



Chapter 3

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

I HAVE BEEN THROUGH A FEW aspects of Buddhist history and certain particulars I thought would help you establish a good foundation for Buddhist practice, or remind you of your good foundation.

PRAJNAPARAMITA

Now I would like to go through some of the teachings that relate to emptiness, the Prajnaparamita. Within the teachings of Lord Buddha the Prajnaparamita Sutras belong to the Sutra section. There are six main Sutras in this group, known as the six mothers, and eleven other Sutras, known as – let’s say – the Daughter Sutras. In Tibetan these seventeen texts are called the *Yumse*: *yum* means mother, *se* means child. This *se* could be short for *se-pa* and therefore mean sons or *se-ma* and refer to daughters – it doesn’t say which it is. This means the six main texts are described as “mothers” and the eleven smaller texts are described as “children,” either daughters or sons.

These six main texts are all the Lord Buddha's words. The first of these has 100,000 *shlokas*. A *shloka* is a verse of four sentences; this means the first of these main texts has 400,000 sentences and is the largest Prajnaparamita Sutra. The second and second largest text has 20,000¹⁶ *shlokas*, the third 18,000, the fourth 10,000, and the fifth 8,000. The sixth is known as the *Do-du-wa*, the condensed text. The *Do-du-wa* is quite a short text compared to the others. If you were to read the *Do-du-wa* quite quickly but not very quickly it would probably take you between half an hour and an hour. It is a text suitable to be read as a daily practice. The 100,000 *shloka* text, on the other hand, runs to twelve huge volumes and is certainly not able to be read as a daily practice.

Out of the Rinpoches around today in our lineage, one of the best readers is Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche. If he reads from dawn to dusk, he can finish three volumes – two volumes comfortably – where it might take me one and a half to two days to finish one volume. It is an enormous task to read this many of these very thick volumes. According to the standard Western way of counting pages, where both sides of a page are counted, each of these volumes would have 800 to 1,000 large pages. [Tibetan texts have many different page sizes.] The pages of these volumes are called “arrow size;” they are the size of an arrow in length, in other words quite large texts.

The texts known as the “Eleven Daughters,” include the 700, 500, 300, 150, 50 and 25 *shloka* Prajnaparamita Sutras. They also include the Prajnaparamita Sutras requested by the disciples Rabtsel Namnön (Suvikranta Vikrami) and Koishika, the one word Prajnaparamita Sutra and the Prajnaparamita Sutra of a few sentences. Finally there is the Prajnaparamita Sutra known as the *Heart Sutra*.

The reason some of these texts are called “mothers” and others are called “daughters” is not necessarily because of their size. It depends on whether or not the individual text includes the eight aspects of the Prajnaparamita; any text that has all eight aspects is known as a “mother” text and any text that does not have all eight aspects is known as a “daughter” text. These eight aspects were clearly enumerated by Lord Maitreya in his text called the *Abhisamayalankara*, or the *Sherab kyi par rol tu chin ba men ngag gi*

ten chö ngon bä tog bä jen in Tibetan. In English it is called, *The Ornament of Clear Realization: An instructional shastra of the Prajnaparamita*.¹⁷ This text was the first of the five teachings Lord Maitreya taught to his disciple Asanga in the Tushita heaven. It is a Prajnaparamita text taught in these eight aspects. Each of the eight aspects or characteristics is to be found in a separate chapter so they can be easily understood.

When we try and find these eight characteristics in a big text like the 100,000 shloka Prajnaparamita, which is usually in twelve huge volumes, it is difficult. These eight characteristics are not lined up in order so trying to find them is like trying to separate out the ingredients of a fruit shake. It is like trying to separate the mango out from the kiwi fruit and the orange when they have all been blended together.

These eight characteristics are an important part of Mahayana Prajnaparamita practice and as many of you read the *Heart Sutra* I think it will be helpful to go through them, even if some of you already know them. I will go through them according to Lord Maitreya's clear description in the *Abhisamayalankara*.

One interesting thing about this text is that it begins and ends in the same place. It begins with the motivation and ends with the fulfillment of that motivation. The first chapter of the book is omniscience, the Buddha-essence or Buddha-nature, the *namchen*. The second chapter describes the knowledge of the path, *lam sheba*. This knowledge of the path fulfills the essence's aspiration. The third deals with the knowledge of the foundation, *zhi sheba*. This foundation is the essence, the omniscience. It is a mystery. It is out there. We may think the Buddhas are great and wonderful. We may think the bodhisattvas are great and wonderful. We may think that we want to be like the Buddhas and bodhisattvas but we can only achieve this if we have the Buddha-essence. It is the basis for this achievement. Only because we have Buddha-nature can we become Buddhas.

It is also only because of the Buddha-nature that we can purify the karma we have created. It is impossible to accumulate good or bad karma ultimately because the creation of karma is dualistic and

it is only because karma cannot be created ultimately that it can be purified. All the karma we have accumulated for countless lifetimes can be purified because ultimately it never happened, it only happened relatively. As long as we are dualistic it is still relevant, but as soon as we are free from dualism it has been purified. Through this foundation, the Buddha-essence, we can say, “I wish to become a Buddha in order to lead all sentient beings to Buddhahood.” Without this base it would just be blah, blah, blah.

If you are not a Buddhist you may use other words to describe this process. You can say everyone has limitless potential. You can say everyone’s essence is perfect, limitless, sacred and holy. You can use whichever words you like to describe the non-dualistic primordial essence. Whatever you call it this is the third of the eight characteristics.

These three characteristics refer to the existence and knowledge of omniscience, the path and the base. The next few characteristics describe the implementation of this knowledge. The first of these and the fourth chapter of the *Abhisamayalankara* describes the complete implementation, the *namchen jorwa*. In this text this topic is described by 173 stages of meditation and contemplation. This covers all 173 aspects of the Prajnaparamita practice in a step-by-step way.

The fifth characteristic, and the second implementation, is a description of the *tsemor jorwa*. This means the implementation that reaches towards the top. The word *tsemo* means the peak or tip of something. Practicing this implementation means you are climbing towards the top. Beings implementing the aspects of meditation in this way still practice every aspect, though. They progress in every aspect of meditation. In the same way that saying, “I take refuge in the Buddha” today will not have the same depth and profundity as saying it after ten years of practicing refuge would, they increase their understanding of these aspects through the implementation of their knowledge. They may be using the same words, saying the same things, but the meaning becomes deeper and more profound.

The sixth characteristic, and third implementation, describes implementing all these 173 aspects of the Prajnaparamita in one

session. That is being able to comprehend each of them, from step one to step 173, one after another without a break in one meditation session. It is called the *thar ji bä jorwa*, the gradual implementation.

The seventh characteristic, and fourth implementation, is a description of how these 173 aspects become non-dual. It is called the *kechigmä jorwa*, the momentary application. All the aspects are implemented in a snap of the fingers. The other ways of implementing these practices were to go through them one by one, but here they are all implemented at once. Not one by one. Not one each month, or one each minute. They are all implemented in a single second. The only way this can possibly happen is when the aspects are observed non-dualistically. Otherwise they could not be comprehended in an instant. How could your mind comprehend 173 points in a moment dualistically? It would be impossible.

The eighth and last characteristic and chapter is a discussion of the final fruition, the dharmakaya, the *chö ku*. Any texts that teach on all eight of these topics is called a “Mother Prajnaparamita Sutra” and those that only focus on seven, six, five or fewer of them are called “Daughter Prajnaparamita Sutras.”

Included within the six Mother Sutras is the brief text I mentioned earlier, the *Do-du-wa* that can be read as a daily practice. This text is actually a chapter of the third Mother Sutra that has 18,000 shlokas. There are eighty-seven chapters in this Sutra, and the eighty-fourth chapter is the *Do-du-wa*. It is also called a “Mother” Sutra by itself because all eight aspects of the Prajnaparamita are included within this one chapter. When this chapter is extracted from the 18,000 shloka text, the remaining text still contains these eight aspects. Therefore, both this chapter and the entire text are both considered “Mother” Prajnaparamita Sutras. If they were not enumerated separately like this there would only be five Mother Sutras and eleven Daughter Sutras. As it is there are six Mother Sutras and eleven Daughter Sutras.

There are also other Prajnaparamita texts that are not included within these two groupings; such as the *The Essence of the Sun*, *The Essence of the Moon*, *The Prajnaparamita Kuntuzangpa*, *The Prajnaparamita at the Request of Vajrapani*, and *The Prajnaparamita*

at the Request of Vajra Jeltsen. A *Jeltsen* is like a flag, a victory banner. These texts, and many others, are not included within the seventeen texts mentioned earlier but are still considered Prajnaparamita texts.

Now you know where the Prajnaparamita teachings, the teachings on emptiness, come from. It is also important to note the connection between the teachings on emptiness and their meaning, how they are both part of the Prajnaparamita. The Prajnaparamita and emptiness have the same meaning; Prajnaparamita means the wisdom paramita.¹⁸

I am sure my Sanskrit pronunciation is not very good. I only studied it for two or three weeks. My Guru, His Holiness the Karmapa, invited a Sanskrit professor to Rumtek to teach us but he left after two or three weeks and never came back. I think maybe it was our food or our habits. He was very learned, I think he knew seventeen or eighteen languages, a wonderful person, but somehow he couldn't stand us. In those days I, at least, was a real teenager. I was fifteen or sixteen and he had to teach a handful of teenagers like me. It was too difficult for him I guess so he left after two weeks and never came back! Because of this my Sanskrit is totally zero and I will pronounce these words in the traditional way other Tibetans pronounce them.

I actually have an important historical connection to Sanskrit. The eighth Tai Situpa was supposed to have been one of the greatest Sanskrit scholars since the initial period of the transmission of Buddhism to Tibet. During this initial transmission, the time of Guru Rinpoche and slightly afterwards, there were many Tibetans who mastered Sanskrit. After this time though, there was a gap of about 800 years until the eighth Tai Situpa became a master of Sanskrit. He encountered Sanskrit panditas in Nepal who told him that if he were to visit India he would receive the honor of thirteen peacock umbrellas. I don't know exactly what that means. I believe it is umbrellas with many levels. Not actually thirteen different umbrellas but one umbrella with many levels, they keep adding more and more levels. I think they represent something similar to a general's stars, they would have shown he had enormous respect because of his knowledge of Sanskrit.

When we arranged a program once for His Holiness' teachings in Talkatora, a stadium in Delhi, he only had one umbrella but it was a peacock umbrella, very beautifully embroidered with many glass or gem ornaments on it. It was beautiful.

Anyway, I have a history behind me that should make me very good at Sanskrit but unfortunately I am not. I am not blaming our teacher who left but somehow I haven't been able to learn Sanskrit since then. Now I am not at an age where learning comes easy so I don't think I am going to become a Sanskrit master in this life. My English isn't very good either. I never learned from a teacher, I just picked it up. My English writing is very, very bad. I only know how words are spelt differently, like the difference between "good" and "god" and that if you reverse "god" it becomes "dog." I know this kind of thing, but beyond this my written English is terrible. My spoken English is not as bad as my written English but I am sure a linguist would find grammatical problems in every few sentences. I really cannot afford to care or worry about this though, otherwise I would be so self-conscious I wouldn't dare say anything to all of you.

Now back to the connection between Prajnaparamita and emptiness: prajna means wisdom, paramita means completion, accomplishment, reaching beyond. If you want to reach the far shore of a river, the paramita of river crossing is reaching the other side. Prajnaparamita means to reach beyond wisdom. What is the difference between wisdom and reaching beyond the accomplishment of wisdom? Reaching beyond wisdom is the realization of primordial wisdom. Wisdom itself is derived from primordial wisdom but you can have wisdom without realizing primordial wisdom, there is a difference between the two. For example, if you put an expert businessman, politician and computer technician together for a weekend or three-day session they may come up with a brilliant master plan that has lots of insight and depth. To develop this plan would take wisdom but each one of these individuals may be in a terrible state. They may have lots of problems at home, for example, and as their primordial wisdom has not been realized, they can only derive

wisdom from their primordial wisdom as part of a team. In this way, wisdom and primordial wisdom are different.

In Tibetan, the word for wisdom is *sherab*. *She* means knowing, *rab* means best and profound. Primordial wisdom is *yeshe*, primordial knowing. You may have *sherab* but your *yeshe* is primordially within you as your essence. When you have *sherab* you can be very intelligent, very good at certain things, but as long as you also have ego – the ignorance of self⁹ – your primordial wisdom will not manifest. If your primordial wisdom has not manifested you will still experience all kinds of limitations to your knowledge: when your primordial wisdom is manifest there are no limitations. Your limitless potential and your primordial wisdom are the same thing; the Prajnaparamita is the realization of this primordial wisdom.

What does that have to do with emptiness? It is very simple. “Emptiness” means that everything is nothing more and nothing less than the interdependent manifestation of everything else. It doesn’t mean you are not there, it doesn’t mean I am not here. It doesn’t mean I am not talking, it doesn’t mean you are not hearing. I am talking, you are hearing, you are taking notes. You are there, I am here and each one of us has a history, a family tree, pluses and minuses, but all of these things we have are nothing more and nothing less than the interdependent manifestation of everything else.

Look at the relationships between us in this room. Some of us feel very clear about each other, some of us might be a little bit confused about each other, some of us might be positively allergic to each other and some of us could be negatively allergic to each other. All of these relationships exist because of our countless lifetimes of relationship. To be bold and clear, each one of us has been a father, a mother, a brother, a sister, a husband, a wife, a lunch, a dinner, an enemy, a friend, a neighbor and a stranger to everybody else in this room countless times. Each one of us has been a king, a queen and a god. Each one of us has been to hell and has been all the animals you can think of – dinosaurs, tyrannosaurus, amoebas, earthworms, cockroaches, beautiful peacocks, mighty lions. You name it, each one of us has been it, not once but countless times.

The result of all this is the life we have today. This life is a final fingerprint of all the past lives we have lived. How we look, how we sound, how we feel, and how we perceive are all results of our past lives. This is what we are. This lifetime is the tip of the iceberg, the signature, the reflection, the production, the cream, the butter of all our countless past lives. In this way we are all unique, each one of us is a masterpiece, a piece of art that has taken billions of lifetimes to create. This is what we have managed to create!

This also means time is relative, that perceptions are relative. All aspects of the environment out there and the perceptions experienced inside our heads are relative. “Relative” in that they are not ultimate. My manifestation is here and your manifestation is there this is true, but it is a relative truth. Ultimately I am not this. Ultimately you are not that. Ultimately you and I are the Buddha’s equals but because of the relative karma we have been accumulating for countless lifetimes I am not yet a Buddha and neither are you.

I don’t mean to be negative but we are like a big piece of coal with a very large diamond at its center. This big piece of coal may be very nice and clean or it may be very dirty and messy. It may have a nice shape or it may have an ugly shape. It may be in a bad place, it may be in a good place, it may be put on an altar, it may be under a pile of garbage, but it has a diamond in it and that diamond is the best and biggest of all diamonds. It is the limitless potential in each one of us, our primordial wisdom, and right now it is covered by relative truth – a relative truth that is our own doing.

The Buddha said, “*Tong pa nyi la zuk me, tsol wa me, du she me, du che nam me.* There is no form, no feeling, no this, no that, no eye, no ear, no nose, no form to look at, no sound to hear.” In manifesting his teachings on the Prajnaparamita, the Buddha went into all this detail. In the very short *Heart Sutra*, each of these details is included very clearly. It says, “Form is empty,” but it doesn’t stop there, it also says, “Emptiness is form.” Just saying, “Form is empty” does not complete the equation, so the Buddha also said, “Emptiness is form.” Then he said, “Emptiness is not other than form,” and “Form is not other than emptiness.” After this the Buddha went on and on

describing feelings, perceptions, effort, consciousness and so on in this way.

For this reason it is important to know the connection between the Prajnaparamita and emptiness. Otherwise we will have a strange perception of what the Prajnaparamita is and what emptiness is. I have seen this confusion in people. I have seen it in some very devoted, very hardworking practitioners. They have some pieces of the puzzle missing from their practice. They tend to think that emptiness means something like “everything is nothing” and that the Prajnaparamita is something so very complicated and hard to understand that they don’t even try to study it. All they do is read a Prajnaparamita Sutra every day. Yet if you connect emptiness and the Prajnaparamita clearly it takes care of this misperception, it becomes very simple.

The Prajnaparamita is about primordial wisdom. Primordial wisdom is the essence of everything, the emptiness that is the ultimate truth. The way everything manifests is relative truth. This is the connection. Emptiness is actually a very simple subject to understand, and by understanding it everything makes sense. Otherwise everything is very hard to explain. Why do you think the way you think? Why do I think the way I think? Why do you look where you look? Why do I look where I look? Why does the world manifest in such a way? Why do things exist in certain ways? Why are some things extinct and other things manifest? Why? How? Without an understanding of emptiness you have no really satisfying, commonsense, true answers.

Without understanding emptiness I would have to draw simple conclusions like, “It is my fate,” or, “It is predestined,” or “It was a bad accident,” or, “It was a good accident,” or, “Somebody made me like this because he or she wanted me this way.” There are all kinds of easy conclusions like this that will make us feel temporarily okay. There may even be somebody else who agrees with us and says, “Yes, that’s true.” Then when three, four or five people agree with us we may become comfortable about our belief. We may even accept it as fact. If you really sit down and think clearly though – and the limitless potential we all have enables us to think carefully and clearly – then these kinds of conclusions don’t make any sense.

If somebody had the ability to make me, why didn't they make me perfect? If we think on this theory a little more deeply the person who made us becomes responsible for all our problems. If that person made me this way, he, she or whoever it was is responsible for all of my problems. They cannot just take credit for all the good things and blame me for all the bad things. That would be saying, "I made you to do good but you won't listen so you do bad things." They cannot say this, there has to be two-way traffic. If a person has the power to make you, they would have to be able to make you any way they wanted.

Easy conclusions like this are okay for making people feel comfortable from day to day; they are like finding a nice pillow to lie down on, a glass of wine, nice air conditioning, or even nice music to put us to sleep. They can do this, but they cannot really take us any further. We cannot evolve through thinking like this. It does not help us find out exactly what we could be. It is not a bad thing, it does act as a stopgap measure, but the Prajnaparamita breaks through stopgap measures.

I am not talking about a particular religious view here, just reality. As Buddhists, for example, we all know about karma, but if karma is "hard cooked" it becomes fate and we look at it as ultimate truth. If karma was the ultimate truth we would all be finished, we could never become Buddhas. It would take countless lifetimes to purify the karma of drinking a glass of water, or even to purify the karma we accumulate by killing all the germs in the water to make it drinkable. We accumulate all this negative karma before we drink a drop. There must be ten thousand, or maybe scientists would even say ten million, germs killed in order to make one glass of water drinkable. It is not that these germs are so small we can't see them and therefore there is no karma in killing them. This is a false assumption; we take many lives to make one glass of water drinkable.

As we walk, how many little beings do we squash? Walking from over there to here how many dust mites did I kill? I am very heavy, how many of their hearts came out of their mouths when I stood on them? How many of their intestines oozed out? How many of their eyes popped out when I stood on them? To them I would be like

Gulliver in Lilliput. Going from that side of the room to this would be like Gulliver's travels for all these little creatures living there with their families, their little dust-mite babies, their cousins and nephews. Just by walking from there to here I squashed many of them.

This is why in India we have a religious group called the Jains who put white cloth on their mouths to make sure they don't breathe in any insects, never walk on carpet, and carry a piece of wood to sit on. They are also very careful not to stand on insects. The real masters of this religion don't even wear clothes and take a long time to eat their meals. They take one handful of food, look at it and inspect it very carefully to ensure it contains no bugs and then eat it, even though these meals are vegetarian. In this religion there are also nuns, I think, who are covered totally by cloth and carry a very soft, cotton broom to sweep away small insects in front of the masters when they walk. These masters themselves wear very special shoes that are soft like cotton and when they walk they make a sound, like ringing a bell, to drive away all the bigger insects. They do their best, but even if we behaved like them, if there was no emptiness, how many lifetimes would it take just to purify the karma of drinking a glass of water?

This is the greatness, the sacredness, and the profoundness of the Lord Buddha's second turning of the wheel, the Prajnaparamita, which he manifested at Rajgir on the top of Vulture's Peak. There he said that, "Everything is nothing more and nothing less than the interdependent manifestation of everything else." This means we have hope. Our hope is based on this truth, the ultimate truth that we are perfect at all times; that ultimately everything is perfect at all times because everything is *shunyata*. I am *shunyata* – emptiness – everything is emptiness, perfect.

Relatively, as long as I have defilements, this *shunyata* is only something I can understand intellectually and have faith in. As long as I have defilements I cannot experience it directly. I can have confidence that enlightenment is possible, but relatively we have to do lots of hard work to achieve it. Should I say, "hard work" or "honorable work"? I don't know. All honorable work is hard, and all dishonorable work is not. We have a lot of honorable work to do. I will give you a very simple but cruel example of how honorable work

is difficult. This example happens all over the world. It takes a lot of time and energy to make a good human being. The father, the mother, the relatives, the family, the school, the college, the teachers, the tutors, the doctors all use everything they have got for about thirty years to bring about a good human being. It takes about thirty years from the time a baby is born until they become a complete person, someone you don't have to worry about going in the wrong direction. Until they are thirty people can be influenced negatively because they lack experience. As they have not been exposed to certain things, they can be overwhelmed when they experience them. Even though today's legal age of adulthood is eighteen, it really isn't the case that we become adults at eighteen. It is very difficult to influence a truly mature thirty year old, but even quite mature twenty-five year olds can be much more easily influenced.

Then of course we may have a mid-life crisis at forty or fifty where a little window opens through which we can be negatively influenced. Somebody may flatter us and say, "You really don't look that old." And we may think, "I don't look that old," go out and buy a new, red Ferrari and go bungee jumping. Even if bungee jumping at that age is very dangerous and we may break our back we may still try it to prove to ourselves that even though we are forty, fifty or sixty, we are not like a forty, fifty or sixty year old. There is this window of time in which we may do these things, but generally it takes about thirty years to really set a person.

Even then, though, all this hard work can be destroyed with no cost in the snap of a finger. To bring up someone well takes so much effort but one careless, cruel – or maybe not even cruel, maybe ignorant person can destroy all this work by, for example, killing this well brought up person just to steal some money from their pocket to buy drugs with. This kind of thing happens all the time. Anything that is good to do is not easy, but anything that is not so good to do is quite easy.

This is the way things are relatively. Although ultimately everything is perfect and emptiness, relatively we need constant effort, awareness and diligence to continue progressing. From this point of view, it is very hard work. It is only just before we reach the first

bodhisattva level that we can say, “Okay now I don’t need to do anything because everything will happen by itself.” We call this state *zopa*, “forbearance,” the third level of the second of the five paths, the path of application: the path of application has four levels, warming, summit, forbearance and highest worldly dharma.²⁰ The five paths are accumulation, application, seeing, meditation and no more learning. When we reach this state of *zopa* everything will happen automatically, but until we reach this state we have to stay totally on our toes; we have to use our ears, eyes, nose and tentacles – everything we have – to detect the negative influences that may overwhelm us. As Buddhists, we always have to be disciplined and follow the guidelines of Lord Buddha. If you are not Buddhists then you have to implement the guidelines of whichever religion you follow.

RANGTONG AND SHENTONG²¹

Everything is also relatively empty, as is exemplified by the different emphases placed on the concept of emptiness in the different schools of Buddhism. There are so many of these different schools.²² Here, however, I am only going to go through three of them from my notes, as examples. The first school is called the *Rangtong Mä-gag*, [Proponents of a Self-Empty, Non-affirming Negation]. *Rang* means “self,” *tong* means “emptiness,” *mä* means “non-existence” and *gag* means “total cessation.” How does this school describe emptiness? They say the essence of everything, including the concept of “everything” itself, does not have any true, solid existence. Emptiness is nothing, from the forms we can see up to enlightenment itself nothing exists in a solid manner. This is the view of the Rangtong Mä-gag School, non-existence by itself.

Then there is the *Rangtong Ma-yin-gag* [Proponents of a Self-Empty, Affirming Negation]. The negation *Mä*, which the previous school asserted, means something doesn’t exist at all. The negation *Ma-yin* means “it is not that.” There is a difference between these two negations. For example, if somebody is looking for Mr Agawul,

and Mr Agawul is not here, his absence is the negation *Mä*; his not being here is *Mä*. If, on the other hand, the person looking for Mr Agawul has mistaken Mr Marter for Mr Agawul and we say, “He is not Mr Agawul, he is Mr Marter,” this kind of negation is a *Ma-yin*. The first negation says he is not here, the second says he is not this. A *Mä-gag* means “not there,” but a *Ma-yin-gag* means “not that.” With a *Ma-yin-gag* we are saying that it is not Mr Agawul, it is Mr Marter.

How then does this particular school or lineage, the Rangtong Ma-yin-gag, describe Buddha-nature? It describes it as lacking a solid, permanent entity and as having a nature that is ineffable, indescribable. That is, it is not there as a dualistic, solid entity because its nature is unexplainable. Buddha-nature, the primordial wisdom itself, does not have any solid existence because it is ineffable, unexplainable – there is no example for it. We do not have to use Buddha-nature as our example of a phenomenon, we can use any phenomena, but if we use Buddha-nature it is easier to understand.

The Rangtong *Mä-gag* School says there is nothing and the Rangtong Ma-yin-gag school says it is ineffable, unexplainable and unimaginable. The third school is the *Shentong Ma-yin-gag*. The only Shentong School is the *Ma-yin-gag*; there is no Shentong *Mä-gag* school. Remember, “*Mä*” means “to not exist.” The Shentong Ma-yin-gag School says that Buddha-nature is always there, it is never not there. This presence is one of its qualities. It is there, but it is not dualistic. The non-dualistic, primordial essence is there but it is void of any kind of dualistic existence. It is not there like a table, not there like a thought, not there as a subject, not there as an object. These words refer to “other things,” they are dualistic. The Buddha-nature is a non-dualistic, limitless, primordial perfection that is always present.

This is the view of the Shentong Ma-yin-gag School of which I am a follower. Being a follower of this school means I will never say we are nothing; I will say we are everything. I will say our limitless essence is ineffable, indescribable perfection. I will say it is the same as the dharmakaya of the Buddha but it is not there dualistically as a subject or an object. I will say the primordial essence is there but

that it is free from dualism. This is the view of the Shentong Ma-yin-gag School.

These three examples describe a little of the various Buddhist philosophical schools, but there are so many others. The differences in views of the schools sometimes even developed further and became schools by themselves. The three I described were the Rangtong Mä-gag, the Rangtong Ma-yin-gag and the Shentong Ma-yin-gag. There is no Shentong Mä-gag but the Rangtong School has both a Mä-gag and a Ma-yin-gag version. The Rangtong Mä-gag says that the Buddha-nature itself is empty, it doesn't exist. The Rangtong Ma-yin-gag says it does not exist because its quality cannot be described. The Shentong Ma-yin-gag says its essence exists but not dualistically. In *Shentong*, *Shen* means other, *tong* again means empty. "Empty of other" means empty of a dualistic entity, but the non-dualistic, perfect essence that has a limitless potential is there in everyone and everything at all times.

There has been so much debate between these three schools that volumes have been written on them. One of the greatest texts written by a Shentong master in our lineage is called, *The Faith of Shentong, the Lion's Roar*. It sounds very nice, "Lion's Roar," these days there is no greater roar than the roar of a lion. Maybe the tyrannosaurus had a greater roar but they are a long time gone. The lion, the king of the animals, the king of the jungle, has the loudest, most majestic roar. This title likens the words of the Shentong Ma-yin-gag to this lion's roar; ultimately everything else can fall into it.

The Shentong followers, for the sake of debate, will say there is no better way to describe the essence of the Buddha than the Shentong Ma-yin-gag. Actually, though, if you learnt the Rangtong Mä-gag view properly, in the end it becomes the same as the Shentong Ma-yin-gag and if you learn the Shentong Ma-yin-gag truly, in the end you will have no problems with the Rangtong Mä-gag, or the Rangtong Ma-yin-gag. In the end there will be no problem between the different approaches, but you really have to study hard to reach this point. Reaching this understanding from the point of view of the Rangtong Mä-gag may be a little harder than reaching it from the point of view of the Rangtong Ma-yin-gag, from which in turn it

may be a little harder to reach this point of view than from the Shentong Ma-yin-gag. But of course you are hearing this from a Shentong practitioner and you shouldn't forget that. Anyway in the end it is really the same thing.

The description of emptiness has evolved in very subtle ways into many, many schools. The transmission of teachings on emptiness may be given in various ways, but they truly are the key to the basic definitions of enlightenment, samsara, karma and all the other things that the dharma involves, that life involves. The Lord Buddha's teachings on emptiness are very profound. Of course all of the Lord Buddha's teachings are profound, but when he taught at Rajgir, he manifested much more than when he manifested the Four Noble Truths in Varanasi. The Four Noble Truths are a very important base but by the time he manifested the Prajnaparamita teaching, his disciples had evolved much more. In these teachings he not only describes good and bad, but also the essence of everything that is good and bad. Still later the Tantra aspect of the teachings manifested, but I will stop here, this subject is quite vast so you may have lots of question.

QUESTIONS

Question: Could you describe the difference between Rangtong Mä-gag and Rangtong Ma-yin-gag again?

Rinpoche: Rangtong Mä-gag says there is nothing. Rangtong Ma-yin-gag says it is ineffable, indescribable. That is the difference. Rangtong Ma-yin-gag is closer in view to the Shentong Ma-yin-gag.

Question: Can you say something about ignorance, and it being co-emergent with wisdom?

Rinpoche: Actually ignorance could not exist if it were not for wisdom. Ignorance is like wisdom's shadow. You have the capacity to know, you have a limitless potential and because of that when you don't

know, there is ignorance. Ignorance, ego, self and I are all the same thing. There are four sentences, written in a prayer by the third Karmapa, that describe this.

*Self-appearance, which never existed, has confused itself
into projections;
Spontaneous intelligence, because of ignorance, has confused
itself into a self;
By the power of dualistic fixation one wanders in the
realm of existence –
May ignorance and confusion be resolved.*

The object never existed out there; it is my own perception but I have mistaken it as an object. The second sentence says that I constantly encounter my realization – the essence of my self, my awareness – but I mistake it for “I.” Due to this everything out there becomes an object and everything in here becomes a subject. Dualism develops out of these two types of ignorance, these two steps of ignorance, and I wander around samsara in circles. Samsara actually means to go around in circles. The final sentence requests that we expose this process. That this is exposed to us and we realize the illusion of ignorance.

My environment, all of this is the nirmanakaya and the sambhogakaya, a pure land, but I don't recognize it. I see a table with lots of things on it and all kinds of people. I know the names of most of these people and the faces of almost everyone. It is quite an interesting room. I am not certain why some things have been done in certain ways in this room, but it is a nicely put together room. I don't perceive it as a mandala though, and I don't perceive myself as a Buddha. I perceive myself as someone who was born somewhere, became something, came here to India and grew up here. I perceive myself as someone to whom many things have happened. I remember what I used to do, what I am doing now, what I know and what I don't know. I perceive myself like this.

Based on this perception I go around in circles. Sometime these circles are so big I don't even realize I am going in circles! Sometimes

the circle is so small I not only realize I am going in circles but also pass out, or throw up. When I go around in big circles, I call that success. When you are successful you are going around in circles so big you don't even know you are going around in circles. When you are in trouble the circles are so small it is like you are spinning.

This is the definition of wisdom and ignorance. When you realize something, you understand what you haven't realized. Therefore wisdom and ignorance are two sides of the same hand, they are connected. The transformation of ignorance is wisdom and it happens in many different ways.

Question. So one could say that ignorance is a manifestation of primordial wisdom?

Rinpoche: You can definitely say that, with full confidence to anybody. If this were not the case where does it come from? It is like saying the sharpest shadow is the outcome of the brightest light. Ignorance is the outcome of our limitless potential. The reason we are so greedy, for example, the reason it is so impossible for us to be content if we decide not to be content, is that we have a limitless potential for anything. We have to work quite hard to decide, "Okay, enough. I have this and that, it is enough." We have to keep saying this to ourselves and pull on our own ears, otherwise our greed would have no end. If we just let our attachment, anger, jealousy and pride take over there would be no end to them. Take jealousy for example: if we don't control it we will be jealous of our own brothers and sisters, our own wives and husbands, our own children, our own parents. We may start off being jealous of other people who are not close to us, but if we don't control it, it may develop like this. Greed can also develop like this, and hatred, there is no end to them. There is no way to fulfill the appetite of our ego. Why? Ironically, because our potential's essence has no limit. This is the flip side of our potential; the brighter the light, the sharper the shadow.

We need to know how to take care of this potential. We do not take care of it by doing everything we like, hoping we will become tired of whatever it is we are doing and not want to do it anymore.

There is no such point. Behaving like this we may even end up in jail where we can't have what we want, where you are told what you can and cannot have. Apart from something like imprisonment there will be no end to our behavior.

If we continue to behave like this we may also end up "meeting a mother's son." This is a Tibetan expression, an eastern Tibetan expression. If someone is being very greedy and manipulative, taking advantage of others, we say they have never met "a mother's son." "A mother's son" is a strong man, a strong person who will not take any nonsense from them. So if somebody is being a bully, getting away with everything and taking advantage of everyone, we say they need to meet a mother's son. Their greed will stop if they meet a mother's son, lose a few teeth and have to "Sit in their own chair." This is the way we say, "Be put in your place." This is a rough but clear way to describe this process.

We have an impossible appetite like this because we have a limitless potential. Indulging in everything we have an appetite for is not the way to deal with it though. This only makes it worse. The way to deal with it is first to be content, second to take precepts, and third by practicing meditation so that our limitless potential can manifest. When we have no limitations whatsoever, when we have nothing more to want, we become a Buddha. A Buddha is not greedy because they have no limitations. When our limitless potential is fully developed, we have no limitations and are a Buddha. This is the ultimate goal for every one of us. When our limitless potential is combined with ignorance, however, we develop all the other defilements, like unlimited greed.

For example, a long time ago people had to wait about six months to get a reply from letters they sent across the ocean. They would wait, and when they received their answer they would be very happy. Now we can e-mail these letters directly, we can do a six month or one year job in an instant and even correct the spelling of the person replying to us on our computer, yet we still don't think we have enough time. Now we can also be more certain of delivery. When letters were sent by ship, the ship might have sunk in the middle of the ocean and no one would have received our letters. Still, with all

this uncertainly, people got things done and were happy, perhaps even happier than we are now.

Now we have so much; I don't even have to go somewhere to see something. Somebody with a video-camera can go instead of me, shoot a video and I can watch it on my laptop. I can see what is happening right now, somewhere else, or talk to my friends, via my laptop. I may not be able to eat the food on the table that they have cooked for me, but I can talk to them, look at them, hear from them – everything. Yet, still this isn't enough – we want virtual reality. I won't be surprised if before long we will be able to actually eat the food people have put out for us. It may be possible. It may create problems if we try to travel through the computer screen and come back mixed up with other people doing the same thing though; somewhere in between computer screens we may get someone else's head. I may get her head and his head and his legs. I would appear back in front of my computer in a very funny way. Or perhaps a mosquito would get mixed up in it all and I would end up with a mosquito's head, there would always be this danger. There is a Tibetan saying, "If you do all kinds of things, all kinds of things will happen to you." This is true, there is no limit.

Question: Rinpoche, just now you said that the primordial state is the state of pure wisdom, but at the same time you said that ignorance is also from primordial reality. This doesn't appear that clear to me.

Rinpoche: It is true it is not clear. It is not very clear for me also. Without doubt, we have primordial wisdom within us, but without doubt we also have ignorance. In order to understand where this ignorance comes from, we first need to understand what we are ignorant of – we are ignorant of our primordial wisdom. Then we need to understand how we are ignorant. Our ignorance can be based on jealousy, anger, attachment, fear or greed.

I will give you an example. I have a very funny problem that I want to solve and have spoken with many doctors and experts about. It is not serious, it is actually quite funny and stupid but I still experience it. I don't like flying in big airplanes in the aisle seat, even

at night when you can't see out the window. The worst is when I am in a 747, it is night and I am in the aisle seat. You can't even see out the window at night, but it makes a 100% difference to me whether I am in the window seat or the aisle seat. I have tried to find out what's wrong with me, but it is just my ignorance.

The father of one of my friends was a TWA pilot for many years. He is now retired. Before working for TWA he was a fighter pilot in Europe. He flew one of those planes with a propeller on the nose whose appearance is quite majestic – they have all kinds of windows, glass like bubbles on top, underneath and behind – a big bomber. He told me how he was flying one of these planes when he wasn't even nineteen. He said he fought in Germany, flew through all the bomb drops with shells exploding here and there all around him and that he would get holes in his airplane's wings, tail, and sometimes even in his fuselage. After flying in the war he flew a TWA passenger plane for many years then retired. Trying to help me get over my fear he pulled out his suitcase. He was one of those really American people, from the East coast, and he had used this suitcase the whole time he was flying. It was very square, solid and black with all kinds of stickers on it from the places he had visited. He said to me "I would never fly a plane if I was not sure it was going to make it to my destination. I have a wife, I have children and I don't want to die. You should remember this, it might help."

Now I know this but it doesn't help, I am still the same! This is how ignorance manifests. I know the danger of crashing in a 747 is low, there is nothing to hit in the sky and the only dangerous time is when you take off or land. Still I have no problem taking off, and when we are landing I am so glad we are landing I am not afraid at all! But in the middle of the air when nothing is going to happen to me I become afraid, not just mentally but physically afraid. I have been studying this phenomenon, it is very interesting. This concern actually occupies a little bit of my time, especially before I fly long distances. I tell my secretary to make sure I get a window seat and if he doesn't get me one I get quite annoyed. Many times I have swapped my first class aisle seat with people who have economy class window seats. I have. I have said to them, "Please take my seat up there, your

economy window seat will be more comfortable for me than my first class aisle seat.” People normally buy these expensive tickets for me; it’s nice, but if I get the wrong seat I would rather have a window seat in economy. This is what ignorance is like.

I am not saying this is the only thing I am ignorant about, there are many other things, but this is the one that really sticks out, the one I can’t understand. A helicopter is smaller and much more dangerous than a large airplane, but I enjoy riding in helicopters much more than any other type of vehicle. One time I was in a helicopter in the UK and there was fog so we didn’t know where we were going. We could only go exactly over the highway with all its wires and everything. Finally we landed on the lawn of a hotel and called the Dharma center to send a car to pick us up. All this happened and I didn’t have a problem with it. I enjoyed it. This fear does not really have anything to do with dying either; cars can be very dangerous and many people become afraid in cars, but I never do. I am never afraid on the train or on ships: just in big airplanes, which are the safest, and in the aisle seats, which are the most comfortable.

To go to sleep on a plane at night would be wonderful! All the lamas with me sleep like babies right next to me, but I am wide-awake all night and all day. This is how I exhibit my ignorance, which has to have something to do with my primordial wisdom. It has to be interconnected. When I don’t know what I am supposed to know, that is ignorance and it continues all the time. I have flown so many times, for so many years, for so many hours and it hasn’t become any better; actually it has become worse. Each one of you must have something like that in your life.

Question: Rinpoche, you said that everything is nothing more and nothing less than the interdependent manifestation of everything else. What does this “else” mean?

Rinpoche: The “else” is not necessary. Maybe it is...

Student: Everything is alright?

Rinpoche: Yeah, everything is alright. You can take out the “else.” You are a lawyer, so you have to get it right don’t you? We can skip the else.