
They equally reject even a speck of suffering,
And equally wish for even a pinpoint of happiness.
Therefore, cultivate loving kindness and compassion for all.

If you wish for even one being to be free of suffering,
And generate uncontrived compassion just once,
Your negative karma from many eons will be purified,

And the merit will surpass that of making hundreds of offerings
and donations.

There is no need for hardship or expense.

It is a fairly easy meditative practice with no chance of mistakes.

Meditate on compassion one session daily without fail.

With sincere faith, this becomes the ultimate dharma.

Now that you have obtained this human body this once,

And you know the difference between virtue and non-virtue,

Think about the skillful means to go from happiness to happiness—

Not only in this life but in all your lives to come.

In the lower realms, sentient beings experience unbearable
suffering.

In the human and celestial realms, happiness and suffering
are mixed.

Generate a mind of weariness with the whole world and
its inhabitants,

And always aspire to be reborn in pure lands.

In particular, relying on the aspiration power of Amitabha,

The Buddha of Boundless Light, the lord of Sukhavati,

It is easy to be born in his land.

So always aspire to take rebirth in that buddha land.

When the day of death arrives,
Since the mind cannot recall many instructions,
Visualize all deities and gurus as the essence of Amitabha,
And pray to him.

If you die while mindful of this,
You will not go to the three lower realms,
And your consciousness will be transferred to the pure land.
There is no instruction more profound and easier than this.

Although this brief teaching on the two codes
Is not necessary for those of great wisdom,
I have set it down as beneficial heartfelt advice
For those who have devout faith in me.

Through this merit, may all sentient beings
Accomplish all their aims as they wish in this life,
And in the afterlife be reborn in the pure land of Sukhavati
In the presence of the peerless guru.

This teaching was composed by the Shakya nun Mumtso and written down by the monk Gudrak on the fifteenth day of the sixth month in the Water Tiger year of the Tibetan calendar (2022), upon the request of people from the group responsible for collecting stories and materials for

*compiling my biography at Larung Gar Five Sciences Buddhist Academy,
who asked me to write simple advice for devout laymen and laywomen.
May all be auspicious!*

GUIDANCE THAT LIGHTS THE WAY TO LIBERATION

I prostrate to the root guru, indivisible from the Lake-Born Lord,
The sole embodiment of the three secrets of all the Victorious Ones.
As I explain the essence of instructions lighting the way to
liberation,

You, intelligent ones who are interested, listen with appreciation!

When fortunate people travel the road to liberation,
They must first search for the entrance to the way,
Which is the source of excellence in this and future lives:
It's crucial to restrain the mindstream with pure ethical discipline.

From a preceptor or master who possesses the sets of five qualities,
Receive the pratimoksha vows of fourfold or sevenfold
abandonment.

This will not occur if you lack determination to be free.

The thought of renouncing existence is therefore important.

From a learned spiritual mentor who upholds the Mahayana vows,
Take the bodhisattva vows of aspiration and application through
the ritual of the two traditions.

Without the commitment with twin aspects, the vows are merely a reflection.

Therefore train again and again in intention and compassion.

From a powerful vajra-holder with eight qualifications,

Take on the samayas related to the four empowerments.

They will not be obtained if two causes and four conditions
are absent,

So strive in the methods for proper acquisition and protection.

Having thus established a basis of pure ethical discipline,

Focus on the essential meaning of the sutras through study and
reflection,

And, with the torch of the key points of noble masters' pith
instructions,

Look into the secret of your mind, the ultimate guide.

Through the common, uncommon and special forms of mind
training,

Gradually purify your mindstream and become a suitable vessel
for dharma.

If you do not tame your habitual patterns of negative thought,

Applying pith instructions will be like trying to cultivate high
ground in winter.

The Great Perfection is the pinnacle of the ocean of sutra
and mantra.

Generate the power of intense appreciation, aspiration, and
diligence

For these instructions for traversing the paths and levels all at once,
And take them to heart with a focus on the essential meaning.

Practicing in this way will give significance to the freedoms and
advantages,

And you will discover the confidence of being without regrets at
the time of death.

Through the joyous celebration of spontaneously accomplishing
twofold benefit,

You will show yourself immense kindness, as your mind is happy
and at ease.

Through the virtue of speaking these words,

May the Sage's teachings flourish and all beings be happy.

May I too, in all my lives to come,

Bring vast waves of benefit to others.

*This was written in the hermitage of Great Secret Liberation into the
Body of Light on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month of the Iron
Dragon year by the shramanerika follower of Shakyamuni called Mumtso*

in response to a request from some lamas and monks who hold the dharma lineage of Orgyen Mindrolling. May it bring virtue and excellence!



COMMENTARY

by Khenpo Sodargye

Commentary on
The Melody of the White Dharma Conch

LECTURE 1

APRIL 5, 2024

Today and tomorrow, Friday and Saturday, we will study *The Melody of the White Dharma Conch: My Heartfelt Advice for the Benefit of Han Chinese Disciples*, a text composed by Dakini Mumtso. Starting next Monday, we will resume our study of the *Surangama Sutra* and *A Journey to the West*, following the same schedule as last year—with four lectures weekly on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday evenings.

Since 1996, we have traditionally begun the annual dharma teaching sessions at the academy by studying the *Song of Victory* composed by His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, as a means of creating auspicious conditions. Sometimes we also study the *Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*. This tradition is comparable to establishing safety barriers or having workers wear helmets before commencing a construction project—it serves to protect both the entire dharma center and each individual practitioner. Therefore, I will first recite

the *Song of Victory* in Tibetan as an oral transmission, and then begin the teaching.

THE TITLE

The full title of the text is *The Melody of the White Dharma Conch: My Heartfelt Advice for the Benefit of Han Chinese Disciples*. In the original Tibetan, “The Melody of the White Dharma Conch” is actually a subtitle and serves as a metaphor. However, following conventions common in Chinese and other languages, placing “The White Dharma Conch” at the beginning of the title is more appropriate. This gives it a certain appeal and makes readers more interested in discovering what it’s really about. For example, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche’s English autobiography is titled *Brilliant Moon: The Autobiography of Dilgo Khyentse*, where the metaphor “Brilliant Moon” is placed first. Similarly, the biography of Dakini Mumtso is titled *White Lotus: The Biography of Dakini Mumtso*. In both the English and Chinese versions, the metaphor “White Lotus” appears at the beginning.

In fact, many treatises and scriptures use “White Lotus” in their titles, such as *The White Lotus: The Extensive Biography of Buddha Shakyamuni*, *The White Lotus Garland of Explanations: A Commentary*

on the Ornament of Clear Realization, and *White Lotus: An Explanation of the Seven-line Prayer to Guru Padmasambhava*, all authored by Mipham Rinpoche. Today, however, when we mention “White Lotus”, many people immediately think of Dakini Mumtso’s biography.

“The Melody of the White Dharma Conch” is a metaphor. In Tibet, the color white is considered auspicious. The phrase refers to the wondrous, auspicious sound of a white conch blown before dharma teachings are given, a sound that plants the seeds of liberation in the mindstream of any sentient being who hears it. Hearing it also brings a deep sense of peace and comfort in their hearts.

Over several decades, Dakini Mumtso has cultivated deep connections with Han Chinese practitioners, and she composed this teaching primarily for their benefit, as indicated by its title. Through practicing this teaching, Han Chinese disciples can more readily give rise to wisdom and compassion. That said, its benefits are not limited to Han practitioners; it can equally benefit practitioners in the Tibetan Land and elsewhere. In the Buddha’s time, teachings were often requested by specific disciples, but the profound dharma that the Buddha expounded for them went on to benefit countless sentient beings beyond the original audience. For example, the *Surangama Sutra* was addressed primarily to Venerable Ananda,

yet—as we all know—it has brought immense benefit to innumerable beings throughout history. The same is true of the teachings of many great masters.

THE AUTHOR

As for Dakini Mumtso, I don't think much introduction is needed—she is a lama that many of us are familiar with. By contrast, when we mention His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, newer students who joined the academy in recent years may feel less acquainted with him, as he passed away more than twenty years ago and can seem more remote. Lama Mumtso, however, has bestowed empowerments and blessings almost every year, so people feel a closer, more immediate connection to her.

Last August, I was asked to translate her biography. I began in December and, after more than two months of work, completed the Chinese translation. Written by Tulku Tendzin Gyatso Rinpoche, the biography is superbly crafted. Because Dakini Mumtso is humble and low-key and has never publicly spoken about her realizations—whether in class or elsewhere—the author relies on verifiable facts to convey her achievements. In today's world, her accomplishments as a female master are truly remarkable.

We have grown accustomed to her annual return to bestow empowerments and blessings, perhaps taking them for granted and failing to recognize her extraordinary kindness and exceptional nature. This is true not only of Lama Mumtso but of many great teachers: their greatness is not always fully appreciated during their lifetimes, and only after they pass away do people widely discuss their qualities and the vast scope of their accomplishments. This seems a common pattern in worldly affairs as well.

Why have I decided to teach this text now? Because you will soon receive my Chinese translation of her biography, which includes this text. The book contains more than 200 rare and valuable photographs and offers richly detailed accounts of her life. Although Lama Mumtso returns to the academy regularly, many have not had the chance to interact with her closely. These words and images offer a rare opportunity to understand her qualities and spiritual accomplishments more deeply. I hope everyone will read this biography with faith and joy. If you do not expect to read it within the next six months, you might consider waiting before obtaining a copy.

I undertook the translation as an offering of gratitude to Lama Mumtso, even while enduring physical weakness. It is my heartfelt

wish to share this work with my dharma friends here at the Victorious Mara-Subduing Land. I firmly believe that recognizing a teacher's qualities and cultivating profound faith while the teacher is still alive is of utmost importance.

I was deeply moved by the biography. From ancient times to the present—across Han, Tibetan, and Theravada traditions—there have been many accomplished female practitioners. Yet compared with the number of highly realized male masters, female masters remain far fewer, and truly extraordinary figures like Lama Mumtso are especially rare.

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro contributed a foreword that is balanced and objective, and Tulku Tendzin Rinpoche presents her life in a factual, impartial manner. This is not an exaggerated account simply because we are her disciples. Historically speaking, such great masters are truly rare. While it would be inaccurate to claim there has never been anyone like her, it is exceedingly uncommon for someone to begin guiding disciples and teaching at the young age of seventeen.

The photographs in the book capture the majestic scenes of Lama Mumtso bestowing empowerments and teachings upon countless

monastic and lay practitioners—exceptional moments seldom witnessed in past or present. The biography was written by Tulku Tendzin Rinpoche in 2022. Lama Mumtso turns fifty-nine this year, and by the age of fifty-seven she had already accumulated over one billion recitations of her deity mantra—a feat rarely achieved even among the most dedicated practitioners. This is not exaggeration.

What is especially remarkable is that throughout her life she has never lost her temper with her followers or those around her. For most of us, refraining from anger for even a month—or a year—is extremely difficult, let alone for a lifetime. When I first read this, I too wondered whether it could really be true—after all, it seems almost impossible never to get upset. But reflecting on my own experience, I realized that it is indeed true of her.

Personally, I have spent more than two years with His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and Lama Mumtso—six months in India, three months in the United States, nearly two months in Singapore and Malaysia, as well as time together at Mount Wutai and many other places across China. In all that time, I have no memory of Lama Mumtso ever losing her temper or even showing the slightest displeasure. In the presence of Yidzhin Norbu and her mother, Ani Medron, she was always profoundly respectful and never acted in a way that violated the dharma or caused anyone dissatisfaction.

Truly, many of these things are beyond imagination. Without close and careful observation, fully appreciating the depth of her qualities across various dimensions remains challenging.

In fact, among all the present-day disciples in His Holiness's lineage, the one who received the most teachings is none other than Lama Mumtso, as the biography records. From her birth until His Holiness's parinirvana, she was essentially always by his side and received the complete transmission of all his teachings—both Sutrayana and Tantrayana. No other disciple received such a vast and complete body of teachings. For female practitioners in particular, she serves as an exemplary model. Today there are many female Buddhist devotees and monastics worldwide, and in many ways Lama Mumtso stands as their representative, symbol, and role model.

The term “Guru of the Three Kindnesses” refers to a master who bestows pith instructions, tantric teachings, and empowerments. For each of us, Lama Mumtso is such a guru. Yet because she speaks little and is extremely humble, some people may not be very familiar with her. In this degenerate age, many tend to exaggerate—claiming realization they have not attained or supernatural powers they do not possess—and paradoxically, many are drawn to rely on such false teachers.

Personally, Lama Mumtso has shown me immense kindness and compassion in both worldly and transcendent matters. As mentioned earlier, *The Melody of the White Dharma Conch* is a teaching she composed for Han Chinese disciples. Her biography also includes other teachings, such as *Guru Yoga: The Rain of Siddhis Pours Down Universally* for all disciples, *Illuminating the Path to Liberation: A Brief Explanation of View, Meditation, and Conduct* for female Tibetan practitioners, *Words to Devout Laymen and Laywomen* for Tibetan lay practitioners, and *Guidance That Lights the Way to Liberation* for the lamas and monks of Mindrolling Monastery. Through these teachings, one can feel the powerful blessings of her vajra words and the profound depth of the dharma she reveals.

I will not elaborate further here. If you wish to understand Lama Mumtso's qualities more deeply, I encourage you to read the biography with joy and devotion when you receive a copy. Though its language may appear simple, its content is extraordinarily profound. As her disciples, we should not only pray for our teacher's long life, but also diligently listen to, contemplate, and meditate on the dharma. This is the most powerful and meaningful way to create the causes and conditions for a teacher to live long and continue turning the wheel of dharma.

I have not taught for quite some time—since last winter—so my delivery may be a little less smooth. I will now offer a brief, literal explanation of this text.

HOMAGE TO MANJUSHRI

**Your compassionate activity is always directed
Toward all the fortunate disciples in the Han regions of China.
The supreme and noble deity Manjughosha,
To you who dispel the darkness of ignorance, I respectfully
prostrate.**

This verse pays homage to Bodhisattva Manjushri from the perspective of his compassionate activity. Although Manjushri is renowned as the embodiment of wisdom, his compassion in benefiting sentient beings is equally vast—particularly toward the multitude of beings in the Han Chinese regions. This sublime deity—Glorious Manjughosha—dispels the darkness of ignorance and delusion that has persisted since beginningless time for anyone who diligently recites his mantra and visualizes him. Therefore, before composing this treatise, Dakini Mumtso first offers homage to Manjushri with body, speech, and mind.

Generally speaking, Bodhisattva Manjushri has a particularly strong karmic connection with sentient beings in the Han Chinese regions; Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta is closely connected with beings from India; and Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara has a deep connection with beings in the Land of Tibet. In modern times, however, Manjushri practice appears more widespread among Tibetans—featuring forms such as Yellow Manjushri and Four-Armed Manjushri—while Han Chinese practitioners more commonly engage in Avalokiteshvara practices. As the saying goes, “In every household there is Guanyin; in every home, Amitabha.” Nevertheless, Han Chinese disciples in fact have an especially profound connection with Bodhisattva Manjushri; therefore we should all pray to him regularly and sincerely.

Last year, before the annual retreat, each of us at Larung Gar aspired to recite one million Manjushri mantras as a collective practice of the sangha. I completed this commitment not long ago and felt genuinely joyful. While there’s typically no need to mention personal mantra recitations to others, since we made this shared aspiration, I’m sharing this update with everyone. I have now begun reciting another deity’s heart mantra, likewise with the aim of one million recitations, and I am trying to maintain a steady daily quota.

I believe many of you have already completed your one million recitations of the Manjushri mantra; I've heard some finished during the retreat, while others may still be working toward this goal. In any case, continual supplication to Manjushri is very important. We should frequently recite his mantra, regularly visualize Manjushri, and even carry his image when going out.

From the standpoint of dependent origination, repeatedly and sincerely praying to a deity is like calling out to someone again and again—you eventually receive a response. Thus, when we pray frequently with sincere devotion, the blessings of the deity naturally flow to us. Cultivating wisdom is essential and profoundly beneficial for each of us; therefore, supplicating Manjushri is of utmost importance.

The following verse pays homage to His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and serves as a supplication for blessings in preparation for composing this treatise.

HOMAGE TO CHOJE YIDZHIN NORBU

**Whatever befalls me, be it happiness or sorrow, good or bad,
Except for the incomparable guru, the wish-fulfilling jewel,
I have no one else to turn to.**

O protector, grant your blessings so that this advice may be carried out!

These are Dakini Mumtso's heartfelt words. She supplicates Choje Yidzhin Norbu: "Whatever I encounter—suffering or happiness, misfortune or auspiciousness—there is no source of hope or refuge apart from my incomparable, gracious root guru, the Dharma King, Wish-Fulfilling Jewel." For her, all experiences carry the guru's blessing: happiness is the guru's blessing, suffering is the guru's blessing, auspicious signs are the guru's blessing, and even disturbing dreams are the guru's blessing. Whatever circumstances arise, her thoughts turn only to the guru; there is no other object of supplication. Accordingly, when Lama Mumtso composed this text for Han Chinese disciples two years ago, she first and foremost prayed to her lord guru, "Please sincerely bless me, for I have resolved to begin writing this teaching."

It is evident that Lama Mumtso consistently maintains unwavering, profound faith in her root guru, Choje Yidzhin Norbu. Generally, people readily develop faith in those far away yet often struggle to have the same faith in those close to them. For instance, recognizing family members or friends as one's teacher proves difficult for most. Yet this was never the case with Dakini Mumtso. Her biography

clearly illustrates this exceptional devotion. The many exchanges she had with His Holiness before his passing, and her conduct after his parinirvana, all demonstrate her deep reverence for her uncle. Few could relate to their own uncle in such a way. The details make clear that she did not view her uncle from a worldly perspective, but revered him from a transcendental one—as her root guru.

As the verse implies, “Apart from you, I have no other source of refuge. Whatever I encounter, I will always seek your blessings. Now, before composing this dharma teaching, I first beseech your blessing.” Take a moment to reflect inwardly and ask yourself whether you could truly maintain such devotion. If you have a relative who is a great master or accomplished teacher, would you truly recognize and relate accordingly? From this alone, we can sense the depth of Dakini Mumtso’s devotion to her uncle, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche.

Next, the author discusses who are suitable vessels for receiving this teaching.

SUITABLE VESSELS FOR THIS TEACHING

**To those who possess faith in the sacred dharma,
Especially long for the Secret Mantrayana, the pinnacle vehicle,**

**And also delight in me and regard me with respect,
I offer these words on what to adopt and what to abandon,
illuminating the excellent path.**

Who, then, will benefit from this teaching? Primarily those who have faith in all the sacred dharma teachings of the Sutrayana and Tantrayana. Three conditions are specified here. For those who have faith in the Buddhadharma, particularly yearn for the pinnacle vehicle of Vajrayana, and feel genuine joy and reverence toward Lama Mumtso, studying this teaching will be beneficial. This accords with experience: when I give dharma teachings, for instance, they certainly benefit those who have faith in me, in the dharma, and particularly in Vajrayana teachings. If someone lacks trust in me personally, though, my teachings will be hard-pressed to benefit them.

Dakini Mumtso thus points out these three conditions that render one a suitable vessel to receive and benefit from this teaching. If one lacks faith in the author, lacks faith in the Secret Mantra, and lacks faith in the dharma—or simply is not a Buddhist—then no matter how many teachings one hears, benefit is unlikely. To those who do possess these three kinds of faith, she humbly says: “I will offer teachings that illuminate the excellent path, guiding you in

what to adopt and what to abandon in terms of cause and effect, and distinguishing between good and evil.”

Take a moment to reflect: Do you truly have faith in the dharma, in Vajrayana, and in Lama Mumtso? If any of these is lacking, there is little point in listening, for the teaching will have scant meaning for you. For instance, if you accept the Buddhadharma but not Vajrayana, you may reject the Vajrayana elements presented here. And if you have faith in the dharma and Vajrayana but not in the guru, her teachings may likewise fail to benefit you.

This principle is not unique to Lama Mumtso; it applies to any teacher—especially in Vajrayana. If you have faith in the dharma and Vajrayana, and also trust a particular teacher, the teachings they transmit will certainly benefit you. If you do not have faith in that teacher, it may be better not to listen at all. In short, before receiving any dharma instruction, we can use these three conditions to discern whether it is suitable for us.

In the main body of the teaching, Lama Mumtso begins with the topic of impermanence.

CONTEMPLATE THE IMPERMANENCE OF LIFE AND DEATH

We all will not remain long in this human world.

Like those who came before us,

We too will one day depart for the next life.

Those who fail to contemplate this are truly ignorant.

In this world, human life is brief. No one lives two hundred years, and very few reach one hundred. Think of our parents, grandparents, and ancestors—generation after generation, none lived especially long. Likewise, we will not remain here for long. One day, we will set out alone for the next life. If we never contemplate impermanence and the fragility of life, how are we any different from animals? We drift on in ignorance and delusion.

This teaching deserves our deepest reflection. Each day, countless events unfold in this world. Beyond our individual lives, consider how many have died in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, in the war between Russia and Ukraine, in Taiwan’s earthquakes, and during the pandemic over the past two years. Even within our own circles, how many people around us have passed away? Among those who

attended dharma teachings last year, among our vajra brothers and sisters, how many are already gone? I'm sure some of you have received such news. All this shows that death can come at any moment.

To live without contemplating impermanence is, in truth, a mark of deep ignorance. Yet among the more than seven billion people on this planet, very few genuinely reflect on death and transience. Sometimes I wonder: though everyone knows they will die one day, are there even a hundred million—or ten or twenty million—who truly contemplate life's impermanence? Perhaps not. Some religious practitioners, including certain Buddhists, remain unwilling to consider this topic at all. In fact, whatever dharma practice one undertakes, beginning with contemplation of death and impermanence is essential. A lack of such reflection is simply a sign of ignorance.

Full awareness of impermanence compels us toward dharma practice. The instructions presented in the following verses are relatively profound. Lama Mumtso begins by emphasizing the importance of contemplating impermanence, then gradually guides us into the deep and subtle view of the Middle Way. This teaching is thus truly profound. Although the surface words may appear simple,

without a solid grounding in Buddhism the deeper meaning may be hard to grasp.

VIEW BIRTH AND DEATH AS DREAMS

**Although death cannot be avoided,
If, as the great masters of the past have done,
We recognize the appearances of birth and death as dreamlike,
This becomes a skillful means for freedom from suffering.**

No one can escape death. In this world, all sentient beings are ultimately “on the road to death.” Is there any way to avoid dying? There is not. With rare exceptions—such as those who attain the rainbow body, like Guru Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra—beings relying on impure, conditioned bodies will inevitably experience death. Yet when we face death, there is a way to be free of fear and meet birth and death with ease: follow the example of the great masters and understand that both birth and death are like dreams and illusions. Only by realizing this can one be free from suffering in the cycle of samsara.

As the great master Milarepa said, at first he practiced diligently in solitary retreat out of fear of death, continually meditating on impermanence and death; eventually, he completely transcended

the fear of dying. Once one awakens from the dream of samsara and attains buddhahood, one enjoys complete freedom—just as the Buddha proclaimed upon his birth, “In the heavens above and on the earth below, I alone am the honored one.” Having awakened from the samsaric dream and realized perfect enlightenment, the Buddha naturally transcends fear of samsara’s sufferings. Even without such a high level of realization, if one understands—at least on the level of reasoning—that all things lack true existence and that birth and death are like dreams and illusions, one will not be overwhelmed by suffering.

Of course, this is a profound instruction and not easy to accomplish. Many people rely on prayers to their guru or similar practices when facing death, but such methods are not the focus of this text.

Generally speaking, only buddhas and bodhisattvas fully realize that life and death are like dreams or illusions. As the *Avatamsaka Sutra* says,

*Bodhisattvas clearly understand
That all phenomena are like a dream—
Whether the arising and ceasing of worldly events
Or the coming and going of sentient beings.*

Bodhisattvas recognize that all phenomena are dreamlike in nature. The arising and ceasing of worldly appearances and the birth and death of sentient beings are no different from a dream. Living and dying in a dream, all activities within it lack inherent existence.

Truly realizing this truth is not easy. Here, the dakini presents this teaching in a manner that resonates with Han Chinese cultural expressions. Because Han Chinese people often say that life is like a dream, a game, or an illusion, she uses dream imagery to illuminate life's illusory nature. When one understands that living and dying have no ultimate reality—that their appearances are dreamlike, and that in essence all things are empty of inherent existence—then, when facing death, one feels more at ease and less fearful. One understands it is merely a change of bodies. Death does not mean the cessation of everything; it is simply a transformation of dreams. For those with profound realization, death is merely waking from a dream—nothing more, nothing else.

The meaning of this verse is quite profound. Generally, without some realization of emptiness, it is difficult to understand the dreamlike nature of phenomena, and harder still to apply such insight at the moment of death. Next, Lama Mumtso explains that, in order to realize the dreamlike nature of all phenomena, we

should first study the principle of dependent arising and emptiness. This represents the most supreme method.

REALIZE THE UNION OF DEPENDENT ORIGATION AND EMPTINESS

**The ultimate essence of the oceanic teachings of Sutrayana and
Mantrayana**

Is emptiness and dependent origination.

If you realize the illusory nature of their union,

You will transcend all suffering in samsara.

The vast, oceanic teachings of both Sutrayana and Mantrayana, when distilled to their essence, can be encompassed within the profound union of emptiness and dependent origination. All phenomena, in their ultimate nature, are utterly devoid of inherent existence. Yet on the relative level of appearances, they arise through causes and conditions, unfailingly following the laws of causality. This seamless interplay of dependent origination operates with impeccable accuracy. The arising of appearances and the emptiness of their true nature are nondual—this is what we call the union of appearance and emptiness.

If we realize the illusory nature of this union—seeing that while all appearances are empty in essence, they nonetheless manifest vividly from emptiness—we naturally understand the teaching of the *Heart Sutra*: “Form is none other than emptiness, and emptiness none other than form. Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.” At that point, we recognize that the suffering of samsara lacks true existence and can be overcome, leading to complete liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

In truth, all of the Buddha’s teachings are encompassed within the principle of dependent origination and emptiness. If one truly understands this, suffering in samsara does not arise. As it is said in the *Lankavatara Sutra*:

*Observe the three realms—
All are like dreams or illusions.
Those who perceive them thus
Will attain liberation through practice.*

This teaching is of paramount importance. Through careful examination, we see that everything is indeed dreamlike and illusory; no phenomenon possesses intrinsic, independent existence. Practicing in accord with this realization, liberation comes readily, and the sufferings of samsara no longer bind us.

The principle of dependent origination and emptiness is supremely important. Yet when I discuss it theoretically, at times I feel as though I understand it completely; at other times, it seems I understand nothing at all. Do you, too, have a special feeling about this teaching? In listening to the dharma, your personal response matters greatly. Whatever the teaching, examine whether your mind connects with its meaning. Even if that connection lasts only a fleeting moment—even if what seemed like insight later proves to be a misunderstanding—it still means you have touched something profound. I believe this is very important.

Once one understands dependent origination and emptiness, fear in the face of samsaric suffering falls away. To comprehend this teaching, it is essential to study the texts of the Middle Way, such as Chandrakirti's *Introduction to the Middle Way*, the *Rice Seedling Sutra*, and other scriptures that elucidate emptiness, including the *Surangama Sutra* and the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. Through such study and analytical contemplation, one can indeed realize the profound truth of dependent origination and emptiness.

Even in the twenty-first century, the Buddha's wisdom remains unsurpassed. The truths realized through his profound awakening withstand all refutation; there is simply no basis on which to oppose them. Everyone here should understand this principle. By studying

these esteemed sutras and shastras and engaging in analytical contemplation, we can cultivate unshakable conviction in the view of dependent origination and emptiness.

Now, Lama Mumtso will speak about the importance of fully understanding the union of dependent origination and emptiness.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEPENDENT ORIGINATION AND EMPTINESS

The clear appearance of the deity in generation stage requires this.

The meditation on luminosity in completion stage requires this.

The view and meditation of the Great Perfection require this.

Without this, there is no hope for liberation.

To practice the generation stage—vividly visualizing the deity—one must understand dependent origination and emptiness; otherwise, reifying the deity as truly existent cannot lead to liberation. Likewise, the completion stage of channels, winds, and bindus must be grounded in dependent origination and emptiness. If one takes channels, winds, and bindus to be truly existent and substantial, liberation cannot be attained. The view and practice of the supreme Great Perfection are equally inseparable from this understanding.

In short, the view of dependent origination and emptiness pervades every level of dharma practice—from the preliminaries through the entire path to ultimate fruition. Therefore, the Buddha's teachings on prajna are truly extraordinary.

Why does the dakini emphasize dependent origination and emptiness here? Perhaps because many Han Chinese Buddhists take great interest in these teachings, often studying sutras such as the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, and the *Heart Sutra*, and developing deep insight into them. By contrast, compared with Tibetan Buddhism, Han Buddhism has tended to place less explicit emphasis on the mind's luminous aspect as presented in works like the *Web of Magical Illusion*, the *Mahayana Uttaratantra Shastra*, and the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra*; such teachings are discussed relatively less.

This passage makes clear that whether one practices the generation stage, the completion stage, or the Great Perfection, none can be separated from the teachings on dependent origination and emptiness—otherwise, there is no hope of liberation. This applies not only to Tibetan Buddhism but to every school, including Han Buddhist traditions such as Huayan, Chan, and Pure Land. Dependent origination and emptiness constitute indispensable knowledge for

all practitioners. Without this understanding as a prerequisite, no other dharma practice can be successfully cultivated.

For example, the Pure Land tradition emphasizes reciting Amitabha Buddha's name. At a basic level, this can be done without explicitly discussing dependent origination and emptiness. However, as one advances to formless recitation or attains single-minded concentration, this understanding becomes necessary and essential.

Across all Buddhist traditions—Tibetan, Han, and Theravada—this principle is of paramount importance. Without a correct understanding, how could one possibly realize the ultimate truth of the selflessness of the person and the selflessness of phenomena? It would be impossible. Thus, dependent origination and emptiness stand as the essential core of all the Buddha's teachings.

Yet not everyone can realize this indispensable principle. Indeed, those who have genuinely realized emptiness remain exceedingly rare. The following verse will address how few actually attain this realization.

ITS REALIZATION IS HARD TO ATTAIN

**It is easy to speak of emptiness with the mouth,
Yet few let its meaning truly arise in the mind.
It is easy to meditate on a contrived notion of emptiness,
Yet few thoroughly cut through misconceptions.**

Many Han Chinese Buddhists often say, “the four elements are empty,” “all phenomena are empty,” or “everything is like a dream or an illusion.” It is easy to talk about “emptiness” at a superficial level, which is why such phrases are widely used. The *Heart Sutra* appears on art prints—and sometimes even on slippers emblazoned with “the four elements are empty.” Many Buddhists like to say, “It’s fine, don’t cling—everything is empty, the four elements are empty.”

Yet in reality, how many people have truly realized the meaning of emptiness—that all phenomena lack inherent existence? How many among monastics? Among lay practitioners? Among non-Buddhists? Of course, non-Buddhists generally do not speak of emptiness, and when they do, the view often slips into nihilism, as if nothing exists at all—missing the profundity of the teaching. Those who gain certainty in emptiness do so not merely through hearing

others' words, but through personal investigation and insight arising from their own wisdom. However, those in whom the ultimate truth of emptiness genuinely dawns are exceedingly rare.

In fact, it is relatively easy to intellectually fabricate a conceptual understanding of emptiness—thinking, for example, “Nothing exists; the bottle doesn’t exist, the pillar doesn’t exist; all phenomena do not exist.” This kind of constructed, approximate view of emptiness can be readily developed, and practitioners who mistakenly cling to this notion of mere nothingness or nihilistic emptiness are not uncommon. By contrast, those who, guided by lineage masters and grounded in the Buddha’s authentic teaching, determine that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence and fully cut through conceptual elaborations and mental fabrications are very few.

In the *Surangama Sutra*, whenever the Buddha teaches emptiness, it often appears that even Venerable Ananda struggles to fully grasp it. If someone as exceptional as Ananda found it difficult, how much more so for ordinary people like us. Today, many lay instructors in Han Buddhist communities are doing admirable work—leading others in studying profound texts such as *The Adornment of the Middle Way*. However, some instructors tend toward overconfidence in their teaching sessions. They often speak boastfully, saying things like, “There’s really nothing hard to understand. The reasoning is

quite simple. Just contemplate emptiness and you'll get it," as if already enlightened. But when they face even a minor household problem, they are unable to see it as empty and instead fall into mental suffering—contradicting their earlier confidence.

As Lama Mumtso points out, many can talk about emptiness, but when adversity actually arises, they likely cannot remain in emptiness. Many can practice emptiness conceptually; however, those who, like His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and other great masters, have utterly severed conceptual elaborations and confusion are extremely rare. To free the mind from all obscurations and maintain non-attachment toward everything and everyone proves extraordinarily difficult.

As I mentioned earlier, we may sometimes feel that, through study and contemplation, the meaning of emptiness truly manifests. Yet when difficulties arise, the mind can again become disturbed, agitated by emotional turbulence. In such moments, realization is distant; even our basic understanding may falter. This requires no external validation; we can confirm this through our own experience.

Therefore, the point here is entirely correct: many speak about emptiness, but very few truly realize it; many practice emptiness,

but very few have genuinely eliminated conceptual proliferation. We should take this teaching to heart. We are not practitioners of the sharpest faculties like the Sixth Patriarch Huineng, who awakened upon hearing a single phrase—"give rise to a mind that does not abide anywhere." We must be aware of our own level and capacity.

This teaching is truly excellent, but how much we can apply it in practice is another matter. Often, talking and doing are two very different things. I can give a talk, and so can all of you. After my teaching, during group discussion, perhaps everyone can speak about emptiness as if truly enlightened. Yet on the way home, if someone hides your shoes or deliberately provokes you on the road, whether anger immediately arises is another question.

Realizing emptiness is not easy at all, so it is best not to boast. Many people, as soon as they gain a slight intellectual understanding, begin speaking grandly—this is unnecessary and unwise. Remember that the great masters of the past were profoundly humble; we should adopt the same attitude. In this way, others will have greater confidence in us. If we constantly boast and make exaggerated claims, trust may be lost. We must be mindful of this.

Next, Lama Mumtso discusses the stages of the path toward enlightenment.

THE STAGES OF THE PATH

The way to practice this profound path is:

At the beginning, complete the five hundred thousand preliminaries to accumulate merit and purify obscurations,

In the middle, apply the two expedient methods—

Invoking the blessings of the lineage gurus and analyzing through scriptures and logical reasoning.

How, then, does one actually practice this profound teaching on dependent origination and emptiness? The path does not begin with immediately meditating on the emptiness of all phenomena. Rather, we must proceed through stages, as kindly outlined here.

This teaching is truly precious. Those with deep faith may wish to commit it to memory, for doing so will bring great benefit. Lama Mumtso offered it specifically for Han Chinese disciples—though of course, all practitioners can benefit from its wisdom.

Here the method for practicing the union of dependent origination and emptiness is explained. The practice follows a definite sequence,

beginning with the 500,000 preliminaries. Whoever you are, however excellent your spiritual capacity, it is still recommended to start with these preliminaries.

The *White Lotus* records that Lama Mumtso completed the preliminaries once together with Choje Yidzhin Norbu and Ani Medron, and then four more times on her own—for a total of five complete sets. For each mantra required at Larung Gar’s annual dharma assemblies, she would always recite one million herself. Clearly, her dedication to virtuous practice far exceeded our own. In comparison, I feel deeply ashamed, as my own practice is inadequate. Although I have completed the 500,000 preliminaries in number, I am not satisfied with their quality, and I very much wish for the chance to practice them properly once more.

At the very beginning, we must start with the 500,000 preliminaries. Even if you are highly educated—a university graduate or even a PhD—if you truly wish to practice, begin with the preliminaries. Do not assume that knowledge, wealth, or good looks allow you to bypass the foundational practices; start humbly and correctly from the beginning.

In the middle stages, two skillful methods are essential. The first is to receive the blessings of the lineage gurus. There are rare individuals—like the Sixth Patriarch Huineng—who do not require extensive study or scholarly learning. Through the blessings of a realized lineage master, they can attain sudden awakening on the spot. The second type of practitioner must analyze by way of scriptural authority and logical reasoning, progressing systematically through the stages of hearing, contemplating, and meditating. They must first understand how the Buddha taught in the sacred scriptures, how reasoning is applied in Buddhist logic, and what the Middle Way teachings explain. Then, through careful examination, investigation, discussion, and discernment, they develop unshakeable conviction and authentic insight. Based on this foundation of knowledge, they gradually enter into practice and eventually attain realization. This is the second method.

Of the two, this text emphasizes the latter. The first resembles the sudden path of direct realization, but individuals who awaken solely through the guru's blessing are exceedingly rare. The second corresponds to the gradual path exemplified by Master Shenxiu—engaging the teachings through scriptural study and logical reasoning, and proceeding step by step through study, contemplation, and meditation. In reality, ninety-nine percent of

practitioners are suited to the gradual path. To presume oneself a candidate for sudden realization without the proper basis is risky. It is safer and more fitting for us to proceed gradually.

The teachings that follow are presented mainly according to this second approach. How do we practice step by step? First, we listen and contemplate.

LISTEN TO AND CONTEMPLATE THE DHARMA

**You Han Chinese are very intelligent,
As you are disciples of the compassionate deity Manjughosha.
You should reflect on various logical reasonings
That clarify the illusory nature of appearance and emptiness.**

Lama Mumtso says that Han Chinese practitioners are highly intelligent and exceptionally wise. In many respects, this rings true. I have observed that when Tibetans and Han Chinese study subjects like computing or mathematics together, the Han Chinese often grasp the material quickly. While Tibetan students are still grasping the concepts, their Han Chinese counterparts have already achieved full comprehension. Particularly in worldly knowledge, they master new skills with remarkable speed. Perhaps this is

because Han Chinese are traditionally regarded as those to be guided by Manjushri's great kindness and compassion.

In terms of compassion, Tibetans often excel—many seem to be born with an innate sense of loving-kindness. Even toward the tiniest insect, they feel spontaneous and heartfelt love. Han Chinese, by contrast, tend to shine in the domain of wisdom. As the fortunate disciples to be guided by Manjushri, it would be somewhat ironic not to awaken wisdom through his blessing. After all, who could be a better teacher of wisdom than Manjushri?

Since you are disciples of Bodhisattva Manjushri, you naturally possess great wisdom potential. Therefore, you should apply the valid methods of reasoning found in the Middle Way and Buddhist logic to investigate the nature of all phenomena. These include the neither-one-nor-many reasoning, the refutation of production from existence or nonexistence, the diamond splinters reasoning, the sevenfold reasoning of the chariot, and other profound analytical tools. By examining ultimate and conventional truth through such reasonings—using analogies and careful analysis—you will discover that no phenomenon possesses true inherent existence. At that point, you will understand the principle of appearance and emptiness, the illusory nature of all things.

Given your intelligence and Manjushri's blessings, if after study you still do not understand, it would be a bit embarrassing. In fact, by engaging these methods of logical analysis, you can surely gain certainty that appearances are empty and illusory, and come to know the mind's true nature. For this reason, when studying the Middle Way, everyone should approach them with depth and thoroughness—only then will genuine insight dawn.

Of course, learning is a challenging and demanding process; it is unrealistic to expect everyone to attain enlightenment immediately upon hearing the teachings just once. Along the way, many doubts may arise. As will be explained next, having many doubts is actually a positive sign on the path.

In the very beginning, it is difficult to attain realization through analytical study.

The deeper you contemplate, the more your doubts increase.

The more doubts you have, the more evident it becomes

That your analysis has reached genuine depth.

When first engaging in hearing and contemplation, aside from the very few who have amassed vast merit in past lives, most people cannot attain enlightenment immediately upon hearing the teachings. As you deepen your listening and contemplation over

time, your scrutiny becomes more exacting, and with that, doubts often multiply. This is not a bad thing. As the Chinese tradition wisely states, “Small doubt, small realization; great doubt, great realization; no doubt, no realization.” Doubt can serve as a stepping stone toward awakening.

That said, some remain stuck in doubt and never arrive at a well-founded understanding; even after twenty years they are still mired in confusion. And how many twenty-year spans does one life contain? While studying the Middle Way, some raise peculiar or obscure questions—doubts few others would ever conceive—and often these are neither meaningful nor consequential. In some cases, perhaps due to imbalances in their subtle body—channels, winds, and bindus—the students may pose rather odd questions—queries that don’t quite qualify as genuine inquiries. If you say they aren’t real questions, they somehow seem to be; yet if you say they are, something feels amiss.

The doubts praised here are reasonable, constructive doubts. When many great masters began their training, they advanced step by step—hearing, contemplating, and meditating—and in that process, doubt was a healthy sign of deep engagement. The more incisive the doubt, the deeper the inquiry. Ultimately, however, every doubt must be fully resolved and exhausted. What is that state like?

**Thinking, “It is so because the Buddha said so,”
Or “It is definitely true because the guru said so,” is not the right
way.**

**Relying on your own in-depth reflection,
You will cut through misconceptions from within and give rise
to certainty.**

What is it like when certainty truly arises? It is not merely thinking, “Shakyamuni Buddha said so, therefore it must be so,” or, “Mipham Rinpoche and His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche said so, so it must be correct.” While it is necessary to rely on the Buddha’s words as a guide, more crucially—as stated in *The Beacon of Certainty*—we must rely on our own profound wisdom through deep contemplation. Only then can definitive understanding arise. Otherwise, if someone claims that the Buddha’s teaching is mistaken, your view may collapse along with your faith. Similarly, if your faith rests solely on the guru’s authority, it may be shaken—or even lost—when the guru is criticized or when your own doubts surface.

For beginners, relying on scripture and the guru’s instruction is appropriate and necessary. But even more essential is sustained, personal reflection and repeated examination until unshakable certainty dawns. This confidence should be so firm that even if a

hundred scholars or a thousand realized beings were to say, “The Buddha was wrong; your guru was mistaken,” your view would remain unmoved. When such certainty arises in your heart, it is like the sun breaking through clouds—dispelling doubt, elaboration, and conceptual grasping. Only then can it be called true understanding.

In the *Sarvastivada Abhidharma*, the Buddha told Nanda, “Do not believe what I say simply because I have said it. Do not depend on my words or follow my thoughts; instead, contemplate and critically examine them for yourself.” We often quote the Buddha’s teaching from the *Ghanavyuha Sutra*, “O bhikshus and wise men, just as a goldsmith would refine his gold by burning, cutting, and rubbing it, so you must examine my words and accept them, but not merely out of reverence for me.” The Buddha urged his followers to rationally discern and analyze his words as one refines gold—again and again, even sixteen times—until its purity is certain. Only through such rigorous investigation does authentic understanding arise.

In the West, critical inquiry is highly valued, though this tendency can sometimes become excessive, leading to a lack of respect for teachers or authority. With seemingly plausible but actually flawed reasoning, they analyze everything indiscriminately. Yet, when guided by sound reasoning, this very faculty can yield firm and

authentic understanding. In studying the Middle Way, Buddhist logic, and Abhidharma, we must cultivate a wisdom grounded in valid reasoning, not easily overturned by others' arguments. Only then is that understanding truly our own. It is not enough to say, "My guru said it is emptiness," or, "The Buddha said it is emptiness." If that is your approach, your view may change the moment someone declares, "It is not emptiness," because you have not established understanding through your own insight.

If, through repeated contemplation, you realize that all phenomena are empty by nature, then when others deny emptiness, you can rely on valid reasoning to engage them and help reveal that emptiness to them as well. Thus, in the dharma, discernment must rest on one's own wisdom. Buddhism differs from many religions in this respect: while honoring the words of the founders and teachers, it places even greater emphasis on personal verification through reasoned analysis.

For this reason, Lama Mumtso reminds us: do not be superstitious. Do not assume a teaching is correct merely because it was spoken by the Buddha or your guru. Rely on profound wisdom to examine and discern the truth. Ultimately, eliminate all conceptual elaborations and confusion—like the sun rising in the east and breaking

through the clouds, bringing sudden, clear realization. This is a very important state of understanding.

Next, Lama Mumtso discusses how to eliminate wrong paths when cultivating the view of emptiness.

STAY AWAY FROM WRONG PATHS

**If you are unable to dispel all doubts
Yet believe you have gained certainty at the beginning,
And deem experiences in the fabricated mind as signs of
enlightenment,
That is a grave mistake.**

During practice, if many doubts remain yet you believe you have attained unwavering certainty—whether about luminosity, emptiness, or the union of appearance and emptiness—what you are experiencing is merely a conceptual fabrication.

It is crucial to distinguish experience from realization. By “experience” we mean transient states of sensation that arise during practice. Some may be auspicious—for example, visions of deities—but they are still only experiences, not genuine realization.

If, while still in the stages of study and contemplation, your doubts remain unresolved, yet you presume a decisive understanding and take the experiences of clarity, bliss, or nonthought as proof of awakening—and even go about proclaiming, “I am fully realized”—this is an extremely serious and dangerous error. As described in the *Surangama Sutra*, the fifty skandha-maras (or demonic states) commonly arise when practitioners mistake non-attainment for attainment, and delusion for enlightenment.

This point must be taken with the utmost seriousness. I sincerely hope that in the future, when fellow dharma practitioners give teachings, even if you have truly awakened, you should refrain from making such claims openly. Those who are genuinely realized are characteristically humble. For example, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was consistently modest; apart from rare occasions when necessary to reference a particular realization, he spoke very little about his personal attainments. As disciples of such a great master, we too should avoid declaring enlightenment. Otherwise, we may simply be mistaking meditative experiences for realization—a perilous confusion the *Surangama Sutra* counts as a demonic deception. Do not take this lightly.

What, then, is the unmistakable path?

THE UNMISTAKEN PATH

**In the preliminary practices, take refuge and arouse bodhicitta;
In the main practice, contemplate the meaning of emptiness;
In the conclusion, seal the practice with profound aspirations—
These are the key points of the unmistaken path.**

Here Lama Mumtso presents the three noble principles. Whatever dharma practice we undertake—whether meditating on dependent origination and emptiness, reciting the *Sole Heir of the Doctrine Tantra*, and so on—we should always begin by taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, reciting the refuge and bodhicitta prayers three times each. This is the noble beginning. The noble main practice is to remain in a state of no reference, resting in emptiness or in the union of compassion and emptiness. The noble conclusion is to seal the session with profound aspiration prayers—reciting *The King of Aspiration Prayers*, for example—and dedicate the merit to all sentient beings. Practiced daily in this way, these are the keys to the unmistaken path.

Our current daily classes follow the three noble principles. Before class, we recite the verses of refuge and bodhicitta, *Wangdu*, and other prayers. In the middle, we listen, contemplate, or meditate while resting in the nondual state of appearance and emptiness. At

the end, we dedicate the merit with profound aspiration prayers. Maintaining such a daily practice truly accords with the correct and unmistakable essential path.

I carefully counted and found that this teaching contains thirty-three verses. Setting aside the first two verses of homage and the final dedication, there are exactly thirty instructions—reminiscent of Venerable Longchenpa’s *Thirty Pieces of Heart Advice*. In the same spirit, we might call this “Dakini Mumtso’s Thirty Pieces of Heart Advice.” It details the entire path of practicing profound emptiness, as well as the deviations to be avoided. There are many essential instructions in the text, but due to time constraints we will not offer an extensive explanation now. A full exposition would require a formal outline to present many key points of practice.

Next, Lama Mumtso explains the merit of this unmistakable path grounded in dependent origination and emptiness.

THE MERIT OF REFLECTING ON EMPTINESS

**Not to mention gaining certainty about the nature of reality,
Even a few reasonable doubts you bring about
Will tear the root of three existences.
So do not underestimate it, but continually reflect on it.**

Contemplating dependent origination and emptiness brings immense merit. Even without realizing the ultimate truth, simply forming a reasonable doubt about the nature of emptiness begins to erode the very root of cyclic existence. Even if such doubt remains unresolved, when through various forms of analysis—such as studying *The Four Hundred Verses* and *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*—one comes to believe that all phenomena must be empty, this alone can gradually undermine samsara's foundation.

Today, many monastics and lay practitioners in the Chinese Buddhist community enjoy studying teachings on emptiness. In my view, while compassion is certainly present, there is room to deepen it further. Thus I encourage studying *The Way of the Bodhisattva* alongside, rather than focusing solely on *The Root Stanzas on the Middle Way*. Of course, Madhyamaka study is excellent, but without sufficient compassion it is difficult to truly benefit beings. As the *Compendium of Trainings* teaches, only when both wisdom and compassion are fully developed can one skillfully and effectively guide beings by various means.

Nevertheless, it is heartening that so many people today are drawn to teachings on emptiness. Even without realizing emptiness directly, developing a well-founded doubt and the conviction that all phenomena should be empty weakens the seeds of cyclic existence

in the three realms. Therefore, meditating on dependent origination and emptiness is no trivial matter. It holds paramount importance, and should never be taken lightly. Regular contemplation and meditation on this truth are essential.

Meditating on emptiness requires merit—and even the arising of a reasonable doubt requires merit. As *The Four Hundred Verses* says,

*Those with little merit cannot
Even generate doubt about this doctrine;
Yet whoever generates even slight doubt
Will shatter the three realms of existence.*

With meager merit, one cannot raise even the slightest doubt about the Middle Way. Many worldly people today do not even think to question these matters, let alone form a reasonable doubt. If we can develop such doubt regarding emptiness, that alone begins to destroy the seeds of cyclic existence, reducing the likelihood of further rebirth in samsara. Accumulating merit is therefore extremely important.

We must value the teachings on emptiness, for their benefits are vast. Each day, we should engage with these teachings: first, analyze with valid reasoning; next, recognize that all phenomena are empty

by nature; finally, abide within that recognition. This is crucial. I recall that during the second teaching of *Placing Buddhahood within Reach* in Singapore in 1995, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche said of the final meditation in guru yoga: “If through actual practice of the clear light Great Perfection you have attained a certain level of realization, rest in that state. If not, remain single-pointedly without conceptual thought for as long as possible.”

If you cannot directly meditate on emptiness, employ analytical meditation to ascertain that all things lack true existence, then rest evenly in that conclusion for as long as you can. When discursive thoughts arise, gently return to the recognition and continue to abide. Repeating this again and again, the mind will gradually be tamed. This, too, is a valid method of practicing emptiness. Even a short session brings tremendous merit.

Next, Lama Mumtso presents the highest view in both the sutra and tantra traditions.

THE MOST SUPREME VIEW

**Meditating on the emptiness of appearing objects is
Madhyamaka;**

Meditating on the emptiness of your own mind is Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

Without understanding that the true nature of everything is emptiness,

You cannot master the view of the Great Perfection.

Meditating on the emptiness of external phenomena leads to the ultimate view of the Great Middle Way. Meditating on the emptiness of the mind leads to the ultimate view of Mahamudra and Dzogchen. Without realizing the true meaning of emptiness, one cannot attain the realization of Dzogchen. Some may wish to bypass study and contemplation of the Middle Way and go straight to Dzogchen, but without a solid Madhyamaka foundation and a correct view of emptiness, genuine practice of Dzogchen or Mahamudra is not possible.

The point here concerns what each approach primarily ascertains through analysis. Of course, Mahamudra and Dzogchen also address the emptiness of external phenomena, and the Great Middle Way also discusses the emptiness of mind. Generally speaking, however, the method of analyzing external phenomena—mountains, rivers, earth, and all forms—to arrive at their empty nature that

is free from extremes and conceptual elaboration is characteristic of the Great Middle Way.

Both Dzogchen and Mahamudra place greater emphasis on the emptiness of mind—one stressing emptiness itself in meditative concentration, the other emptiness united with luminosity. In *A Journey to the West*, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche said, “Sustain the state of calm abiding; the mind’s unmoving aspect is Mahamudra. The mind is unfindable—neither inside, outside, nor in between; such emptiness of unfindability is the Great Middle Way. While resting one-pointedly in emptiness, ascertain that the mind’s nature is lucid, pristine awareness; gaining certainty in this is the Great Perfection.”

Thus, the views of Dzogchen and Mahamudra do not significantly differ in essence, and both require the Madhyamaka view. As stated in *The Beacon of Certainty*,

*In cutting through to primordial purity,
One needs to perfect the Prasangika view.
As for the aspect of non-elaboration,
Those two are said to be no different.*

This means that, in terms of transcending conceptual elaboration, the views of Dzogchen and the Great Middle Way are essentially the same. Furthermore, it says,

In India the glorious Candrakirti

And in Tibet Ronzom Chos bzang both

With one voice and one intention

Established the great emptiness of primordial purity.

In other words, the Prasangika Madhyamaka of the sutra path and Dzogchen in the mantra path are, in one sense, not different at all. From another perspective, we should first establish the Madhyamaka view in order to arrive at Dzogchen. In any case, to realize Dzogchen, possessing the Madhyamaka view of emptiness is crucial.

Chan Buddhism likewise emphasizes seeking the Buddha within one's own mind rather than externally. This reveals that the inner contemplation of emptiness in Dzogchen practice shares profound similarities with the Chan tradition's approach of illuminating the mind to see its nature. For realized masters, differences are largely matters of terminology and expression. Ultimately, the various paths converge—different in form but similar in essence. Their ultimate meaning and profound intent are one and the same.

We will complete the remaining portion tomorrow evening. I believe this text by Dakini Mumtso will greatly benefit each of you. After the teaching, please take time to review it thoroughly.

LECTURE 2

APRIL 6, 2024

Today, we continue our study of *The Melody of the White Dharma Conch: My Heartfelt Advice for the Benefit of Han Chinese Disciples*, a precious teaching composed by the great female master Lama Mumtso for her Han Chinese disciples. As I mentioned yesterday, it could be regarded as Dakini Mumtso's *Thirty Pieces of Heart Advice*. Although brief, it gathers the essential points of both Sutrayana and Tantrayana. This is not merely my personal opinion; given your solid training in the dharma through listening, contemplation, and meditation, I trust you also appreciate its depth.

Why study this teaching together? For many years we have relied on Dakini Mumtso and received numerous dharma teachings from her, yet in some respects many have not fully understood her noble qualities. Recently, Tulku Tendzin Rinpoche wrote her biography, which I have translated into Chinese. I believe this is a good opportunity for you to learn more about our vajra guru and truly appreciate the depth of her merits. In time, it will be

translated into many other languages—especially English—which will surely bring great joy to Western readers.

Generally speaking, Western audiences tend to place greater emphasis on, and often more trust in, female Rinpoches. Part of the reason may be their concern with feminism and the pursuit of women's equal rights across various fields. As I mentioned in *A Journey to the West*, when His Holiness visited the United States in 1993, Professor Janet Gyatso of Harvard University spoke with him at length about dakinis. She was particularly fond of Dakini Mumtso and Ani Medron. Twenty years later, when I lectured at Harvard, she received me on two occasions. She still believes women excel in every field and has consistently devoted attention to women's issues.

Nor is she alone. I recall that when we held the World Youth Buddhist Symposium in Hong Kong one year, our local host—a teacher—placed great importance on women's rights. Some participants at that time were studying related disciplines and later chose to become monastics. In academic contexts—whether anthropology, sociology, or gender studies—Western discourse places strong emphasis on gender equality; this extends to spiritual practice, attainment, and social status. We should be aware of this context.

As I said yesterday, while female masters are relatively fewer in number compared to their male counterparts, this carries no particular significance. In worldly leadership too—heads of state, for instance—women are also proportionally fewer. Yet women play vital roles in many other respects; one only has to imagine a world without maternal love to understand this.

Regarding Lama Mumtso, some consider her extraordinary; others feel she is too low-key, with almost no publicity. In today's society, without promotion, one's merits can easily go unnoticed. Yet in reality, Lama Mumtso is widely recognized as an outstanding figure among female practitioners and an exemplary role model for them. Particularly noteworthy is that at the time of her ordination, it was widely considered shameful across the Land of Tibet for women to become monastics; many believed that only the least successful women would take vows. In such a social climate, Lama Mumtso's ordination helped change the social status of Tibetan women and fundamentally altered the spiritual path and samsaric destiny of many.

The great master Milarepa had four principal female disciples, one of whom was Rema Sahle Ö. One day, while begging for alms, he met the sixteen-year-old Sahle Ö, dressed in finery and adorned with beautiful jewelry. At first she paid him no attention, but that

night she had a most auspicious dream and thereafter formed a positive karmic connection with him. She then renounced worldly life, freed herself from the troubles and pains of marriage, and devoted herself wholeheartedly to dharma practice, ultimately attaining realization. I believe this was the happiest event of her life.

In both Han Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism—especially at Larung Gar—there are more female practitioners. A few years ago, when the academy underwent government-mandated governance and reorganization, it was decided that the permanent population would be set at 3,500 nuns and 1,500 monks. The ratio clearly shows more female practitioners. Without a highly accomplished, realized female master to guide them, it would be very easy for many to lose their way.

For these reasons, we should study Lama Mumtso's biography and reflect deeply on her noble qualities. Many years ago, Dakini Mumtso was just a young girl herding livestock in a valley, without prestige or renown. Relying on aspirations from past lives, her efforts in this life, and recognition from great masters, she gradually became a highly respected accomplished practitioner and vajra master.

These merits need little elaboration from me. We all live together in this valley—small as a cow’s horn—and know one another well. If her conduct were not in accord with the dharma, with so many eyes watching and mouths commenting each day, everyone would know; yet we have never heard criticism in this regard. It is truly remarkable that she has achieved such merit and accomplishment while satisfying everyone—something extraordinarily difficult for ordinary people. Even those with great learning and realization may still encounter conflict and dissatisfaction. In this world, even those of perfect merit and noble qualities will meet people who do not recognize them, and diverse opinions and criticisms will naturally arise. From this perspective alone, the merits of Dakini Mumtso are astonishing.

We should understand the teacher’s qualities on the basis of facts, especially through this biography. It is not because she is our lineage master that we irrationally praise her—there is no need for that. Yet at the very least, we, as her disciples, should be familiar with her many virtues. In the past, I rarely spoke of Lama Mumtso’s qualities in class, for from her words and actions we know she is modest and dislikes praise. However, there is an auspicious convergence of conditions around translating the Dakini’s biography this time,

and now seems an especially appropriate moment for people to learn more about her.

I believe that those with wisdom will fully appreciate the teacher's qualities by reading this biography. Of course, the book does not go into detail about her tantric attainments or some of her extraordinary, inconceivable spiritual powers. Even so, it is evident—on the surface at least—that from childhood to the present, countless people have approached her with respect, faith, and joy, while she remains unmoved, regarding everything as fleeting as passing clouds. Whether others praise her, make offerings, or present flowers and khatas, she remains unperturbed and at ease. This freedom from both aversion and attachment is itself a profound realization.

For ordinary people—monastic or lay, men or women—being praised by many or having such a supreme source of reliance as His Holiness can easily lead to pride or complacency. If it were me, I might be the same: buoyed by having such an excellent teacher and by others' respect, I might talk endlessly or do all sorts of things, unsure whether the outcome would be good or bad. For ordinary people, it is very difficult to maintain moderation and remain humble and low-key.

I will not say more here. There is still quite a bit in the remaining section of this text, and we need to complete it today.

THE METHOD OF INVOKING THE BLESSINGS OF THE LINEAGE GURUS

Yesterday we discussed two skillful means for practicing the profound teachings of dependent origination and emptiness. The first—contemplation and analysis grounded in scripture and reasoning, spanning views from the Middle Way to Dzogchen—we have already completed. The second is to receive the blessings of the lineage through the practice of guru yoga. Today, we begin with this second method.

**In the lineage of the noble masters of the past,
Relying on gurus who were equal to actual buddhas,
And letting the blessings of the gurus' wisdom merge with the
disciples' minds,
Many realized the nature of mind instantaneously.**

The transmission records of the great masters of the past attest that a disciple can attain sudden enlightenment by relying on a guru who embodied the qualities of a true buddha, when the guru's mind transmission merged directly with the disciple's mind. Many

practitioners realized the nature of mind through their gurus' pith instructions or simple gestures. Such cases have appeared in various places across both Tibetan and Han Chinese regions, in ancient times and even within recent decades.

For example, when Do Khyentse Rinpoche called Patrul Rinpoche an "old dog," Patrul immediately looked into his mind and awakened—though for us today this would be exceedingly difficult. Even if someone called us an "old dog" or "Piggy," sudden realization would likely remain out of reach. Likewise, when Master Xuyun was practicing Chan at Gaomin Monastery, he was splashed by hot water from a cup and instantly awakened; whereas even a full basin poured over our heads might not produce the same result.

In former times there were realized masters endowed with wisdom and capable disciples endowed with genuine faith. When a master's blessing met a disciple's devotion, immediate realization was truly possible. In the Buddha's era, many realized selflessness and attained arhatship upon hearing a single verse. Reading the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* compiled in the Liang, Tang, and Song dynasties, one finds that a slight pointing-out often sufficed for awakening. The same is true in Tibetan Buddhism. By comparison, in modern times such attainment is much rarer.

**In these days when the teachings are declining,
The meeting of a realized and accomplished vidyadhara
And a karmically connected disciple of great faith and devotion,
As occurred in the past, has become rare.**

Now, as the dharma declines and we approach the dharma-ending age, with the five degenerations intensifying, truly accomplished vajra masters are relatively few, and disciples with deep faith and strong karmic connections are also rare. The convergence of both is rarer still. Sometimes the master is accomplished but the disciple is unreceptive, rendering even the greatest master powerless; at other times, the disciple has great faith but the teacher is spurious. It is difficult for these two conditions to align.

Great master Marpa once told Milarepa, “When you accept disciples in the future, never require others to undertake the same austerities you did. A realized vajra master like me is exceedingly rare, and a disciple with faith like yours is also hard to find. Do not imitate my methods in guiding disciples.” This is indeed so. From a temporal standpoint, we are in a period of dharma decline. In recent decades, many eminent masters across India, Tibet, and the Han Chinese world have passed into parinirvana. Today, truly recognized accomplished masters of profound realization are fewer

than before. And although it may not have been obvious, among the disciples of past masters there were at least some who were realized; now such disciples are increasingly rare as well.

Although instances of realization are far fewer now, they are not nonexistent. Female accomplished masters like Lama Mumtso exemplify contemporary enlightened beings, and there are also many remarkable male practitioners. I believe there are such disciples too; it is simply that, relatively speaking, they are becoming fewer. Compared with past accounts, meetings between karmically connected disciples and realized masters have become rarer.

There are quite a few great female teachers both domestically and abroad. One of the most extraordinary of our era was Khandro Tsering Chödrön, consort of Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, root guru of Sogyal Rinpoche; Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche revered her as his “spiritual mother.” Another is Mindrolling Jetsün Khandro Rinpoche, eldest daughter of the 11th Mindrolling Throne Holder, Minling Trichen Rinpoche. Born in India and fluent in English, Tibetan, and several Indian languages, she has taught in English in the West since the 1980s and holds a prominent place in Western Vajrayana. The renowned teacher Pema Chödrön is also widely respected in the West; her books, including *When Things Fall Apart* and *Living Beautifully*, have reached countless readers.

In Han Buddhism, the lay practitioner Ye Man—a disciple of Nan Huai-Chin—was an exceptional teacher. A Peking University graduate who lived to 103, she was a layperson whose teachings on classical texts such as the *Surangama Sutra* and on traditional Chinese learning have earned the admiration of Western audiences.

All of this shows that modern times have indeed produced remarkable female masters, though they remain relatively few. I believe that many more accomplished female practitioners will emerge. In our academy, numerous khenmos and female dharma teachers are engaged in rigorous study and contemplation. They may not be well known now, but once their training ripens, they will surely benefit countless beings.

In fact, regardless of gender, there will be no shortage of capable practitioners in the future. In our academy alone, nearly three hundred khenpos and khenmos teach the dharma daily, and through their efforts more and more talents are being cultivated. Just as in spring even a bucket or two of water helps seedlings thrive, the steady, day-by-day teaching of so many khenpos and khenmos will cause the seedlings of wisdom in those who receive instruction to grow. Thus I believe accomplished practitioners will certainly appear in times to come, though their numbers may be relatively small.

So when we say “the teachings are declining,” it does not mean there are no accomplished practitioners now, nor that there is no hope. As will be explained below, if we practice guru yoga properly, opportunities for realization still remain.

THE PRACTICE OF GURU YOGA

Nevertheless, toward the root guru

**Who bestows authentic empowerment, guidance, and
instructions,**

**Cultivate faith and devotion, seeing the guru as the actual
buddha, and**

**Merge your mind inseparably with the guru’s wisdom mind,
thereby abiding in samadhi.**

Before a teacher who properly confers empowerments, provides textual guidance, and imparts pith instructions, we should maintain reverence that regards them as a buddha. Even if this teacher was not a great accomplished master in previous lives and is not presently well known, so long as he or she is a qualified spiritual guide capable of bestowing empowerments and transmitting the dharma, we should respect such a teacher as we would Buddha Shakyamuni himself.

Although the teacher is not literally a buddha, the blessings we receive accord with the view we hold: if we regard the teacher as a buddha, we receive a buddha's blessings; if as a bodhisattva, a bodhisattva's blessings; if as an ordinary person, only ordinary blessings. If we view the teacher as inferior or faulty, wrong views arise in our mindstream and harm us.

If, with faith and devotion, we pay homage by seeing the teacher as the actual buddha and begin the practice of guru yoga—allowing the teacher's nonconceptual wisdom to merge with our own mind and meditating in that state—our practice will certainly succeed. It may be difficult for us to achieve realization as swiftly as the great masters of the past, who attained accomplishment immediately upon practice. However, if we visualize the teacher as Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, or other enlightened deities, merge our ordinary mind with the teacher's wisdom mind, and meditate on the inseparability of guru and disciple, then through sustained practice we will definitely succeed. Fortunate practitioners can indeed attain enlightenment through this meditation.

**At this time, let stirring thoughts of analysis subside,
And remain like an ocean without waves.**

**Through this skillful method of receiving the guru's blessings,
The fortunate will realize the true nature as it is.**

As described in the guru yoga section of *Placing Buddhahood within Reach*, the practice manual of *Peaceful Manjushri*, when practicing guru yoga we should visualize the guru and ourselves as inseparable and not let the mind be filled with proliferating thoughts, discriminations, or conceptual distractions. There is no need to worry about whether we are practicing correctly or whether what arises is wisdom or ordinary thought. Instead, we allow the guru's wisdom to merge with our own mind, free of conceptuality—like an ocean without waves—and abide in a state of profound stillness. Relying on this meditative absorption and the blessings of the lineage gurus, fortunate disciples can fully realize the ultimate nature of reality.

In short, we must practice diligently and sincerely. Either use the analytical approach of Madhyamaka to examine all phenomena and our own mind, thereby recognizing and realizing emptiness; or practice guru yoga with faith and devotion, merging the guru's wisdom with our own mind. Either path will lead to success. These are precious pith instructions uniquely transmitted by His Holiness

Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. Though the words may appear ordinary, without explanation their extraordinary value may be overlooked.

Lama Mumtso's teachings are presented in verse, which some may find difficult to understand. In fact, the principle here is simple: either use wisdom to analyze and ascertain emptiness through Middle Way reasoning, or pray to the guru with faith and practice guru yoga. These two skillful means are of paramount importance, and practicing in this way will certainly lead to awakening.

Below is a summary of these two profound practices.

SUMMARY OF THE TWO EXPEDIENT METHODS

**Thus, analyzing through profound and subtle reasoning,
And practicing guru yoga,
Are the two expedient methods for realizing the nature of mind.
Alternate these two practices and never abandon them.**

Through profound, meticulous reasoning, we can ultimately realize the mind's true nature. As we have often said, we should observe and analyze with keen intelligence. Whether we are studying Madhyamaka or other profound texts such as the *Treasury of the Dharmadhatu*, we must attend to our thoughts and examine where

the mind abides. For example, in the sixth chapter of the *Root Stanzas of the Middle Way*, “An Examination of Desire and the Desirous,” the nature of all phenomena is discerned by analyzing whether afflictions and the afflicted possess any inherent existence. At the same time, we can regard the guru as a true buddha and practice guru yoga. Both methods help us recognize the nature of mind. They are among the most effective skillful means for realization, and it would be a pity to neglect either. I trust everyone understands these principles; applying them in actual practice, however, is another matter.

In brief, you can realize emptiness by analyzing Madhyamaka arguments, or become inseparable from the teacher’s wisdom mind through guru yoga. You can alternate the two—practicing guru yoga today and the Middle Way tomorrow, or contemplating emptiness in the morning and guru yoga in the afternoon. Arrange your practice according to your circumstances; there is no fixed rule. Today you may feel strong faith in the guru and wish to practice guru yoga; tomorrow you may prefer debate and reasoning to ascertain the lack of inherent existence in all phenomena. If you persist in alternating these practices, you will eventually succeed.

Of course, beings differ in capacity. If these two skillful means do not work for someone, that does not mean there are no other

methods. It is simply that, within Mahayana Buddhism, these two are especially recommended. As a merchant might say, “You would do well to buy these two—they are the most precious. But if you do not like them, I still have many other things to recommend.” So it is in the Mahayana: there are many methods of practice. If one does not suit you, try another. Some may say, “I truly cannot understand the Middle Way; I cannot sit still to practice guru yoga; I certainly cannot see my teacher as the Buddha. I cannot visualize any teacher at all. I have no hope of liberation!” Must success depend solely on these two profound methods? That is not the case. The dharma path accommodates all temperaments and capacities.

MANY OTHER MAHAYANA PRACTICES

People differ in age—young and old alike—

And in their interests.

Even if you cannot train properly in this way,

Opportunities to practice the sacred dharma are never lacking.

All sentient beings are unique. They differ in age, gender, personality, and countless other ways. Educational backgrounds vary widely: some have only primary schooling, others secondary or vocational

training; among us today, some cannot read, while others hold advanced academic degrees.

Likewise, each person's inclinations in practice diverge. Some prefer profound teachings, others simpler ones; some like guru yoga, others life-release practices; some are drawn to Vajrayana, others to Sutrayana; some enjoy a fast pace, others a slower one; some value direct, clear explanations, while others find such approaches too harsh. Even mundane preferences vary—some like water in class, some prefer tea, and others feel one shouldn't drink anything during a lecture...

In short, preferences and spiritual capacities are extraordinarily diverse. Even in the Buddha's time, he adapted his teachings to suit his audience's dispositions. For a dharma teacher, addressing every need is no simple task—and it is unreasonable to expect everyone to follow a single approach. Not everyone will practice Madhyamaka; some will study Buddhist logic. If everyone practiced the Vinaya, it would exclude those drawn to Chan. If all took up Dzogchen, some would lack sufficient faith or readiness and would need other teachings. This shows how varied beings' dispositions are, and how challenging it is to teach to capacity.

Earlier, we emphasized Madhyamaka analysis and guru yoga, which may not suit everyone. Does that mean some have no way to practice? Not at all. The opportunity to practice the sublime dharma is always present. If you keep faith, do not give up on yourself, and study and practice earnestly, there will always be a way.

For monastics, keeping pure precepts is paramount. Some Mahayana sutras state that monks and nuns must always carry their three robes—whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down—and are not permitted to give them away, even if asked; otherwise, they incur a violation. Among all roots of virtue, monastic discipline is supreme; by comparison, generosity and the like are less weighty. Still, does breaking monastic vows mean all is lost? Not necessarily. The *Compendium of Training* says that even if some monastics, influenced by bad friends, commit grave offenses, they can still generate bodhicitta and benefit beings. Of course, if one breaks the root monastic precepts, one can no longer live with the sangha and is not qualified to participate in Buddhist ceremonies such as the fortnightly precept recitation or the summer retreat. Yet even then, everything has not collapsed: one can continue to practice as a lay practitioner.

Some people approach spiritual practice like worldly lovers caught in infatuation: if the object of their affection loses interest, they feel

their world has collapsed and may even contemplate suicide. This is a misunderstanding, often influenced by film and television. Even if someone does not like you, it is not the end of the world; there is always someone who will reciprocate. Likewise, if one practice does not succeed, that does not mean there are no other options.

Consider the omniscient Longchenpa's biography by Chödrak Zangpo. It is recorded that while at Sangpu Neuthog he was compelled to move seven times because of disturbances from classmates from Kham. Deeply disheartened, he chose to leave. Before departing, he composed the well-known acrostic poem, *Disheartened by Circumstances*. I translated this biography into Chinese many years ago, and you should be familiar with the story. Had someone else been pushed out of their own temple and unable to stay, they might have felt they had lost everything, but Longchenpa's experience shows this isn't the end.

Mahayana Buddhism is expansive and inclusive, with vast teachings. So long as you do not give up on yourself, there are always methods to practice. As the verse says, "Opportunities to practice the sacred dharma are never lacking." This point is crucial. Many Buddhists, especially monastics, feel they have lost everything once they lose the qualification to live with the sangha. In reality, as long as you do not adopt wrong views, you can continue to live simply and practice

the dharma elsewhere. Life always presents many opportunities. If you are expelled from a monastery or compelled to leave by adverse conditions, you can go to another place and continue your dharma training in another capacity.

Today, some people—including certain khenpos and khenmos—abandon everything, even the right view, simply because they encounter minor difficulties in practice or daily work. This is truly tragic; it shows they have not recognized that many avenues of practice remain. In what follows, we will discuss numerous dharma methods, including cultivating compassion, developing renunciation, life-release, mantra recitation, deity practice, and more. If you truly cannot understand the view of emptiness or practice guru yoga, you can engage in these practices as well.

CULTIVATING COMPASSION

The essence of the Great Vehicle's teachings

Is said to be loving-kindness and compassion.

Toward beings of all stations, inferior or superior,

**Always cultivate an altruistic heart—of all virtues, this is
supreme.**

As we know, loving-kindness is the wish that beings enjoy happiness and its causes; compassion is the wish that beings be free from suffering and its causes. These are the very heart of the Mahayana Buddhism—the altruistic mind that seeks to benefit others. We should relate to all sentient beings—regardless of status, whether human or otherwise—with an equal, impartial, and altruistic attitude. Among all virtuous practices, this is the foremost and most essential.

Compassion does not mean being warm to those who benefit us while frequently losing our temper with those who do not. It means sustaining a loving, altruistic heart at all times. If you can do nothing else—if guru yoga eludes you, Madhyamaka is hard to grasp, or Buddhist logic remains opaque—then practice compassion every day. The method is simple: do not harm beings and do not give way to anger.

That said, not losing one's temper is not easy. What moves me most in Lama Mumtso's biography is her unfailing equanimity—she never loses her temper. If we look honestly, refraining from anger is difficult for most of us. In the presence of someone who never flares up, the atmosphere is naturally peaceful. Anger, by contrast, damages our body and mind and creates a negative environment

for others. If a teacher never gets angry and is consistently loving and gentle, imagine the atmosphere that would foster.

There are many inspiring stories of accomplishment in *White Lotus* that truly embody the qualities of a great master. I have relied on Lama Mumtso for many years; this is not perfunctory praise but something I have personally witnessed. I arrived at Larung Gar in 1985, and in the winter of 1986 we traveled together to many monasteries in the Garze, Nyarong, and Drango regions, spending almost the entire winter on the road. At that time, Choje Yidzhin Norbu was accompanied by his four closest disciples, including Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro and myself. From then until now, to the best of my recollection, Lama Mumtso has never shown the slightest displeasure—an observation based on close contact.

Who among us can match her, never losing their temper? Some Mahayana sutras note that for a bodhisattva, certain unwholesome actions may in context be permissible—for example, desire is not absolutely proscribed, as it can be transformed into love for sentient beings. Anger, however, is never permitted because its faults are extremely grave. It harms both others and oneself and cannot be transformed into the path. Those strongly prone to anger should reflect deeply on self-transformation and cultivate compassion for all beings.

Some people seem like celestial beings when in a good mood, yet like demons when angered—even they can scarcely forgive themselves. This is truly alarming. One reason we are studying Lama Mumtso's teachings now is the hope that our own mindstreams can change—at the very least, that from this year onward we reduce the frequency of our outbursts.

I have advised some volunteers not to lose their temper and blame others every day, for this squanders one's own virtue. People around you may remain silent, yet in their hearts they will judge your character. Once, someone lost his temper badly during a meeting. Later, a khenpo who rarely gets angry remarked, "I hear he is technically capable and has been at Larung Gar for a long time, but judging from that outburst, his practice may not be very solid." After such an episode, others form impressions and may hesitate to work with you. As the saying goes, "Once bitten by a snake, one fears ropes for ten years."

In general—and especially in the Mahayana—anger is the most destructive enemy of the roots of virtue. I therefore hope that through this study everyone will practice impartial compassion toward all sentient beings. This is a vital practice. If other methods are unclear, at the very least persist daily in cultivating loving-kindness and compassion.

Even in worldly terms there are many methods. I once bought an airport book on anger management, hoping to find effective techniques. Sometimes I also behave poorly, but I can recognize my own faults and keep working with them; compared to before, there has indeed been improvement—like a chronic illness gradually healing. A corrosive temperament and severe anger are among the most intolerable traits. Moreover, harshly scolding vajra brothers and sisters creates very heavy negative karma. We must be careful and use compassion to counter these tendencies.

Next, we will turn to the cultivation of renunciation, recognizing that the entire cycle of samsara is suffused with suffering.

CULTIVATING RENUNCIATION

Among the lowly, suffering arises from craving;

Among the exalted, from worry and fear.

All are tormented by birth, aging, sickness, and death—

Within samsara, there is nowhere free from suffering.

In our human world, those of lower social status—such as workers and farmers—spend their days yearning for greater material comfort and higher standing. Especially in places torn by war and conflict, women and children may lack even a bottle of drinking

water; the hardships of life are plain to see. Those in high positions, though spared hunger and cold, are beset by anxiety and suspicion—fearing they will be toppled from power or that their corruption and bribery will be exposed. They, too, suffer greatly.

Clearly, whether high or low, all are tormented by birth, aging, sickness, and death. In samsara there is no genuine happiness. As *The Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way* says,

*The high have mental suffering;
For the common it comes from the body.
Day by day, both kinds of suffering
Overwhelm people in the world.*

This has been cited many times: the exalted suffer mentally; the ordinary suffer physically. Day after day, both forms of suffering afflict beings—thus, no true happiness is found in samsara.

The *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* also states,

*Within the three realms of samsara,
There is not a single place of true happiness;
There is only the great suffering of
Birth, aging, sickness, and death.*

Across the three realms, there is nowhere truly delightful—just as a heap of filth has no fragrance—there is only great pain. Such is the distinctive mark of samsara. For this reason, when Prince Siddhartha beheld old age, sickness, and death, he left the palace and embarked on the noble path of renunciation, seeking the means to transcend suffering and attain ultimate liberation.

Our primary focus here is the cultivation of renunciation. In brief, we must understand that the high have the sufferings of the high, the low have the sufferings of the low, and those in between have their own. Not only humans suffer; animals and the beings of the hungry ghost and hell realms suffer as well. Nowhere in samsara is free from suffering. If we seek liberation, we must repeatedly cultivate the mind of renunciation.

Next, Lama Mumtso explains how to confess and purify negative karma through compassion—this, too, is a method of practice. These practices are comparatively simple. As practitioners, if one method does not work, try another. If nothing works at all, that would be rather unreasonable. If cultivating emptiness does not work, loving-kindness does not work, confession does not work, and even life-release does not work—if nothing works, perhaps only eating remains effective! Some people think about food all day long—while others eat one bowl, they consume several. Apart

from this, they seem unable to accomplish anything else. (Laughter) Indeed, some people are like this: they cannot arouse bodhicitta, cannot pass exams, cannot manage much at all—yet are happiest when eating. Others, by contrast, eat well, generate bodhicitta well, and do everything well.

PURIFYING NEGATIVE KARMA THROUGH COMPASSION

Generating the compassionate wish

To free a single being from suffering even once

Can purify negative karma as great as Mount Meru,

And yield merit as boundless as the ocean.

If, even for an instant, the wish arises in your mind that a single sentient being—human or animal—be free from suffering and find happiness, that fleeting compassion, though not yet great compassion, carries immense merit. It can purify negative karma and obscurations as weighty as Mount Meru and bring forth merit as vast as the ocean. This is affirmed in many Mahayana sutras.

You likely know the story of Bodhisattva Asanga from the *Words of My Perfect Teacher*. After meditating on Mount Kukkutapada for twelve years without a vision of Maitreya, he left in discouragement.

On the road, he encountered a wounded dog whose hind legs were crippled and whose hindquarters were crawling with maggots. Overwhelmed with profound compassion, he resolved to remove the maggots with his own tongue so as not to harm them. In that very moment, he looked up and saw Maitreya before him, radiant like gold.

This illustrates that cultivating compassion truly purifies negative karma. Even directing profound compassion toward a single being can cleanse one's obscurations. Only after arousing such compassion for the injured dog was Asanga able to purify his obscurations and behold Maitreya. Sometimes our practice stalls because our mindstream is clouded by downfalls and karmic obscurations. Therefore, it is essential to purify them through methods such as cultivating compassion or Vajrasattva practice; only then may we directly behold the deity and recognize the nature of mind. Such is the profound significance of purifying negative karma through the practice of compassion.

RELEASING LIVES

Nothing in this world

Is more precious than one's own life.

**So always release fish and other animals whose lives are
in danger,
And you will find happiness in present and future lives.**

In this world, every sentient being cherishes its own life above all else—nothing surpasses life's preciousness. In daily life we often see fish being slaughtered, which is truly pitiable. If we sincerely engage in life-release, we will experience happiness in this life and in future lives; for the beings released, their relief is greater still. In the past, Emperor Wu of Liang asked Chan Master Zhi Gong, "What are the merits of releasing living beings?" Zhi Gong replied, "The merit of releasing life is immeasurable."

If the previously mentioned methods—cultivating compassion, renunciation, or guru yoga—feel out of reach, you can instead persevere in life-release over the long term. Of course, life-release requires resources, which may be difficult for some. Generally speaking, without determination little is accomplished; with determination, much is possible. In truth, releasing even a single life accrues boundless merit; setting even a few birds free is profoundly meaningful. Nowadays, countless beings are killed each day—this is heartbreaking. If we frequently release lives, the merit is tremendous.

In Han regions, conditions for life-release were generally favorable in the past, though there may now be challenges due to environmental protections and other factors. Even so, we should not give up. When possible, it is best to join group life-release annually; or you can purchase fish at the market and arrange transport to release them yourself.

Years ago, when we first arrived in Chengdu, we went to the market and hired a tricycle to carry out a life-release. Though we had little money, our enthusiasm was great. Today, opportunities for life-release are fewer by comparison, yet we still find ways to protect the lives of sentient beings. If other practices do not suit you, life-release remains an excellent choice. And if even this proves difficult, you can always pray to the guru and the Three Jewels.

PRAYING TO THE GURU AND THE THREE JEWELS

Happiness and suffering, good and bad, always alternate.

Such is the nature of samsara and cannot be altered.

Therefore, pray continually to the Three Jewels.

**If your faith and devotion are not weak or lax, they will certainly
protect you.**

In this world, happiness and suffering, good and bad, rise and fall without a fixed pattern. Today you may feel elated; tomorrow you may be overwhelmed by sorrow. Today everything appears wonderful; tomorrow it may turn bleak. The same is true of our physical and mental states: today the body feels well, tomorrow it does not; today the mind is bright, tomorrow it is not. Such uncertainty is a natural law no one can overturn. So long as karma and afflictions persist, these patterns cannot be changed.

Some dharma friends experience volatile moods—feeling low today and tomorrow, better after a few days, then low again, like unpredictable spring weather. Others are emotionally steady but in poor physical health—perhaps a headache today, a toothache tomorrow. Whether due to medicine, diet, or other factors, many people now seem unwell. I’ve heard that seventy to eighty percent of those at the academy are dealing with health issues—perhaps this estimate is high, but at least forty to fifty percent are affected. As khenpos and khenmos, you should know how many in your class are physically well and how many are not; how many are mentally well and how many are struggling. Physical illness is one matter; mental distress is especially troubling. Those with psychological issues often lack insight into their condition and may consider

themselves perfectly fine. By comparison, physical ailments are somewhat easier to address.

In essence, this represents samsara's natural principle—a pattern that simply cannot be changed. You cannot alter the karmic trajectories of beings, the harsh realities of society, or, still less, the principles by which the world operates. Looking at the global situation, one might think every country could make full use of its resources without resorting to war, yet this is not the case. Some in power seem possessed by forces beyond reason, continuously generating anger and hatred, perpetually provoking conflict and plunging the world into chaos—truly heartbreaking. In such circumstances, beyond single-mindedly praying to the Three Jewels, there seems no better remedy.

When His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was in France in 1993, someone asked how he endured the hardships of the Cultural Revolution. He replied, “The only thing I did was pray to the Three Jewels.” This crucial pith instruction is recorded in my book *A Journey to the West*. Whether at Larung Gar or elsewhere, when faced with alternating good and bad circumstances, praying to the Three Jewels is especially important.

Recently, I watched a documentary on Master Sheng Yen, produced to commemorate the tenth anniversary of his passing. It recounts his life and how he faced difficulties while striving to be a good monk. In his later years, afflicted by illness, he said, "I entrust my body to the doctors and my life to buddhas and bodhisattvas, so I have no worries." In December 2008, his cancer had already metastasized. A disciple trained in medicine said to him, "Master, you will surely live to be a hundred." Master Sheng Yen then asked his disciple Chang Kuan, "Do you think it would be good for me to live to a hundred?" Chang Kuan could not answer. The Master returned to the question: "Would it be good for me to live to a hundred?" Chang Kuan replied, "Master, I will take this as a koan to contemplate." Shortly afterward, the Master smiled and passed away.

At life's final stage, we all face various physical and mental changes. At that time, we should wholeheartedly pray to the Three Jewels. So long as we sustain unwavering faith and devotion, and do not slacken in our prayers, the Three Jewels will surely protect us. Of course, their protection is not guaranteed in every circumstance. It is like a warrior's armor: it offers protection but cannot ensure absolute safety. No protection is infallible; it affords only a measure of safety. Many things in life cannot be changed—our karma, social realities, and the operating principles of the world. In the face of

such uncertainty, wholehearted prayer to the Three Jewels remains our most reliable practice. As for methods of prayer, His Holiness provided further explanations in his 1995 overseas teachings, with particular emphasis on practical aspects of the path.

PRACTICING YOUR PRINCIPAL DEITY

**From now on and throughout all future lives,
You must have a deity to whom you can direct your mind.
It is meritorious to meditate on the inseparability of deity
and guru
While reciting the deity's mantra as much as possible.**

From now on, and throughout all future lives, we should take one principal deity as the focus of our practice. You may keep the same deity across lifetimes, or practice with one in this life and another in the next; in any case, it is important to identify one or a few principal deities—such as Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, Guru Padmasambhava, or Amitabha—and engage in their practice. Once you have clearly identified your deity, regard your root guru and the deity as inseparable, and recite the deity's heart mantra. This practice is of paramount importance.

As mentioned yesterday, by the age of fifty-seven Lama Mumtso had already recited her deity's mantra more than one billion times. In the Tibetan tradition, age is counted by "nominal years," which include the months in the womb; in other words, age is reckoned from conception. For example, I was born in 1962 and was already considered one year old that year. This method appears in many historical sources, such as the *Epic of King Gesar*, where a person's age is counted from conception. Dakini Mumtso was born in 1966, so by this reckoning she was fifty-seven in 2022.

In any case, we should each focus on one deity and recite the heart mantra as much as possible. Some people recite diligently; others assume that if they study the Middle Way they need not recite mantras—you rarely see them with a mala. This is unfortunate. Remember, Lama Mumtso is an emanation of Dakini Yeshe Tsogyal, yet she practices mantra recitation with such diligence that she completes one million recitations for each dharma assembly. Do we truly believe we can surpass her?

Before passing into parinirvana, Choje Yidzhin Norbu tallied his life's recitations: nine hundred million, counting both long and short mantras. Yet some remain self-satisfied and complacent—this should not be. If you truly do not wish to recite mantras, no one can force you. But some even rationalize: "I don't need mantra;

Chan is enough—just abiding is enough.” Such people often make grand claims, yet in reality lack steady meditation and realization; their words and conduct make this plain.

In this lifetime, then, each of us should recite our deity’s mantra as much as possible. In mantra practice, regard your root guru and the deity as inseparable—or the deity and the mantra as inseparable. As we studied in the *Essence of Clear Light*, practitioners of lesser capacity invoke the deity through mantra—for example, calling upon Manjushri with the heart mantra *om ah ra pa tsa na dhiih*. In truth, the mantra itself is the deity; deity and mantra are inseparable. This is among the most important pith instructions of Vajrayana. In other words, Buddha Shakyamuni’s heart mantra is Buddha Shakyamuni; Manjushri’s heart mantra is Manjushri; the guru’s heart mantra is the guru. The mantra you are chanting is directly the deity. Practiced in this way, realization comes swiftly.

This concludes the instruction on deity practice; next comes the teaching on pure land practice. Earlier, Lama Mumtso presents very profound methods; later, she offers approaches that are comparatively simple and accessible for Han Chinese practitioners.

PRACTICING THE PURE LAND

**When the time of death arrives,
You will migrate from this world.
So constantly maintain a clear visualization of Amitabha,
And yearn for the realm of Sukhavati.**

For each of us, death is a great migration, a profound relocation—yet we never know when we will set out for the next life. Even an ordinary move can be exhausting, as we must pack every belonging, large and small. Still, that is relatively fortunate, for all those possessions remain yours and can be used in your new home. In the great migration of death, however, nothing can be taken with us—not even our own body. We set out alone into an unfamiliar life to come, carrying only our karma.

As the *Collected Sayings of Chan Master Chewu* puts it: “The power of karma is great, but the power of mind is greater still. Since karma has no inherent nature, it depends entirely on the mind; the mind creates karma, and the mind can transform karma.” At the moment of death, two forces are at work: karma and mind. If the mind is strong, it can wholly transform karma. This point is crucial.

We must understand that neither wholesome nor unwholesome karma has inherent existence; the weight and momentum of karma are determined entirely by the alaya consciousness. If, at the very moment of death, your mind is powerful and immediately recollects Amitabha Buddha, you will certainly be reborn in Sukhavati, the Pure Land. Even karma that would otherwise lead to rebirth in the lower realms can be changed by the power of mind. As it is said in *Liao Fan's Four Lessons*, everyone's destiny can be changed.

Therefore, when the time comes for our great departure from this world, if we earnestly visualize Amitabha, we will surely be reborn in his pure land. But before that day arrives, we must prepare day and night, so that when the moment truly comes we can recollect Amitabha without fail and take birth in his pure land. The final instruction is this: do not forget this teaching at the moment of death.

REMEMBERING THE TEACHING UPON DEATH

At the time of death, things will not be as they are today.

Many teachings will be difficult to put into practice.

**Therefore, hold this instruction firmly in your mind and
never forget it,**

**For it is the supreme method for closing the gate to
the lower realms.**

Each of us will ultimately leave this world. At the time of death, the situation will not be as it is now—when we can try one teaching for a while and then switch to another, enjoying relative freedom; even those with modest training can at least manage some dharma practices. At death, however, terrifying bardo visions will arise; the pain of the four great elements disintegrating will manifest unceasingly; illness will afflict one both inwardly and outwardly; and a cascade of chaotic, disturbing phenomena will occur all at once. In that state, many of the teachings we have learned will be very difficult to apply.

In fact, even those who have practiced well may face great difficulty. Some people become gravely ill, and if their practice is not deep, they may cry out in pain. Some have not practiced long—becoming monastics or committed practitioners only mid-way through life—and despite ten or twenty years of training, their earlier negative karma may still be more powerful. Thus, in that moment, the practices performed in daily life can be hard to apply effectively.

Therefore, at the moment of death, you should single-pointedly pray to Buddha Amitabha and visualize yourself as inseparable from your root guru. When Choje taught the *Peaceful Manjushri* in Singapore, he said:

Imagine that your mind appears as a white syllable *ah* at your heart while chanting *ah ah ah...* Visualize this syllable *ah* rising through your crown aperture and dissolving into your guru's heart, accompanied by the sound of *hik* or *phat*. Your guru, inseparable from Lord Manjushri, ascends higher and higher, going directly to the pure land of Sukhavati.

This is the finest pith instruction for the bardo of dying. If, at that time, you cannot apply any other practice, just do this visualization. This practice appears in the original text *Placing Buddhahood within Reach*, though Choje has explained it with slight variations on different occasions.

In regular meditation, at the conclusion, you should visualize your guru—inseparable from Manjushri—transforming into light, descending, and dissolving into your heart, thereby bestowing the deathless siddhi of mastery over lifespan. In other words, during daily practice you conclude with the longevity phase; but at the time of death, you must visualize rebirth in the pure land of Sukhavati.

When facing death, everyone should practice in this way. Understand that at the time of dying, people are not as free and at ease as they are now—many experience great suffering. Even those with considerable realization sometimes find it difficult to remain stable in meditation, let alone others.

As His Holiness once said, at the moment of death the mind is like one confronted with thunderclaps, lightning flashes, and deafening crashes. In such a state, you cannot pray to Avalokiteshvara for a moment and then switch to Manjushri; instead, you must single-pointedly pray to Buddha Amitabha and your guru. As Guru Padmasambhava taught in the method of instantaneous rebirth within the Six Bardos, your very first thought must be to visualize your consciousness ascending upward.

Of course, it is best to prepare for rebirth in the pure land while still alive. Just as a soldier drills with weapons before entering battle, we too must train in this way, for no one knows when or how they will leave this world. Therefore, we should rehearse this practice again and again.

Death is something we must face alone; no one can accompany us. Dharma friends may promise to assist with prayers, but whether they will be by your side at that moment is uncertain. You might die

in a hospital or in a car accident—there are countless ways to die. Those of us gathered here are no longer young; within forty or fifty years, most of us will have departed from this world. At that time, if you keep this teaching in your heart, you will not fall into the lower realms. This is an exceptionally profound and expedient instruction. That is why Dakini Mumtso offers it as the final method of practice. Before the dedication, Lama Mumtso explains its extraordinary qualities.

THE EXTRAORDINARY QUALITIES OF THIS TEACHING

**The heartfelt advice presented above
Is the heart-essence of all Sutrayana and Mantrayana teachings.
Practiced properly with sincere faith,
It becomes a supreme instruction that truly benefits you.**

The teachings presented here are heartfelt advice, encompassing the essential points and pith instructions of both Sutrayana and Tantrayana. As many of you will have found, whether you study the Five Great Treatises or Vajrayana teachings, genuine practice always comes down to these key points. This is what makes so many Tibetan Buddhist masters remarkable: they are able to distill and summarize the essence of all sutra and tantra teachings. This

teaching itself is concise—just over thirty verses—yet it contains the essential meaning of all scriptural and tantric instructions. If you practice it correctly with sincere faith, they will become a source of extraordinary benefit.

As I mentioned earlier, without true sincerity and proper understanding, even the Buddha's final instructions may not truly help you. But with a sincere heart, these teachings that Lama Mumtso has personally transmitted will become a source of immense benefit. Having relied on Lama Mumtso for so many years, it would be a pity to remain only superficially connected—offering prostrations yet failing to receive the essence of her wisdom. To rely on a teacher means to study and internalize the teacher's wisdom intent; this is the primary purpose of following a guru.

If all you seek is a blessing tap on the crown, or simply to travel, dine, or watch movies with the guru, that is not genuine guidance. The guidance of a guru is entirely unlike worldly relationships: a true guru elicits transcendent wisdom within your mindstream and clarifies what to adopt and what to abandon—that is the real value of a teacher. If you do not understand these principles, then no matter how many years you have followed your teacher, it will not amount to much. Whether you fold your hands or applaud, weep or laugh when the guru comes and goes—these things are

not important. What truly matters is to practice sincerely and in accordance with the dharma.

Although this teaching is brief, I hope you will invest real effort in contemplating and practicing it. In the group discussions, it seems everyone understands clearly, but I am not sure about those listening at home—some may have dozed off, or even forgotten to turn off the radio and only switched it off upon waking in the middle of the night. In any case, only by practicing with a sincere heart will these teachings truly benefit you.

When I first arrived at Larung Gar, His Holiness was teaching Venerable Longchenpa's *Thirty Pieces of Heart Advice*. After listening, I felt my life transformed; every sentence was an unsurpassed treasure to me. Likewise, for those who have faith in Dakini Mumtso, the teachings she has personally transmitted are of the utmost importance. In the future, when you teach the dharma to others, you can share this instruction as well. These are vajra words flowing from the wisdom of a realized female practitioner.

In recent years, due to health reasons, Lama Mumtso has taught very little. She taught more in the past—for example, in 2000 she taught *The Flight of the Garuda*, and I served as the simultaneous interpreter. In the foreword to the biography *White Lotus*, Khenpo Tsultrim

Lodro wrote: “Lama Mumtso’s understanding of the dharma is deep and thorough. Her teachings are clear, straightforward, and easy to understand. Apart from expounding the dharma, she never mixes in idle chatter or irrelevant remarks—her teaching style is concise and pure. Whoever hears her teachings will gain firm conviction in the Buddhadharma and be filled with great joy.”

Thus, this teaching from her possesses extraordinary depth. As someone who has studied and practiced for many years, you can discern whether a teaching is well composed. When I was translating this text, I was so moved that I thought, “I must teach this at least once this year.” Now, having taught it, my excitement and enthusiasm are nearly spent, and I feel content. For Han Chinese practitioners, it is important to present dharma that is both profound and accessible. This is something Lama Mumtso understands well, and so do I.

CHOOSE THE PRACTICE THAT SUITS YOU

**What we call profound or non-profound teachings
Depends only on whether they suit one’s mindstream,
In their essential nature, there is no difference.
Understanding this, apply the dharma in your actual practice.**

In truth, whether a teaching is “profound” depends primarily on whether it suits your mindstream. When your mind is in harmony with a teaching, that teaching is profound for you; when it is not, it lacks that profundity. For example, the unsurpassed Great Perfection is intrinsically profound, yet for those who cannot connect with it or practice it, it cannot serve as a profound path.

Regarding all the teachings transmitted by the Buddha, we should not entertain notions of superiority and inferiority. As the *Sutra on Generating the Supreme Aspiration of Bodhisattvas* teaches, ranking some teachings as superior and others as inferior constitutes the fault of slandering the dharma. The 84,000 teachings were given according to beings’ diverse capacities, like prescribing medicine for specific illnesses. If your mind resonates with the Shravakayana teachings, then for you they are very profound; if they do not resonate, then they are not.

The same applies to Dzogchen, Avalokiteshvara’s mantra, and this very instruction from Dakini Mumtso. If it accords with your mindstream, diligent practice will certainly lead to accomplishment, and it will be especially profound for you. If it does not, it remains simply a piece of writing—essentially no different from other teachings. Having understood this principle, each person should

choose a dharma path aligned with one's own inclinations and capacities, and persevere in the practices that truly fit.

The final verse dedicates the merit to all sentient beings.

DEDICATION

**By the merit of offering this advice,
May those who read, recite, contemplate, or keep it in mind,
Supported by the blessings of the peerless guru,
Have the light of the authentic path to liberation shine brightly
within them.**

To whom shall we dedicate this merit? To all sentient beings who read, contemplate, and uphold these teachings. Through the blessings of the lineage masters—especially the incomparable guru, the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche—may their minds manifest the signs of the genuine path of liberation, such as the four visions in Dzogchen practice, together with the various indications of meditative experience and direct realization.

In studying this text, may we join the author in making the same dedication. May all sentient beings who read, contemplate, and uphold these teachings receive the blessings of the lineage masters,

connect with the dharma, and genuinely give rise to renunciation, bodhicitta, and nondual wisdom within their mindstreams. May they develop heartfelt interest in the practices mentioned above, including life-release, compassion, mantra recitation, and recollection of the Buddha. The enthusiasm of sentient beings is crucial: with enthusiasm, all practices become effective; without enthusiasm, even the most profound practices remain ineffective.

COLOPHON

This advice was composed on the tenth day of the fourth lunar month of the Water Tiger year (2022) of the Tibetan calendar, in response to repeated requests from devoted Han Chinese disciples who expressed their sincere hope that I might offer advice to benefit their minds. At the Palace of the Spontaneously Accomplished Four Activities in Chengdu, the Shakya nun Mumtso composed the text, and Khenpo Yeshe Phuntsok of Dule Namgyal Ling (Victorious Mara-Subduing Land) at Larung Gar recorded it. May it be virtuous!

Lama Mumtso's full name is Mumé Yeshe Tsomo. The Palace of the Spontaneously Accomplished Four Activities is her residence in Chengdu. Khenpo Yeshe Phuntsok holds the oral transmission for

this teaching. When convenient, you may request Khenpo Yeshe Phuntsok or Lama Mumtso to bestow the transmission for everyone. I personally do not hold the transmission; I am only providing an explanation of this text.

At that time, through her attendant Yingrik Drolma, I sought Lama Mumtso's permission and blessings to translate this teaching. I also checked with Khenpo Yeshe Phuntsok whether he had already translated it, as duplicate efforts would be unnecessary. Learning that he had not, I translated it into Chinese in February. Now, in April, the teaching has been fully presented.

Commentary on
Words to Devout Laymen and Laywomen

LECTURE 1

MAY 27, 2024

SOME WORDS FOR PEOPLE AT LARUNG GAR

Starting today, we will study several short texts by Lama Mumtso. Today and tomorrow, I will teach *Words to Devout Laymen and Laywomen*, one of her writings included in her biography *White Lotus*. There will be no class on Wednesday. On Thursday, we will study another short text by Lama Mumtso. After that, I do not yet have a clear plan; we will decide when the time comes.

About Attending Khenpo's Lecture

For my recent teachings, only members of the oral presentation group may come to the sutra hall. Everyone else should listen via the radio in their own cabins. This morning I explained this request to the khenpos and khenmos who are responsible for the sangha's affairs, as well as to the disciplinarians (monastic supervisors). I told them that until the oral presentation session ends, no unrelated individuals should be allowed in. Usually people

may enter the sutra hall freely after my teaching, but for now such a lax arrangement could allow people with bad intentions to slip in.

For those in the sutra hall who need to use the restroom before the session ends, please remember to take your ticket with you. Some classes take place in the afternoon and finish just before my teaching; in that case, those students can continue listening to my teaching in their own classrooms upstairs. Except for a few khenpos and khenmos who truly need to come, no one else is allowed in.

As you know, the current situation is not promising, though it is not so bad—basically the same as last year. If we are not careful and do not keep a low profile, we may invite trouble. I have noticed that during the oral presentation and the group discussions after my teaching, many unfamiliar people come, and it is unclear what they want. It seems our disciplinarians and gatekeepers are sometimes too strict and sometimes too lax. In the past, some unfortunate incidents occurred due to their carelessness. Therefore I am making this request to ensure that my regular teachings proceed smoothly.

The reason I allow only members of the oral presentation group to come is that they have specific responsibilities. After I finish, they must give the oral presentation to recap my teaching and participate in group discussion. They have assignments; they are

not coming here idly. It would be meaningless to attend only to fall asleep or be distracted by a smartphone. For now we will keep the current group; we have not accepted new members since the beginning of the pandemic. I have come to know most of you over the years. The group is already quite large and could attract unwanted attention, so it is better to maintain the current arrangement to ensure everything runs smoothly.

I know some resident practitioners very much want to receive my teachings on-site. Some of you may feel disappointed and ask, “Why are we not allowed to be present in the sutra hall? We can neither participate in the dharma assembly nor attend the regular teachings on-site. It is too bad that we can only listen on the radio.” I truly understand how you feel. But given the current situation, this is the best we can do. On the one hand, without the oral presentation assignment, it makes little difference to listen via the radio; you receive the same transmission and study the same teaching. On the other hand, if most of you come to the sutra hall, your presence might upset certain government staff.

As you know, Larung Gar is not allowed to host the Han Chinese sangha; only a few Han monastics and lay Buddhists are permitted to stay here as technical staff or paid employees. This year, government officials have even begun to question the legal residency of

such Han Chinese and intend to make inquiries. As for me, the government allows me to give only informal dharma teachings to Han Chinese with residency permits, as well as to a few Tibetans who do not understand Tibetan. Therefore, the number of people who can attend my teachings is very limited, although there are always occasional visitors and tourists—especially numerous during summer.

Given all these reasons, please understand my decision. I am not favoring anyone or neglecting others. If you are serious about studying, you will receive the same teaching at home. Many khenpos and khenmos are used to this; even if I invite them, they may still prefer to stay in their cabins. After a full day's work, they are often exhausted, and in the evening they feel more comfortable receiving the teaching at home. In his later years, His Holiness also allowed people to receive his teachings from home, so this is not unusual.

But when you listen to the radio at home, please be attentive. If you completely relax and enjoy your dinner while listening, that would be unfortunate. Some may even fall asleep and wake to find my teaching still in progress. In such a case, you can hardly benefit. In any event, I am sorry that those who are not in the oral presentation group cannot come to the sutra hall, but please cherish the teaching at home.

Some dharma friends who came for our recent collective Vajrasattva practice have not yet left. I hope you can also understand our situation. It is not easy for you to come to Larung Gar. Now that you are here, you want to see me and receive teachings in person, even just once. I am very sorry, but this is not the right time. While you are in the valley, you can listen to my teachings on the radio. Beyond that, I may not be able to offer anything. At present, live-streaming teachings online is not allowed. It is also not convenient for me to meet you in person, as that could draw unwanted attention. As Buddhist practitioners, our goal is to tame and purify the mind through the dharma. You do not have to see a teacher in person. In this day and age, it is rare for someone to experience sudden enlightenment simply by seeing a master face to face. On the contrary, some people may even develop negative thoughts when they stay close to a master. Therefore, the best way to follow the path to liberation is to listen to and study the dharma. This is very important.

In short, this request regarding how to attend my teachings applies to resident practitioners, new visitors, and everyone else. I will not repeat it before each teaching. The disciplinarians and those in charge should follow my words, and I will let you know when things improve. I believe this is the only way to ensure regular

teachings. Otherwise, if too many people gather, things will become complicated and we may encounter unwanted obstacles. I am worried about this. I hope everyone can understand my concern. If some of you feel that my request is a bit harsh, I am sorry, but I have to stand by my decision. As a dharma teacher, I am not asking anything of you. I have tried my best to offer the dharma, and at the end of the day it is up to you how you receive it. It is not surprising that, when we teach and listen to the dharma, we may encounter difficulties. In such cases we need to use skillful means, and we should be tolerant of any necessary adjustments throughout the process.

Face-to-Face Meeting Is Not Important

My health is still not very good. Sometimes I feel fine; sometimes I feel very unwell. Although I can stay in Larung Gar as the weather warms, I do need some rest. Of course, now that I am back, many things await me, so I cannot avoid certain important meetings. But I want to let you know that I will not have any personal meetings before or after class as I used to. I appreciate your understanding. If someone comes to my cabin and knocks on the door, I will probably not open it, no matter who it is. Otherwise, if I receive one person, the news will spread quickly and more people will come, and my

little hut will become a reception room. This is what I want to avoid. I am telling you in advance; please let others know as well.

In truth, seeing the guru in person is not so important. What matters most is reading the guru's books. If you have faith in a teacher, it is best to follow his or her teachings. For example, if you wish to rely on Lama Mumtso as your guru, study her texts and receive her instructions, like the one I am going to teach today. Meeting Lama Mumtso in person would certainly be wonderful; just by seeing her, you would experience extraordinary blessing. However, the best and most essential way to rely on her is to receive her teachings and internalize their meaning. This is the only way to tame and purify your mind.

When I followed my teachers in the past, I tried my best to put their words into practice, and that is what has made my life most meaningful. If a disciple stands by a teacher's side but never follows the teacher's words, it does little good. Looking back in history or around us, we can find many examples of disciples who were close to their teachers but did not benefit, because they failed to integrate the teachings into their hearts. Some may have met their master countless times, yet ended up becoming worse than an ordinary person.

For me, it is wonderful to meet and connect with different people. This is how great bodhisattvas usually benefit sentient beings, and I certainly want to emulate their actions. But I am getting older and my health is not very good. These factors, along with the external circumstances, make me feel that meeting people and giving blessings is less important right now. If you truly have devotion to me, please read my books—either my own writings or my translations of great treatises. Some of my new books are now available in the bookstore; you can buy them if you are interested. I have told the staff responsible for distributing my books that we will no longer send them out for free, because when people receive books without cost, many will probably not appreciate or even read them. If people are truly interested, they may buy the books at cost.

In recent years I have given many talks at public events and at prestigious universities. These talks have recently been collected and published. I have forgotten much of the content, but when I skimmed through them the other day, I felt they were worth reading. In my eyes now, these speeches are not perfect, but at that time I prepared them to the best of my ability. Each time I shared the fruits of years of dharma study and practice with the audience, I tried to tailor my talk to their knowledge, background, and interests. So if you want to have a connection with me, read books like these. You

can understand my thoughts and draw nourishment and strength from my words. This will greatly benefit you.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS TEXT

We will now study Lama Mumtso's *Words to Devout Laymen and Laywomen*. It was composed at the request of a group of Tibetan khenpos and khenmos who were collecting Lama Mumtso's life stories to assist Tulku Tendzin Gyatso in writing her biography. They asked her to offer a teaching specifically for Tibetan lay devotees; this text is her response. We have just studied another short text, *The Melody of the White Dharma Conch*, which the same group requested for the benefit of Han Chinese students.

Although primarily addressed to lay practitioners, *Words to Devout Laymen and Laywomen* also contains valuable guidance for monastics. Even if you have embraced monastic life and gone a step beyond lay Buddhists, you may still fall short in aspects of worldly conduct and spiritual practice. In such cases, this teaching is deeply helpful and immediately applicable to daily life. Moreover, if you have opportunities to teach the dharma in the future, this text is an excellent choice to share with diverse audiences, as it speaks directly to modern Buddhists—especially women practitioners.

Unlike the writings of great masters who lived hundreds of years ago, such as Longchenpa or Jigme Lingpa, which may feel remote to modern readers, *Words to Devout Laymen and Laywomen* was written by a contemporary great female master. As a renowned figure of our time, her words are fresh, resonant, and imbued with special blessings. Studying this text is therefore especially meaningful, and you will appreciate it all the more through close reading and practice.

Over the years, most of us at Larung Gar have received empowerments and transmissions from Lama Mumtso. But since she has not offered regular dharma teachings following His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche's passing into nirvana, those who arrived afterward may never have received her direct instruction. You may wonder what kind of teachings such a great female master offers to people today. These texts provide an answer. If you practice accordingly, you will benefit yourself and be able to help those connected to you.

Today, women outnumber men among Buddhist practitioners in Tibetan regions, Han Chinese regions, and elsewhere. Larung Gar is no exception: of the 5,000 resident monastics officially recognized by the government, 3,500 are women and 1,500 are men—women comprise more than two-thirds. It is therefore especially beneficial

for them to receive direct teachings from a female master to guide their practice.

There have been many great female masters both historically and in our time. Recently, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro has been teaching the Tibetan sangha Padmasambhava's *Essential Instructions*, largely consisting of Guru Rinpoche's answers to questions posed by Dakini Yeshe Tsogyal. Presented as dialogues, this classic work offers comprehensive guidance for people of all backgrounds and includes abundant practical advice for women. With the blessings of Guru Padmasambhava and Dakini Yeshe Tsogyal, these teachings continue to inspire sincere seekers, many of them women. Likewise, as you begin to share the dharma in the future, this short text by Lama Mumtso will be especially helpful for women practitioners.

At Larung Gar there are more khenmos than khenpos, which is actually advantageous. Why? Because teachings of female masters can be particularly apt and beneficial for women practitioners. Sometimes female practitioners seem more attracted to male teachers, or vice versa. For instance, if a male and female master were to teach the same topic online, many female listeners might choose the male master's presentation. However, female teachers are more likely to understand women's emotional afflictions, struggles, and

pains more fully. Having shared similar mental and physical experiences, they know more precisely what women need and how to address their difficulties.

(Khenpo pauses to cough.)

If you attend classes or go to other crowded places, it is best to wear a surgical mask. Various flus have been spreading both in Larung Gar and elsewhere, even though the worst of the pandemic has passed. Local doctors report many cases of influenza and severe colds. I strongly recommend that all of you continue to wear a mask, especially if you have a bad cough. Otherwise, persistent coughing will concern those nearby about infection, though they may feel it rude to express their discomfort. Some thoughtless people even cough directly toward others, which understandably annoys them. When I coughed just now, I was facing only my iPad screen.

Considering the current ratio of women to men among Buddhists, it would be far better if there were more female masters in the world. In reality, however, more than ninety percent of recognized masters are men, while about seventy to eighty percent of Buddhists are women—both in China and abroad. While Lama Mumtso still lives among us, people may not fully recognize her greatness. Yet if you consider the number of disciples she has guided, the depth of

realization she has attained, the volume of mantra recitations she has accumulated, and her diligent engagement in virtuous deeds over decades, you will recognize her extraordinary qualities as a great female master. A female guru of this caliber is rare in our time and a source of pride and joy for all women practitioners.

Given that women make up such a large proportion of Buddhists, it would be disheartening if there were no accomplished female figures. Fortunately, there are now a number of well-known, highly accomplished women practitioners in this country and abroad. Scholars have identified some of the most influential contemporary female Buddhist figures—some I know and others I do not. In any case, Lama Mumtso is widely revered and recognized as a highly realized and influential female master. Her teachings are certainly open to men, but women, in particular, should cherish and embrace them with profound respect.

My point is that it may be more beneficial for women practitioners to follow a female master than a male master. When women study with a male teacher, sincere and pure faith certainly brings benefit. But if that faith slips into personal attachment, it can give rise to jealousy, craving, or anger, which contaminates the pure master-disciple relationship. With a female master, women disciples often find it easier

to maintain a pure, unentangled mind; their faith and devotion are less likely to be complicated by inter-gender attachment.

Why are so many women drawn to the Buddhist path? I believe women are often more open and more readily accept the teachings. Generally speaking, owing to their physiological structure, socialization and other factors, men tend to be more self-centered and proud. In many parts of the world, boys are raised as superior, and this conceit becomes ingrained and hard to change. A man may not easily develop faith when he meets a master. By contrast, women's relatively mild and gentle disposition makes them more receptive to Buddhist philosophies. Some say the higher proportion of women Buddhists is due to women having more afflictive emotions, but I disagree. Men and women share the same mental sufferings; the differences lie only in which emotions tend to be more prominent in each.

I recently heard about a Tibetan woman who has sold yogurt in Larung Gar for many years. She used to work in the monks' area and later moved to the nuns' area. She observed that when she sold to monks, they rarely criticized her products; when she sold to nuns, they were more discerning and often questioned the quality—asking whether it was pure yak milk, if it contained horse milk, or if it had been diluted with water. Roughly seventy

percent of monks would buy without hesitation, while a similar proportion of nuns voiced doubts. She once believed male and female monastics were the same, but now feels a little discouraged that nuns are harder to please and sometimes embarrass her. She attributes this disparity to her own negative karma. Indeed, in some respects it can be harder for a woman to maintain a wholly pure perception of another woman. Overall, however, the khenmos and most nuns at Larung Gar are very capable—both in teaching the dharma and in handling various situations.

With Lama Mumtso as our guru, I hope all disciples—women and men—will rely on her teachings to tame the mind and uproot mental afflictions. Women practitioners, in particular, should treasure her instructions as precious guidance. In the future, you will undoubtedly have many opportunities to spread the dharma throughout the world. When that time comes, I hope you will share Lama Mumtso's teachings with many women, so they too can be guided onto the path of enlightenment.

As male masters, we can certainly offer guidance to women students, but often only in general terms. On matters unique to women's physiological and psychological experience, it may be less appropriate—or less effective—for us to advise. Female teachers, on the other hand, can more readily relate to their students' lives and offer

teachings tailored to their particular confusions, challenges, and struggles. We are witnessing the rise of women in today's world. According to the yin-yang philosophy, it is beneficial to maintain a balance of feminine and masculine energies. The power of the feminine should never be underestimated; in some cases, it may even be more profound. In the realm of spiritual teaching, the words of female masters often resonate more deeply with women audiences due to shared experience and innate qualities of insight and compassion.

Therefore, I hope that women dharma teachers—both monastic and lay—will offer more teachings to women Buddhists, especially addressing women's unique challenges and concerns. Do not hesitate. As mentioned, women are often open-minded and receptive to guidance; it is important for female dharma teachers to take on the responsibility of sharing the dharma and guiding people of the same gender. Of course, it is beneficial to share teachings with male Buddhists as well. However, frequent interaction with male students can carry the risk of emotional attachment, even when one's intentions are purely altruistic; young nuns, in particular, should be cautious. For these reasons, it is most appropriate for female dharma masters to focus on teaching women. Look around, and you will see many women deeply troubled by afflictive emotions,

experiencing pain and suffering, and in urgent need of liberation. In light of this, you should feel an even stronger obligation to offer them the precious dharma, guiding and inspiring them toward peace and freedom. Whoever you are, it is essential to apply what you have learned in the service of benefiting others.

HOMAGE AND COMMITMENT

After about half an hour of background, let us now turn to the text itself. The title, *Words to Devout Laymen and Laywomen*, signals that this work contains special teachings and instructions from Lama Mumtso for her devoted lay disciples. The teaching can be structured into three parts—good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end. The first part comprises a verse of homage and a verse of commitment to compose the text.

Homage

You constantly see with your wisdom eyes

The happiness and suffering of all beings in the Land of Snows.

Sole refuge in this degenerate age, Great Guru of Oddiyana,

**From the depths of my heart I pray: Care for me with your
compassion.**

This is the verse of homage—a supplication from Dakini Mumtso to Guru Padmasambhava. Padmasambhava is the lord of beings in the Land of Snows. He constantly watches over the minds of sentient beings during the six periods of day and night, caring about their happiness and suffering. In particular, he is the true and reliable refuge in this age when the five degenerations are rampant. Thus Lama Mumtso sincerely prays that Guru Rinpoche care for all beings in the Land of Tibet during this degenerate time.

The verse emphasizes the Land of Snows because the text is addressed to Tibetan devotees and this is the customary way of supplicating Padmasambhava. Yet, as recorded in Guru Rinpoche's biographies, his blessings extend not only to beings in Tibet but to all sentient beings throughout the world. There are many scriptural sources attesting to this supreme quality of Guru Rinpoche, as I have often cited.

Before composing the text, Lama Mumtso first prayed to Padmasambhava. This is the approach we should all follow. Whatever obstacles we may face, we should often supplicate Padmasambhava—seeing Guru Rinpoche and our own guru as one in essence—so that, through their blessings, the luminous wisdom of the Great Perfection of the Secret Mantrayana merges with our minds.

In these troubled times, the influence of negative forces is rampant. It is best to keep supplicating Guru Rinpoche. If you do so, it will benefit both you and those around you, for Guru Rinpoche will always look after you. If you never pray, even though the blessings of buddhas and bodhisattvas are inconceivably vast and impartial, you can scarcely experience them. Just as the moon shines high in the sky: if there is a vessel of clear water, its reflection readily appears; without such a vessel, the moon's reflection cannot appear on bare, dry ground. Likewise, sincere faith and earnest supplication are necessary to receive Guru Rinpoche's blessings.

Commitment

**To you faithful devotees, who take birth into this human world
In the same way in accordance with your shared karma,
I, with a good heart, offer this straightforward advice
That appears naturally in my mind.**

This is the author's commitment to compose the text. As human beings, we are born into the human realm of this saha world through the force of collective karma. By this same karmic force, we are born into the same world, live under the same sky, and follow the same human way of life. As Buddhists, the karmic ties we share

are even stronger. In particular, those who have faith in, or karmic connection with, Lama Mumtso share even more common karma to follow the same teacher and dharma lineage. For the benefit of such faithful devotees, Lama Mumtso offers this straightforward advice with a good heart.

Her composition was not for personal gain or fame, nor motivated by the eight worldly concerns. Out of her sole wish to benefit her followers and lead them to liberation, the text arose naturally in her wisdom mind. She then offered these teachings frankly and directly. Some of her instructions address readers' present shortcomings head-on. Rather than being reserved or hesitant, Lama Mumtso plainly points out which practices and qualities disciples should improve. Of course, the teaching is directed to a group, not to any individual.

As Lord Atisha said, "The best teacher is the one who attacks your hidden faults; the best instruction is that which targets those hidden faults." If an instruction strikes a nerve, it is pointing directly at your problem—and that is a good teaching for you. If it does not touch you at all, you are unlikely to benefit. Therefore, as dharma listeners, whenever we receive a teaching, we should always reflect on ourselves, recognize our limitations, and make improvements. Although this text is primarily for Tibetan lay practitioners, we too

can certainly be inspired by studying it earnestly while examining our own shortcomings.

What advice does Lama Mumtso offer in this text? It consists of two parts: advice on worldly ethics and advice on spiritual practice. The first teaches us how to act properly when interacting with others. Some may scoff at such a topic, thinking they already know how to conduct themselves and behave in society—but that attitude often betrays a lack of self-knowledge.

Some time ago, I taught *A Hundred Wisdoms*, Nagarjuna's advice on worldly conduct. Afterwards, several people told me they had never encountered such a valuable treatise and were deeply grateful, as they had greatly benefited from the study. Those who aspire to noble character will not dismiss teachings of this kind; they will use them to examine their behavior and make corrections, and will reap great benefit. Frankly, everyone living in this world—monastic and lay alike—needs to learn how to be a decent human being.

WORLDLY ETHICS

We now begin the main body of the text—the “good in the middle.” It comprises: 1) worldly ethics; 2) spiritual practice; and 3) conclusion. In the section on worldly ethics, the first verse addresses how to get along with others.

Get Along with Others

**When you are in the company of others in the human world,
If you are in harmony with everyone, you will be happy.
So refrain from the evil conduct that is a disgrace
In the eyes of all people—superior, inferior, or in-between.**

Living in the human world, you cannot avoid interacting with others. If you can be in harmony with whomever you meet, you will be happy. Being affable and agreeable is essential to healthy relationships. Some lack this quality and can be as prickly and disagreeable as ox horns. As we know, with their sharp tips and stiff texture, ox horns are hard to carry; placed in a bag, they inevitably clash and make an unpleasant racket. Likewise, an “ox-horn” temperament only displeases and discomforts others.

By contrast, a water-like disposition is easygoing, getting along with anyone and bringing happiness to oneself and others. Wherever water is poured—into a triangular or square vessel, or along a narrow channel—it simply conforms. Water has no fixed shape; it adapts to its environment and never demands that the container change. If you cultivate a water-like character, you can relate harmoniously to anyone—non-Buddhists, learned Buddhist scholars, even those with a hot temper. This is what Lama Mumtso means by “in harmony with everyone.” If you do so, you will be happy; if not, you will feel frustrated and helpless.

This is an essential quality that cannot be neglected. At Larung Gar it is taken seriously. For instance, when applying for a degree certificate, the committee first checks whether the applicant has been criticized by the disciplinarians who maintain order in the sangha. At the Tibetan monks’ graduation ceremony a few days ago, some monks did not graduate because they did not meet this criterion. An easygoing person is unlikely to be flagged; they integrate into any group without disrupting others. Those who cannot get along with others stand out like a sore thumb and often annoy the disciplinarians over trivial matters.

Those who maintain harmony with everyone enjoy happiness wherever they are. They blend in so well that they draw little

attention. We Tibetans say, “He is so kind and easygoing that you hardly notice him in a crowd”—a compliment to an amiable character. Of course, distinct talent or remarkable intelligence naturally draws notice. Still, an affable person pleases others and receives praise from all. As Nagarjuna’s *A Hundred Wisdoms* puts it:

*Those who conduct themselves like a king’s servant,
And listen to instructions in a compliant manner,
Will have all their wishes fulfilled,
As if they had obtained the wish-fulfilling jewel from the ocean.*

To cultivate such noble character, you must avoid any behavior that others regard as disgraceful. Some people make themselves unwelcome; their superiors, colleagues, friends, and subordinates all find them troublesome. Whatever they say or do is driven solely by their own feelings, with no regard for others. For example, some modern people, taking a shallow cue from Western individualism, feel “special” by being uninhibited and opposing the majority. They imagine that being incompatible makes them stand out, but such a stance is naïve and creates trouble for themselves and others. It is praiseworthy to make unrelenting efforts at self-improvement—provided one’s conduct is not seen as disgraceful or demeaning by others.

At the extreme, notorious war criminals considered themselves remarkable, yet were condemned by nearly everyone.

The Pitfalls of Misunderstood Individualism

Western cultures often advocate individualism—emphasizing uniqueness, personal achievement, and individual rights. Under this influence, some equate a more conspicuous personality with greater specialness and success. Today, films often depict a character who begins as a kind and innocent person but ends as ruthless to achieve success. At first he is buffeted from pillar to post; once he becomes tough and hard-hearted, he achieves his aims and wins fame and glory. This is merely a beautiful illusion—utterly misleading.

A famous actress once told me, “Please don’t think I am as wicked as I am on screen. That is only a role I must play. I am nothing like that in life. I don’t agree with the character’s values, but as an actress I have no right to change them.” Despite this simple fact, many young people are immersed in what they see on screen. They struggle to realize that these admired figures are pure fabrication; instead, they idolize and emulate them in real life. Eventually, they become a headache to parents, teachers, and friends—and, without knowing why, they feel frustrated and disappointed with

themselves. Therefore, overemphasizing personal “edge” while disregarding others is undesirable and should be avoided, particularly by anyone seeking spiritual cultivation.

Whether ordained or lay, we should cultivate a kind heart that is willing to accommodate others. Such a quality makes you a good person in everyone’s eyes. Those around you—superiors, subordinates, and peers—will readily say, “You are a decent person!” By contrast, if people consistently speak ill of you, it suggests you are not relating well to others. When we select a department supervisor or manager at Larung Gar, sometimes a proposed candidate meets broad objection—from superiors and subordinates alike—which reveals an inability to get along with others.

Personal Reflections on Lama Mumtso

Lama Mumtso herself exemplifies harmony with everyone. She is so affable and easygoing that there has never been a rumor about her having quarrels or conflicts with others. I have never heard such a thing—from people of high, low, or middling status. Frankly, disagreements among disciples close to a master are not uncommon; disputes arise in temples in both Tibetan and Han regions. Yet nothing of the sort was ever heard of regarding Lama

Mumtso while she was with His Holiness. She understands the importance of harmony and lives it.

When I translated Lama Mumtso's biography into Chinese, I shared my impression of her in the preface. I traveled many times with His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, and each time Chojé brought Lama Mumtso and her mother along. I was thus fortunate to spend considerable time in the Dakini's company. She was always gentle and humble. I never saw her in conflict, nor did I hear of any—from relatives or attendants—not even so much as a word of reproach to her attendants. While attending His Holiness, she never offended anyone or caused even the slightest discomfort to those who came to visit her uncle. This is remarkable, considering how easily the attendants of great masters can disappoint or displease visitors.

Had Lama Mumtso offended anyone, gossip would have spread—for instance, that she quarreled with someone or forced someone to leave. People are keen-eyed in such matters. Even though disciples are duty-bound not to find fault with their teachers, some still cannot resist making negative comments—criticizing in private while reciting “om benza satto hung” to confess their improper speech. Yet even before Lama Mumtso became widely acknowledged as a vajra guru, I heard no negative

comments about her. Her conduct embodies her teaching and stands as an example for all her followers.

Accordance with Living Beings

In the chapter “Universal Worthy’s Conduct and Vows” of the forty-fascicle *Avatamsaka Sutra*, it says: “If a bodhisattva accords with living beings, he accords with and makes offerings to all buddhas. If he honors and serves living beings, he honors and serves the Thus-Come Ones.” To comply with the wishes of sentient beings is to comply with the wishes of buddhas; to delight sentient beings is to please the Tathagatas. With this in mind, do not become the opposite. If you fail to respect others and look down on everyone, you will become a thorn in everyone’s side. I strongly suggest you keep this verse in mind: whoever you associate with, leave a good impression. Respect your superiors, care for your subordinates with compassion, and remain in harmony with your peers. If you think you are “special” and need not care about others’ feelings, you are free to act as you like—but from the standpoint of the Buddhist teachings and the counsel of great masters, that is unwise, as it benefits neither you nor others.

Now that you are studying this text, I encourage all of you—women and men—to reflect on your own speech, conduct, and mind. While

translating, I repeatedly asked myself, “Am I someone who cannot get along with others? Do I offend or annoy those I interact with?” We Tibetans have a saying: “A house dog lives only nine years, yet manages to displease everyone around.” Suppose someone lives at Larung Gar for five or twenty years, constantly disturbing everyone they encounter and causing endless trouble—how unnecessary. Since you are in such a sacred place as Larung Gar, you must stay in harmony with all others. Now that you’ve asked me to teach, I am, in accord with your wishes, sharing the lineage gurus’ teachings based on my own insight and life experience. With that in mind, please contemplate these words again and again. If they resonate, you may give me a “like”—just as you would upvote a comment or post you agree with. (*Audience laughs.*)

Give Up Unwholesome Activities

**In particular, those activities that harm your health,
Such as drinking alcohol, smoking, taking drugs,
And gambling, which brings you no benefit but invites others’
ridicule—
All such unwholesome deeds should be given up forever.**

In Tibetan and Han regions, and elsewhere, it is not uncommon for people to delight in addictive substances and behaviors that damage their health: drinking alcohol, smoking, and taking drugs such as heroin. Many young people today are drawn to various addictions. Some even indulge in gambling, losing money and attracting ridicule. All these unwholesome activities are harmful and should be abandoned.

Years ago, I explained in detail the faults of smoking and drinking. Yet worldly people often take a different view, with sayings like “A cigarette after a meal makes you feel immortal,” and “No wine, no feast.” People tend to glamorize what they love—even unreasonably. With persuasive rhetoric, others are easily swayed, like the blind leading the blind. This is common, especially today, when people are often misled due to a lack of sufficient knowledge.

The Harm of Tobacco

Regarding the harms of tobacco, both medical studies and Buddhist texts have addressed them repeatedly. In terma literature, tobacco is said to have arisen from the malignant vows of King Mara’s youngest daughter. Long ago, as Mara was dying, he seemed overwhelmed with discontent and refused to close his eyes. Seeing this, his eldest daughter vowed to kill a thousand beings; he was displeased. The

second vowed to take the lives of a hundred million; he remained unsatisfied. Finally, the youngest daughter vowed to spread her menstrual blood across the earth, imbuing it with evil wishes so that poisonous plants would grow. She swore that whoever inhales the smoke of such plants would see their merit and health consumed, suffer misfortune, and have no opportunity for liberation. After making many malicious curses, Mara appeared pleased and passed away contentedly. Given this origin story, smoking is strongly discouraged.

In fact, those addicted to cigarettes suffer both physically and mentally. World Health Organization reports that tobacco use is associated with increased vulnerability to mental health problems. The effects of smoke on health are well documented. As a recent WHO brief states: “The tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest public health threats the world has ever faced, killing over 8 million people a year around the world. More than 7 million of those deaths are the result of direct tobacco use while around 1.3 million are the result of non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke. All forms of tobacco use are harmful, and there is no safe level of exposure to tobacco.”

According to the U.S. National Cancer Institute, “Of the more than seven thousand chemicals in tobacco smoke, at least 250 are known

to be harmful, including hydrogen cyanide, carbon monoxide, and ammonia. Among the 250 known harmful chemicals in tobacco smoke, at least 69 can cause cancer.”

In China, more than a million people die each year due to smoking. Because of tobacco’s negative impact, many countries restrict or ban tobacco advertising to reduce consumption. As of mid-2023, one third of countries—representing a quarter of the world’s population—had completely banned all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship, according to WHO. Nevertheless, many tobacco companies continue to produce tobacco and develop new products. On a related note, last year several senior officials in China’s tobacco sector were reportedly investigated and arrested for corruption.

What I am emphasizing here may be unnecessary for most monastics, since monks and nuns generally do not smoke, though in some countries cases of monastics smoking have been reported.

The Dangers of Alcohol

Alcohol consumption also exacts a heavy toll on health. WHO’s official webpage clearly lists its negative effects: “3.3 million deaths every year result from harmful use of alcohol. This represents 5.9% of all deaths.” It also notes that 5.1% of the global burden of disease

and injury is attributable to alcohol, and that alcohol-related death and disability occur relatively early in life. Among people aged 20 to 39, approximately 13.5% of total deaths are attributable to alcohol. While some believe moderate drinking is harmless or even desirable, WHO stated in *The Lancet Public Health* that when it comes to alcohol, there is no safe amount that does not affect health. From a medical standpoint, then, alcohol is not encouraged.

This is even clearer from the Buddhist perspective. In the Vinaya, Buddha Shakyamuni states that his followers must give up alcohol—even as little as a dewdrop on the tip of a blade of grass—and that anyone who drinks cannot be his student. I have discussed this many times. Years ago, I gave a special lecture on the harms of alcohol; and when teaching Lala Sönam Chödrup Rinpoche's *Illuminating the Path to Liberation: A Commentary on the Aspiration of Sukhavati*, I detailed these faults, citing scientific studies, abundant scriptural evidence, and numerous well-attested stories from history and the scriptures.

The Perils of Gambling

As for gambling, according to research published in *Nature*, the world's leading multidisciplinary science journal, "Gambling is associated with higher rates of future unemployment and physical

disability and, at the highest levels, with substantially increased mortality.” A WHO report states, “The gambling-related burden or harm appears to be of similar magnitude to harm attributed to major depressive disorder and alcohol misuse and dependence. It is substantially higher than harm attributed to drug dependence disorder.”

In *Letter to a Friend*, the great Buddhist scholar Nagarjuna exhorted his disciple, King Dechö Zangpo,

*Gambling, public spectacles and shows,
And indolence, bad company, strong drink,
And nightly prowls—these six will lead to lower realms
And damage your good name, so give them up.*

To conclude, all such unwholesome activities—exemplified by smoking, drinking, and gambling—should be abandoned once and for all. I am not sure about elsewhere, but in Tibetan regions you often hear people praise a young person by saying, “He’s a good kid—he doesn’t drink, smoke, or gamble.” In my hometown, people often assess a youth by whether he or she has these bad habits. Those with such habits naturally seek like-minded company; if someone joins in, they will likely fall in with them and gradually

give themselves over to these behaviors. In that case, it is easy to lose control and watch life unravel.

Teaching the Dharma in Accordance with Listeners'

Propensities

For those listening here at Larung Gar, I do not think anyone—monastic or lay—drinks, smokes, or gambles; that is very good. At the same time, if you wish to share the dharma with different people in the future, you will need skillful means when addressing these topics. For instance, if many in your audience smoke, bluntly condemning smoking and insisting they quit immediately will likely invite criticism and aversion. Many Tibetans are addicted to smoking. In some areas, heavy drinking is common—be it highland barley wine or other alcohol. If such people are in your audience, be skillful when you broach these matters. If you are confident that frank criticism will not provoke resistance but will instead inspire meaningful change, proceed—but watch your listeners' expressions as you speak. Otherwise, you may unwittingly offend them and prompt them to walk out mid-talk, which is awkward for everyone.

For example, when teaching people habituated to smoking, it is unwise—and somewhat discourteous—to say, “Quit right now or

you'll fall into hell. Padmasambhava's teachings say cigarettes come from Mara's daughter's evil wishes; you are now her victim." That approach is harsh. Instead, be gentle and considerate: "Studies suggest smoking harms health. I'm concerned for your well-being. You may not feel ready to quit, but for your health, perhaps reduce how much you smoke—and gradually you may be able to stop."

The same applies to heavy drinking. When I interact with people who smoke or drink, I do not demand abstinence. At times, when officials ask if they may smoke or drink in front of me—"Will it annoy you?"—I reply, "Of course not; it's fine. Just don't drink too much; it's not good for your health." Then I may chat with them about practical, worldly ways to improve their health.

In short, you need to know how to give proper teachings according to people's interests and capacities. Each year we send monastics out to teach elsewhere. For those entrusted with this, it is crucial to adapt teachings to listeners' inclinations. Simply repeating what you memorized from texts can be clumsy. Quite possibly, before you reach your main point, the audience may already feel offended, making it hard to continue. Suppose you plan a seven-day series; if on the first day you upset everyone, continuing to day two becomes difficult, let alone finishing the series. You will only leave a poor impression. So, whenever you spread the dharma, learn the local

customs and culture in advance, and learn to read people's thoughts by observing their words, behavior, and expressions.

Returning to the verse, demanding that people immediately and completely give up smoking, drinking, or gambling is unrealistic and overly harsh, because these habits are deeply ingrained. I hope you will be well equipped with skillful means—be considerate, and act in accordance with people's needs. Try to understand their interests and backgrounds. Without adequate background knowledge, your words will likely fail to resonate—and may even cause annoyance.

For those accustomed to smoking or drinking, quitting is challenging and distressing. I know how it feels. In middle school, my next-door neighbor was a hunter who smoked daily; under his influence, I picked up the habit. Later, when I decided to quit, I struggled for quite some time. The same was true when I stopped drinking, a habit formed in my teens. Therefore, you will get nowhere if you mechanically apply theory and force people to follow teachings without regard for their specific conditions. Be patient when you seek to influence others for the better.

Be Content with Whatever You Can Afford

**By the force of karma from previous lives,
Some are rich and some poor, which is not equal.
But you should be content with whatever you can afford.
If your mind is always happy, you are the greatest of the rich.**

Under the control of past-life karma, wealth is not distributed equally. Some people earn money with little effort—as if RMB, dollars, and the like flow effortlessly into their pockets. Others, lacking merit, cannot meet even basic needs and must borrow. Since time immemorial, unequal distribution of wealth has existed, continues now, and will persist into the future. This results from sentient beings' varied karma. In Tibetan history, King Mune Tsenpo—a devout Buddhist—noticed the vast disparity among his people and attempted to redistribute wealth from rich to poor. It is said he tried three times to equalize abundance, yet each time, the rich gradually became rich again, and the poor fell back into poverty. Thus, each person must experience their own happiness and suffering according to their karma. Even siblings in the same family often end up in very different financial circumstances.

Therefore, in daily life, be mindful of your situation and budget your expenses according to your income. Do not be overly demanding. What you have corresponds to the merit you have accumulated and is what you deserve. It is best to be content and live within your means. When Harry S. Truman was elected U.S. president, journalists flooded his home. It was said that a reporter asked his younger brother how he felt. He replied that he was proud of Harry and believed he would be an excellent president—and that he was equally proud to be a farmer who fed himself and cared well for his family. This reflects a healthy mentality. It's important to pacify the mind with contentment.

In this regard, people in many Tibetan regions seldom blindly compete with those better off than themselves. I once met a director-general whose elder brother served as the bureau's gatekeeper. A busybody teased the gatekeeper, "Your younger brother is now director-general—why are you still a guard?" He replied calmly, "I feel more relaxed and happier as a gatekeeper. My brother deals with many thorny issues and always has his heart in his mouth. He's not as happy as I am. Our roles differ, but I like my job." He seemed genuinely content.

Therefore, regardless of your position or accumulated wealth, maintaining contentment is always beneficial. Understand your

circumstances and be grateful for what you have; then live moderately according to your financial ability. In the *Buddhacharita*, Ashvaghosha says:

If you are rich but not content,

You are still in poverty.

If you are poor yet satisfied,

You are the richest.

If you are wealthy but lack contentment, you remain poor. If you are materially poor yet content, you are the wealthiest, and your life is full of hope. So always infuse your mind with gratification. This applies not only to possessions but also to everything you have, including social status and relationships. For monastics at Larung Gar, if you are a tutor, be happy; if you hold no position, be happy still—you are fortunate to be ordained and to have time for spiritual practice. For laypeople, whatever your profession you enter, fully embrace it knowing it's perfect for you. This mindset will serve you well.

Avarice Knows No Bounds

**Look at people around, though they have nothing to gain or find,
They remain lost in desire throughout this life.
Without even a day's leisure to recover,
They pass on to their next lives.**

This is powerful advice. Look at the many people in this world who spend their entire lives chasing desires but ultimately gain nothing. Day after day, from childhood to old age, they crave people or possessions. They lose themselves in cravings, unable to find even one day's ease and leisure. They rush about, frustrated and exhausted. Eventually, death arrives and their karma drags them to the afterlife. Observing people around, you'll find many are always on the run, never satisfied, forever chasing new ambitions. But someday, their lives will end. When that day comes, only a heap of negative karma remains—worldly attainments are meaningless for the journey ahead.

Steve Jobs once told Stanford graduates: "Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life... Almost everything—all external

expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure—these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important... No one wants to die, even people who want to go to Heaven don't want to die to get there, and yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it." Death is unavoidable. On your deathbed, you will reflect on your entire life. At that moment, you'll see that glory, status, and reputation all fade—nothing can be taken with you.

I often think that, in my twilight years, if I have personal time, I would like to set everything aside and focus on practice. Throughout my life, I have dedicated myself to teaching the dharma, translating scriptures, managing, and serving the sangha—especially the Han sangha at Larung Gar. When death comes and I must move on, these endeavors will have merit and benefit me. Still, it would be far better to have a stable level of inner realization.

Regrettably, many let desire lead them by the nose, suffering throughout life and ending with nothing meaningful. This deserves deep reflection. You may have such experiences: Everyone seems busy; then one day a friend or relative is diagnosed with a serious illness, and soon after you hear of their death. Some

mourn, some carry on. Either way, life goes on, and before long the deceased's name is forgotten; the person is nowhere to be found.

Everyone Is on the Path to Death

Once you are born in this place of cyclic existence,

There is no path but the road toward death.

When you reach the end of that road,

If you are happy and at peace, you are the great wise.

Having been born in samsara, there is only one road, and it ends in death. Life is a one-way road and everyone travels toward the same destination with no escape route. If, when the Lord of Death arrives, you have practiced virtue and gained some realization, you will remain peaceful—or even display confidence in breaking free from birth and death. With such attainment, you are truly wise and admirable.

A genuine practitioner does not fear death. This fearlessness is not reckless bravado. Some nonbelievers may boast, “I am not afraid of death; I don’t fear hell,” yet in the end they are terrified. One who truly does not fear death shows ready confidence, as did Milarepa and other great masters. Milarepa sang:

*Fearing death, I went to the mountains.
Again and again I meditated on death's unpredictable coming,
And took the stronghold of the deathless, unchanging nature.
Now I have gone beyond all fear of dying!*

For great practitioners, when life ends, wherever they are, they remain completely at ease, without worry or panic. This reflects their inner accomplishment. Consider Master Xuantai, recorded in the *Song Dynasty's Collection of Biographies of Eminent Monks*. He practiced diligently throughout his life and attained high realization. At sixty-five, he passed into nirvana. Before passing, he left this stanza:

*No need to shave my head;
No need to bathe me.
A pile of fierce fire
Is perfectly enough for me.*

He meant there was no need for the usual rites; a simple cremation would suffice. This suggests he'd gained high accomplishment, giving him full confidence to face death with ease. Many of you may not yet have such confidence. Nonetheless, if you practice earnestly, at least you will feel no regret at the moment of death. You who receive this teaching may not attain lofty realizations such as the

rainbow body. Yet you have encountered the dharma, received many empowerments and instructions, and perhaps embraced monastic life. Please recognize these as your present life's greatest attainments.

This is how I view my own life. I have earned a reputation, but I do not dwell on it—it will not accompany me into the next life. Nor am I puffed with pride over offerings from faithful devotees; on the contrary, I fear misusing them and incurring grave negative karma. Apart from that, I pay little heed to wealth. What matters most is that I have met teachers equal to the Buddha and received manifold empowerments and instructions. These make my life most meaningful. Although I regret not fully practicing the teachings and acknowledge certain flaws in observing samaya vows and other aspects, I confess diligently. During the recent collective Vajrasattva practice, I completed tens of thousands more recitations than required. Even if I were to die soon, I would have no regrets, because I have done so many Vajrasattva mantra recitations and fervently confessed all misdeeds. If I live on, the power of these recitations will continue to purify negative karma—at least that accumulated up to next year's Vajrasattva assembly. Likewise, you

too should take heart in the virtue you have cultivated and meet death without fear. Such contemplation will help you feel settled.

Follow the Karmic Law

When you are a child, heed the advice of your elders.

**When you are an adult, embrace the teachings on cause
and effect.**

In all your actions, reflect on yourself.

**If you are satisfied with your own conduct, others will be pleased
with you too.**

It is especially helpful for children to hear the stories that elders tell. The customs they pass on and the experiences they share can profoundly inspire the young later in life. When some of our dharma friends were children, their parents or grandparents often recounted their life experiences and stories—memories that later played an important role in their lives. As we Tibetans say, “Good stories come from the mouths of the elderly; the choicest meat clings to the joints.” Just as gnawing the bones yields the finest morsels, listening to elders yields rich, valuable stories. In truth, older people hold a wealth of traditions and knowledge, and it benefits us to listen to them.

Once we grow up, it is essential to receive teachings on the law of karma. If we ignore how karma works and do whatever we please, painful results inevitably await. Therefore, seeking instruction on the principle of cause and effect is crucial. Whatever you do to others, pause and ask how you would feel if you were in their place. If you would be fine with it, it is likely acceptable to others as well. This is what people mean by “put yourself in another person’s shoes,” or by the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Before you speak, consider how your listeners will feel upon hearing your words. Before you act, ask whether you could accept it if others did the same to you. If the answer is yes, go ahead. Some behaviors—such as informing on others out of spite or bullying—are unacceptable both to oneself and to others and should therefore be abandoned. Always put yourself in others’ place and consider how you would feel; they are human beings just like you, and they share your capacity for feeling. This is the essence of decency, in harmony with the karmic law of what to do and what to avoid.

Keep Self-Discipline When You Are Young

**When the flower of youth is in bloom,
Do not chase every desire that arises in your mind.
When your hair has turned white with age,
You will enjoy happiness with your own mind as witness.**

When you are young and full of vigor, like a flower in full blossom, do not act on every impulse. In youth, the psychophysical system—channels, winds, and essences—is highly active, and all kinds of desires arise again and again. It is wise to avoid rash, imprudent action; otherwise you are likely to make mistakes you will later regret.

It is not surprising that young people are more prone to impulsive decisions and misdeeds. But if they train their minds and rein in unconsidered thoughts, then in old age they will enjoy genuine happiness and a quiet satisfaction with themselves. Their own minds will testify: “When I was young, in my prime and even when I held status, I did not abandon myself to a life of indulgence. Thanks to self-discipline, I made no grave mistakes.”

Not long ago, I attended a meeting with several officials. One of them said to me, “I hope you won’t be too ambitious. From now on, please don’t try to expand construction or the population at Larung Gar. For our part, at our age, we will not take any drastic actions against your monastics.” He implied that, although they had some power, they did not want to do anything they would later regret. His words reflect the reality of many officials. When in office, some show little concern for others and take many inconsiderate actions. Later, as they age and step down, they begin to reflect on their lives and feel remorse for their misdeeds.

The same is true of many elderly people. I have heard older Tibetans confess with regret: “When I was young, I killed animals and did many harmful things. I deeply regret it. I was foolish—I didn’t care about others and had no fear of wrongdoing. Now, as death approaches, I cannot help feeling afraid.”

If you are careful in every respect when you are young, you will not end up in regret. In this, monks and nuns often lead the way. Some enter monastic life in childhood. Their bodies and minds remain relatively pure, untainted by harmful social habits. In old age, they feel no regret but rather contentment. Khenpo Lekshe of Domang Monastery, whom I greatly admire, exemplified this path. He was ordained young and kept himself within the bounds

of discipline all his life. He passed away peacefully last year—a testament to his high accomplishment.

By contrast, some people indulge in pleasure when young and only later realize their errors and begin to discipline themselves. Naturally, as people age, they adjust their lifestyles in the face of mortality; this is common. But some monastics are fortunate to be ordained early and maintain a pure life from start to finish. As they grow old, they enjoy the happiness of a meaningful life, with nothing to regret.

Everyone should reflect on how to conduct themselves appropriately for their age and station. This is especially important for those close to high officials or great masters: they must often remind themselves of impermanence, life's unchanging law. When you hold a position, you may bask in the reflected glory of your superior or guru and grow proud. If you behave improperly or offend others, people may refrain from pointing it out directly, but in private they will likely criticize you. Once you step down, a sorry end may await.

Many officials, while in office, enjoy the respect and support of many people. They think highly of themselves and do whatever they want—but many end in misery. I knew a governor whose circle committed countless wrongs in pursuit of power and wealth.

Suddenly he lost his position and authority. Unable to face the consequences, he took his own life. After his death, no one would even drive his body to its destination, no matter how much they were offered.

Therefore, when you are bathed in the glory of success and fame, do not become conceited; the future is uncertain. This is why Lama Mumtso reminds us that if, in youth, we often do disgraceful deeds, we will be overwhelmed with remorse later in life, and that feeling will only grow with age. Conversely, if we learn self-restraint when we are young, we will be enveloped by happiness as we grow old.

A person's reputation rests on others' words. There is a popular Tibetan saying: "What a person is like is heard from the mouths of others." It is thought-provoking. Praising yourself carries no weight; others will form their own judgments, and time will reveal your true character. Another saying goes: "Whether a man is a warrior is known on the battlefield; whether a woman is virtuous is known from the comments of her husband's family." It is unconvincing for a father to boast that his son is a hero; the son's courage will show itself in battle. It is likewise feeble for a mother to praise her daughter; her goodness is recognized when commended by her husband's family. In the same way, it is futile to proclaim your own virtue; those around you will assess you by how you behave. In

general, others' judgments are fairly consistent—whether you are good, bad, or somewhere in between. Is this teaching not truly inspiring for living an authentic life?

Adapt to Others' Needs

**Just as a dense forest contains trees of every description,
The world is filled with people of varied dispositions.
If you cannot adapt to others' needs,
Thorns will obstruct your life's path.**

In a dense forest, trees vary in type and shape—some bent, others tall and straight. So it is with human beings: people differ in temperament and character. Some are kind, some harsh, and still others eccentric. Despite this diversity, the Mahayana spirit calls us to adapt ourselves to others' needs. If you are constantly at cross-purposes with people, your path will be full of obstacles.

Being accommodating does not mean indulging unwholesome deeds born of negative motivations. For example, if someone is consumed by desire, you should not debase yourself by mirroring that desire; nor does it mean joining someone's quarrels simply because they are enraged. Rather, recognizing that people have varied temperaments and inclinations, if you wish to help them

you should avoid needlessly offending them and engage with them in ways they can accept.

For instance, as I've noted before, some people enjoy eating meat, drinking, or smoking. When you keep them company, it is often unskillful to denounce these habits head-on. First try to understand their dispositions and afflictions, then gently inspire them toward a healthier, more wholesome life. If you lack consideration and keep upsetting people one after another, you will end up regarded as disagreeable; others will frown and shy away whenever they see you. Such an outcome leaves you helpless.

Some young people, however, take acting on every whim and disregarding others' feelings as a sign of uniqueness. When others disapprove, they take it as proof of how special they are. This is misguided. From a Buddhist perspective, unless you have a specific compassionate purpose, there is no need to disturb others. Otherwise, your life will be filled with thorns, and you will find it hard to take even a single step forward. This is practical, down-to-earth advice: we inevitably live among others, and if you are widely disliked, progress in both spiritual practice and daily life becomes difficult. Therefore, learn to adapt to others' preferences and to accommodate their reasonable wishes.

This teaching is heartfelt advice distilled from Lama Mumtso's life experience. Some may think that because Lama Mumtso is not very talkative, she has little to share. But speaking little does not mean lacking in instruction. Reflect deeply on this teaching and you will recognize its value. Internalizing this teaching, you will grasp a fundamental principle of human relations—one that helps you be welcomed wherever you go.

Of course, there are a few narrow-minded people who seem displeased with everything and everyone; even trifles trigger their grievances. Such people are the minority. For Mahayana practitioners, it is always necessary to adjust oneself to others' likes and needs. This ability is especially indispensable if you aspire to spread the dharma widely. To promote Buddhism, first understand people's inclinations; do not offend them carelessly through lack of careful observation. Everyone has a distinct character and no one can please all. Nevertheless, dismissing whatever you dislike as illogical is itself unreasonable. Many teachings in this text point to our hidden faults; I hope you will stay open and explore their profound meaning.

Maintaining Proper Boundaries

There is a proper limit to using fire for warmth.

Likewise, do not be too close to a friend.

There is a proper limit to using moxibustion to heal.

Likewise, do not be too cruel to an enemy.

When you warm yourself by a fire, you must keep the right distance: too far and you stay cold; too near and you get burned. By the same logic, when keeping company with a friend, avoid over-closeness. People sometimes joke that two friends are “joined at the hip.” But overfamiliarity breeds friction, and conflict soon follows. As Venerable Longchenpa advises in *Thirty Words of Heart Advice*:

Befriend all with neither intimacy nor hostility;

Keep your independence—this is my heart advice.

Similarly, with moxibustion, getting too close burns you rather than cures you. In the same way, when dealing with enemies, avoid excessive cruelty. Some bully those who appear weak, but even the meek will bite when cornered. However mild someone may seem, if you oppress them too much, they will eventually fight

back. In short, observe proper measure—be neither overly attached to friends nor ruthlessly harsh to enemies. As the Zhuangzi says, “The friendship of the virtuous is light as water yet enduring; the friendship of the unvirtuous is sweet as wine yet easily broken.”

Maintaining appropriate distance does not mean withholding care. Kindness and friendliness toward all are praiseworthy. Among our community there are many volunteers—men and women—who treat everyone warmly and complete their tasks flawlessly. Wherever they serve, people speak well of them. I have never heard a negative remark about them. They are self-disciplined, attentive to their conduct, and considerate of others. Unless someone is intent on fault-finding, there is little to criticize. They are regarded as good by all, and this impression only deepens through collaboration. Such people truly deserve admiration.

Therefore, we should refine ourselves and become decent human beings. His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche offered many profound teachings on this theme. For further study and contemplation, works such as *The Treatise on the Modes of Being*, *The Just King: The Tibetan Buddhist Classic on Leading an Ethical Life*, and *Ordinary Wisdom: Sakya Pandita’s Treasury of Good Advice* are all worth reading.

Care for All Those Connected to You

**Those connected to you—parents, relatives,
Dogs at your door, cattle in your yard—
Have become one family through the force of karma.
Be kind and care for them all. This is the way.**

Those closest to you—your parents, relatives, and even the animals in your household—are joined to you by karmic bonds from past lives. Extend loving care and compassion to them all. Today, many people keep pets and treat them as family, which is commendable. However, some go to an extreme, lavishing attention on pets while neglecting their own parents or children. I have heard that, in some Western countries, people may keep many pets and care for them well, yet leave aging parents in nursing homes with too little attention. This is a reversal of priorities.

No one becomes a member of your family without cause; the determining force is karmic connection from the past. His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche often emphasized that people become family members through karmic links. He taught: “Sometimes these links are wholesome, sometimes adverse. Whatever the case, recognize that past-life bonds connect you with your relatives

and close ones. There is no reason not to show love and care for everyone around you, animals included.”

A true story is recorded in *The Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Dharma*. During China’s Jin dynasty, there lived a wealthy man named Du Yuan who dearly loved his son, Tian Bao. At the age of ten, the boy died of a sudden illness. Some months later, a sow in the household farrowed five piglets. Soon after, when an official visited the district, Du Yuan decided to slaughter the fattest piglet as an offering. Just as his servants seized it, a bhikshu appeared and said, “This is your son. How can you have forgotten him when only a hundred days have passed since his death?” Having spoken, the bhikshu departed; as Du Yuan looked out, he saw the monk rise into the sky and disappear.

Summary: Living by the Human Code

These teachings are much needed by worldly people.

When keeping company with friends, foes, or those in-between,

If they do not know the proper code of conduct,

They will be unhappy themselves and make others suffer.

The teachings above are especially relevant to ordinary life. In brief, when you interact with those close to you, those opposed to you,

and everyone in between, if you do not know how to be a decent person and act accordingly, you will end up frustrated and will unsettle others as well.

These verses set out a worldly code of conduct. After this teaching, when the oral-presentation group begins its discussion and presentations, I hope you will gain a thorough understanding of what you have learned today. Worldly ethics form the foundation of spiritual practice. If you understand them and apply them in daily life, you will progress readily on the path; without them, there is no basis for spiritual accomplishment.

My wish is for all of you to live happily, free from troubling moods. The way to happiness is to live by the code of decency. If you truly understand the verses above, you can bring happiness to yourself and others while advancing in your practice and developing the capacity to benefit sentient beings.

Through this teaching, I hope you recognize the precious value of this text. People often praise the instructions of Dakini Yeshe Tso-gyal—indeed, they are marvelous and beneficial. Likewise, please recognize the excellence of Dakini Mumtso’s instructions—perhaps even more noteworthy for us today. As a contemporary female master who has bestowed so many empowerments and instructions, she

shares a particularly close dharma connection with us. Teachings from such a great guru of our time—even a single sentence—can transform our minds and change our lives.

The wise may experience thorough transformation from just one word of inspiration, whereas the foolish may make no progress even after hearing abundant teachings hundreds of times. I sincerely hope each of you will reflect deeply on today's teaching, take it to heart, and cultivate both a sense of propriety and the skillful means to get along well with all.

LECTURE 2

MAY 28, 2024

DILIGENCE, HEALTH, AND MANAGEMENT

Cherish Your Time

First, I'd like to address several important matters. We're now well into 2024, with spring already behind us. This summer will be unusually long, with an intercalary sixth month in the Tibetan calendar. Yet time flies. I hope each of you has a clear plan for your dharma study and practice. It is essential that we take responsibility for our own lives. In the Larung valley, everyone should either engage in dharma study and practice or serve the sangha community. It makes little sense to remain here while doing neither. If you volunteer to serve the sangha, please also set aside time for your studies.

It is not easy for any of you to stay here; everyone faces difficulties of one kind or another. So while you are here, cherish your time and devote yourself to study, practice, and service to the sangha. Is that not the very purpose of living here? If you do not engage

in virtuous activities, it is meaningless to idle away your time on this high plateau. Of course, visitors who wish to circumambulate the Mandala and enjoy the scenery are welcome to stay briefly—a few days or a couple of weeks should be enough.

Yesterday I met with the khenpos and khenmos to discuss the management of resident practitioners at Larung Gar. I asked the monastic disciplinarians to look into each person's situation—their study, practice, and volunteer work. If someone remains here without engaging in any of these, it is hard to understand why they have come. Were they sent with ulterior motives? Are they here for worldly aims—seeking personal benefit or reputation under the academy's name? Or are they struggling with mental health challenges that make self-regulation difficult? Whatever the case, this is a sacred Buddhist university, not a nursery, a nursing home, or a shelter for all manner of problems. Therefore, we must set specific requirements regarding age and background for enrollment as formal students of Larung Gar.

For current students, after you graduate, I encourage you to go elsewhere to spread the dharma and continue your practice. This is necessary for your own growth and also essential for the academy's vitality. Graduation requirements have not yet been finalized, but they will be implemented sooner or later, and they will apply to

both Han Chinese and Tibetan monastics. If everyone insists on staying, the academy will be burdened by many pressures and become like a stagnant pool, leaving no opportunity for new people to enter. Therefore, while you're here, the best course is to gain a solid Buddhist education to support your future dharma activities, and upon graduation, be ready for your next destination. Please prepare with this in mind.

Now that the new spring semester has begun, I urge all students to commit themselves to study and practice; those not engaged in any dharma-related undertaking should relocate. This also applies to those who have lived here for many years and prefer to meditate in their cabins. At the very least, attend one teaching by a khenpo or khenmo each day. Regular teachings support your practice. If you sit in blank dullness, without properly directing your mind to the dharma, you will not progress—you may even lose the experiences you have already gained.

Tibetan Medicines Based on Dorje Dechen Lingpa's Terma

The second thing is about the Tibetan medicines, which are produced in my hometown hospital by following the formulas recorded in Dorje Dechen Lingpa's terma. A few days ago, I purchased a

large quantity, and you can buy them in our male or female hospital. They are the same products that many of you have bought last year. I am not advertising here to increase sales or to make profit. They will be sold at the cost price and all the money will be given back to the producer. I am thinking that some people here are in poor health and these medicines, all-natural and of good quality, will do good to you. That is why I suggest you take a try.

A few years ago, I established a small hospital and recruited experienced lamas and practitioners, along with pharmacists and physicians, to manufacture traditional Tibetan medicines. We use the complete set of formulas from Dorje Dechen Lingpa's terma. As I have mentioned before, among the various termas are those that teach medicine—methods and ingredients for curing different diseases. Production began last year. Broadly speaking, the formulas include:

- Medicines for conditions of the upper body (head and neck, if I recall correctly)
- Medicines for conditions of the middle body (kidneys, liver, gallbladder, stomach, and other organs)
- Medicines for conditions of the lower body (various pains below the waist)

- Medicines for general bodily pain
- Medicines for gynecological conditions

There is a verse in the *terma* describing these functions, though I cannot fully recall it now. These are general-purpose formulas, unlike many Western medicines that target a single disease.

Traditionally, Tibetan medicines are named by their main ingredient plus the total number of ingredients, which can be obscure in Chinese translation. Therefore, I suggest giving each medicine a straightforward Chinese name indicating its function—for example, “Medicine for the Upper Body.”

As quantities are limited, these medicines are currently reserved for practitioners at Larung Gar. Please do not buy large amounts to distribute outside the valley. If you are not ill, save your money. Even if you have symptoms, buy a small amount to try first; if it proves effective, then purchase more.

I have asked the hospital staff to collect as many herbs as possible each year and increase production, so we can help more patients in Han and Tibetan regions. In practice, this is difficult: many herbs are seasonal and rare, and few people possess the skills to locate and collect them. Annual output is therefore small, and I can only ask the hospital to reserve some for Larung Gar practitioners.

Because the Tibetan and Chinese names can be ambiguous, I want to flag that one of the formulas contains anesthetic ingredients and is sedating. On one occasion, our hospital director caught a cold and inadvertently took an excessive dose; he slept deeply into the next day, causing much concern. I also tried this herb in my youth when it could be found in the mountains. The medicine is mildly narcotic—you may feel drowsy, as if tipsy. This is a normal effect; do not be alarmed.

The Importance of Cooperation

Finally, a word about cooperating with the management team. In the Han college, different departments handle finance, curriculum planning, discipline, the organization of dharma assemblies, and more. To keep the college functioning properly, we need layered management, and each person has clear duties in their role. I hope all khenpos and khenmos will work together harmoniously with genuine mutual respect. In particular, when a specific khenpo or khenmo serves as the overall administrator, all other khenpos and khenmos should respect their authority and support their decisions—even as each manages their own team.

There is a Tibetan saying: “If a log supports a log, together they become pillar and beam; if a person supports a person, together they become king and minister.” In reality, status has no inherent existence; identities and ranks are merely designated constructs. Under certain conditions, someone must take on the role of leader or manager. When that happens, the rest of us should accept that designation and show respect. At the same time, it is unwise for those elected to set themselves above others and expect everyone to be at their beck and call. According to the philosophy of servant leadership, a leader is first and foremost a servant—responsible for serving the team and the organization ahead of personal goals. If each manager embraces this spirit while others respect them and support their decisions, the whole group will function well and remain in good order.

It is not easy to run a large dharma institution. I know dharma friends who left Larung Gar, visited many centers and monasteries elsewhere, and still wished to return. Some planned to revive an old temple or establish a new one in Han regions to spread the dharma; once they began, they discovered it was not so simple—there were many affairs to manage and challenges to face. Then they realized how comfortable life at Larung Gar can be, where everything is provided. At Larung Gar, great masters attend to every aspect of

life—accommodations, food, and other needs. To those lacking ambition who merely drift through each class, this can seem like paradise. But you cannot remain here forever under your gurus' wings. You must prepare in every respect and equip yourself for whatever the future brings. This is crucial.

READ LAMA MUMTSO'S BIOGRAPHY

Before we begin the teaching, I have a request for all of you. I believe everyone has received a copy of Lama Mumtso's biography, *White Lotus*. The Chinese edition was distributed free to every student. If you missed it, please check with the bookstore, though I'm uncertain if any remain. Regardless, now that you have the book, I hope you will read it at least once this year. The Dharma Teaching Department may set a reasonable deadline.

A couple of years ago, we launched an extracurricular reading program, assigning a required book at the start of each semester. You have already completed *The Autobiography of Sera Khandro*, *Lady of the Lotus-Born: The Life and Enlightenment of Yeshe Tsogyal*, and others. Reading the lives of great masters provides abundant inspiration for your own practice.

I spent over two months translating Lama Mumtso's biography into Chinese for your benefit, so there is no reason not to read it. Yesterday I attended the Tibetan Sangha's semester award ceremony and was seated next to Tulku Tendzin Gyatso. He leaned over and said, "I heard you finished the translation. So quickly! Truly wonderful!" I must admit I am efficient. While working on this translation, I was also occupied with other projects, and I did my best to complete it promptly. On your part, please show your appreciation by reading the book at least once—either on your own or in a group study organized by the khenpo or khenmo of your class. It will benefit your practice.

Cultivating Faith in Living Masters

It is important to cultivate faith in great masters while they are still alive and among us. If you do not kindle pure faith in your guru and dharma friends while they are with you, it will be even harder to recognize their virtues and feel devotion once they leave or pass away. Now that Lama Mumtso's biography is in your hands, cherish the opportunity to gain a clear understanding of her merits and qualities.

To many, masters may seem little different from ordinary people—they eat, sleep, and fall ill. Yet if you pay attention, you will notice the noble qualities and meritorious character they naturally display. Consider how long it takes you to complete 400,000 recitations of the Vajrasattva mantra—then you’ll appreciate how extraordinary Lama Mumtso is, having already completed several hundred million recitations.

The biography also notes repeatedly that she never lost her temper or became angry with anyone. You might think that is unremarkable, but reflect on your own behavior. How often do you flare up? Can you refrain from anger even for a month? Last year we held a forbearance practice, asking everyone to avoid anger for 100 days. In the end, most did not succeed; in the worst cases, some realized they had lost their temper nearly a hundred times. Maintaining equanimity is not as easy as it sounds.

Some time ago I visited relatives. One cousin said his guru teaches compassion and forbearance meditation every day, and he has been following those instructions. When asked how his practice was going, he replied proudly, “I meditate every day. I feel good about my practice.” His wife interjected, “He may meditate every day, but he’s getting even more bad-tempered. I don’t know what he’s meditating on—it seems like he’s training in anger.”

For certain practitioners, paradoxically, the longer they practice, the more easily they lose their temper. By contrast, Lama Mumtso has never been seen to lose control of her temper before attendants or others. This is written in her biography; it is not my subjective praise. Not getting angry may sound simple, but when we reflect on how we treat those around us—superiors, subordinates, and peers—we find that even a hundred days—a month, or even a single day—of unbroken patience is hard to achieve, let alone a lifetime.

An Extraordinary Life from Ordinary Beginnings

As I mentioned in the last lecture, although Lama Mumtso appears outwardly no different from an ordinary female practitioner—she faced many challenges like others of her generation—yet her achievements are extraordinary. As a child she herded sheep; later, at a very young age, she took ordination as a nun. In the preface to the biography, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro notes that when he arrived at Larung Gar, Lama Mumtso was already a nun, not yet twenty. I came in 1985, about a year after Khenpo. At that time, Lama Mumtso's mother—His Holiness's sister, Ani Medron—was still a layperson. My point is that while her life trajectory was similar to that of many Tibetan nuns, her inner qualities and accomplishments distinguish her as truly exceptional.

Setting aside transcendent experiences—such as visions of buddhas and bodhisattvas—even her daily conduct reveals her noble character. As mentioned, losing one’s temper is natural for most people—but not for Lama Mumtso. When I first read the section describing her exceptional gentleness, I was astonished and somewhat skeptical. It says she never once criticized anyone with a show of displeasure. Was that an exaggeration, perhaps overpraise from close attendants?

Yet upon reflection, having spent so much time with her, I must admit I have never seen her lose her temper or show impatience toward others. When we accompanied His Holiness on travels, she never treated me or those around her impatiently. Traveling together often breeds disagreements. Many of you live alone and are mostly harmonious with others, yet on pilgrimage you may find your own stubbornness easily causes conflict; some even return alone and stop speaking to their companions. I have indeed heard of such incidents among Tibetans traveling to Lhasa.

Thus, even in ordinary aspects of daily life, Lama Mumtso displays exceptionally admirable qualities. While it may be difficult to emulate her great feats—such as bestowing empowerments—you can strive to emulate her gentle disposition and noble character. This is especially instructive for women, for whom she sets a powerful

example. But it does not mean male masters and practitioners have nothing to learn from her. On the contrary, her biography can prompt a deeper examination of one's own practice.

For instance, some khenpos have cultivated compassion for many years—can you relate to others so skillfully that no one ever feels displeased with you? When I reflect on this, I feel somewhat ashamed. I often express dissatisfaction toward colleagues or criticize monastics' classroom performance, sometimes speaking emotionally in public or private. By comparison, Lama Mumtso has taught countless Tibetan nuns and many others. I have attended many of her teachings, and she has always remained calm and peaceful, with no abrupt shifts of mood.

In modern terms, she has excellent emotional self-regulation—a quality much discussed in contemporary Western thought. But to be frank, only Buddhism offers the most skillful methods and trainings to master one's emotions. In short, reading Lama Mumtso's biography will greatly benefit your practice.

ABANDON NON-VIRTUE

Now, let us continue with *Words to Devout Laymen and Laywomen*. This text follows the traditional structure: good in the beginning,

good in the middle, and good in the end. The middle part itself has three sections: 1) worldly ethics, 2) spiritual practice, and 3) the conclusion. In the last lecture we completed worldly ethics. We now turn to spiritual practice, which has two components: abandoning non-virtue and cultivating virtue. The first is explained in two ways: (1) committing misdeeds leads to suffering, and (2) forsaking misdeeds leads to happiness.

Committing Misdeeds Leads to Suffering

There are many negative actions to forsake.

Those who harm the lives of weak and feeble animals,

Who steal, break vows, and scold their parents,

**Will experience ripening effects not only in future lives but also
in this one.**

There are countless negative actions to avoid. In brief, be mindful and vigilant to refrain from all misdeeds—both those unwholesome by nature and those proscribed by the Buddha. Among them, several are especially disgraceful and must be shunned.

First and foremost, do not harm weak and defenseless animals. Here “animals” does not refer only to small creatures; relative to human beings—who wield weapons and possess cunning methods of

hunting—all animals are vulnerable and unable to escape, whether tiger, elephant, or leopard. To exploit our advantage and slaughter them is unfair and unworthy.

A decent person also refrains from stealing or robbing, breaking vows, and mistreating parents. Such actions bring severe retribution, causing immense suffering in future lives. Even in this life they lead to pain and misfortune. We often hear of those who abuse their parents or kill animals only to end up in wretched circumstances. The consequences of such misconduct are dire.

When I was a child, religion was strictly forbidden and many monasteries in my hometown were destroyed, including Drango Gompa. Atop its main hall stood the eight-spoked dharma wheel and a pair of deer—typical monastic ornaments. When the demolition began, these could not be brought down. One man devised a plan: he tied a stout rope around a deer's head and had everyone pull together. They succeeded, and everyone applauded his "cleverness." A few days later, while he was outside—likely herding yaks—he was shot dead by a hunter who later said, "I saw a deer in the brush and shot. I truly didn't see a person—only a deer." The retribution for grave misdeeds can be swift.

The *Sutra of Miscellaneous Jewels* records this story: In a certain village lived an elderly woman whose son was unfilial. Once, in extreme anger, the son struck his mother with his hand. Later that day he encountered a band of robbers who cut off one of his arms. This is the immediate result of mistreating one's mother. Stories like these, illustrating the consequences of failing one's parents, abound.

Therefore, do your utmost to refrain from all negative actions. If you commit a misdeed unintentionally, its results are less severe; but if you deliberately engage in serious wrongdoing—such as mistreating your parents or showing disrespect to the Three Jewels, your guru, or dharma friends—terrible suffering awaits. For countless lives you may be trapped in the lower realms, experiencing endless suffering. Even in this life grave misfortunes may befall you soon or in later years.

During the Cultural Revolution, many disregarded the karmic law and deliberately destroyed temples, statues, and stupas while speaking ill of Buddhist teachings. Many subsequently met with disaster. The immediate consequences of such severe negativity are frightful. Each of us has likely committed wrongs, whether knowingly or not. As we noted last time, those who indulge in many negative deeds will experience regret in old age, while those who refrain from unethical behavior from youth will enjoy happiness

and ease when their hair turns gray. So avoid misdeeds—and if you have done them, purify them through confession.

Monastics are generally careful in conduct and unlikely to commit the gravest actions. Still, many Han Chinese monks and nuns here did not begin studying Buddhism from youth. Some entered monastic life after marriage; others discovered Buddhism in middle age. I sometimes wonder whether this conviction in karma has truly taken root in your hearts. Though you may claim faith in causality, from various observations, your faith may be unsteady. This is common among modern Buddhists, lay and monastic alike.

Please reflect deeply: “Though I have taken refuge in the Three Jewels, taken lay practitioner vows, or received ordination and donned the monastic robes inherited from the Buddha, do I truly believe—without hesitation—that good is rewarded with good and evil with evil?” Without such certainty, realizing the Great Perfection or the Great Seal is certainly impossible.

Firm conviction in karma is the foundation for any higher attainment. That is why, in Dzogchen, one trains first in the four thoughts that turn the mind from samsara before undertaking the five inner preliminaries. You must contemplate step-by-step: the rarity of

obtaining human life with freedoms and advantages, the impermanence of life, the infallibility of karmic law, and the defects of samsara. Without understanding the function of karma, you cannot fully entrust yourself to the Three Jewels, nor can you arouse bodhicitta—the resolve to attain buddhahood for the sake of all beings.

Some are fortunate to have been guided to Buddhism from childhood or to have been ordained while His Holiness was still alive. Having lived at Larung Gar for so long, they have had little opportunity to do grave harm. If they maintain a pure monastic life from start to finish, never deviating into wrong ways, they are truly admirable, blessed with merit surpassing most people. Others once committed many wrongs but later reformed and became exemplary practitioners; this too is admirable. Yet I worry that if unfortunately exposed to a corrupt environment, they might revert to old patterns and violate karmic law recklessly. That would be unimaginably tragic.

To prevent this, continually pray to the Three Jewels, and especially to Padmasambhava, vowing: “Even if in this life I gain no attainment, at the very least may I never be seized by wrong views. Please bless

me!” For if you fall into wrong views—denying karma and the afterlife—you will plunge into misdeeds without restraint. Therefore, always pray to Guru Rinpoche and refrain from wrongdoing.

Forsaking Misdeeds Leads to Happiness

When you have moderate food and possessions

That are needed by people of your kind,

**Do not accumulate negative karma but follow the law of cause
and effect.**

Do this and you will be happy in this and all future lives.

All people are of the same kind—human beings on planet Earth, not animals or aliens. It’s sufficient to have moderate food and possessions. Excessive wealth becomes a source of suffering, and at life’s end, possessions prove useless. Conversely, extreme poverty—lacking food or warm clothing—certainly causes distress. A life of moderate financial well-being suits us best. When you can comfortably cover basic expenses without financial stress—perhaps reaching middle-class level or running a small enterprise—be perfectly content. Don’t let desire swell. Avoid incurring negative

karma in pursuit of more wealth; instead, conduct yourself according to karmic law. Do this, and you will enjoy happiness in both present and future lifetimes.

It is important to do good and accumulate merit. Some doubt this, saying they have acted virtuously yet seen no results. But that is not how karma works. As taught in the *Treatise on the Establishment of Truth*:

*If you practice virtue but meet suffering,
It is because the virtue has not yet ripened.
When the virtue comes to maturity,
You will witness your experience of happiness.*

*If you do bad but meet happiness,
It is because the evil has not yet ripened.
When the evil comes to maturity,
You will witness your experience of suffering.*

If you do good and still face misfortune, it does not invalidate karma. The time for the seed to ripen has not yet arrived. Once it matures, happiness will follow. Conversely, some commit all manner of evil yet live extravagantly. This is not because the law of

karma has failed; rather, their negative seeds have not yet ripened. When they do, suffering will ensue.

Please keep this stanza in mind. Nowadays people may say, “That person has taken refuge and walks the Buddhist path—why is he gravely ill? That other fellow is so sinful and yet he lives well. Where is karma?” But karma never promises instantaneous results. Every action requires time to bear fruit. When good people suffer and bad people prosper, it simply means their deeds have not yet ripened; when they do, each will meet the results they have sown.

Therefore, it is sensible to live moderately and avoid wrongdoing. While this is our goal, people involuntarily engage in negative acts periodically, obscured by ignorance and compelled by negative karma from previous lives. Nevertheless, whenever you commit a misdeed, confess it immediately and vow never to repeat it.

CULTIVATE FAITH AND COMPASSION

Now, the second part—practicing virtue—divides into two sections: cultivating faith and compassion, and training in the path of liberation. The first section consists of a concise summary followed by extensive explanation. Let’s begin with the summary.

Concise Summary

**Although there are many ways to practice virtue,
The essence of the noble dharma is faith and compassion.**

The Buddha taught innumerable methods of virtuous practice—the eighty-four thousand dharma doors. All of them can be distilled into two core practices: cultivating faith and cultivating compassion. These are the most crucial elements of the path. The following verses offer an extensive explanation of these two.

Cultivate Faith

**If your faith is firm, steadfast, and unshakable,
You can obtain the sacred dharma free of error.
If you pray to one deity with sincere devotion,
And recite a considerable number of his mantra
With steadfast faith, neither too tense nor too relaxed,
You will definitely be protected when obstacles arise.**

Faith is the key to dharma practice. *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* says, “With faith, one can enter the ocean of Buddhadharma; with wisdom, one can cross over it.” The text also likens faith to hands, “When a person comes upon a mountain of treasure,

without hands he gains nothing.” Imagine arriving at a mountain filled with hidden treasures. With diligent hands, you can unearth bountiful riches. Without arms, you remain empty-handed. Likewise, faith allows you to discover and possess the precious treasures of the dharma; without faith, you neither recognize its value nor receive its benefits. With steadfast, unshakable, irreversible faith, you will unmistakably obtain the sacred dharma. The teachings of our compassionate Buddha can only be acquired through faith.

If you have faith in your guru, you will draw great benefit from the guru’s instructions. If you have faith in a scripture—say, the *Lotus Sutra*—you will be inspired by its words. If you have faith in a tantric text, it will prove precious to you. This is why *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* opens the chapter on taking refuge by presenting the three kinds of faith and stating: “Just as taking refuge opens the gateway to all teachings and practices, it is faith that opens the gateway to taking refuge.” In Longchenpa’s *Wish-Fulfilling Treasury*, an entire chapter is devoted to faith—its nature, its benefits, the faults of lacking it, how to cultivate it, and what undermines it. Never underestimate faith; unwavering faith grants access to the sublime dharma.

While faith provides opportunity to acquire dharma, faith alone isn’t sufficient. You must engage in actual practice. Here Lama

Mumtso instructs us to pray to a deity with sincere devotion and recite that deity's mantra wholeheartedly. The deity may be Manjushri, Padmasambhava, Amitabha, or another noble being. Devote yourself to that mantra—one million, ten million, even one hundred million recitations—and keep count.

Mantra recitation is an accessible practice. When chanting, remember that each mantra encapsulates the power of all others. Last year, we studied Patrul Rinpoche's *The Practice of View, Meditation, and Action: A Discourse Virtuous in the Beginning, Middle, and End*. I recall there is a verse from this text:

One deity, Chenrezig, embodies all buddhas;

One mantra, the six syllables, embodies all mantras;

One dharma, bodhicitta, embodies all development and completion practices.

Knowing the one that liberates all, recite the six-syllable mantra.

Avalokiteshvara embodies all buddhas; the mani mantra “om mani padme hum” is the essence of all mantras; and bodhicitta encompasses all development and completion stage practices. Knowing this one practice that liberates all, rely on Avalokiteshvara as your principal deity and recite the six syllable mantra. Then all dharmas will be realized and all aims accomplished.

When I taught this text, many felt inspired to chant the mani mantra. Personally, each time I teach, I feel fervent devotion and eagerness to practice—yet after a while, enthusiasm can fade. My point is, whichever practice you trust, stay with it. If you feel devotion to Avalokiteshvara, accumulate as many mani recitations as you can. If you prefer Manjushri or Padmasambhava, persevere with their mantras. Whatever mantra you recite, regard it as embodying all mantras; with this understanding, you receive the blessing of them all.

It is vital to rely on one deity with sincere devotion, praying and reciting the mantra wholeheartedly over extended period. Accumulate a substantial number—one hundred million, ten million, one million, or at least tens of thousands. Some practitioners here have completed hundreds of millions of recitations; this is truly praiseworthy.

Do not practice in a way that is too tight or too loose. I suggest not starting out in an overly strenuous way. Some begin with great zeal—barely resting by day or sleeping by night—only to burn out. So this isn't sustainable long-term. Whether doing retreat or daily practice, it is better to maintain a relaxed steadiness, without exhaustion.

Some masters may argue: if you can stare at a laptop or phone for hours without eating or resting, why not rouse yourself to tireless diligence for permanent happiness? Their point has merit, yet for many, an ascetic approach quickly exhausts motivation, and soon they abandon all practice. A moderate, sustainable discipline—praying with steadfast faith, neither too tight nor too slack—is sensible. Practiced in this way, at critical moments—facing death, a sudden accident, or adversity—the deity’s blessing will manifest without fail, and you will be protected.

This verse teaches us to combine faith with practice. Faith without practice is fruitless; practice without sincere faith bears little result. Worse still, without faith one may not even feel inclined to pray or recite. Faith is the prerequisite for dharma practice.

Cultivate Compassion

This topic consists of three parts: the reason for cultivating compassion, its benefits, and the method. The following verse explains why we need to train in compassion.

Reason for Cultivating Compassion

**Although there are many sentient beings in this world,
They equally reject even a speck of suffering,
And equally wish for even a pinpoint of happiness.
Therefore, cultivate loving kindness and compassion for all.**

We must cultivate loving kindness—the wish that beings have happiness and its causes—and compassion—the wish that beings be free from suffering and its causes. The focus here is developing compassion and understanding why. All beings are alike in not wanting even the tiniest suffering and in seeking even the slightest happiness. This applies not only to humans but to all animals across the world. As *The Way of the Bodhisattva* says,

*In joy and sorrow all are equal;
Thus be the guardian of all, as of yourself.*

All living beings equally avoid suffering and seek happiness. Therefore, we should protect every being as we protect ourselves. All beings respond the same to suffering and happiness. This universal principle grounds our obligation to show compassion to people of all races, colors, and creeds, and to all animals. Just as you fear pain,

so do others; just as you seek happiness, so do they. Therefore, to destroy others' happiness or harm them is surely unacceptable.

Shantideva expounds this in detail in *The Way of the Bodhisattva* and *Compendium of Training*. It is crucial to understand the logic of compassion practice. Many religions praise compassion, yet some limit mercy to humans alone—treating animals cruelly or even sacrificing them to their gods. This is not true compassion.

Benefit of Cultivating Compassion

**If you wish for even one being to be free of suffering,
And generate uncontrived compassion just once,
Your negative karma from many eons will be purified,
And the merit will surpass that of making hundreds of offerings
and donations.**

If, from the depths of your heart, you genuinely long for even one being to be free of suffering, that single, uncontrived moment of compassion purifies negative karma accumulated over many eons. The merit generated far exceeds that of making offerings to buddhas and bodhisattvas or giving alms to the poor hundreds of times. The latter's rewards cannot compare to one thought of

compassion. Compassion is such a supreme practice for purifying negativities and accumulating merit.

“Uncontrived” means compassion arising naturally from the heart. If, seeing your mother or father, a friend or enemy, or a yak, sheep, or dog in pain, you cannot help but cry for them, “If only they could be freed from suffering!”—that is genuine compassion. Such a thought purifies vast negativity and amasses immense merit. Therefore, practicing compassion in daily life holds tremendous significance. The *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* says:

*If you generate compassion
For all sentient beings,
You join the family of noble beings
And attain immeasurable merit.*

When compassion for all beings arises, you are no longer ordinary; you become a noble one, a bodhisattva endowed with inexhaustible merit.

Some often ask, “I don’t know how to practice—what can I do?” This need not be a problem. If you do not know how to meditate, practice compassion. It is simple, yet its reward is inconceivable. I once said I wished to stay in Africa for a year or two—why?

Because it is an environment that naturally evokes compassion. Even without formal meditation, seeing those who suffer from poverty, starvation, and illness fills the heart with compassion. The hardship is so stark one might wonder whether the lower realms have appeared in the human world.

Recently, media reports from Gaza have shown that, due to Israel's bombardment and siege, many children have lost their homes, with no safe haven or food. Watching such images is heartbreaking. Elsewhere, too, countless people suffer from illness and destitution, lacking even the basics to sustain life. Faced with such suffering, compassion naturally wells up.

Compassion is a direct practice of tremendous merit, highly praised by great masters. Recall the story of Khampa Lhungpa from *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*:

Geshe Tonpa once asked a visiting monk about various masters.

"What is Potowa doing?"

"He teaches the dharma to hundreds of sangha members."

"Wonderful. And Puchungwa?"

"He spends his time making representations of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind from offerings he and others have gathered."

"Wonderful. And Gonpawa?"

“He does nothing but meditate.”

“Wonderful. And what of Khampa Lhungpa?”

“He stays in solitude, face hidden, weeping continually.”

At this, Tonpa removed his hat, joined his palms at his heart, and, shedding many tears, exclaimed, “Oh, that is truly marvelous! That is really practicing the dharma.”

Khampa Lhungpa hid his face and wept because he was constantly contemplating beings tormented by samsaric suffering, meditating on compassion for them.

Method of Cultivating Compassion

There is no need for hardship or expense.

It is a fairly easy meditative practice with no chance of mistakes.

Meditate on compassion one session daily without fail.

With sincere faith, this becomes the ultimate dharma.

Compassion practice is straightforward. It requires no money, unlike practicing generosity, building dharma halls, or commissioning statues; nor does it demand austere disciplines like tsa-lung. It also leaves little room for error, unlike complex practices. In generation and completion practices, inaccurate meditation can disorder channels and wind energies. Also, as we learned in the *Surangama Sutra*,

there are fifty demonic states linked to the five aggregates that can arise during shamatha and vipashyana; failing to recognize them can lead to wrong views and straying from the path. Many practices carry such risks, but compassion does not.

Therefore, everyone can practice compassion. Simply recognize how unfortunate sentient beings are. Ordinary beings wander in the ocean of suffering without liberation. Hell beings wretchedly endure extreme cold and heat. Hungry ghosts suffer ceaseless thirst and hunger, rarely even hearing the words “food” or “water.” Animals face predation, bondage, and slaughter. Among humans, many are ignorant of karma, pursuing happiness through actions that bring only suffering. Some are beset by mental afflictions; some never plant the seeds of virtue; even within the monastic sangha, some fail to keep their precepts intact... Observing beings carefully reveals countless opportunities for compassion practice.

In brief, feel compassion for beings in distress and wish that they be free from suffering, attain temporary happiness, and ultimately realize liberation. Meditate on this at least one session daily. This isn’t demanding. Spend an hour, half-hour, or just fifteen minutes daily. Practice whenever suits you—upon waking or before bed. Daily meditation on emptiness and bodhicitta is praised by many great masters of the past; here Lama Mumtso emphasizes compassion,

likely because it was her constant practice. Her biography shows that from a young age she treated all animals—wild mountain creatures and domestic sheep and dogs—with kindness and love.

Train in compassion with sincere faith, and it becomes the ultimate practice among all dharma teachings. Cultivate conviction that compassion practice encompasses all others. As taught in the *Dharmasamgiti Sutra* (*Compendium of the Teachings Sutra*):

The bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara addressed the Blessed One: “Blessed One, bodhisattvas need not train in many qualities. If bodhisattvas fully understand and comprehend a single quality, then all the Buddha’s qualities will rest in their palm. What is this one dharma? It is great compassion. Blessed One, through great compassion, the entire dharma of the Buddha is held in a bodhisattva’s hands.”

Please keep this teaching in your heart and dedicate yourself to the practice of compassion. Sentient beings in need are all around us. Summer grasslands teem with countless insects while yak herds graze distant hillsides. In large cities especially, crowds unaware of karmic law move like ants in an anthill, buzzing back and forth. When such people die, might they fall into the lower realms and lose the chance for human rebirth? Reflecting in this way, compassion

naturally awakens. Simple yet profound, this practice embodies the essence of all dharma teachings.

TRAIN IN THE PATH OF LIBERATION

The Importance of Liberation

**Now that you have obtained this human body this once,
And you know the difference between virtue and non-virtue,
Think about the skillful means to go from happiness to
happiness—
Not only in this life but in all your lives to come.**

The second section—training in the path of liberation—also has several subsections. We begin with the importance of following the path of liberation.

You have obtained a human body—perhaps only this once. While a few may be reborn human again, in general a human rebirth is rare. You are thus exceedingly fortunate to possess a precious human life with freedoms and advantages. Moreover, you understand, at least in part, the law of karma—a truth little known by most ordinary people and even by many in other religious traditions.

With such favorable conditions, contemplate deeply and ask yourself: “How can I proceed from happiness to happiness? What methods will ensure happiness—not only in this life, but in all lives to come?” There is indeed a path leading to lasting, ultimate happiness, and your precious human life is the perfect vehicle for it. But if you fail to follow it, the opportunity slips away. Therefore, do not waste this valuable human life, and do not neglect to discipline yourself in accord with karma.

Those receiving this teaching—as do I—are truly fortunate. By His Holiness’s blessing, we have come to understand cause and effect. Our practice may not yet be exemplary, but compared with those unable to discern right from wrong, we can distinguish virtue from non-virtue. Without such knowledge, we might abandon ourselves to a life of indulgence—feasting on game and seafood such as fish, frogs, and snakes, even on rare animals—accumulating heavy negative karma and little merit.

Happily, we know good and bad and can act accordingly. This results from merit accumulated in previous lives. We should be grateful, so long as we do not squander these advantages. Most of you have little fame or status, and after many years on the Tibetan plateau—where ultraviolet radiation is intense—you are no longer young and your skin has grown rough. Yet this is more

than worthwhile because status, fame, and youth are impermanent and unreliable, whereas understanding karma carries profound significance for all lives to come.

Why are so many people interested in Buddhism today? One reason is that its philosophy is logical and withstands rigorous analysis; another is that it is practical and workable. When put into practice, its effectiveness is felt. People today are pragmatic: if something brings no benefit, they lose interest after a few days. Yet Buddhist principles—especially the law of karma—benefit everyone’s inner well-being. Even apart from future lives, one can live more happily here and now by following them. This practical effectiveness is a major reason many Westerners embrace the Buddhist path. Of course, studying Buddhism does not eliminate hardship, but it equips us with methods to face it—for example, the cultivation of bodhicitta and the reasoned analysis of the Middle Way—both profoundly helpful.

Therefore, with all favorable conditions in place, seek methods to secure happiness from now until liberation is attained. Regrettably, many today are indifferent to future lives; worse, some deny rebirth. In films we often hear lines like, “If there is an afterlife, I’ll marry you,” or “I’ll repay your love in the next life—if there is such a thing.” Such words betray doubt or blind belief. But truth is

not invalidated by disbelief. Rebirth is reality—people's ignorance cannot negate its existence.

The General Practice of Renunciation

In the lower realms, sentient beings experience unbearable suffering.

In the human and celestial realms, happiness and suffering are mixed.

Generate a mind of weariness with the whole world and its inhabitants,

And always aspire to be reborn in pure lands.

This presents the general approach to liberation: cultivating renunciation. Throughout samsara, happiness is scarce and suffering abundant. In the three lower realms—hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals—suffering is extreme and happiness negligible. In the three higher realms—humans, asuras, and celestial beings—pleasure and pain alternate. We humans may be happy today and sorrowful tomorrow. Ask yourself: do you experience more happiness or more suffering? Most people probably experience more suffering than happiness.

Samsara is like a house on fire, having no place of lasting peace. Everywhere in samsara—lower or higher realms—and everything within it—both outer environment and inner inhabitants—remains unreliable, being either suffering itself or its cause. What’s truly reliable is liberation from samsara. Therefore, cultivate weariness of samsara and eagerness to transcend it, leaving behind both the lower and higher realms. Repeatedly aspire to be reborn in a pure land. There are many pure lands you may choose, for example, the buddha land of Manifest Joy in the east or the Copper-Colored Mountain of Glory in the west. In short, resolve to break free from samsara and take birth in a pure land, cutting attachment to all samsaric things. This is the mind of renunciation, though definitions vary slightly across texts. As Lama Tsongkhapa teaches in the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*:

*When, through growing accustomed to thinking in this way,
Hope for samsaric pleasures no longer arises for even an instant,
And throughout both day and night you long for liberation,
Then, at that time, true renunciation has been born.*

His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche characterizes renunciation in his *Song of Victory*:

For all kinds of grand events in samsara,

Do not have any thought of desire.

In sum, renunciation is the mindset that finds no joy in remaining within samsara and longs for rebirth in pure lands. To walk the path of liberation, you must cultivate this renunciation—it is the general foundation.

The Specific Practice of Aspiring for Rebirth in Sukhavati

In particular, relying on the aspiration power of Amitabha,

The Buddha of Boundless Light, the lord of Sukhavati,

It is easy to be born in his land.

So always aspire to take rebirth in that buddha land.

Relying on the power of Amitabha's eighty-four great aspirations, even ordinary beings can be born in his pure land without difficulty. Therefore, aspire to take birth in Sukhavati. As Chan Master Yongming Yanshou said:

If there is Chan but no pure land,

Nine out of ten will go astray.

If there is no Chan but there is pure land,

All who practice will arrive there.

This shows that rebirth in Sukhavati is an easy path to liberation. Even without practicing Chan, those devoted to pure land practice can readily take birth there. Conversely, those with some Chan realization who never aspire to Sukhavati may, nine times out of ten, miss the mark and go astray on the spiritual path.

For this reason, Karma Chakme Rinpoche wrote in his *Text of Choosing Pure Land* that although each pure land has unique meritorious qualities, he aspired solely to be born in Sukhavati, the pure land of Amitabha. Our benevolent teacher, His Holiness, likewise said that after his passing he would certainly be reborn in the western pure land of Sukhavati.

Therefore, even if your principal practice at Larung Gar is the Great Perfection, you should still aspire to Sukhavati. To that end, I have given extensive teachings in the past, including the *Five Sutras of the Pure Land School* in Han Buddhism and many relevant Tibetan Buddhist instructions. Having studied them, many of you feel confident about rebirth in Sukhavati and are willing to undertake the practice. It is indeed crucial for each of us to strive for such a rebirth.

How to Transfer Your Consciousness

**When the day of death arrives,
Since the mind cannot recall many instructions,
Visualize all deities and gurus as the essence of Amitabha,
And pray to him.**

This verse explains how to transfer your consciousness to Sukhavati at life's end. When death comes, the four great elements constituting your body disintegrate and great pain ensues. In such moments, it is difficult to recall and apply the many teachings you have received; you may be confused, grasping at whatever comes to mind—praying to Padmasambhava one moment, Manjushri the next, or flitting between different masters' instructions. This scattered approach proves inefficient and unhelpful.

At the moment of death, the best and simplest method is to pray earnestly to Buddha Amitabha, who is, in essence, one with your guru and deities and who embodies the blessings of all buddhas and bodhisattvas. This is the way to transfer consciousness to Sukhavati. Familiarize yourself with this practice now as preparation for death.

In *Placing Buddhahood within Reach*, a profound Dzogchen manual by His Holiness, there is this instruction:

If in this life you have not attained a stable, supreme realization, then at the moment of death visualize your mind as a white syllable ah at your heart, which ascends on the upward-moving wind and dissolves into the heart center of your guru, who is seated above your crown. The guru ascends higher and higher, departing for the pure land of Sukhavati. With focus on your mind and the guru's mind becoming inseparable, take rebirth.

This is concise yet profoundly helpful for the dying. Beyond such specific guidance, you can always recollect Amitabha with firm conviction that he is the embodiment of all buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the ten directions. Amitabha is inseparable and non-dual with all buddhas. The Buddha himself clearly taught this essential point in the *Lankavatara Sutra*:

*In all worlds of the ten directions,
Among all bodhisattvas and sentient beings,
All the dharmakaya and sambhogakaya buddhas,
The nirmanakaya ones and their manifestations,
Originate from the Buddha of Boundless Life
In the pure realm of Ultimate Bliss.*

Across the worlds of the ten directions, countless buddhas stand as lords of bodhisattvas and ordinary beings. Yet all of them—whether appearing as dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, or nirmanakaya, along with their countless emanations—manifest from Amitabha in Sukhavati. For example, you may adopt Vajrasattva, Manjushri, Padmasambhava, or Ksitigarbha as your principal deity. In essence, all are forms of Amitabha. Thus, if Manjushri is your personal deity, at life's end visualize that your deity Manjushri, your guru, and Amitabha are one in essence, and pray fervently. In this way, fear will not arise and you will certainly be guided to Sukhavati. Such visualization is fully in accord with the Lankavatara Sutra.

When I teach, I often cite sources from different Buddhist traditions. Please note them and keep them in mind—many doubts that obstruct your progress will thus dissolve. You will see that the scriptures and commentaries of various schools are not contradictory; they convey a single intent. Too often, narrow understanding leads people to conclude that different teachings are incompatible. We should abandon such narrowness through broad study and careful contemplation.

The Benefit of the Transference Practice

**If you die while mindful of this,
You will not go to the three lower realms,
And your consciousness will be transferred to the pure land.
There is no instruction more profound and easier than this.**

This verse describes the benefits of transferring consciousness. If, at death, you abide in mindfulness of the oneness of Amitabha and all buddhas and bodhisattvas and pray wholeheartedly to Amitabha, you will not fall into the three lower realms—at minimum, you will be protected from terrible rebirths. In a middling case, you will obtain a human or celestial rebirth. At best, your mind will become inseparable from Amitabha and you will be guided to Sukhavati. There is no teaching more profound than this. Though people may have trained in many practices, at death this method alone can guarantee liberation. This instruction carries deepest significance while being the easiest of all—you won't make mistakes practicing it, much like compassion practice.

Therefore, meditate on Amitabha daily. This is especially important for the elderly. In Tibetan regions, most elders spin prayer wheels

and recite mantras continually, typically the mani—*om mani padme hum*—or the Amitabha mantra—*om amideva ayu siddhi hum hrih*. Some Tibetans prefer chanting the noble name of Amitabha instead of his mantra. When my father was alive, he recited Amitabha's name every day. The Tibetan invocation is quite long:

*chomdendé deshyin shekpa drachompa yangdakpar dzokpé sangye gönpo ö
pak tu mepa la chaktsal lo chödo kyab su chi o*

*Bhagavan, tathagata, arhat, complete and perfect buddha, protector
Amitabha—to you I pay homage! To you I make offerings! In you I
take refuge!*

Back then, Khenpo Chime Rigdzin often visited my cabin for tea. Whoever came, my father kept reciting while spinning his prayer wheel, loudly enough for all to hear. Later, Khenpo would often imitate my father's pronunciation of "pak tu mepa la" to tease me, and I would joke back, "Well, why didn't your father even recite pak tu mepa la?" In the past, his father did not chant much; now I hear he is devoted to the practice as well. In those days, the Khenpo and I often teased each other.

As my father's example shows, most Tibetans become especially eager, in old age, to prepare for death through dharma practice—devoting themselves to the mani or to Amitabha. Many of

you listening to this teaching, myself included, are entering old age, so we should prepare well.

Earlier this year I was staying in a city. Sometimes I went out alone. After returning one day, friends asked whether I had paid for the bus. They told me those over sixty ride free. But since I hadn't applied for such a card, I still paid. My point is simply that we of my generation and older have now joined the ranks of the elderly; practices that direct consciousness to the pure land suit us perfectly. Now is exactly the time to train in such practices. Of course, this does not mean the young can neglect pure land practice—obviously, many die in youth.

So let me remind everyone to prepare in advance. It is understandable that ordinary people unfamiliar with the dharma squander their lives and fail to prepare for death. But we have received abundant instruction and know methods to transcend dying; it would be regrettable not to gain certainty about going beyond death. If you lack confidence, reflect repeatedly on the relevant teachings and familiarize yourself with the practice.

Death is certain, but when and how it arrives remains uncertain. People die in different situations and leave this world in various ways. Most are overwhelmed with extreme agony, unable to focus on

beneficial teachings. Not only ordinary practitioners—sometimes even great masters suffer deeply as they die. Such cases puzzle many people. They wonder, “He was such a good practitioner, practicing diligently every day. Why did he still undergo such agony, struggling and speaking incoherently?” Such thoughts are misinformed. Everyone’s alaya consciousness contains countless karmic seeds; which will ripen at death is uncertain. Therefore, if in the future some khenpos, khenmos, or dharma teachers die in distress rather than serenity, do not fall into wrong views and declare the dharma ineffective. It is entirely understandable because myriad karmas can manifest at death.

Many practitioners, however, pass away peacefully, mindful of Amitabha. Numerous dharma friends of ours have departed calmly, some in hospital, some at home. As I have said, it does not matter where you die—Tibetan regions, Han regions, or elsewhere. Some insist, “I don’t want to die in a hospital—take me home.” At that moment it often makes little difference. You might die and journey to another world before even reaching your house. Dzogchen teachings state that superior practitioners die like wild beasts—having no fixed abode, they die wherever they happen to be. This is a dignified way to die for a true practitioner. What matters most is whether you can die mindfully, remembering Amitabha and your guru. If

you can, at the very least you will be spared the lower realms; if you have practiced well in life, you will be reborn in the pure land.

As practitioners, we must know how to practice both in life and at death, and habituate ourselves to these methods. Meanwhile, strive to spread the dharma and benefit beings. Yet while such aspiration is excellent, this transient life may not allow its full accomplishment. I notice that most current khenpos and khenmos are ten or twenty years younger than I am; when they reach my age, energy and capacity for great endeavors may wane. Although aspiring to establish dharma centers and spread teachings is meritorious, time flies and people age quickly. With age, the four elements become imbalanced, health falters, mental capacity shrinks, and memory declines. In youth, intelligence is keen and memory sharp; in advanced age, let alone spreading the dharma widely, even looking after oneself can be difficult. In such cases, it is better to care for yourself than to speak grandly of benefiting others.

With this in mind, I suggest that the elderly speak less and focus more on personal practice—for example, recite the mani as much as possible. I do not encourage frail elderly monastics to take on the role of dharma teacher. If your health has deteriorated—your hands shake, your nose runs, your mind is dull—it is incongruous to teach; better to continue your recitation. In doing so, you comport

yourself well, leave a wholesome impression, and when death comes you will be able to steady your mind and secure a favorable rebirth. This is sensible.

Life is brief. Though aspirations are good, there is little time to realize them; before long you find yourself in your fifties, sixties, or seventies. After seventy, it is unrealistic to shoulder great projects for the teaching and beings—though a few masters have flourished late in life. For older practitioners, I encourage you to make vast aspirations while applying yourselves diligently to proper practice.

By now, we have completed the verses on worldly ethics and spiritual practice. Next comes a summary of these two codes.

CONCLUSION: SUMMARY OF THE TWO CODES

**Although this brief teaching on the two codes
Is not necessary for those of great wisdom,
I have set it down as beneficial heartfelt advice
For those who have devout faith in me.**

Lama Mumtso states that this brief teaching on the worldly and transcendent codes of conduct is unnecessary for erudite scholars and accomplished practitioners. Nevertheless, for the sake of those

who have faith in her and seek her blessing—now and in the future—she offers these words as sincere, heartfelt counsel. As noted earlier, being a female master, Lama Mumtso speaks with distinct emphases especially pertinent to women practitioners; those devoted to her will find particular benefit.

People often supplicate a master, “Venerable guru, please bless me!”—usually meaning a physical blessing by the guru touching their head. That is indeed one form of blessing. But personally, I believe a deeper form of blessing is the transformative power that changes your mind. For example, when I read a text by the omniscient Longchenpa and a sentence pierces my heart and proves profoundly beneficial, that is Longchenpa’s blessing. Whenever a teaching—whether from a living master or one who has passed—truly inspires you, you have directly received that master’s blessing.

Thus, beyond asking the guru to touch your head, it is even more important to receive the teaching and use it to tame your mind. Take this instruction as an example: if you find the worldly code helpful and resolve to practice it, you are receiving Lama Mumtso’s blessing. Blessing is, in essence, transformative power; if it effects no change, it is not truly a blessing.

GOOD IN THE END: DEDICATION OF MERIT

**Through this merit, may all sentient beings
Accomplish all their aims as they wish in this life,
And in the afterlife be reborn in the pure land of Sukhavati
In the presence of the peerless guru.**

By this merit, may all beings have their wishes accomplished here and now. In the afterlife, may they be reborn in Sukhavati, come into the presence of the peerless guru, and partake of the joyous feast of Mahayana teachings. The peerless guru refers to our benevolent teacher, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, who is inseparable from Amitabha. According to reliable prophecies and his own aspirations, His Holiness must be compassionately watching over us and waiting for us in Sukhavati. In the pure land, assemblies gather around various noble beings; once born there, we will immediately behold His Holiness and enjoy the stainless Mahayana teachings alongside him, while gaining the capacity to benefit countless beings. It is Lama Mumtso's wish that all connected to her take rebirth in Sukhavati.

Postscript

This teaching was composed by the Shakya nun Mumtso and written down by the monk Gudrak on the fifteenth day of the sixth month in the Water Tiger year of the Tibetan calendar (2022), upon the request of people from the group responsible for collecting stories and materials for compiling my biography at Larung Gar Five Sciences Buddhist Academy, who asked me to write simple advice for devout laymen and laywomen. May all be auspicious!

When Tulku Tendzin Gyatso was writing Lama Mumtso's biography, a special team of Tibetan khenpos and khenmos was formed to collect accounts and materials. They supplicated Lama Mumtso to write an easy-to-understand instruction for the benefit of devout lay practitioners. At their request, Lama Mumtso gave this teaching—simple in words but profound in meaning. Lama Mumtso dictated the words, and the monk Gudrak transcribed them on that date. The monk Gudrak is Lama Mumtso's younger brother, born of the same father but a different mother, who helps Lama Mumtso maintain her household.

Final Reflections

Though simple in expression, the instruction is comprehensive, encompassing both worldly ethics and spiritual practice. It can be regarded as a concise counterpart to Ju Mipham Rinpoche's *The Treatise on the Modes of Being*, which I taught in detail years ago. Lama Mumtso's presentation here is more straightforward, and I hope my explanation has been helpful. Afterwards, please read and contemplate it on your own; you may find yourself even more inspired. While listening to me, some may doze or drift; but in personal study or group discussion, attention deepens and the text touches the heart more readily. Apply effort, and you will reap greater benefit.

While translating this short work, it occurred to me that this text would serve well for monks or nuns giving teachings to lay Buddhists—say, over a three-day program centered on this text. Its key points and the two codes of conduct are vital for laypeople seeking a happy life: what to be careful about in daily affairs, why harmonious relations matter, and how to cultivate them. Spiritually, it guides the cultivation of faith, compassion, and renunciation, and familiarizes practitioners with transference of consciousness as preparation for death. All of these essentials are practical and beneficial for lay practitioners.

Given its great benefit, we should be grateful to the khenpos and khenmos who requested Lama Mumtso to compose it. When those around a great master have foresight and wisdom, they know how to make timely supplications, prompting the master to turn inner realization into written teachings for all beings' benefit. When Ju Mipham Rinpoche was alive, many great beings around him frequently requested writings—hence the wealth of his works we have today.

By contrast, when attendants preoccupy their guru with worldly matters, they may inadvertently hinder teaching and writing. Consequently, even though the guru is great, few teachings or writings remain. Disciples thus play a crucial role in a master's enlightened activity.

I translated this text into Chinese on February 12 of this year, 2024. With that, we conclude our study of *Words to Devout Laymen and Laywomen*.

There will be no teaching tomorrow. The day after tomorrow, we will begin another short text by Lama Mumtso.

**Commentary on *Guidance That Lights
the Way to Liberation***

LECTURE 1

MAY 30TH, 2024

A FEW WORDS BEFORE THE TEACHING

About Attending Khenpo's Lectures

I'd like to address a few matters before we begin today's teaching. First, regarding in-person attendance: for now, most of you should listen via the radio broadcast in your own cabins. Only members of the oral presentation group may attend in the hall. As you know, my health is not very good, and I am grateful to still be able to teach regularly. For the time being, apart from formal dharma teachings, I won't be involved in many activities, including receiving visitors or giving blessings.

Please do not come to the sutra hall without an admission pass; otherwise, the hall will become overcrowded. Disciplinarians and gatekeepers should take this instruction seriously. Admission passes are for members of the oral presentation group only, with limited exceptions for some khenpos and khenmos. It is improper to hand out various "special passes" and change the rule on the fly.

This arrangement will continue through the first half of the year. I will not repeat this reminder at every session. When the situation allows everyone to attend in person, I will inform you. Until then, please follow the current system so classes can run smoothly. Without such limits—especially with summer bringing more visitors of different backgrounds and motives—it’s hard to predict who might show up or what issues could arise. To ensure regular dharma teachings, I’d appreciate everyone following the current guidelines.

On the bright side, it’s convenient and comfortable to receive the teachings at home. Many of you are already used to listening by radio in your cabins—and might be reluctant to come to the sutra hall even if you were paid one hundred yuan to attend in person. Just joking. In any case, this is hardly bad news for most of you. But when attendance is required, please do come.

The Current Teaching Schedule

Second, our current teaching schedule. Today I will teach Lama Mumtso’s *Guidance That Lights the Way to Liberation*. Tomorrow we will resume the *Surangama Sutra*. This will likely take considerable time, and we may not finish before our annual summer vacation—a

time for relaxation in the grasslands. If so, I'll teach it alongside *A Journey to the West*, as we've done previously.

The summer break for the Han Buddhist college begins on June 12. As usual, the male and female sangha vacations are staggered; the Tibetan monks' break starts on the first day of the fifth Tibetan month. Since the Han Chinese sangha includes both monks and nuns, your vacation runs from June 12th to 22nd, overlapping the latter half of the Tibetan monks' break and the first half of the Tibetan nuns' break.

The weather should be pleasant. Use these eleven days as you wish—even khenpos and khenmos who have been busy with teaching and administration. Some may need to see doctors; others may wish to go sightseeing or make pilgrimage to sacred mountains such as Kang Rinpoche (Mount Kailash). Take this opportunity to do whatever you like—even, as a joke, “take a trip to hell and come back with a report.” (Audience laughs.)

Staying at the academy is also worthwhile. I know people who have lived here ten or twenty years and prefer not to go anywhere, while others have a restless habit of traveling—understandable, as habits are hard to control. In any case, I hope this advance notice helps your planning. Summer in the Tibet plateau is very pleasant.

Since the Tibetan monks and nuns each have a ten-day vacation, it is reasonable for you to enjoy one as well. I will not schedule classes during this time.

Back to the near term: tomorrow is Thursday, and I plan to teach the *Surangama Sutra*. I am still considering whether to continue *A Journey to the West* in parallel. If I can finish the sutra before the break, I would prefer to cover a bit more each class and complete it; but that seems unlikely, so I will probably teach both texts together. We have essentially finished the *Surangama Sutra*, as I have already given the oral transmission of the last two volumes. Starting tomorrow, I will offer a brief explanation of the final volume to conclude the teaching.

As before, there will be no classes on Saturday and Sunday. Next week—barring the unexpected—I will teach Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday; no classes Wednesday, Saturday, or Sunday. That is the current schedule.

Addressing Unqualified Residents

Third, the issue of unqualified residents at Larung Gar. We need to improve management and enforce our regulations. I've noticed

some departments have been recruiting people who are not permitted to stay—those lacking the “three kinds of qualifications,” those over the age limit, and those who have been expelled from a department or from the sangha. Some linger and refuse to leave, trying to remain by joining other departments and posing as ordinary staff. After discussing with several khenpos today, we decided to locate such cases and require them to leave after the summer break.

If you are not qualified to stay, please return home or find another dharma center during the vacation. Otherwise, we will have to take firm measures afterward. Under our current rules, those dismissed from the academy, those with severe mental health conditions, and those who do not meet the qualifications are prohibited from remaining here. It is unreasonable to try by every means to stay at Larung Gar. Each year we spend considerable funds and manpower addressing these cases.

In short, this is a Buddhist academy dedicated to dharma study and practice, not a place to accommodate people with unrelated purposes and needs. If you think you will never be identified, or that the rules will not apply to you, you are deceiving yourself. We have many measures available if needed. Only those who meet the qualifications and abide by the rules may stay. If you are unqualified, or have violated regulations—or even broken

precepts or samaya—your presence harms the academy and, more importantly, causes you grave negative karma.

The Vinaya states that if you lack permission to enter the sangha, or if you've been expelled, using any sangha property—including something as simple as walking the monastery road, drawing its water, or using a cushion in the sutra hall—brings great harm and severe negative karma. So don't insist on staying if you're unqualified.

Some may stay because they have nowhere else to go or cannot bear to leave. That does not justify a prolonged stay. It seems they do not fear karmic retribution in future lives, so they drift along in this one. Secular measures may be needed for such people. If the sangha cannot educate and persuade them with gentleness and compassion, harsher steps will follow—an outcome neither the sangha nor those individuals want. Therefore, I urge all unqualified residents to go elsewhere during the summer break. Otherwise, by late June or early July, we will conduct a thorough review and apply compulsory measures. Without addressing these cases properly, the sangha cannot be set in good order. In this degenerate age, it is sometimes necessary to remove unqualified members to keep the whole functioning well. Even in the Buddha's time, those who

violated certain pratimoksha vows were expelled, as recorded in the Vinaya.

In a word, do not come to this sacred place to accumulate negative karma; that would be irrational. A holy site is where you prostrate, pray, and forge wholesome connections—not where you commit unwholesome deeds of body, speech, and mind. If you cannot resist wrongdoing impulses, I suggest you do not stay here. Go elsewhere—there are plenty of opportunities outside.

Meanwhile, those permitted to remain are obliged to study and practice the dharma. Starting this year, I strongly recommend raising the admission threshold for the Han college and the requirements for study and practice. Those who do not study or practice, those who gossip and cause disputes, those who corrupt their monastic code, those preoccupied with fame and personal gain, those who intentionally deceive the sangha or mislead faithful devotees, and those with ulterior, harmful intentions—all such cases should be identified and removed.

Be Aware of the Overall Situation

Fourth, I'd like to remind everyone—especially khenpos and khenmos overseeing sangha affairs—to speak and act prudently. The

overall situation is more complex than you may think. Rules and regulations for religious communities are enforced more strictly than before, and dharma centers and monasteries face closer oversight from various levels of government. In such a climate, you must be careful with your words and actions.

This emphasis applies to everyone here. For example, soliciting funds for collective practice can be imprudent. A few days ago, the Larung sangha held a collective Vajrasattva practice. It was not an open, public gathering with formal government approval. Yet due to careless statements, officials saw an online post saying that a donation of 55,000 RMB could provide food and drink supporting the entire sangha's one-day practice—purportedly endorsed by the Tibetan monks' college. But that college does not even have the authority to hold dharma assemblies. Consequently, government officials condemned the college for hosting an open event without permission.

A few months earlier, an online message claimed that Larung Gar was holding an Amitayus Dharma Assembly. In fact, years ago monasteries were asked to reduce the frequency of such events, and at the authorities' request Larung Gar no longer holds an open Amitayus assembly. On the government side, our five annual dharma assemblies have already been reduced to four. Recently,

because of these postings, some officials came to me for further inquiries.

As you can see, online administration is strict. Platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, Douyin, Kuaishou, and other short-video apps are constantly monitored. On our side, our disciplinarians are responsible for supervising sangha members' online words and posts. On the government's side, the Ministry of State Security, the Ministry of Public Security, and other agencies are vigilant regarding public statements. Under such circumstances, even while traveling, casually posting photos or sharing information without checking the content—and without a sense of what is permitted—can bring serious trouble, for the academy and for you personally. Personally, I have not posted even a word on my Weibo for nearly half a year. I prefer to keep a low profile and avoid trouble—and, to be honest, I've lost interest.

Given the current situation, I am content if I can give some teachings when conditions allow. If even that becomes impossible, I would rather stay in seclusion and focus on mantra recitation. In my later years, I wish to recite the mani and Vajrasattva mantras while turning the prayer wheel of *The Sutra of Great Liberation*. Beyond that, I no longer harbor the grand aspirations I had when I was young—to spread the dharma widely, benefit beings, and attain the

rainbow body. People tend toward grand, wonderful aspirations when young, but with age, these aspirations fade and evaporate. As an old man, what matters most is to confess and purify my negative karma and pray to the guru and the Three Jewels. In a sense, this is also a sober response to the present circumstances.

For these reasons, I urge everyone in this valley to stand higher and see farther. Do not confine yourself to trivial personal concerns. Some people focus only on what to eat and how to live comfortably—tracking the price of vegetables, eggs, and so on. While it is understandable to care about daily life, it is also necessary to understand the broader domestic and global environment. Take time to study history and reflect on your place in today's society. If you examine the trajectory of the nation and of humanity, you may gain a clearer sense of where you are heading and how things might unfold. This is very important.

TITLE, HOMAGE AND VOW OF COMPOSITION

Now I will explain Lama Mumtso's *Guidance That Lights the Way to Liberation*. This text was composed quite early—twenty-four years ago, in 2000. Although Lama Mumtso gave this instruction long ago, many of you may not have known it until it was translated into

your language. The title, *Guidance That Lights the Way to Liberation*, indicates that it clearly illuminates the path to liberation. The opening verse is a homage and a vow to compose:

**I prostrate to the root guru, indivisible from the Lake-Born Lord,
The sole embodiment of the three secrets of all the Victorious
Ones.**

**As I explain the essence of instructions that light the way to
liberation,**

You, intelligent ones who are interested, listen with appreciation!

The embodiment of the three secrets, i.e., the body, speech, and mind, of all buddhas throughout the three times of past, present, and future is Padmasambhava, the Lake-Born Lord. In other words, Padmasambhava is the quintessence of all buddhas. The root guru, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, is one with Padmasambhava and inseparable from him. In realization of this, Lama Mumtso pays homage with her three doors to her guru in full veneration.

In Lama Mumtso's *Words to Devout Laymen and Laywomen*, she also begins by paying homage to Padmasambhava. As I have often emphasized, it is of the utmost importance to pray to Guru Rinpoche. I am considering translating some of Padmasambhava's teachings into Chinese. Today, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro urged me to translate

Guru Rinpoche's instructions. He has been teaching them recently and is quite captivated by them. Over tea he said, "These are truly excellent teachings—really excellent! Could you translate them?" I cannot promise, though I would be delighted. At present I am occupied with many other projects. There are always treatises I wish to translate, but it is hard to say how long I will live and what the future holds.

Westerners are especially fond of Padmasambhava's practices—perhaps because of his special blessing in this degenerate age. Wherever I go, I find people embracing his life-story and receptive to his teachings and practices. For countless people, even a brief instruction from Padmasambhava brings immense benefit. This may be because he is often portrayed historically as a non-monastic practitioner, sharing the same identity as most modern people.

As a great historical figure, his life and times are well recorded. During the reign of King Trisong Detsen, Padmasambhava came to Tibet and stayed for about a year and a half. During that time he composed many treatises and translated and transmitted a considerable number of teachings. Some of his works were unfortunately lost, while others were preserved and passed down to this day.

In light of this, translating and preserving his works in written form is very important. It occurs to me that Taranatha of Jonang's Tibetan biography of Padmasambhava, *Three Reasons for Confidence*, would be a fine choice—concise and deeply moving—and I may translate it. I no longer have the courage to commit to a very lengthy work, as my schedule is always full and the time remaining to me is uncertain.

Returning to our topic, I strongly encourage you to read more of Padmasambhava's life-stories and spend more time in his guru-yoga, like the one you undertook during ngöndro practice. In doing so, you will experience his powerful blessing. Once that blessing penetrates your heart, whatever practice you undertake will readily succeed.

In this verse, Lama Mumtso states that she will explain the essence of dharma teachings that illuminate the path to liberation, and that those who are intelligent and aspire to it should listen attentively. As the *Four Hundred Stanzas of the Middle Way* says,

An unprejudiced, intelligent, and interested

Listener is called a vessel.

Those who are upright, keen-minded, and sincerely seek the truth are good dharma vessels for this teaching. Such listeners should

attend with appreciation and full attention, even if the text is brief. Whenever you receive instruction—whether a formal discourse or a pith teaching—the proper attitude is to listen attentively.

OBSERVE PURE ETHICAL DISCIPLINE

The main body of the text has two parts: ethical discipline and actual practice. The first concerns the three sets of vows—the pratimoksha vows, the bodhisattva vows, and the samaya vows of Secret Mantrayana. Lama Mumtso begins by emphasizing the importance of discipline.

Importance of Discipline

**When fortunate people travel the road to liberation,
They must first search for the entrance to the way,
Which is the source of excellence in this and future lives:
It's crucial to restrain the mindstream with pure ethical
discipline.**

For those who are fortunate, if you wish to travel the path to liberation, you must first find the key that opens the door to this

path. In other words, you must identify its entrance—the entry-level practice. What is this? It is none other than upholding pure discipline. With discipline as your foundation, you establish the source of excellence in this and all future lives. Discipline is the root of merit and the ground of all noble qualities throughout the three times—just as the earth serves as the base for all living and inanimate things in the world. It is therefore of the utmost importance to safeguard your mindstream and keep your precepts pure. As the *Avatamsaka Sutra* says,

Discipline is the root of unsurpassed bodhi.

So endow yourself with pure discipline.

If you possess and uphold pure precepts,

You will be praised by all tathagatas.

Discipline forms the foundation for ultimate enlightenment. Whether monastic or lay, you must at least observe some precepts. Keeping pure vows greatly increases merit and brings the protection of dharma guardians. This is the essential entrance to the path of liberation and what all buddhas praise.

The Vows of Pratimoksha

**From a preceptor or master who possesses the sets of
five qualities,**

**Receive the pratimoksha vows of fourfold or sevenfold
abandonment.**

This will not occur if you lack determination to be free.

The thought of renouncing existence is therefore important.

This verse concerns the pratimoksha vows, or vows of individual liberation. One should receive these in the presence of a teacher who possesses five qualifications. In brief, such a preceptor must: uphold pure precepts; have maintained full pratimoksha vows for more than ten years; and be accomplished in the three higher trainings—discipline, concentration, and wisdom—grounded in the Three Pitakas.

From such a teacher one may take the pratimoksha vows of fourfold or sevenfold abandonment. Fourfold abandonment refers to the four root precepts: not taking life, not taking what is not given, avoiding sexual misconduct, and not lying. Sevenfold abandonment means refraining from the three nonvirtuous actions of body

(killing, stealing, sexual misconduct) and the four of speech (lying, divisive speech, harsh words, idle chatter). At this level, pratimoksha concerns body and speech; mental misdeeds are not specified because they are difficult to detect in this framework.

Ideally, one takes and observes monastic vows—either full ordination or novice vows. If that is not possible, then the refuge vows and the five lay precepts. If even that is difficult, keep one or more of the four root precepts for life—such as refraining from taking life. At the very least, if lifelong observance feels out of reach, commit to a period—such as a year—of one specific abstention.

All such vows must be rooted in the mind of renunciation. Without the determination to be free of samsara, vows lack true efficacy; they exist in name only. As the *Dharmasamuccaya* (*Compendium of the Dharma Teachings*) says,

*The beings trapped in the cycle of birth and death
Are numberless and immeasurable.
Without generating the mind of renunciation,
They only delude themselves.*

Without determination to renounce samsara, received vows remain superficial, lacking significant meaning, and only deceive oneself

and others. Therefore, when receiving pratimoksha—monastic or lay—rouse a strong intention to gain freedom from the three realms, remembering, “I no longer wish to remain in samsara, the ocean of suffering.” As we learned in Lama Mumtso’s *The Melody of the White Dharma Conch*: “Within samsara, there is nowhere free from suffering.” There’s no point in taking birth anywhere in samsara, whether in the three higher or lower realms. This is clear to most Buddhists, especially those who’ve received extensive teachings on related subjects. Human life represents quite a favorable form of samsaric existence, yet when we examine our own situation, human life remains merely satisfactory, still filled with worries and suffering. This is why it is vital to cultivate renunciation.

The Bodhisattva Vows

**From a learned spiritual mentor who upholds the Mahayana
vows,**

**Take the bodhisattva vows of aspiration and application through
the ritual of the two traditions.**

**Without the commitment with twin aspects, the vows are merely
a reflection.**

Therefore train again and again in intention and compassion.

The bodhisattva vows should be received from a wise master who upholds pure Mahayana vows, as taught in *The Way of the Bodhisattva* and *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*. The bestowal of vows—both aspiration and application—follows either the tradition of Profound View initiated by Nagarjuna or the tradition of Vast Conduct initiated by Asanga. In our Nyingma lineage, the vows are generally conferred according to the Profound View tradition.

When taking the vows of bodhicitta in aspiration and in application, two aspects are indispensable: the intention focused on perfect enlightenment and the compassion that extends to all sentient beings. Without these twin aspects, one cannot truly engage in virtuous practices for the benefit of living beings, and the bodhisattva vows in one's mindstream become mere reflections devoid of substance. Therefore, to enhance your bodhisattva vows, repeatedly cultivate bodhicitta endowed with the twin aspects of wisdom and compassion. This is why we recite the *Ritual for the Bodhisattva Vow* and *The King of Aspiration Prayers* in every session.

Some may feel that the half hour of chanting before and after class is dispensable, but in fact it is a profound Mahayana practice that generates great merit. By practicing daily, our human lives become truly meaningful. As Je Tsongkhapa teaches,

*Yet if this renunciation is not embraced
By the pure motivation of bodhicitta,
It will not become a cause for the perfect bliss of unsurpassed awakening,
So the wise should generate supreme bodhicitta.*

Even with intention to renounce samsara, without bodhicitta's guidance—the great aspiration required in Mahayana teaching—one cannot attain perfect enlightenment. This accords with the *Avatamsaka Sutra*:

*If one generates a firm mind of great compassion,
one will delight in profound teachings.*

When great compassion or bodhicitta dawns in your heart, you naturally delight in the profound teachings of emptiness and the entire Mahayana. Seeing how many suffer without the nourishment of compassion and wisdom—and how attachment torments them—you will yearn to learn skillful means and dharma methods to guide and liberate them swiftly. For all Mahayana practitioners, continuous training in bodhicitta—the perfect union of wisdom and compassion—is fundamental.

Here, as always, actual practice is essential. Though I have emphasized this many times, habitual laziness makes it hard to follow

through. Still, periodic reminders are beneficial. Otherwise, people easily become lost in worldly, meaningless pursuits. Now that you're blessed with favorable conditions for spiritual practice and surrounded by qualified teachers and devoted practitioners, please always spur yourself to action. This is crucial.

The Samaya Vows of Secret Mantrayana

**From a powerful vajra-holder endowed with eight qualifications,
Take on the samayas related to the four empowerments.**

**They will not be obtained if two causes and four conditions are
absent,**

So strive in the methods for proper acquisition and protection.

One should receive empowerment from a vajra-holder (vajra master) who possesses eight qualifications and is equivalent to a sugata. In *The Great Chariot*, his commentary on *Finding Rest in the Nature of Mind*, Longchenpa cites Vimalamitra's teaching from his commentary on the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* to enumerate these eight. In brief, a Secret Mantra master must: 1) have properly received empowerments, 2) maintain pure samaya vows, 3) have full mastery of the tantras, 4) be able to perform the four enlightened activities—pacifying, enriching, magnetizing, subjugating—freely,

5) be unwavering in the view, free of delusion, 6) have gained the warmth of experience in meditation, 7) be inseparable from awakening in conduct, and 8) be endowed with great compassion to guide sentient beings.

Standards for vajra masters vary across texts (see, for example, *Fifty Stanzas on Following a Teacher*), but the minimum, by this teaching, is these eight. Before such a teacher one should receive the four empowerments: the vase empowerment, secret empowerment, knowledge-wisdom empowerment, and precious word empowerment. Each empowerment entails its own set of vows that the disciple must uphold.

Empowerment cannot be conferred or received without two causes and four conditions (as explained when I taught *Essence of Clear Light*). The two causes are concomitant and cooperative causes. Simply put, the concomitant cause refers to the disciple's buddha-nature—inanimate objects like stones and plants lacking consciousness cannot receive empowerment. Beings in the formless realm are also excluded because they lack proper channels, winds, and vital essences. The cooperative cause refers to the ritual supports (vase, images, crystal, etc.) required for empowerment.

Regarding the four conditions: The causal condition means a disciple suitable to receive empowerment must have faith and intelligence. The dominant condition means the master giving empowerment must possess the power of blessing. The objective condition refers to the mantra, ritual, implements, and similar items that must be visualized. The immediate condition means former stages of empowerment and ritual must precede following stages. For example, the vase empowerment must precede the secret empowerment, which must precede the knowledge-wisdom empowerment. The process order cannot be mistaken, because the former causes the latter.

Only when the two causes and four conditions are complete can empowerment be given and received. In other words, for empowerment to truly occur, all requirements must be fulfilled by both disciple and teacher. Otherwise, a ceremony with a vase or implements alone is not a genuine empowerment. On the disciple's side, when the guru leads the ritual—taking refuge, receiving bodhisattva vows, or accepting samaya—one must also engage in proper contemplation. Thereafter, one must strive to keep the samayas pure.

CARRY OUT ACTUAL PRACTICE

Look Directly into the Nature of Mind

**Having thus established a basis of pure ethical discipline,
Focus on the essential meaning of the sutras through study and
reflection,
And, with the torch of the key points of noble masters' pith
instructions,
Look into the secret of your mind, the ultimate guide.**

With the pure observance of the three sets of vows as your foundation, listen to the dharma and reflect until you grasp the essential meaning of the sutras. At the same time, rely on the profound pith instructions of your realized masters as a torch to illuminate the path. With these three favorable conditions in place—1) pure discipline, 2) thorough understanding of scriptures through dharma study, and 3) the guru's profound instructions—you can look into the nature of mind. Only by turning inward in this way will you realize the mind's secret nature.

This is a precise and powerful pith instruction. Lacking any one of the three—discipline, study, or reliable instruction—merely sitting still will not reveal the mind's hidden nature. That is not the

proper way to practice. As the Fifth Chan Patriarch Hongren writes in *Treatise on the Supreme Vehicle*, “The essence of the hundreds of thousands of scriptures is none other than watching over the genuine primordial mind.” Ultimately, all sutras direct you to recognize your own mind’s nature. Likewise, as Shantideva says in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*,

*All those who fail to understand
The secret of the mind, the greatest of all things,
Although they wish for joy and sorrow’s end,
Will wander to no purpose, uselessly.*

Without realizing the mind’s secret nature, ending suffering and attaining true happiness remains unrealistic. So engage in genuine practice to realize the nature of mind. Of course, this is not as easy as it sounds. You may feel a spark of understanding when hearing a teaching or reading a text, yet find progress elusive in actual meditation. My younger cousin’s wife told me her husband meditated daily on the nature of mind with great focus, yet he became increasingly bad-tempered. Such cases are not rare. Many practitioners seem normal and get along well with others before beginning meditation practice or even before following the Buddhist

path. But when they start meditating, they grow more irritable, leaving themselves embarrassed and others critical.

Despite such discouraging examples, it is essential to put teachings into practice. Failing to integrate them into your mindstream is a great pity—like owning a luxury car that sits idle for years until it is scrapped. In the same way, if you receive supreme pith instructions and never make time to practice them, you will deeply regret it at death. Therefore, it is urgent to practice—especially to meditate on the mind and discover its nature. Realizing it brings genuine ease and the ability to meet all circumstances with confidence. Please strive for this.

Undergo Gradual Training

Through the common, uncommon and special forms of mind training,

Gradually purify your mindstream and become a suitable vessel for dharma.

**If you do not tame your habitual patterns of negative thought,
Applying pith instructions will be like trying to cultivate high ground in winter.**

It is important to take gradual training steps to purify your mind, becoming a suitable vessel for dharma. The stages include: 1) the common preliminary practices of meditating on the rarity of a human rebirth, the impermanence of life, the defects of samsara, and the infallibility of karma; 2) the uncommon preliminary practices including taking refuge, developing bodhicitta, purifying karmic obscurations, and accumulating merit and wisdom; and 3) special forms of mind training such as Dzogchen preliminaries, including the preliminary of body, speech, and mind that leads to the three doors, and the yoga of the four elements that leads to the three kayas.

These gradual training stages are important because not everyone has the capacity for sudden realization. The vast majority—very likely more than ninety percent—are suited to gradual cultivation. If that is your disposition, it is wise to begin with the 500,000 accumulations of the ngondro practice, as Lama Mumtso teaches in *The Melody of the White Dharma Conch*. Following this procedure, the mind becomes tamed and receptive to dharma, ensuring success in your practice.

If, however, you give free rein to mental afflictions—desire, anger, ignorance, pride, and jealousy—and never train to subdue them, then even profound instructions from Dzogchen, Mahamudra, or the highest Chan will not bear fruit. It is like plowing and sowing in

midwinter—no harvest will come. The realizations of buddhas and bodhisattvas take root only in the field of a mind well cultivated through proper training. As the *Avatamsaka Sutra* says,

As in a fertile field,

The seed you sow will flourish.

In the field of a pure mind,

The Buddhadharma takes root and thrives.

In a well-tilled field, seeds flourish; likewise, the seeds of a buddha's qualities germinate only in the soil of a purified mind. If the mind is an untilled wasteland, it is wishful thinking to expect a bumper crop of realization. Lama Mumtso uses a vivid analogy in this verse. Many people overlook this obvious fact. When they read Dzogchen texts, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, or Bodhidharma's teachings on sudden enlightenment, they feel impressed and rush to meditate—yet gain little benefit. Hence in this teaching, Lama Mumtso asks us to undertake step-by-step training on the spiritual path.

Practice Dzogchen

**The Great Perfection is the pinnacle of the ocean of sutra
and mantra.**

**Generate the power of intense appreciation, aspiration,
and diligence**

**For these instructions for traversing the paths and levels all
at once,**

And take them to heart with a focus on the essential meaning.

This verse exhorts you to practice Dzogchen. The Great Perfection is the summit of Sutrayana and Tantrayana—the highest of all teachings—and a gateway to swift realization. Rather than proceeding step by step, it guides one to traverse all paths and levels at once. It includes trekchö, which cuts through to original purity, and tögal, which directly crosses over to the spontaneous presence of appearances. These instructions enable practitioners to swiftly pass through the five paths and ten bhumis within a single lifetime—whereas on the Sutrayana path, this would take at least three countless eons.

Given its sublimity and profundity, if you cultivate strong conviction and great diligence, and truly meditate on its core meaning, you can undoubtedly achieve realization in this transient human life. As His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche teaches in *The Heart Essence: My Heart's Advice*:

*At this time, when the darkness of the five degenerations prevails,
It is hard for the starlight of the eight lower yanas to banish it.
Shine instead the Nyingtik sun with its hundred thousand rays,
Drawn along by the seven-horse chariot of the three kinds of faith!*

In this degenerate age, the eight lower yanas are like stars whose light is too dim to dispel darkness in sentient beings' minds. The ninth yana, the Great Perfection, is like the sun with a hundred thousand rays; drawn forth by the seven-horse chariot of the three kinds of faith, it brings liberation from samsaric darkness in this very life.

Therefore, Lama Mumtso teaches that after establishing pure vows, focusing on study and contemplation, and completing the progressive trainings, you should take up Dzogchen as your ultimate practice. This sequence also accords with the stages advocated by His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. As his disciples, align

yourselves with his guidance and first uphold the vows of pratimoksha, the bodhisattva vows, and the samaya vows of Secret Mantrayana. If your vows are damaged, it is crucial to confess your wrongdoings, repair and restore the damaged and broken vows so your minds regain purity. Meanwhile, strive in study and practice. With these prerequisites in place, practice Dzogchen and dedicate the merit for rebirth in Sukhavati. In this way you fulfill all stages of training and the final goal, exactly as instructed by His Holiness and Lama Mumtso.

The Result of Practice

**Practicing in this way will give significance to the freedoms and
advantages,
And you will discover the confidence of being without regrets at
the time of death.
Through the joyous celebration of spontaneously accomplishing
twofold benefit,
You will show yourself immense kindness, as your mind is happy
and at ease.**

This verse speaks to the fruit of dharma practice. If you follow the foregoing steps, your human life—endowed with freedoms and

advantages—will be profoundly meaningful. For those of you at Larung Gar, so long as you do not adopt a wrong livelihood in the future, you are truly fortunate to have obtained a human birth, encountered the dharma, and devoted years to study and practice. Be glad that your life has such weight and worth. Had you not met the sangha, dharma friends, and kind teachers, who can say how much negative karma you might have amassed—and what wretched fate might await in the next life?

By putting the teachings into practice, your human life becomes truly significant. When this life draws to a close, you will feel no regret and be confident about what lies ahead. Some practitioners face death with assurance, thinking, “I have practiced profound teachings. I have confessed my misdeeds and cultivated many virtues. Wherever I go now, I feel no fear or remorse. Even if I do not reach Sukhavati, I am sure I will not fall into the lower realms. I have not violated samaya; I have received great teachings of both Sutrayana and Tantrayana, and I have done my utmost to practice them.”

Balancing Humility and Self-Confidence

In this context, excessive humility that diminishes yourself—especially at death—does not help. Many practitioners

habitually refer to themselves as “your humble and ashamed disciple” when addressing their teacher. In many Asian cultures, modesty is esteemed, so even in public Asian Buddhists might describe themselves as unworthy: “I am burdened with negative karma,” “I lack wisdom and knowledge,” “My precept-keeping is shamefully poor,” “I am full of discursive thoughts,” “My temper is bad,” “My six senses are obscured,” and so on—hiding any positive qualities.

While modesty is praiseworthy from Buddhist and Asian cultural perspectives, today self-respect and appropriate self-appreciation are often more effective, especially among the young. They prefer directness about their merits and don’t admire excessive modesty. For example, if a learned scholar calls himself ignorant, others may take it literally and withhold deserved respect. Some graduates of Han-area Buddhist colleges frequently call themselves “the ashamed disciple” or “one with shallow knowledge.” Perhaps they’re only outwardly humble while inwardly proud or even arrogant. This isn’t meritorious.

We need balance—avoiding both self-deprecation and conceit. As a Tibetan saying goes of the arrogant: “He walks looking only at the stars, never down at the ground.” That is clearly not right. But the opposite extreme—always bowing one’s head, staring at the

ground, never lifting one's gaze to the sky—isn't desirable either. In general, it is best to look forward, neither too high nor too low.

So it is in practice. The other day I spoke with an old middle-school classmate who also became a monk. I said, "Honestly, my practice is not excellent and my conduct leaves much to be desired, yet I feel fortunate to have met great teachers and sublime teachings. I don't know when or how I will die, but whenever it comes, I am content. Had I not met my teachers and these virtuous teachings, I would have accrued immense negative karma—so I am satisfied."

Thoughts like this often arise in me. When we consider ongoing crises in the Middle East, Ukraine, and elsewhere, the world seems to be entering an era of war and famine. In such a complex, chaotic age, we are exceedingly fortunate to be reborn in a region of Jambudvīpa where the dharma still flourishes. We're even more fortunate to rely on qualified teachers from whom we have received priceless instructions. My only regret is not having spent more time in meditation. Still, according to many Dzogchen texts, if one has received Dzogchen empowerments and teachings and has not violated samaya, one will not fall into the three lower realms—even if one's practice has been insufficient.

Maintain Positive Mindset in the Face of Aging and Death

With this in mind, I urge all dharma friends to refrain from sorrowful emotions, especially at death. Consciousness then is extremely sensitive; a single negative thought can easily draw it toward lower realms. When you realize your time is short, adjust your mindset and recall the virtues you have cultivated. Some seasoned practitioners face death with unshakable confidence and no regret. Likewise, when the time comes, remind yourself: “I have taken vows and done my best. I have applied myself to practicing the dharma and benefiting beings. I have done all I could and experienced all I should. I have tasted various foods, seen a world of variety, and heard both melodious and harsh sounds. I am satisfied with this life and ready for the next!”

Inevitably, our six sense faculties deteriorate. When that day comes, be satisfied with what you have experienced and accomplished. My eyesight and hearing are worsening, but I feel fulfilled by what I have seen and heard. Many people my age probably experience similar conditions. Days ago, I visited my temple, Domang Monastery, for an award ceremony. I noticed that when everyone burst into laughter, monks around my age looked puzzled, asking, “What are they laughing at?” because they couldn’t hear clearly.

As we age, our senses grow dull; foods—salty, spicy, or sweet—taste increasingly alike. The keen faculties of youth decline. When this happens, it is important to feel accomplished and satisfied with your life. Don't derive fulfillment only from possessions or sensory enjoyments. Find satisfaction in spiritual practice. If you have worked diligently at practice throughout your life, you will feel no regret at death. Besides, regret serves no purpose. When illness, aging, or death strikes, indulging in remorse benefits no one.

Appreciating Your Spiritual Journey

This verse is deeply thought-provoking. Practiced as above, the result is a human life rich with meaning and a death without regret. With the power of bodhicitta—which does not perish at death—you will spontaneously accomplish the twofold benefit for self and others. So long as you do not intentionally abandon bodhicitta, you will enjoy this joyful feast of benefit in all future lives until attaining perfect enlightenment. Having engaged in dharma practice this life, you will be happy and at ease—this is the greatest kindness you can show yourself. Unlike those who commit wrongdoing daily and harm both self and others, those who truly practice will end this life filled with happiness and joy—and spread that happiness to all karmically connected to them. Such is the fruit of dharma practice.

This is a truly admirable outcome—strive toward it as best you can. Some of you did not begin practicing when young and accumulated much negativity beforehand. Even so, encountering the dharma later in life is still great fortune. Therefore, make effort to maintain ethical discipline; when you transgress under adverse conditions, purify misdeeds through confession. Above all, do not develop wrong views toward the guru and the Three Jewels; otherwise, liberation is impossible.

Beings' tendencies are complex; it is hard to predict what we will meet or how we will be influenced. The Buddha says in the *Sutra of the Heap of Jewels* that, in his bodhisattva training, many people slandered him and spread rumors about misconduct and violations of discipline, and even so, he never considered abandoning the bodhi path. Given this, it is entirely normal for us to face obstacles and experience slander, misunderstanding, or harassment. There is no one greater than Shakyamuni Buddha; yet in his causal stage—and even after awakening—many disliked or insulted him, intentionally or not. Considering this, what can we ordinary beings expect in this age of five degenerations? Difficulties, obstacles, and suffering are certainly inevitable.

Everyone has hardships and stories—painful and inspiring. Focus on the encouraging aspects: How did you handle adversity?

When wronged, how much did you suffer, and how did you find courage? When conditions were favorable, how did you seize them to strengthen practice? What inspired you to turn from worldly life toward liberation? How did you come to rely on masters? How did you reach a solitary mountain hermitage to seek the dharma and receive the deepest Dzogchen teachings? You each have wonderful, extraordinary stories to cherish.

My point is to see the positive side of your life and appreciate your happiness. Hold the bottom line of not harboring wrong views toward the guru and the Three Jewels; if such thoughts arise due to heavy karma, confess and purify them. If you do so, you will live happily and meaningfully—worthy of your own and others' rejoicing.

This modern age differs from old days when food and clothing were scarce and many died from cold or hunger. Today, few of us worry about basic necessities—this is already a form of happiness. Moreover, we enjoy Mahayana teachings. Few people worldwide can meet and enjoy the nectar of Mahayana Buddhism. Although the Tibetan plateau may be materially underdeveloped, it is rich in Sutrayana and Tantrayana teachings. Since you have received profound instructions from your lineage masters and dedicated yourselves to benefiting others, there is every reason to feel happy.

Recognizing this, you will be eager to strive even more for the flourishing of the dharma and the welfare of sentient beings.

DEDICATION

**Through the virtue of speaking these words,
May the Sage's teachings flourish and all beings be happy.
May I too, in all my lives to come,
Bring vast waves of benefit to others.**

This is the dedication verse. By the merit generated from the foregoing teaching, may the wish-fulfilling jewel of the Buddhadharma flourish in the ten directions, and may beings throughout all worlds attain both temporary and ultimate happiness. Lama Mumtso also aspires to continue the great work of benefiting beings throughout space in all future lives. Let us follow Lama Mumtso's example and make the same aspiration.

When we chant *The King of Aspiration Prayers* after the teaching, contemplate its meaning deeply and rouse the corresponding aspirations. All of Samantabhadra's hundreds of thousands of aspirations are encompassed within *The King of Aspiration Prayers*, which His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche further distilled into *The Sun of Samantabhadra's Realm: The Quintessence of Oceanic Prayers*

of Aspiration. Summed up, *The Sun of Samantabhadra's Realm* urges two great aims: to spread the dharma and to benefit sentient beings. Following Lama Mumtso's lead, let us likewise aspire to bring the Mahayana teachings to countless beings in all lives to come. The power of aspiration is inconceivable—please focus on these two when you dedicate the merit.

Lama Mumtso's instruction here is excellent. If you have the opportunity, I encourage you to share it with others. It can be presented in one or two talks. Of course, its meaning is profound, and you can also teach it comprehensively. But often an audience needs a simple, practical guide. In such cases, provide a literal, introductory explanation, letting them know that following the Buddhist path begins with observing pure precepts, proceeds through gradual mind training, and culminates in the practice of Dzogchen. Ultimately, they can fully engage in altruistic activities benefiting sentient beings. Meanwhile, encourage them to cultivate positive attitudes and live happily. Learn to see the bright side rather than dwelling in sadness or anger. Some perceive the whole world as unpleasant and chaotic, viewing everything through a hostile lens—this is unhelpful. Having met the dharma and having the chance to practice makes one more fortunate than many; there is every reason to feel joy and gratitude.

This text is easy to understand literally, yet its meaning is deep. In itself, it does not matter whether it is taught by a male or female master; but considering the author's noble qualities, this work bears the special blessing of a contemporary female guru. As noted earlier, Lama Mumtso is an extraordinary female master endowed with strong aspirations and majestic qualities. Because of her blessing and compassion, anyone can rely on her by learning and practicing her teachings. Following a master does not necessarily mean cooking and doing chores—those are offerings of body and speech. Of the three ways to please the teacher, the best is to study and practice the dharma. If you wish to rely on Lama Mumtso as your guru and to please her, put her teachings into practice.

A Rare Female Master with Extraordinary Accomplishments

As I have said, it is rare to encounter such a great female master in our time. If you look at the scenes of Lama Mumtso bestowing empowerments around 2015, you will be amazed. It is extraordinary for a woman to preside over such large ceremonies. You can find these photos in her biography *White Lotus*. With the author Tulku Tendzin Gyatso's permission, I translated the biography from Tibetan into Chinese and included many photographs of Lama Mumtso—from youth to the present. Each image tells a story; in

that sense, the Chinese edition also serves as a historical photo book, often conveying more direct and vivid impressions than words.

Lama Mumtso was recognized as the reincarnation of Jetsün Mingyur Paldrön, a highly realized female practitioner of Mindrolling Monastery. In 1998 she traveled to Lhasa for the enthronement ceremony, and His Holiness sent me to accompany her. After the ceremony, as she toured the monastery, she recalled scenes from her previous life, as recorded by Tulku Tendzin Gyatso in her biography. In those former lives—as Jetsün Mingyur Paldrön or other great female practitioners—her realization and contributions to the dharma and beings were already remarkable.

Modern people may find reincarnation difficult to accept. But even if we look only at her present life, we can still glimpse her noble qualities from many angles: how she relates to people, how she treats others and handles affairs, and how diligently she practices. Practitioners—male and female—can use the same lenses for self-reflection. Consider her mantra recitation: by the age of thirteen she had completed one hundred million recitations, and to date she has surpassed one billion. Some dismiss mantra recitation as simple, but if you reflect carefully, even one million is difficult for many. Last year during our annual retreat at Larung Gar we practiced *Peaceful Manjushri*, and each person aspired to complete

one million Manjushri mantra recitations. I suspect many have not yet finished. Recently, in a seven-day collective Vajrasattva practice, each participant was to recite the mantra four hundred thousand times. I think most finished, as it's quite a modest requirement.

Outwardly, Lama Mumtso may not look so different from us—some of you are in your sixties as she is—but the difference in realization and skill in handling matters is striking. She uses her time with exceptional efficiency and maintains a remarkably stable mind. Among the living disciples of His Holiness, she is the most learned. Many of us came to Larung Gar in the 1980s and, from then until His Holiness's passing, received all his teachings. Yet, as her biography notes, His Holiness—her uncle—had been instructing her since she was under ten years old, even during the Cultural Revolution when Buddhism was highly restricted. While we missed those early years, she received the teachings in their entirety.

Lama Mumtso has also been unfailingly obedient to her uncle's instructions—an extraordinary and admirable trait. Without a gentle, stable disposition, she could not have relied on His Holiness throughout her life. Put many people in the same scenario—whether in Tibetan region or elsewhere—no matter how many qualities their close relatives possess, they might not appreciate them as much,

let alone consistently attend their teachings daily. Even such small observations reveal the gap between the noble and the ordinary.

In short, as we have the good fortune to study this text from a great contemporary female master, cultivate pure perception and recognize Lama Mumtso's greatness. At the same time, live by the teaching, even if full implementation is difficult. Some senior practitioners here have heard similar teachings many times; some have applied them well, others less so. In any case, any time and energy invested in study, reflection, and practice is beneficial to inner growth. It is therefore meaningful to aspire to benefit others with the Mahayana in all our future lives.

POSTSCRIPT

This was written in the hermitage of Great Secret Liberation into the Body of Light on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month of the Iron Dragon year by the shramaneriika follower of Shakyamuni called Mumtso in response to a request from some lamas and monks who hold the dharma lineage of Orgyen Mindrolling. May it bring virtue and excellence!

The Iron Dragon year is 2000—two years after Lama Mumtso's enthronement at Mindrolling. As mentioned, the enthronement

took place in 1998, and I was present. The next day we drove to Lhasa, and I shared a car with the abbot of Mindrolling. En route, we had an accident—the car overturned in the Yarlung Zangbo River. We were very fortunate to survive—though I did lose a shoe in the river. Later, back at Larung Gar, His Holiness quipped in class, “Mumtso’s trip to Mindrolling went quite well—no major obstacles, except that Khenpo Sodargye lost a shoe!” In fact, the car was severely damaged and we all fell into the river. It was truly dangerous, but thankfully none of us was hurt. One could regard it as a challenge that can arise on the spiritual path.

Afterward, Lama Mumtso was enthroned again at Larung Gar—some of you may remember. In 2000, eminent masters from Mindrolling visited; together with monastics from Mindrolling and its branch monasteries studying at Larung Gar, they made offerings to Lama Mumtso and supplicated for her long life and the flourishing of her dharma activities. At their request, a second enthronement was held in Larung Gar’s main sutra hall. You can find the details in the biography. This text was composed on that occasion, and I translated it into Chinese on February 12, 2024.

“The Hermitage of Great Secret Liberation into the Body of Light” refers to Larung Gar—another name for our academy—because, as recorded in Dudjom Lingpa’s biography, thirteen great practitioners

attained the rainbow body in the Larung valley. Perhaps that is why we often see beautiful rainbows here—just yesterday one arced over the mountain. Who knows—did someone attain the rainbow body? In Dzogchen, transforming one's body into light is a supreme accomplishment. When I first came to Larung Gar and heard this name, I thought, "What a wonderful name!" This concludes my teaching on this text.



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