



THE DALAI LAMA

MIND IN COMFORT AND EASE

The Vision of Enlightenment in the Great Perfection

FOREWORD BY SOGYAL RINPOCHE

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MIND IN COMFORT AND EASE

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THE VISION OF ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE GREAT PERFECTION

Including Longchen Rabjam's
Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation on the Great Perfection

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

FOREWORD BY SOGYAL RINPOCHE

TRANSLATED BY MATTHIEU RICARD,
RICHARD BARRON, AND ADAM PEARCEY

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VERSES OF HOMAGE

by Kyabjé Trulshik Rinpoche

Om svasti!

With merit and wisdom gathered over countless ages as the cause,
You gained the result—the ten strengths and four fearlessnesses of
buddhahood.

Great guide of this fortunate age, appearing with the signs and marks
of perfection,
Siddhartha, you who fulfilled your every aim, grant us virtue and
excellence!

Amid the splendor of a hundred rays of light from Amitabha's heart,
You were born on the tip of a lotus stem upon the lake of Sindhu
And came as a second buddha to the Land of Snows.
Lotus-born guru Padmakara, grant us your protection at all times!

Embodiment of all the buddhas' compassion, holder of the white lotus,
Having set aside the apparel of the sambhogakaya,
You appear as a monk in saffron robes to protect this world.
Victorious lord Tenzin Gyatso, in heartfelt devotion, we bow to you!

In response to requests by the Rigpa Sangha of Lerab Ling in France for a prologue to this book, this was written and offered from Nepal by the one called Dzarong Shadeu Trulshik, Ngawang Chökyi Lodrö, in the Tibetan year 2133, the Fire Dog, on the 26th day of the 4th month (June 21, 2006).

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FOREWORD

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA of Tibet is one of the great spiritual leaders of our age. He has devoted his whole life to furthering the well-being of humanity and for nearly forty years has traveled all over the world, sharing his message of human values, universal responsibility, and compassion. It is a message that grows more pertinent and more vital as each day goes by. What His Holiness has shown, and so many people respond to with alacrity and joy, is that altruism and caring for others hold the very meaning of life and that by training and transforming the mind with compassion, we can become better human beings, we can treat others with love and respect, and we can find happiness and peace. With his sincerity and his humanity, for countless people His Holiness is the still center in a chaotic and violent world.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama's first visit to the West was in September 1973. He met Pope Paul VI in the Vatican, who declared in his welcome that His Holiness' presence would "contribute to the furtherance of mutual love and respect among the adherents of different creeds." I will never forget that occasion, as I had the honor of serving His Holiness and helping to organize his visit. But we could never have imagined then, as we welcomed him onto the soil of Europe, the impact and influence that he would have on the world. At that time, his message was one of universal responsibility, kindness, and the good heart, and it is a message he has tirelessly continued to deepen and expand, to address the many dimensions of our changing world. His Holiness' vision, which the Nobel Peace Prize Committee called his "philosophy of peace," embraces the whole theater of human

affairs, encompassing understanding between religions, peace and reconciliation, the protection of the environment, human rights, economic equality, education, and science. I often feel that these deep concerns of his, to use a Buddhist image, are like the rays that stream from the blazing sun of his wisdom and compassion. The scale of both his vision and his achievements is simply staggering; you only have to look at the list of countries he visits, the amount he accomplishes, and the sheer number of people he reaches. His Holiness tends to describe his international activities modestly, in terms of sharing his understanding of the importance of basic human values, advocating interreligious understanding and harmony, and promoting the rights and freedoms of the Tibetan people. Yet of all the Dalai Lamas, I feel there has never been one who has accomplished anything comparable with what he has achieved.

One dimension in which His Holiness the Dalai Lama has played a unique and critical role is the development of Buddhism in the West. He has personally taken an extremely active interest in ensuring that the study and practice of Dharma flourish authentically in the West, as much as in the East. His continuous commitment to teaching in different countries has proved, for students of the Dharma, an unceasing source of inspiration. He is a master scholar whose teachings are studied like those of the learned panditas of the past, but at the same time his knowledge and experience allow him to translate and relate the Buddhadharmā to modern life in a persuasively immediate and accessible way. His brilliant and far-reaching dialogue with the world of science has demonstrated unequivocally the extraordinary depth and power of the Buddhist teachings and what they have to offer. And he has taken a lead as well in building a road to real interaction and openness within Buddhism and between Buddhism and the other faith traditions. If over the last two decades Buddhism has won greater respect and acknowledgement in the world at large, it must be largely because of his leadership and example. Without him, the world of Buddhism would be quite different.

In September 2000, His Holiness visited our international retreat center, Lerab Ling, in the south of France, to give a major Buddhist teaching entitled “The Path to Enlightenment.” We had invited him to

map out the path of study and practice from the beginning up to the Great Perfection, *Dzogpachenpo*, with its key elements and reference points, and so provide a blueprint for a complete spiritual path for modern people. With his learning, his familiarity with the different Buddhist schools, and his ability to adapt and relate to the modern world, we knew that he was uniquely placed to give such a survey of Buddhist teachings and practice.

I remember so vividly the whole ten days of His Holiness' visit. It was the first time that he had been to Lerab Ling, and he arrived one day early in order to devote some time to quiet retreat in the rural surroundings. As he told us later, "I have found this to be a delightful place, secluded, beautiful, full of blessings, and with its natural environment well preserved..." This was 2000 and a year of anniversaries. As well as being the millennial year, it also marked the sixtieth anniversary of His Holiness' enthronement and the fiftieth year since he was invested, at the age of fifteen, with the rule of Tibet. Seeking to find a way to celebrate the importance of this occasion, I invited thirty of the seniormost monks of the Dalai Lama's own personal monastery, Namgyal Dratsang, to Lerab Ling to conduct a special Vajrayana practice, the complete *drupchen* (group practice) and *mendrup* (consecration of medicine) of Vajrakilaya, the yidam deity who embodies all the buddhas' enlightened activity. Never performed before outside of Tibet or Dharamsala in India, this particular practice is from a *terma* treasure called *Phurba Yang Nying Pudri*, concealed by Guru Padmasambhava and revealed by Tertön Sogyal, Lerab Lingpa, who conferred the whole of this teaching on the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and entrusted him as its custodian. What is significant about this practice, as His Holiness explained, is that it has a unique connection with the well-being of the Dalai Lamas, the future of Tibet, and the flourishing of Tibetan Buddhism.

His Holiness arrived to preside over the final day of the two-week drupchen, which included the receiving of the blessings of the practice and the consecration of a large quantity of medicinal *amrita*. On the following day, he conferred the empowerment of *Phurba Yang Nying Pudri* on the 1,400 people gathered in the drupchen tent situated at the heart of Lerab Ling. At that moment, I could not help feeling

tremendous hope and promise that this very powerful practice, executed so perfectly by the Namgyal monks and presided over by His Holiness, would indeed have an effect for the long life of the Dalai Lamas and their work, the resolution of the question of Tibet, and the future of the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism in the West. A number of propitious signs accompanied the drupchen, and His Holiness confirmed how auspicious it had been.

How wonderful it was, too, that Kyabjé Trulshik Rinpoche, one of the most eminent and highly revered masters in Tibetan Buddhism, was also present at this time. A great upholder of the Vinaya lineage of the Nyingma tradition, he was a disciple of my master Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö and the heart son of both Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoche and Kyabjé Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. For a number of years he has been giving His Holiness rare teachings and transmissions from the Nyingma and Dzogchen traditions. Soon after His Holiness arrived at Lerab Ling, he paid a number of visits to Trulshik Rinpoche, from whom he was receiving the transmission of *The Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease* by the great Dzogchen master, Longchenpa. I remember that Trulshik Rinpoche auspiciously offered His Holiness a photograph of Gangri Thökar, the hermitage in Tibet where Longchenpa had composed his masterworks; I offered him a portrait statue of this great master made from life, which had been revered by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and Nyoshul Khenpo, two of the foremost exponents of Dzogchen of our time. His Holiness seemed to decide spontaneously that he would teach on Longchenpa's *Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation on the Great Perfection*, one of the texts in the trilogy, as a principal theme during his five-day teaching.

Over ten thousand people attended His Holiness' teachings, from twenty-one countries and from as far away as Australia and the United States. There were over a hundred lamas and geshe, and many were struck that His Holiness had chosen such a profound text on which to comment. All of us were moved by the depth, relevance, and accessibility of his teachings; there were those who considered them among the most remarkable they had ever heard him give. In a wholly original but always authentic way, His Holiness brought a sense of his own personal quest, as he explored the entire Buddhist

path and particularly the pith instructions of the great masters of the Great Perfection. Like an expert jeweller, he set the teaching of Dzogchen within the context of the other traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, highlighting their parallels and their common ultimate aim of realizing the clear light nature of the mind; in so doing, he seemed to continue many of the themes from previous teachings on Dzogchen he had given in the West. During the course of the teachings, His Holiness conferred the empowerment of Padmasambhava and his Eight Manifestations from the pure visions of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama, which he had granted at our request in 1982 in Paris and in 1989 in San Jose, California. As Guru Padmasambhava is so often invoked as a powerful source of peace and transformation, this represented an immense blessing for the whole region and for France itself and seemed to seal the dedication of these extraordinary teachings to peace in the world.

One of His Holiness' great gifts is his ability to show the distinctive features of the teachings and practices of the different schools of Tibetan Buddhism. At Lerab Ling he spoke of his own deep commitment to the open-minded, unbiased spirit of Rimé, which I have always sought to make a defining feature of Rigpa's work, considering it as the legacy, in a way, of the great Rimé master Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö. At the same time, too, His Holiness gave precious advice on the importance of maintaining the integrity and authenticity of the Buddhist tradition of Tibet. "At Lerab Ling," he said, "a center has been born that is destined to make Buddhist culture, as developed in Tibet, known in an authentic manner. For what counts is that it is an authentic representation of Tibetan Buddhist culture and so can provide an example and bring about intercultural exchanges in France and in other places. I am convinced that this center at Lerab Ling is already making a contribution and will continue to do so, more and more, toward a greater knowledge of the rich culture of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition." As ever, His Holiness' presence had an indelible impact on the hearts of everyone, whether experienced Dharma students, local people, politicians, VIP protection officers, or the local *gendarmerie*. And as often happens, it opened the door to a new sympathy and acceptance for Buddhism in the whole region.

For me it is the greatest possible privilege to introduce this book and also an immense blessing as His Holiness is one of my principal teachers; and for all Tibetans, he is our leader, our guiding light, and our inspiration. All His Holiness' precious teachings in September 2000 are included in this volume, which is being published to celebrate His Holiness' second visit to Lerab Ling and his inauguration of its temple and monastery. The temple was constructed on the very site where the drupchen took place in 2000, and I am certain that it is thanks to His Holiness' blessing that it came into being so swiftly and auspiciously. Kyabjé Trulshik Rinpoche has named this temple *Palri Pema Ösel Dargyé Ling*, after the Copper-Colored Mountain with its Palace of Lotus Light, the heaven of Guru Padmasambhava. It is here at Lerab Ling that I will be leading my students in a three-year retreat, beginning this year.

All of this, the temple and all our work, I dedicate to His Holiness' long life and good health, to the fulfillment of his aspirations for Tibet and humanity, and to the thriving of the Buddhadharma here in the West. I pray that, for all who read this book, the nectar of His Holiness' teachings infuses their mindstreams, inspires them with new understanding and enthusiasm, and leads them unerringly along the path to enlightenment.

SOGYAL RINPOCHE
LERAB LING
JULY 6, 2006

PREFACE

“CAN YOU TELL us something about your extraordinary destiny?” asked a journalist as His Holiness the Dalai Lama arrived at Lerab Ling on the morning of September 17, 2000. His Holiness turned to him and said, “All human beings have an extraordinary destiny! Sometimes things bring us joy and, at other times, sadness. But these ups and downs are part of everyone’s destiny. I believe the most important thing in this existence of ours is to do something that can be of benefit to others. What we need more than anything is to develop an attitude of altruism—that is what truly gives meaning to life. The fact of having been recognized as the Dalai Lama allows me on various occasions to do a bit of good around me. This is the path I try to follow, to the best of my ability.”

In these few words, the Dalai Lama captured the message of compassion and altruism that has made him known throughout the world and that figured prominently throughout his visit to the Languedoc-Roussillon region of southern France in September 2000. This was His Holiness’ seventeenth visit to France, and in the course of the year leading up to it, three very different events took place that vividly displayed the scope of his compassionate action in the world. The first was in 1999 with the publication of *Ethics for a New Millennium*, in which the Dalai Lama distilled his sixty-year study and practice of Buddhism into a nonreligious, but fundamentally spiritual, vision for individuals and society, based on the training of the mind. He called for a spiritual and ethical revolution—“a radical reorientation away from our habitual preoccupation with self,

toward the wider community of beings with whom we are connected.” *Ethics for a New Millennium* is a handbook for human survival, which begs to be put into action with imagination and rigor, by being translated into a practical program of training and education.

The second was in March 2000, when His Holiness met with a group of neuroscientists, psychologists, philosophers, and Buddhist practitioners in Dharamsala in India, for the eighth in the series of conferences organized by the Mind and Life Institute. These ground-breaking meetings have constituted the most profound and important collaboration ever to have taken place between Buddhism and the sciences. The 2000 dialogue studied destructive emotions and led directly to a number of far-reaching initiatives in research into the effects and applications of meditation training. Experiments took place the following year in the United States in Madison, Wisconsin, on the effects of meditation practices on brain function, which involved experienced Tibetan Buddhist practitioners and received attention not only from the world press but also from prestigious scientific journals. Many people began to realize the extraordinary repercussions if the universal value of Buddhist contemplative techniques for training the mind in meditation and compassion were to become more widely recognized. The momentum of this seminal meeting in 2000 continues still; in 2005 His Holiness addressed the Society for Neuroscience in Washington, DC, and the following year published *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*, wherein he describes this encounter of science and spirituality as having “far-reaching potential to help humanity meet the challenges before us.”

Lastly, after visiting Poland, Germany, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden in the early summer of 2000, His Holiness traveled to the United States on his last trip abroad before going to France in September. He took part in the massive Folklife Festival, “Tibetan Culture Beyond the Land of Snows,” in Washington, DC. There, on July 2, in an hour-long free public speech to fifteen thousand people on the National Mall, he made a powerful plea for inner values, basic human qualities, and concern for others: “In modern times, I feel it is vitally important to promote basic human values. Otherwise in the future, material development will be our only goal, and inner values will be

neglected. Then humanity will face many more problems.” But what most people there will remember is His Holiness’ uncompromising words on the damage to the environment caused by the richer nations and by those striving to copy the American lifestyle and pattern of wealth and consumption. He warned of the long-term global dangers of economic and social inequality at its present scale, and he spoke explicitly about Washington’s poor. To a mounting tide of applause, he said: “This is the nation’s capital, in the richest country in the world, but in some sections of society here people are very, very poor. This is not just morally wrong, but practically wrong...We need to close the gap between the rich and poor.”

A revolutionary formula for a saner and more peaceful world, a groundbreaking collaboration of science and spirituality, and a deep and outspoken concern for humanity and the planet—these powerful examples of the Dalai Lama’s compassionate involvement with the world all formed part of the background to his visit to France in 2000.

THE CONTEXT OF THE TEACHINGS

Beginning in 1991, His Holiness the Dalai Lama began to give a regular series of Buddhist teachings for a federation of the Tibetan Buddhist centers in France, and in 2000 it was the turn of the centers grouped geographically in the Golfe du Lion region, near Montpellier in southern France.¹ The honor of arranging His Holiness’ teachings fell to Lerab Ling, which is Rigpa’s main international center, founded by Sogyal Rinpoche and now at the heart of his work. Chosen and blessed by Kyabjé Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and consecrated in 1991 by Kyabjé Dodrupchen Rinpoche, Lerab Ling became the site for Rigpa’s summer retreats from 1992 onward, since when many eminent Tibetan Buddhist masters have been invited to teach and retreats have taken place continuously. In the ancient Occitan language, the original name for the site means “the place of springs,” and its wooded slopes, streams, and meadows lie on the edge of the immense Larzac plateau, most of which is national parkland.

In September 2000 for two weeks, monks from the Namgyal Monastery led by Khamtrul Rinpoche and their abbot Jadho Rinpoche,

conducted an intensive group practice at Lerab Ling, a drupchen of Vajrakilaya according to the terma revelation of Lerab Lingpa, Sogyal Rinpoche's previous incarnation. His Holiness' arrival was timed to allow him to preside over the final day and culmination of the drupchen and to grant the empowerment for this practice the following day. Also present was Kyabjé Trulshik Rinpoche, from whom His Holiness was receiving the transmission of *The Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease*, an important work by the great Dzogchen master Longchen Rabjam (1308–64). This was the context for his choosing to comment on and explain one of the texts in the trilogy, *Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation on the Great Perfection*, in Tibetan *Samten Ngalso*.

The teachings of Dzogchen, or Great Perfection, are treasured at the heart of the “Ancient,” or Nyingma, tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, which dates back to the eighth or ninth century, when Buddhism was established in Tibet by the great Guru Padmasambhava, King Trisong Detsen, and the scholar-abbot Shantarakshita. The origins of Dzogchen are traced to the primordial buddha, Samantabhadra, from whom a living heritage of wisdom has been transmitted from master to disciple in an unbroken lineage down to the present day. Dzogchen is described as “the primordial state, that state of total awakening that is the heart-essence of all the buddhas and all spiritual paths, and the summit of an individual's spiritual evolution.”² While considered the very pinnacle of all teachings, the practice of Dzogchen is also renowned as particularly clear, effective, and relevant to the modern world and the needs of today.

His Holiness divided his teachings into two sections. First, he gave an introduction to the key principles of the Buddhadharma. Second, to demonstrate how to take the teachings to heart and practice them, he began to explain the root text of *Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation on the Great Perfection*. At the same time, he gave the oral transmission for the whole of the root text.

In choosing to teach on a text by Longchenpa, His Holiness was going to the very heart of the ancient Nyingma tradition and its Dzogchen teachings. The “omniscient” Longchen Rabjam was one of the greatest scholars and realized masters of Tibet, who gathered and synthesized all the traditions of Dzogchen in Tibet, setting out a

complete foundation for the study and practice of Dzogchen in his extraordinary writings such as *The Seven Treasuries*, *The Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease*, *The Trilogy of Natural Freedom*, and *The Three Inner Essences*.³ The great Dzogchen master Patrul Rinpoche (1808–87), to whom His Holiness often refers in his teachings, wrote:

So did this omniscient master reveal in his sublime works
The entire range of the Victorious One’s teachings.
Never before had any of the wise masters of India or Tibet
Left such a legacy to the world.

Nyoshul Khenpo (1932–99), who was such an authority on Longchenpa and his works that many of his students regarded him as Longchenpa in the flesh, wrote: “Longchenpa appeared in this world as a second primordial buddha Samantabhadra, transmitting teachings with the lion’s roar of the three categories of Dzogchen...His works are indistinguishable from the words of the Victorious One and constitute an inconceivable body of secrets. Simply to read them causes realization of the wisdom mind that is the true nature of reality to arise in one’s mind.”

Longchenpa composed *The Trilogy on Finding Comfort and Ease* at his hermitage of Orgyen Dzong, located at Gangri Thökar in central Tibet to the south of Lhasa, where he taught and composed many of his works such as *The Seven Treasuries*. In his own catalog of his writings, dividing them into outer, inner, and secret, he placed *The Trilogy* in the secret category and within the more general explanations that, he said, “serve to show how the Dzogchen path, together with its fruition, is in accord with, and incorporates, all the other vehicles, so that one can understand the ultimate point of these vehicles: that they are simply skillful preliminary paths leading to the path of Dzogpachenpo.”⁴

Nyoshul Khenpo gathered Longchenpa’s works on Dzogchen into three groups:⁵

First are those that represent the extensive, scholarly, or pandita’s approach, principally *The Seven Treasuries* and *The Trilogy of Natural Freedom*. This group also contains commentaries such

as Longchenpa's overview of the tantra *The All-Creating Monarch*, which constitute the portion of his writings concerning *the category of mind*. The portion of his writings related to *the category of space* in this extensive scholarly mode includes a short text known as *The Vast Array of Space*, along with his commentary.

The second group is that of the profound, *kusuli's* approach, that is, the streamlined approach of a Dzogchen yogi. This group consists of the three Yangtik cycles that Longchenpa revealed: *The Innermost Heart Drop of the Guru (Lama Yangtik)*, *The Innermost Heart Drop of the Dakini (Khandro Yangtik)*, and *The Innermost Heart Drop of Profundity (Zapmo Yangtik)*. These teachings are designed for the very unelaborate lifestyle of a wandering yogi or someone in retreat.

The third group consists of the teachings that are the underpinnings of both the extensive, scholar's approach and the profound, yogi's approach. These are Longchenpa's teachings on the graduated path—*lamrim*. The most well known is *The Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease*, which comprises *Finding Comfort and Ease in the Nature of Mind (Semnyi Ngalso)*, *Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation (Samten Ngalso)*, and *Finding Comfort and Ease in the Illusoriness of Things (Gyuma Ngalso)*.

Longchenpa explains the sequence of the three works in *The Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease*:

In the beginning, when we first set out on the path, it is important that we establish a good foundation in the Dharma, and that is why the thirteen chapters of *Finding Comfort and Ease in the Nature of Mind* offer an elaborate explanation of the bases for *the view* that is beyond the two extremes, from the difficulty of finding the freedoms and advantages onward. At the same time, they also explain aspects of the stages of the path and fruition.

Once we have understood the ground, we can begin *meditation* on the path, and so the four chapters of *Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation* offer a step-by-step explanation of the places where *meditation* can be practiced, the types of individual

sued to the practice, the techniques we can use in meditation, and the types of concentration that can be achieved.

While this path is being practiced it is important to have teachings on nonattachment and nonclinging toward phenomena. So, as a support, a clear and elaborate presentation of the stages of *action* is given in the eight chapters of *Finding Comfort and Ease in the Illusoriness of Things*. These chapters reveal, thoroughly and without any error, how to relate to all phenomena, and how to experience them as the eight similes of illusoriness.⁶

His Holiness frequently quotes Longchenpa's works in his teachings on Dzogchen in the West and in 1989 based his teachings in San Jose, California, on sections from *The Precious Treasury of the Dharmadhatu*.⁷ When he visited the Dzogchen monastery in south India in December 2000, at the invitation of His Eminence the Seventh Dzogchen Rinpoche, he also gave a transmission and teaching on both *Finding Comfort and Ease in the Nature of Mind* and *Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation*.

THE SEQUENCE OF THE TEACHINGS

The Dalai Lama's five-day teaching, entitled "The Path to Enlightenment," took place close to Lerab Ling on a site that was given the name Lerab Gar. An enormous teaching tent stood surrounded by other tents housing restaurants, information resources, publications, an exhibition on the history of Rigpa, services, and the press. Seventy percent of the audience of over ten thousand came from France and the rest from twenty-one other countries. Over a hundred lamas and geshe, monks from the Namgyal, Gomang, and Gyutö monasteries, and two hundred Western monks and nuns attended, along with a hundred friends of His Holiness and Tibet.⁸ Two hundred people from the surrounding villages were invited to attend the teachings for a day. Sogyal Rinpoche conveyed the feeling of those present in his welcome to His Holiness:

Here in France we know you will feel at home and among

friends. France is a land that has been touched deeply by the Dharma and its healing message, and that has opened its arms to embrace Tibet and the Tibetans... People have gathered here from all over the world. They realize that you are one of the greatest scholars and Buddhist teachers of our time, and so they know that to receive these teachings from you is the opportunity of a lifetime. We rejoice that these teachings are taking place in the year of the sixtieth anniversary of your enthronement and also in the millennial year 2000. It seems to remind us of your importance for the world, the human race, and its future.

His Holiness began by apologizing for the late start due to the unusual weather conditions. "We have started slightly late on this first day of the teachings," he announced. "This has been because of all kinds of difficulties due to the climate. I am sorry about this, although it is not really my fault. You seem to be in some difficulty; I probably look more comfortable, but it's not very warm up here either." In fact, a devastating storm had hit the south coast of France the previous afternoon, causing severe flooding and damage in Montpellier. Driving rain and gale force winds had flattened the smaller tents on the site, flooded the main tent, and turned much of the area into a quagmire. However, the audience had been so intent on getting there that the teaching was able to begin after a delay of merely an hour.

His Holiness then set the scene for his teachings by speaking about the common objectives of the different religions and the value of maintaining one's tradition and learning from other faiths. He dwelled on the themes of personal transformation, human intelligence and reason, and the importance of altruism and love, speaking of the power of the mind in attaining true happiness. From time to time throughout his teachings, he would strike a personal note or tell an anecdote, as he deftly introduced the key principles of Buddhadharma in a way that was accessible for those present. The topics he explained were: the four noble truths, interdependence, absolute and relative truth, shunyata, the nature of consciousness, the continuity of mind and matter, the disturbing emotions, and enlightenment. These all form the first part of this book: Key Principles of the Buddhadharma.

It was on the third day that His Holiness started to give a commentary on Longchen Rabjam's *Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation on the Great Perfection*, and these teachings comprise the second part of this book. He began by speaking on the schools of Buddhism in Tibet and the great scholars and realized masters of the Nyingma tradition. This led him to present the unique features of the Great Perfection as compared to other vehicles and the distinction made between ordinary mind and the pure awareness of rigpa, quoting the Great Fifth Dalai Lama as he did so.

Longchenpa's text is composed of three parts: the *locations* for cultivating meditation, the individual *meditator* or practitioner, and the *Dharma* to be practiced. His Holiness commented on the first two parts in detail. Here he spoke on renunciation, following a spiritual teacher, overcoming and transforming the negative emotions, mindfulness and vigilance, the different views of selflessness, anger and patience, impermanence and death. He then came to the third part, the main practice, and the four kinds of preliminary: (1) renunciation, (2) compassion and bodhichitta, (3) pure vision, and (4) guru yoga.

In connection with the preliminary of bodhichitta, on the following day His Holiness gave a teaching on compassion and bodhichitta, which grew progressively more moving till he spoke very personally of the value and benefit of bodhichitta, at which point he wept for a few moments. He then conferred the bodhisattva vow, in the most beautiful ceremony based on Asanga's *Bodhisattva Stages*. During the series of questions and responses between the master and disciples that form part of the ceremony, His Holiness introduced an air of lightness and comedy by improvising a set of wry, but probably truthful, replies on behalf of the audience. For the bodhisattva vow ceremony, His Holiness' throne and table had been garlanded with white and yellow Tokyo lilies, and at the conclusion of the transmission of the vow, His Holiness stood on the throne and cast flowers to the buddhas and bodhisattvas in all directions, imploring everyone not to let their aspirations be mediocre or ordinary but to make the most heartfelt prayers to reach buddhahood for the benefit of both themselves and others.

That same afternoon, in light of the teaching on the preliminaries of pure vision and guru yoga, His Holiness conferred the empowerment

of Padmasambhava and his Eight Manifestations, the mind sadhana of *The Union of All Innermost Essences* from the cycle of pure visions of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–82), an empowerment he had granted when giving Dzogchen teachings at Rigpa’s request in 1982 in Paris and in 1989 in San Jose. His Holiness spoke about the Great Fifth Dalai Lama and his pure visions, which are entitled *Bearing the Seal of Secrecy*. The eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche, or Pema Tötreng, as listed in the empowerment are: the lotus-born vidyadhara Padmakara, the bhikshu Padmasambhava, the learned Loden Choksé, the magnificent Padma Gyalpo, the yogi Nyima Özer, the enlightened lord Shakya Sengé, the wrathful Sengé Dradok, and the embodiment of “crazy wisdom,” Dorjé Drolö. In Dharamsala in 2004, when explaining the importance of invoking and praying to Guru Rinpoche, His Holiness spoke of the unique inspiration that the Great Fifth Dalai Lama drew from Guru Padmasambhava:

The precious guru Padmasambhava—*Lopön Rinpoche*—was not only endowed with all the true qualities of a great spiritual guide—knowledge, compassion and infinite capacity—but he was also a great master who commanded extraordinary power. Most of the great historical figures of Tibet, both spiritual and secular, have placed themselves under the compassionate protection of the great master Padmasambhava and received his blessing. The Great Fifth Dalai Lama, for example, clearly had a very special link with Guru Rinpoche, and the thirteenth Dalai Lama, too, quite evidently enjoyed a unique connection with the precious master.⁹

Immediately after the empowerment, His Holiness then embarked on the main practice from the third part of *Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation on the Great Perfection*: the Dharma to be practiced. Straightaway he taught on the Great Perfection, the clear light, and the ultimate nature of the mind, introducing the *higher two truths*, identifying the clear light as the profound feature of both highest yoga tantra and Dzogchen, and clarifying the place of analytical meditation and the Middle Way view. At this juncture, he quoted from Longchen Rabjam’s

Seven Treasuries and referred to instructions by the third Dodrupchen, Jikmé Tenpé Nyima (1865–1926), for whose writings His Holiness always expresses the deepest admiration and whom he invariably quotes when teaching on Dzogchen. Dodrupchen Jikmé Tenpé Nyima was one of the foremost masters in the Nyingma tradition in the early twentieth century and was himself a student of legendary figures such as Patrul Rinpoche and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. In shaping his own understanding of the profound correspondences between highest yoga tantra and Dzogchen, the Dalai Lama wrote, “reading Dodrupchen was as if he were stroking my head in confirmation, giving me confidence that my insight was not unfounded.”¹⁰

On the morning of the final day of the teachings, Kyabjé Trulshik Rinpoche led everyone present in a long-life ceremony for His Holiness. This was especially meaningful, as every year Kyabjé Trulshik Rinpoche accomplishes a retreat for His Holiness’ longevity at the Maratika Cave in Nepal, where Padmasambhava attained the stage of *vidyadhara of immortal life*. The actual ceremony, entitled *Sublime Vase of Nectar of Immortality*, was compiled by Trulshik Rinpoche himself from the long-life practice *Light of Immortality*, a terma revelation from the Northern Terma tradition, along with elements from Lhatsün Namkha Jikmé’s pure visions, a dream revelation of Minling Terchen Gyurmé Dorjé, and the Sangwa Gyachen visions of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama. It was chosen for this occasion by His Holiness, and it was performed, for the first time in the West, with meticulous perfection and grace by the Namgyal monks, just as it would have been in Dharamsala. Two features stood out: the deep rapport and devotion between Trulshik Rinpoche and His Holiness and also the quality of completeness created by the combined presence of His Holiness, Trulshik Rinpoche, the Namgyal monks, His Holiness’ associates from Dharamsala, supporters of Tibet, and the whole assembly. This was the only longevity ceremony of such scope carried out in the West to mark the sixtieth anniversary year of the Dalai Lama’s enthronement.

It was the weekend, and, learning that there were some people who had just arrived, His Holiness presented a masterful summary of the teachings so far, including themes such as happiness and suffering, understanding interdependence, altruism and love, the essence of

religion, the view and conduct of the Buddhadharmā, caution on the spiritual path, and the need to maintain authenticity.

His Holiness then continued to deepen the teaching on Dzogchen, clarifying the wisdom of rigpa, the introduction to the nature of mind, the view of Dzogchen, essence, nature and compassion, and many other key points of Dzogchen practice. As well as quoting from Dodrupchen Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, His Holiness read a passage from the writings of Tulku Tsullo, or Tsultrim Zangpo (1884–1957), a disciple of Dodrupchen and Tertön Sogyal Lerab Lingpa. Speaking later to the directors of studies at Lerab Ling about how to implement a Rimé, unbiased, approach in practical terms, His Holiness made mention of Tulku Tsullo:

In my own experience, when I read a Nyingma text written by a great Nyingma teacher who does not know the terminology of other traditions, it can create confusion for me. When I read a pure Geluk lama, who only knows about the Geluk tradition, it is not much help either in developing a deeper understanding of other traditions. However, as I mentioned earlier, there are some remarkable teachers such as Dodrupchen Jikmé Tenpé Nyima, and particularly his student, Tsullo. His background was Nyingma, but at the same time he was familiar with the Geluk tradition. Tsullo knew all about Lama Tsongkhapa's way of presenting things and the terminology involved, and so he often makes the connections in his writings.

There is another author who has a similar grasp of the different traditions. I just received a book from Tibet by Nyengön Tulku Sungrap. He was a lama from the Geluk tradition, who at the same time received teaching from the previous Tertön Sogyal Rinpoche and other Nyingma lamas. He had a real experience and through this experience developed a deep respect and admiration for the Dzogchen tradition. In his work, he draws out comparisons, and so it becomes very clear.

Say, for example, individuals who are already familiar with the Nyingma and Dzogchen teachings, and especially *trekchö*, study such comparative explanations. If they then come across

the explanation of emptiness or clear light according to the work of Lama Tsongkhapa, they will be able to connect and correlate one with the other. Once these students have a more complete picture, if they receive teachings from a Geluk scholar, they will already have the basis for understanding. Subsequently they can receive further explanation from a Geluk lama, or from a Sakya lama on “the inseparability of samsara and nirvana,” for example. Even though the lamas may not know all these different traditions, at least on the student’s side there will already be some background. Then, with the help of these different teachers, the student’s knowledge can increase. That is the way, I think, to create genuine Rimé practitioners.

His Holiness concluded the teachings by granting the oral transmission for the remaining part of the main practice and concluding practices from *Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation on the Great Perfection*.

Throughout these five days, His Holiness gave the impression of being impelled by a singular inspiration, and he did not allot any time for questions and answers. His closing words were: “To sum up, I think that the main point is to try to be a good human being. This is the way to give meaning to our present existence and to all the existences to come... At any rate, as the Buddha said, it is up to us to travel the path. It is entirely in our hands: we are our own guide and our own protector. So, be diligent in your spiritual practice.” Finally, Sogyal Rinpoche thanked everyone and dedicated the whole event: “By the truth of these teachings, may Your Holiness’ deepest aspirations and hopes for the Tibetan people be fulfilled. May they find freedom, may their suffering be ended, and may you return soon to Tibet.” The entire audience gave His Holiness a standing ovation.

When it came time for His Holiness to depart from Lerab Ling, a squad of stout uniformed policemen scrambled into line to have their photo taken with him. Catching sight of one of the officers who had a handlebar moustache worthy of Salvador Dalí or Kaiser Wilhelm, His Holiness leaned over and tweaked it, a playful glint in his eye.

His Holiness then took part in an interreligious gathering in the neighboring town of Lodève, an event that became a milestone in

interfaith understanding for the area and was widely covered in the national newspapers. He spoke on “Human Values, the Heart of Religion.” From there, he went to Montpellier, home to one of France’s oldest universities (the medical school is Western Europe’s oldest center of medical learning), and now a city known for new industries and information technology. His Holiness gave a public talk, entitled “Peace of Mind, the Source of Happiness,” which was attended by over five thousand people. On this occasion he was introduced by Jean-Claude Carrière, the well-known scriptwriter, author, and dramatist, who has written a book, *The Power of Buddhism*,¹¹ based on a series of dialogues with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. Once again, His Holiness made the link between inner and outer peace and in particular emphasized how vital it is to develop mastery over the emotions and to nurture the true qualities of a human being. At the end of the talk, His Holiness visited the adjacent hall where he had been relayed on video to another thousand people or more. Striding briskly toward the hall, with his security team sprinting to catch up, he climbed onto a podium and, in two minutes, encapsulated the heart of his talk. The atmosphere in the hall was alive with appreciation at his gesture of coming to address a second audience, and, as he left, he kept plunging into the crowd to shake hands, as if he were somehow attached to each of the people in the room, and each step he made toward the door took him no nearer. If the applause in the main hall had been rapturous, here it bordered on the overwhelming.

His Holiness’ teaching “The Path to Enlightenment,” given on September 20–24, 2000, was translated live into French by Matthieu Ricard, and the transcript was then translated into English by Ane Samten Palmo. A Tibetan transcription of the teachings was made in Dharamsala under the supervision of Ven. Geshe Lhakdor, the main English translator at the teachings in France. On the basis of this, the translation was then revised, with reference to the recording of His Holiness’ own words, by Richard Barron (Lama Chökyi Nyima) and Adam Pearcey. For the sake of completeness and with His Holiness’ blessing, a translation of Longchenpa’s *Finding Comfort and Ease in Meditation on the Great Perfection* has been included here at the end of His Holiness’ teaching. This translation is by Adam Pearcey, based on

an earlier translation made jointly with B. Alan Wallace in 2000. A number of difficult points and references from the teachings and this text have been graciously clarified by Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, Ringu Tulku Rinpoche, Geshe Thupten Jinpa, and Geshe Tashi Tsering.

The appendix offers a historical perspective, based on His Holiness' own explanation of the history and significance of the Vajrayana practices—the empowerment, the drupchen, and the mendrup—that took place at Lerab Ling.

All in all, His Holiness' teachings and his visit to the south of France surpassed everyone's expectations and had repercussions on various levels. For France, this visit by His Holiness witnessed a deepening and maturing of the interest in the Buddhist teachings. His Holiness himself and others commented on the rapt attention and appreciativeness of the audience, who frequently applauded and at the end rose in a long, standing ovation. With the largest gathering to date for a Buddhist teaching by His Holiness in France, news of Lerab Gar was broadcast as far away as Korea and Tibet. For Europe and beyond, these events underlined the respect that Buddhism has increasingly won in the modern world as a great source of wisdom, offered with no notion of conversion but simply to benefit human beings and bring them ever closer to their ultimate nature.

PART ONE

KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE BUDDHADHARMA

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

FIRST OF ALL, let me tell you how happy I am to be able to spend these few days here with you, my spiritual brothers and sisters, and speak about the Dharma. You have come from every corner of the world, which probably has not been so easy as you are doubtless all very busy, and you have had to overcome difficulties of many kinds in order to get here. There are a number of you as well who have worked to make this event possible. So let me welcome and thank you all.

I would like to say one thing at the outset. You have all come here to meet me, and if your purpose in doing so was because you expected to hear me say something quite amazing or to receive some kind of blessing from me that would instantly remove all your suffering and grant you true happiness—I'm afraid you were mistaken. Here we are basically all just human beings, and we are all the same. Our minds work in the same way, and we experience the same kind of emotions and feelings. There is one other thing we have in common and which we need to be aware of: that we all possess the capacity to become good human beings and to make our lives happy. It is up to us. Equally, we have the power to render our lives unhappy, and not only to experience individual misfortune and sorrow but also to cause pain and misery to those around us and bring ruin to others. Looking at it like this, there is no difference between us.

So what do *I* have to offer? I am just a practitioner of the Buddhadharma, a simple Buddhist monk. I am now sixty-six years of age. Ever since I was about ten or fifteen years old, I have felt a conviction and a sincere interest in the teachings of Buddha. Over the years I

have not been able to practice a great deal, but still I have tried, as much as possible, to persevere in the practice. What it has taught me is that all of us are the same, in wanting to find happiness and to avoid suffering. Since we wish to be happy and to steer clear of suffering, naturally we will be keen to know what will truly be of benefit as we live our lives. We will want to know the causes and conditions that lead to either a happy life or an unhappy one. And this is where I do have some slight experience, which is what I would like to share with you now. It is possible that some of you may benefit from my words, and if you do find something helpful, please take it into consideration. But if you find no benefit in what I say, forget it. There's no harm in that, is there?

THE COMMON OBJECTIVE OF ALL RELIGIONS

During the course of my life, on account of my training in the Buddhist teachings, I have gained some experiential understanding; I have thought a lot about these topics, and this is what I would like to share with you. However, if, as I speak, I relate my experience to the Buddhist teachings, it is not in order to propagate Buddhism. That is not my intention, not even in the slightest. I have reasons for this.

First, among human beings there is an enormous variety of mentalities and interests, and over the last three to four thousand years, numerous great religious and spiritual traditions have flourished on earth. Many of them are still alive and active on the planet. Throughout their history, they have served the spiritual needs of millions of people. They still do so and will certainly continue to do so in the future. If, on account of our diverse capacities and inclinations, there are these different spiritual traditions with their individual views and philosophies, it can only be of immense benefit to the individual. This is why I feel convinced that people who adhere to the spiritual tradition of their parents, and live according to its view and philosophy, will find that it suits them very well.

Second, while the spiritual traditions of the world do have different views and philosophies, whatever their differences—and some of them are quite major—we find that the ethical training is mostly the

same. For example, when it comes to cultivating love, compassion, patience, and contentment, or the observance of self-discipline and ethical principles, most spiritual traditions seem to be more or less the same. This is why I feel that, from the point of view of their potential to benefit people and help them develop into good human beings, most spiritual traditions are indeed the same, and this remains my firm conviction. This is a good reason for staying with the religion we have inherited from our parents.

Otherwise, changing one's religion is a serious matter and can be problematic; in some cases it can lead to real difficulties. Whenever I give talks in Western countries to people of different religious backgrounds and I explain the Buddhist teachings, my aim is never to proselytize on behalf of Buddhism. In fact, from time to time, I do have slight misgivings about teaching Buddhism in the West. Why? Because in these countries there are already established spiritual traditions, whether Christian, Jewish, or Muslim. If someone appears and talks about something like Buddhism, in certain cases it may cause people to have doubts about their own faith that they never had before. That is why I feel a little uneasy and apprehensive.

As for the spiritual traditions and religions that do exist around the world, two dimensions or aspects can be discerned. One aspect consists of the metaphysical or philosophical views. The other aspect comprises the precepts we need to follow in order to put these views into practice. This means the regular practice of training the mind, day by day, together with the appropriate kind of speech and physical behavior that go along with it. I believe that the major faith traditions generally exhibit these two aspects.

Sometimes you might wonder: What is the point of having such a diversity of metaphysical views and philosophies? Their aim is to tame this mind of ours and help us develop into good human beings. From the point of view of training the mind, all spiritual traditions are more or less the same and possess this same potential. It is only when we discuss them from the standpoint of the views and philosophies themselves that their differences stand out.

DIFFERENT PATHS

From the point of view of the actual training of the mind, I feel that it is difficult to say that one particular religion is better or worse, or higher or lower, than another. They are all there to suit our various capacities and interests, and it is because of these differences that someone can say, “For me, personally, this spiritual tradition is the most profound and the most appropriate.” But it would be difficult, I feel, to make the claim that any one religion would be just as profound, or not so effective, for everyone as a whole.

On the other hand, if we talk about the views and philosophies of the various religious traditions, I think we can describe one tradition as being vast and profound and another as being more concise or succinct. So from the standpoint of metaphysics and philosophy, it would seem permissible to establish some kind of hierarchy. And yet, however vast and profound it may be, when it comes to putting a given view or philosophy into practice, if it does not suit a particular individual’s mind, it will not inspire any profound experience nor frankly will it be of much use. Conversely, even though a philosophical view may not be labeled profound and vast, if it helps a person to develop his or her mind, then truly it is profound as far as that person is concerned.

Let me give you an example. Even within the Buddhist teachings, there are numerous philosophical systems. In the Mahayana tradition there are two principal systems—the Mind Only (Chittamatra) school and the Middle Way (Madhyamaka) school. These two schools both convey the ultimate intention and vision of the Buddha, and both are based on his words. Yet at first glance, they might seem to be in complete disagreement. The Mind Only school considers certain aspects of the Middle Way school of philosophy to be a kind of nihilism, while from the latter school’s point of view, the Mind Only school falls into the extremes of either materialism or nihilism. So there do appear to be contradictions, even great differences, between these two schools. But they were taught by the same teacher! So you might well wonder, “How are we to reconcile this? What are we to make of it?”

The point is that when Lord Buddha taught the Dharma, he recognized among his followers a diversity of capacities and inclinations and

saw just how important it was for his teachings to adapt accordingly. It was to address this need that he taught different kinds of view, and so this is how we can understand and explain the seeming contradiction.

ONE TRUTH, ONE RELIGION

The same principle can help us consider another important point. Individual practitioners of the various religions need to believe and have faith that their religion is for them the ultimate truth and the only authentic teaching. They might call it “the one and only truth, the one and only religion.” Yet since all the various spiritual traditions and philosophies exist on account of people’s diverse mentalities and interests, it follows that they must all, in a sense, be “true.” But if there are all these authentic religions and philosophies, and yet now only one of them is regarded as correct, isn’t this a contradiction? It seems we have to accommodate two ways of thinking simultaneously: the idea that all religions are good and the idea that the religion we practice is the authentic one.

As I mentioned earlier, within the framework of the Buddhist teachings, a person for whom the Mind Only school is the most appropriate and whose mind is inclined toward this approach will be a follower of this school and therefore reckon it to be the best. Adherents of the Mind Only school will employ the view of their school to assess the ultimate point of view of the Middle Way school, namely, the ultimate state of buddhahood, and they will conclude that the meaning of the Middle Way school, as explained by its followers, is not authentic. That is what they are bound to say, because they feel that the Mind Only school is the approach most suited to their capacities and inclinations. Since this view serves them in such a way, they will think: “This is the most profound; *this* is the best. And so ours must be the unmistakable and ultimate explanation of the state of buddhahood.” They would have to feel this way, wouldn’t they?

At the same time, someone who is more impartial will know that the followers of Lord Buddha, whichever of the four schools of Buddhist philosophy they uphold—Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, Mind Only, or Middle Way—are all followers of one and the same teacher,

all of them dependent upon his kindness. So this impartial person will view the followers of any Buddhist school with equal faith, devotion, and respect.

Therefore, we can say that the statement that there is only one truth is entirely valid and authentic for a given individual, from his or her own personal point of view. But from a global point of view, referring to a group of many individuals, we have to say that there are many truths and many authentic paths. In this way, I feel that there is no contradiction. To sum up: From the point of view of a single individual or of your own spiritual practice, there can be one truth. But from the point of view of a multitude, there can be many.

I believe the different religions and philosophies of the world—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or any of the many branches of Hinduism—are all extremely beneficial and truly help many people. And so I admire and respect them all. It is never my intention to denigrate or find fault with other traditions. Of course, sometimes if I meet a very sectarian or stubborn person, I may feel they are exaggerating and be slightly irritated, but these are isolated cases! Overall, I have a deep reverence and appreciation for all the great religious traditions of the world. So I would like to invite you, my spiritual friends, to think likewise. We should recognize that all the different religions are truly wonderful and serve to help many people. There is a benefit for us, as well, in developing such appreciation for other religions. This is an important point.

Having said all this, it can happen that someone whose parents follow one religion may decide to adopt another. We could take the case of an individual from a Christian family who becomes a Buddhist practitioner, because he or she finds that this tradition suits his or her mentality and inclinations. He or she might even seek ordination as a Buddhist monk or nun and choose the path of a “homeless one” over that of a householder. This person’s family tradition was Christian, but among the millions of Christians in the world, there must, of course, be a wide variety of capacities and inclinations. But what is important is that those who decide to take up the practice of Buddhism maintain respect for the traditions of their parents. It would not be desirable for people to take up a new religion and use that as a reason to act and

speak as though their former religion were useless. Their former religion is still benefiting countless people now.

LEARNING FROM OTHER SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

I believe that there is an obvious benefit to learning about spiritual traditions and religions other than our own. For one thing, we can find in other religions a great inspiration that deepens our understanding of our own faith. I find this so often to be the case. Some of my friends who are Christian practitioners have told me how they incorporate certain points of Buddhist contemplative practice into their spiritual life and how this has helped deepen their own practice. In the same way, too, I think that the Buddhist community, and especially the monastic community, can learn from their Christian brothers and sisters—particularly from their example of community service, in the fields of education and healthcare, and in providing humanitarian aid, all of which they do with such great dedication and commitment. This is definitely an example from which our Buddhist community can learn, and I believe this is extremely important.

So it is with this background of acknowledging our need to foster harmony among the different religious traditions and cultivate a pure and positive attitude toward them, that over the next few days I will speak a little about the teachings of Buddhism. Of course, when I speak from the Buddhist standpoint, I will express philosophical views that are quite different from those held by other religions, for example, the belief in a Creator, which is not accepted in Buddhism. However, in explaining these views, my aim is to clarify the Buddhist philosophical point of view and in no way to create controversy or refute the points of view of other religions.

THE PRELIMINARIES TO THE TEACHING

Usually, when I give general Buddhist teachings, I sit on a chair, and I tend to prefer it that way. In that case, there is no need to begin with prayers. However, today, as you will have seen, I am seated on a throne. The reason for this is purely out of respect for the words of

the Buddha, the vast and profound teaching he gave more than two thousand five hundred years ago, and not because of any sense I may have of being someone important. You may have noticed that before sitting on the throne, I made three prostrations in front of it. In so doing, I was paying homage to the words of the Buddha that I am going to interpret. If I were really some very important person, there would be no need for me to perform such prostrations. It would be enough for me simply to sit up here and look impressive. But if the truth be known, I consider myself just a very simple Buddhist monk, a follower of the Buddha who interprets and shares his words.

Traditionally, whenever a teacher takes his seat on a throne to teach, he recites this verse from the sutras:

Regard all compounded things in this way—
Like stars, hallucinations, and flickering lamps,
Like illusions, dewdrops, and bubbles on water,
Like dream images, flashes of lightning, and clouds.¹²

The teacher climbs onto the throne, recites these lines, and then snaps his fingers. At that instant, he recalls the impermanence of everything; he reflects on suffering and brings to mind the lack of identity in things. Otherwise, when you sit on a throne, there is a risk that you might start to feel proud of yourself. The mind of the one who explains the teachings must be peaceful, tamed, and free from any trace of arrogance or pride.

Of course, some of you here may have been following your spiritual practice with great perseverance and sincerity and gradually progressed through all the levels that lead to spiritual realization. So you may have reached a much higher stage of realization than I have. In which case, it is from you that I should be receiving blessings!

The main point, for each and every one of us, is to tame and train our minds and to put the teachings into practice. In that light, for me to sit on a high throne and fancy myself someone special and different would be a huge mistake. Incidentally, I am not particularly comfortable with all the ostentatious kinds of ceremony we tend to indulge in. In fact, I feel we would be much better off without it. Long ago, after

the Lord Buddha had awakened to perfect enlightenment and began turning the wheel of the Dharma, apart from on a few special occasions, as a rule he did not indulge in any ceremony whatsoever. He simply went about barefoot, carrying his alms bowl, walking here and there, as he taught the Dharma. We hear no accounts of the Buddha being chauffeured around in splendor in some ornate chariot.

It was the same in the case of Nagarjuna, who was known as the “second Buddha,” and his spiritual son Aryadeva, and with Asanga and his brother Vasubandhu. They were all fully ordained monks, who carried their bowls as they went about begging for alms. Apart from that, it does not seem that they went in for any fuss or ceremony. I often joke that we don’t hear about the glorious protector Arya Nagarjuna’s business manager or his treasurer or private secretary. It is most likely he did not have any. However, in Tibet a custom slowly developed whereby spiritual and political roles merged, so that people were at one and the same time lamas and chieftains. This gave rise to a lot of elaborate ceremony and spectacle. Nevertheless, there have been many learned and highly accomplished Tibetan masters, from all traditions—Sakya, Geluk, Kagyü, and Nyingma—who were impeccable upholders of the victory banner of the Dharma. For the most part, these masters acted quite ordinarily and lived as pure and simple monks. All the more reason, I feel, for us not to let ourselves get carried away with ceremony and ostentation but to exercise restraint and caution.

The scriptures state that the Dharma, or spirituality, does not depend primarily on some kind of physical expression, like attire or deportment, nor on some verbal expression, such as recitation and chanting, but is experienced, first and foremost, on the basis of the mind. They say that, rather than emphasizing some outward expression, the Dharma consists principally of special methods for analyzing and watching the mind so as to transform it.

It is true that the methods given in the Buddhist teachings do not focus predominantly on external verbal acts such as reciting prayers and mantras, or on physical acts such as prostrations, and the like. Rather, the teachings are put into practice by means of your mind. This makes the process a little more difficult. Another scripture says,

“For this reason, the tradition of the Buddha is a subtle one.” Why? you might ask. Because it is always possible for people to behave outwardly like spiritual practitioners, while at the same time harboring negative thoughts unworthy of a real practitioner. Similarly, it is possible for people to recite prayers and mantras continuously, while their minds are simultaneously polluted by all kinds of destructive thoughts. However, if we are practicing something positive in our mind—say we are cultivating faith or compassion, for example—at the same time as that positive quality is generated in our mind, it is quite impossible for us to give rise to a harmful state of mind. By the same token, where there is a negative state of mind, a positive one cannot coexist. So the important point here is that everything is accomplished on the basis of our mind.

Now, to begin with, I will be reciting certain traditional prayers—a homage that calls to mind the qualities of the Buddha’s body, speech, and mind; a recitation from the sutras; and a dedication. These are the “three regular prayers” that come before a teaching. Then I will recite the *Heart Sutra* in its Tibetan translation, the homage from *The Ornament of Clear Realization*—its prayer in praise of the “mother” Prajnaparamita—and a prayer of praise from *The Root Verses on Wisdom*, which honors our unsurpassable teacher, the Lord Buddha, as the one who revealed the truth of dependent origination. Those of you who are Buddhists may not know exactly how to chant these verses along with me, but it will be fine if you reflect on the qualities of the gracious Lord Buddha’s body, speech, and mind and rest the mind for a moment with a sense of vivid inspiration. If you are not a Buddhist, then just take a moment now to relax.

Homage to the teacher, the conqueror, the tathagata, the arhat,
the perfect Buddha, the glorious and victorious one, the sage of
the Shakyas.

Praise to the Prajnaparamita

Through knowledge of all, you guide the hearers who seek for
peace toward perfect peace,
Through knowledge of the path, you enable those who benefit
beings to bring about the welfare of the world,

Through being endowed with you, the omniscient sages can teach
 in various ways—
 Homage to you, mother of the buddhas and of all the hearers and
 bodhisattvas.¹³

Homage to the Buddha

He who taught dependent origination—
 No cessation and no origination,
 No annihilation and no permanence,
 No coming and no going,
 Neither different nor same—
 This thorough calming of conceptual elaborations:
 To you, who are supreme speaker
 Among all fully enlightened buddhas, I pay homage.¹⁴

TAKING REFUGE AND GENERATING BODHICHITTA

Someone teaching the Dharma should do so with a completely pure motivation, and someone listening to the teachings should also do so with a completely pure motivation. If the teachings are explained and heard in this authentic way, they can have a beneficial effect in guiding your mind, but, without this pure motivation, there is no such benefit. So let us now, teacher and students, recite this prayer together three times:

In the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly,
 I take refuge until I attain enlightenment.
 Through the merit of practicing generosity, and so on,
 May I attain buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.

This prayer includes both the taking of refuge and the generation of bodhichitta. Without taking refuge in the Three Jewels, this would not qualify as a Buddhist teaching, and without generating the altruistic aspiration of bodhichitta to seek enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, this would not count as a Mahayana teaching. So at the outset of my explaining and your listening to the teachings, we should recite this prayer and so take refuge and arouse bodhichitta.