



2: PREPARING THE GROUND

Teachings on the Bodhicharyavatara, by Ringu Tulku Rinpoche

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2: PREPARING THE GROUND	1
EXPLANATION OF THE CHAPTER TITLE.....	2
CHAPTER STRUCTURE.....	2
[THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCUMULATING MERIT].....	2
I. THE BRANCH OF MAKING OFFERINGS.....	2
I.A. Material offerings.....	2
I.A.1. Offerings that belong to an owner.....	3
I.A.2. Offerings that do not belong to an owner.....	3
I.A.3. Offering of one's body.....	4
I.B. Mind manifested offerings.....	5
I.B.1 Offering the bath.....	5
I.B.2. Other offerings.....	7
I.C. Offering made with the power of aspirations.....	8
I.D. Unequalled offerings.....	8
I.E. Offering melodious praise.....	9
II. THE BRANCH OF MAKING PROSTRATIONS.....	10
III. THE BRANCH OF TAKING REFUGE.....	13
III.A. General meaning of refuge.....	13
III.A.1. Causes of refuge.....	13
III.A.2. Nature of the refuge.....	14
[Believing that you can change].....	14
III.A.3. Categories of refuge (based on the motivation of the person going for refuge).....	14
III.A.3.1. Worldly refuge.....	15
III.A.3.2. Transcendental refuge.....	15
III.A.3.2.1. Transcendental motivation of the Hinayana.....	15
III.A.3.2.2. Transcendental motivation of the Mahayana.....	16
III.A.3.2.2.1. Causal refuge.....	16
III.A.3.2.2.2. Resultant refuge.....	16
III.B. Description of the verses in the root text	18
III.B.1. Description of the Hinayana way of refuge	18
III.B.2. Description of the Mahayana way of refuge.....	18
III.B.3. Way of taking refuge, which is common to both.....	21
IV. THE BRANCH OF CONFESSION AND PURIFICATION.....	23
IV.A. Visualizing the objects of confession.....	23
IV.B. The actual confession.....	23
IV.B.1. The power of regret.....	23
IV.B.2. The power of support.....	25
IV.B.3. The power of antidote.....	28
IV.B.4. The power of resolution.....	33

Explanation of the chapter title

We have given this chapter the title of “Preparing the Ground,” because in this chapter, Shantideva introduces eight practices for accumulating merit that prepare the ground for the taking the bodhisattva vows that are presented in Chapter 3. A more literal translation of the Tibetan title is “Confession,” which refers to one of the accumulation practices introduced in this chapter.

Note that the first four of the eight accumulation practices are described in this chapter. The remaining accumulation practices are described in Chapter 3.

Chapter structure

This chapter has four sections: offerings, prostrations, refuge, and confession.

[The importance of accumulating merit]

As we have discussed, bodhicitta is such a limitless source of all positive benefit for ourselves and others, now and in the long run. How can we develop that perfect intention and action that comes out of it? According to the Buddhist way of thinking, since everything is interdependent, everything has causes and conditions and nothing can come about without the appropriate causes and conditions. So if we have to generate this bodhicitta, it has to be generated in a proper way; it has to have its own right causes and conditions.

So what are the causes and conditions which inspire, or bring about, or develop this bodhicitta? Nagarjuna said that the main cause for generating bodhicitta is the accumulation of merit and wisdom—lots of merit and lots of wisdom.ⁱ Asanga gave a slightly different interpretation; he said that the main cause for generating bodhicitta is having a pure mind. If one has a pure mind, then the bodhicitta comes very easily. But Khenpo Kunpal explains that the main cause for having a clear mind arise is having lots of good karma, which comes from accumulating merit. [Therefore there is no contradiction between Nagarjuna and Asanga.]

So we have said that accumulating merit is one of the main causes for generating bodhicitta. But having the capacity and the opportunity to help other beings is also important. Not everyone can accomplish great things for the sake of all beings; you need to have a certain kind of karmic connections or powers. But how can you develop the capacity to do lots of great things? You need to start by accumulating a small amount of positive merit in order to generate a little bodhicitta. Then the more bodhicitta you have, the more powerful your positive deeds will become, enabling you to generate more and more bodhicitta. This is why Shantideva first explains how to accumulate positive merit.

I. The branch of making offerings

Khenpo Kunpal says that making offerings is one of the most powerful ways of accumulating merit. If you make a very nice offering, that also makes your mind become clear and inspired. In this section, there are five kinds of offerings described:

- A. Material offerings
- B. Mind manifested offerings
- C. Offering with the power of our aspirations
- D. Unequaled or completely excellent offerings
- E. Offering of melodious praise

I.A. Material offerings

The material offerings are the offerings of things that we actually have or that we can gather. This includes the offerings that belong to an owner, offerings that do not have an owner, and offering of our own body.

ⁱ These are referred to as *tsok dzokpa* in Tibetan, the two accumulations.

I.A.1. Offerings that belong to an owner

To the buddhas, those thus gone,
And to the sacred Law, immaculate, supreme, and rare,
And to the Buddha's offspring, oceans of good qualities,
That I might gain this precious attitude, I make a perfect offering. (1)

This is making an offering that belongs to an owner. The offering should be made in accordance with the three purities:

1. Pure mind or intention: you make the offering in order to generate the precious bodhicitta become completely established in your mind. You think something like, "Through this offering, may the great bodhicitta arise in the minds of all sentient beings, including myself."
2. Pure object to whom you offer: to the buddhas, the dharma, and the bodhisattvas.
3. Pure offering: perfect offerings of noble substance, clean, and excellently displayed.

Example of Atisha Dipamkara: demonstrating the need for generous offerings

When Atisha Dipamkara first came to Tibet, people asked him to give them the bodhisattva's vows, and he said: "All right, I will give you the bodhisattva's vows. But first you must make a good offering, with lots of lamps and flowers and other offerings." So they gathered a few flowers and made a few lamps. When Atisha came down to the place, he looked at their offerings and said: "Oh, this is not enough. The offering is too poor. I am not going to give you bodhisattva's vows." And he went away.

Then they made a little bit bigger offering, with more lamps and flowers. The next day Atisha came and looked at the offerings and said: "Oh, this offering is still too small." And he went away again without giving them the vows. Then they made the best offering they could ever arrange. And when Atisha came back, he said: "This is not enough, really, but you Tibetans are so foolish and stupid and miserly that I can't do anything about it." And then he gave them the vows.

This is just to illustrate that in the traditional Buddhist way of thinking, generating bodhicitta is something very great and valuable, with lots of benevolent and big effects. Anything great and big one does, to make it completely successful, then you need to make a great positive deed to support it, to back it up. Even if you make a prayer, you must back it up. Just making a prayer by itself is not that powerful, they say. Everybody makes prayers every day. It is useful, but not that successful. But if you do some really great positive deed to back up the prayer, then the effect comes quicker. The bigger the deed, the better it is.

It is also said that people who have done lots of positive deeds should not make negative prayers, because then the results become very negative. It is said that when people are very powerful in their negativity, it is possible that they have done something extremely good once, and made a very bad prayer.

Atisha said that you should take everything you have and divide it into three parts: one you make offerings, one you make gifts and one you use it for yourself. Of course, this is an ideal thing. That is what the earlier bodhisattvas used to do.

I.A.2. Offerings that do not belong to an owner

The second type of material offering is offerings that do not belong to an owner. Some people may think, "Why do we make offerings of things that we don't have? Or of something that doesn't even exist? It is useless." But this is not so. This type of offering is actually a very important way to accumulate merit, because all of this is a mind exercise. You are working on your miserliness, and on your heart becoming wider and bigger and more open.

I offer every fruit and flower
And every kind of healing medicine

And all the precious things the world affords,
With all pure waters of refreshment. (2)

Every mountain, rich and filled with jewels;
All sweet and lonely forest groves;
The trees of heaven, garlanded with blossom,
And branches heavy, laden with their fruits; (3)

The perfumed fragrance in the realms of gods and men;
All incense, wishing trees, and trees of gems;
All crops that grow without the tiller's care
And every sumptuous object worthy to be offered; (4)

Lakes and meres adorned with lotuses,
All plaintive with the sweet-voiced cries of water birds
And lovely to the eyes, all things wild and free
Stretching to the boundless limits of the sky; (5)

I hold them all before my mind, and to the supreme buddhas
And their heirs will make a perfect gift of them.
O, think of me with love, compassionate lords;
Sacred objects of my prayers, accept these offerings. (6)

This means that whatever you see, whatever you hear, whatever you can think about in all the worlds, in all the cosmos, in all the ten directions—you offer everything. Whatever you think are good things, precious things, the best things that you have heard about or that you can imagine, you make an offering of them all. Even if you don't completely know what it is, whatever is there, I offer them all.

Many people think that if you don't have things, if you are a poor person, then you have no attachment. That is not true. If you have nothing, that doesn't mean that you have no attachment. I sometimes think that the less things you have, the more attachment you have. Because if you have lots of things, then you are not very attached to small things, like a piece of bread, for example. But if you don't have it, a piece of bread becomes so precious. You are really attached even to that.

So if you don't have anything, that doesn't mean that you are not attached to things. And if you have a lot, that also doesn't mean you are not attached to things. Attachment is in your mind; it is the mind which is the most important thing. Therefore making offerings visualized through the mind is a very strong way of working on your attachment and on your miserliness, on letting go of things.

For I am empty-handed, destitute of merit,
I have no other wealth. But you, protectors,
You whose thoughts are for the good of others,
In your great power, accept this for my sake. (7)

So why do I need to offer this? Because in former lives I have not accumulated merit, so therefore I have nothing now. I am not prosperous, I am rather poor. So therefore I don't have anything else to offer, but I offer everything that I can imagine. So please accept all these offerings with your kindness for the sake of all sentient beings.

I.A.3. Offering of one's body

The buddhas and their bodhisattva children—
I offer them myself throughout my lives.
Supreme courageous ones accept me totally.
For with devotion I will be your servant. (8)

For if you will accept me, I will be
A benefit to all and freed from fear.
I'll go beyond the evils of my past,
And ever after turn my face from them. (9)

It is said that the best way of protection, the best way of purification, is just completely giving away, completely letting be, completely letting go. Even Milarepa had certain problems when he was practicing in a cave in the mountains. One day Milarepa returned to his cave and found three most fearsome beings there, waiting for him. They were very small, and their heads were bigger than their body, and their eyes were bigger than their head. They were very fearsome, and he was a bit afraid when he saw these strange creatures.

He tried to ask them to go away. "Please, why don't you go away?" he said. But they didn't go. So then he tried to visualize himself as a wrathful deity and say some mantras. That didn't help. Then he tried all different kinds of meditation practices and they still didn't go away. Then at the end he thought, "Why? This is crazy. I have been doing all these practices, but the teachings that I received say that everything is a projection of my mind. I am just too scared about my own life and this body. These beings might be evil spirits, but, so what? They are beings."

So he said to the creatures, "All right, I don't want you to go. Let us stay together. What is there? If you want to eat, eat. [If you want to drink, drink. Whatever is mine, is yours.]" Then he went in the cave and sat and there was nothing there. The creatures had all disappeared.

So in this way, to have this intention or to have this courage and wisdom of being able to give away your body is considered an important practice of the Mahayana tradition. That is also the main emphasis of the *Chö* practiceⁱ. The *Chö* practice does not really come from Vajrayana, it comes more from the Sutrayana.

I.B. Mind manifested offerings

This section has two parts: offering a bath and other types of offerings.

I.B.1 Offering the bath

Khenpo Kunpal says that offering the bath is according to the ancient Indian customs of bathing before and after eating, washing the feet and anointing them with wood-smelling incense, or decorating the head or body with flowers and garlands. I think in India offering a bath must have been the most important thing, because it is so hot there. But I don't think it will be a bad thing here also.

Khenpo Kunpal says that although the buddhas and bodhisattvas don't have any dirt or stains or negativity, we offer them the bath in order to purify our own body, speech and mind.

Visualizing the bathing palace

A bathing chamber excellently fragrant,
With floors of crystal, radiant and clear,
With graceful pillars shimmering with gems,
All hung about with gleaming canopies of pearls. (10)

Create this offering in your mind by visualizing in the sky in front of you a beautiful bathing palace, sweetly scented with fragrances such as sandalwood or camphor. The floor of the bathing palace is like a great mosaic made of five different colored crystals, all brilliantly clear and bright. The whole palace is decorated with the seven different kinds of precious jewels, always shining in different colors. Between four beautiful pillars is a waist-deep sunken bathtub, and overhead are beautiful canopies decorated with pearls and other beautiful jewels, all radiant and glowing. There are also many different kinds of auspicious symbols and garlands [such as pillar banners,

ⁱ See *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, page 303

parasols, victory banners, streamers, strings, and so on]. [In the ceiling above the bath is a window covered by a small dome, on top of which is a Chinese roof ornamented with a beautiful jewel.]

Offering the bath

There the blissful buddhas and their heirs
I'll bath with many a precious vase,
Abrim with water, sweet and pleasant,
All to frequent strains of melody and song. (11)

All the buddhasⁱ and bodhisattvas arrive at the bathing palace. They enter and remove their clothes and hang them on the railings around the sunken bathtub. You offer them beautiful, clean white transparent bathing garments. There are large vases made of lapis lazuliⁱⁱ, filled with clean, scented, water—not too cold and not too hot. Either you or many different kinds of beautiful offering deities fill the bathtub with the fresh water from the vases. At the same time, outside the bathing palace are many very beautiful offering deities, saying in songs and music the prayers of the buddhas and the bodhisattvas. Say and think, I thus offer this bath, accompanied by a variety of beautiful music.

Draining the water and purifying negativity

When the bath is finished, the bath water drains out from a plug in the bottom of the bathtub. Visualize all sentient beings beneath the bathing palace and imagine they are washed by this water which has come from the bodies of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. This completely purifies all their negative deeds and obscurations. And all the negative things in the land and environment are also purified, including the deity of the mountains, deity of the all different kind of spirits, and so on. All the negative spirits—all the *sinpo*, the *rakshas*, and the rest—everything is purified. Then all the diseases of man, cattle, and other animals are completely purified. And all the obstacles, all the bad thoughts and bad intentions, all the negative actions against each other, the rough and violent actions, all this is completely purified. We feel that all beings are completely washed and purified, and that the great bodhicitta is generated in all those beings upon whom a single drop of this water has fallen.

Drying the buddhas and receiving the siddhis

With cloths of unexampled quality,
With peerless, perfumed towels I will dry them (12, first half)

When all the buddhas and bodhisattvas finish their bath, their bodies are dried with a cloth made of *Kashika*—an unparalleled clear cloth worn by the deities in the god realm that is completely clear and clean—which is powdered with the sweet scent of dried medicinal plants. Then imagine that these *Kashika* cloths dissolve and emanate in the form of a red light possessed with blessings and good siddhis. These red lights stream into us and all sentient beings through our foreheads, and we feel that we have received all the wisdom and all the good qualities of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Offering clothing and ornaments

And offer splendid scented clothes,
Well-dyed and of surpassing excellence. (12, second half)

With different garments, light and supple,
And a hundred beautiful adornments,
I will grace sublime Samantabhadra,

ⁱ Although the mind of a buddha is never distracted from the Dharmakaya, their body, or the form kaya, is emanated as whatever is beneficial for the sentient beings.

ⁱⁱ An azure, opaque, semi-precious stone.

Manjughosha, Lokeshvara and their kin. (13)

[Then you offer the buddhas and bodhisattvas beautiful clothes in various colors and shapes, along with many beautiful ornaments. Make the wish that through these offerings, may all beings, myself and others, attain the excellent ornamentation of the major marks and minor signs of a buddha.]

I.B.2. Other offerings

Now, making other types of offering with our mind.

And with a sumptuous fragrance that
Pervades a thousand million worlds,
I will anoint the bodies of the buddhas,
Light and gleaming bright, like pure and burnished gold. (14)

I will place before the Buddha, perfect object of my worship,
Flowers like the lotus and the madaravas,
Uppala, and other scented blossoms,
Worked and printed in lovely scented garlands. (15)

I will offer swelling clouds of incense,
Whose ambient perfume ravishes the mind,
And various food and every kind of drink,
All delicacies worthy of the gods. (16)

I will offer precious lamps,
All perfectly contrived as golden lotuses,
A bed of flower petals scattering
Upon the level, incense-sprinkled ground. (17)

I will offer palaces immense and resonant with song,
All decked with precious pearls and pendant gems,
Gleaming treasures fit to ornament the amplitude of space:
All this I offer to the loving bodhisattvas. (18)

Precious parasols adorned with golden shafts
And bordered all around with jewel fringes,
Upright, well proportioned, pleasing to the eye.
Again all this I give to the all the buddhas. (19)

The main thing here is to try to make the best offering that we could ever imagine. We are working on our imagination here, so we offer the best things that we can imagine and create with our mind.

This is the usual way of working with our craving, with our miserliness, with attachment and envy and so on. Whenever we see something very nice, instead of saying, "I want this for myself," in this practice you say, "I offer this to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times." Or you can create something even better in your mind, and offer that. Offering to the "buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times" includes all sentient beings; it includes everyone.

This is a way of training your mind to not always grab on and think, "I wish this to happen to myself only." If you see a very nice car, you say, "I offer it to the buddhas and bodhisattvas." If you see a nice house, you offer that. You offer everything—the flowers in the garden, and the trees in the parks, beautiful boulevards—everything.

I.C. Offering made with the power of aspirations

May a multitude of other offerings,
Accompanied by music sweet to hear,
Be made in great successive clouds,
To soothe the sufferings of living beings. (20)

[This is offering to the buddhas vast, unlimited amounts of praise and sweet music for the purpose of making all beings happy and free from suffering. The word 'clouds' connotes very vast.]

May rains of flowers, every precious thing,
Fall down in an unceasing stream
Upon the jewels of sacred Dharma,
The Triple Gem and all supports for offering. (21)

"... it is said that when the Buddha and the bodhisattvas taught the dharma, a rain of flowers descended, called the 'miracle of illuminating the dharma'. (This happened) in the same way every time the dharma of statements was either taught or studied. It is also said that when the Buddha, the Bhagavhan, attained completely manifest enlightenment, the gods of the pure realms let a rain of flowers descend. (This happened) in the same way every time the dharma of realization was born in the minds (of the Buddha's disciples)." - PKT translation

I.D. Unequaled offerings

The unequalled offerings are called *lana mépé chöpa* in Tibetan. *Lana mépa* is unexcelled, nothing above—this is the greatest kind of offering. This is also an offering created by your mind, but it's explained here separately because it's a very unlimited kind of offering, made with unlimited mind.

As you have noticed, the Mahayana's way of doing things right from the aspiration is very limitless. The main aim of all the practices ultimately is to make things unlimited. Like even ourselves feeling very egoistic, very self-centered, very selfish, very small, very scared, very frightened, trying to get security from everywhere: the practice is to destroy this [limited way of feeling] and become completely limitless—[to develop] limitless aspiration, limitless compassion, limitless wisdom. In this way, the whole [path to] enlightenment is in a way becoming limitless. It's nothing else, but actually becoming limitless. Therefore, even in the practice of making offering, there is this exercise of making it limitless.

Offering and purification

In the Buddhist tradition, there are two very important practices, offerings and purification, that are found in both the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions. For example, in the ngöndro, you have the mandala offering and the purification practice of Vajrasattva. I think these two practices are the main practice, because it is training ourselves to let go of things. The purification is letting go of negative things and the offering is letting go of positive things. When you don't cling to something, when you don't get stuck to something, when you can let go of things, then you can become more and more natural, more and more de-conditioned. The whole process of getting back to seeing your true nature, rediscovering the buddha nature, is mainly to de-condition our [samsaric] ways of seeing things and of clinging to them.

That is why so much emphasis is given in making offerings through your mind. Some people might wonder, "Why do you make so many offerings in the mind, when you do not dare to give even a cup of tea? It is useless." But this is not the case. Of course, it's very good if you can actually give material things. But this practice is a little bit different; it is an exercise on your mind.

Offerings made by the eight great bodhisattvas

Just as Manjugosha, gentle and melodious,
Made offerings to the conquerors,
Likewise I will make [offerings]

To the buddhas and their bodhisattva children. (22)ⁱ

[This is referring to the unexcelled offerings made by the Eight Great Bodhisattvas, who are: Manjugosha (Manjushri), Samantabhadraⁱⁱ, Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani, Maitreya, Ksitigarbha, and Sarvanivaranaviskambhin.]

Samantabhadra's offering

There is a famous practice named after one of these eight bodhisattvas, called Samantabhadra's offering, which Khenpo Kunpal describes here. In this practice, you begin by visualizing Samantabhadra in front of you, and then imagine that different colored rays of light stream out from Samantabhadra's heart. Hundreds of thousands of rays stream out, billions of rays, as many rays as there are particles of dust, not only in this world, but in all the Buddha fields all over the space.

Then that is not enough. At the end of each of these lights, you emanate one bodhisattva Samantabhadra like himself. And from the heart of each of these bodhisattvas then again as many lights as before spread out. Then again at the end of each of these lights there is another Samantabhadra. Then again till it's completely unthinkable, completely uncountable, and completely beyond all limits. Each of these Samantabhadras is carrying all different kind of objects of offering. And they make the best offerings ceaselessly day and night to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas and great beings in all ten directions.

That is Samantabhadra's offering. You will find this reference in many places, in the different kind of practicesⁱⁱⁱ.

Offering the fruits of practice and study

Another important type of unexcelled offering is offering [the fruit of our practice and study.] If we can generate a little bit of bodhicitta and make it as an offering, that becomes the best offering. If we can generate a little bit of compassion, if we can understand a little bit of dharma, we can offer that.

In *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, it says very clearly that out of all the ways of pleasing or serving the Guru, the best way is through the *offering of practice*^{iv}. In the same way, the best kind of offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas is to offer the understanding and experience of your practice. This is regarded as an unexcelled offering because it is something that is really real: any kind of compassion or understanding that you can generate in yourself, any small amount of bodhicitta, is a very great offering.

I.E. Offering melodious praise

[1:50]

I will offer prayers by every way and means
To these vast oceans of good qualities.
May clouds of tuneful praise
Ascend unceasingly before them. (23)

This is offering melodious praise to the qualities of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. First, you offer praise to the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind, where:

- The Buddha's *body* is endowed with the 32 major marks and 80 minor signs of greatness.

ⁱ Alternate translation by AP: "Just as Manjugosha and the rest/ Made offerings to all the buddhas, / Likewise I too will offer to those thus gone / And all their bodhisattva heirs."

ⁱⁱ This refers to the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, not the Buddha Samantabhadra. Samantabhadra Buddha is the first Buddha, or *Adhibuddha*.

ⁱⁱⁱ See *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Shambhala publications, page 321.

^{iv} See *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Shambhala publications, page 145.

- The Buddha's *speech* is like the melodious speech of the Brahma, who's voice is very nice to hear and very meaningful, and understood by different people in their own languages. When the Buddha taught, he did not need a translator. He was understood in many different languages, [and his words were] very sweet and inspiring.
- Most importantly, the Buddha's *mind* is completely enlightened, completely omniscient and so on, with ocean-like qualities. *Ocean* is usually used as a metaphor for greatness, for countlessness, for limitlessness. So *ocean-like qualities*ⁱ means great unlimited qualities.

Then you make offerings to the bodhisattvas. To all these buddhas and bodhisattvas we make offerings of praise to their good qualities. And not just making praises in very bad words and a very tuneless kind of voice; [but in a beautiful, inspired way], like Chagdud Rinpoche.

II. The branch of making prostrations

To the buddhas of the past, the present, and all future time,
And to the Doctrine and Sublime Assembly,
With bodies many as the grains of dust
Upon the ground, I will prostrate and bow. (24)

Here we prostrate to the:

- *Buddha*: to all the buddhas of the ten directions and the three times. The ten direction are: East, West, North, South, then South-East and so on, then up and down. The three times are past, present, and future.
- *Dharma*: to the Dharma of the teachingsⁱⁱ and the Dharma of the experienceⁱⁱⁱ.
- *Sangha*: to the sublime assembly, those beings who genuinely practice the Dharma and who have a certain degree of understanding of the Dharma.

Begin by standing and emanating your body into countless bodies, just as we emanated countless bodhisattvas in Samantabhadra's offering. Then with great respect, prostrate as follows:

- With your *body*, show respect by folding your hands and putting the folded hands to your head, throat and heart. Then either: place your whole body on the ground for a full prostration; or place the five parts of your body (two hands, two knees and the forehead) for a half prostration.
- With your *speech*, say the words of praise.
- With your *mind*, remind yourself of the greatness, the good qualities and the best positive things about the beings or objects to whom you are making this prostration.

In that way, you make the prostration.

To shrines and all supports
Of bodhicitta I bow down: (25, first half)

I not only prostrate to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, but also to all the "shrines and all supports of bodhicitta." The support of bodhicitta is anything that brings up or helps me to generate bodhicitta, such as:

- *Images*: for example, a very inspiring image of the Buddha that generates faith or devotion.
- *Teachings or books*: for example, if you read certain books and then you get inspired. Whatever gives you the inspiration, such as the sutras and the different kinds of teachings.

ⁱ Tib. *yönten gyatso*

ⁱⁱ Tib. *lung gi chö*

ⁱⁱⁱ Tib. *tokpé chö*

- *Places*: this could be a place of pilgrimage, such as the place where the Buddha was born and where Buddha got enlightened, or a place where lots of teachings and practices are done. If you go there and you get inspired, that is a place of worship because it generates a positive attitude in your mind.
- *Objects*: representations of the body, speech and mind of the Buddhas, even the stupas.

Whatever there is that generates bodhicitta, that helps us to be more positive, to all of them I make prostrations.

All abbots who transmit the vows, all learned masters,
And all noble ones who practice Dharma. (25, second half)

I also prostrate to any person who serves as an inspiration or support, such as:

- *Abbots*, or khenpos, from whom you receive the Vinaya vows.
- *Teachers* from whom you receive the teachings.
- *Instructors* who give you the instructions.
- Those who are actually on the path and practicing Dharma.

So anyone who is a householder or a monk or a nun, anybody who is going on the right way and doing the genuine thing, to all of them I make my prostration.

How to prostrate

In the commentary, Khenpo Kunpal includes detailed instructions from the sutras on how to prostrate. It says that the prostration we are talking about is body, speech, and mind prostration. Usually, when we say prostration, we think of only the body prostration. But Khenpo Kunpal says that it is not just the body making prostrations. Out of this body, speech, and mind, the mind is the most important, because the mind is the one that actually directs the body and speech. Therefore it is better to make one or two prostrations with the mind in a good place, than to make lots of prostrations with your body, when mind is completely distracted.

Begin by standing straight. When your *body* is straight, your *tsa* or channels become straight. When your channels are straight, your *wind* or *lung* becomes straight. When your wind is straight, your *mind* or *sem* becomes straight. This is called the four aspects of straightness.

With this four-fold straightness, visualize your father on your right side, and your mother on your left; in front of you are your enemies and obstructions who have tried to harm you; all around you are all sentient beings. Everybody has the posture of folded hands, and in these two hands you feel as if you are holding the wish-fulfilling gem. Then either you throw your body down on the floor completely for a full prostration, or just with these five parts of your body for a half prostration.

[Khenpo Kunpal gives a meditation from the sutras on what to think or feel as you do the prostration. In this method:] when you put your right knee on the ground, think and say, "May all sentient beings go the right way." Then when you put the left knee down, think and say, "May all sentient beings who have who have gone the wrong way and left the dharma behind be diverted to the right path."

When you put your right hand on the ground, think and say, "Just as the Buddha touched his right hand to the ground and destroyed all the maras and became enlightened, in the same way, may all sentient beings destroy their own maras and become enlightened." When you put your left hand on the ground, think and say, "For all sentient beings who are lost in the state of spiritual immaturity, who have been very rough and tough and in a very bad way and difficult to subdue, may I be able to bring them to the right path through the four ways of the bodhisattvas."

When you put your forehead on the ground, think, "May all the arrogance and the pride of all beings be completely eradicated. May all beings show respect to their teachers. May all sentient

beings soon become enlightened and have the high mound on their head, like the Buddha has. May all the positive qualities in all beings increase.”

With the five parts of your body on the ground, think and say:

May the five obscurations of all beings be dispelled.

May the five powers of all beings be perfected (such as devotion, remaining on the path, right discipline and so on).

May all beings come to understand the nature of the five sense pleasures.

May all beings gain all the five supernatural powers (such as clairvoyance and so on).

May the five eyes of all beings be completely purified.

May all beings born in the five realms be liberated.

May all beings attain supreme discipline, supreme meditation, supreme wisdom, supreme liberation, and supreme insight into liberating wisdom.

That concludes the instructions for making prostrations. According to the sutras, the benefits of prostrations are:

For each prostration, on the ground where you make the prostrations, however many particles of dust there are from there till it reaches the core of the earth, that many times you will become a Chakravatin king. Then eventually you will attain the complete peaceⁱ.

ⁱ 'Complete peace' means enlightenment

III. The branch of taking refuge

Refuge is the door, the beginning of all the dharmas; it is the basis of all the ordinations and precepts; it's the source of all the good qualities and all the positive experiences; it is the one which differentiates Buddhists and non-Buddhists; which makes one enter into Buddha's teachings. Now we examine these points in detail; refuge is:

- *The entrance into all the dharmas*: from a Buddhist point of view, whatever Buddhist tradition you enter into, whatever school or whatever teachings it might be, you must enter into it first through refuge.
- *The basis of all the ordinations and precepts*: before taking any other precepts, you have to first take refuge. Buddha did not allow any other precepts to be taken without first taking refuge.¹ In the commentary *Seventy Stanzas on Refuge*ⁱ, it says,

You may have received all the precepts or ordinations,
But if you have not taken refuge, you have none.

- *The source of all the positive qualities (of Buddhist practices)*: without having received refuge, then whatever practices you do—whether Hinayana, Mahayana, or Vajrayana—they won't have much effect. Drikung Kyobpa Rinpoche said, "If you have not taken refuge, then you will gain no benefit from your practice." Without the refuge, you have no aim, no objective, no direction—you don't know where you are going.

It is said that if you don't have the foundation or corner stones of a house, then you can not have the walls, and you cannot have a painting on the wall. In the same way, if you don't have refuge then you cannot receive the benefits of practice. Once one has this refuge practice, then whatever other practice you do—whether pratimokshaⁱⁱ, or the Bodhisattva's, or the Vajrayana—the results of those practices come naturally, because you have the foundation, the direction, and the right attitude and preparation. It is like a building where the foundation is very stable, so then the walls are also stable. Then if you make a painting on the wall, that also comes out well.

- *The one that differentiates between the non-Buddhists and the Buddhists, and the main thing through which one enters into the Buddhist path*: according to some scholars, the difference between Buddhists and non-Buddhists is whether you believe in the self or non-self. But here, Khenpo Kunpal says that is not the case. There is a Buddhist school called Vatsiputriya that believes in a self that they say is unable to be expressed, stating: "There is a self who carries the burden, who acquires the karma."ⁱⁱⁱ Since there is this Buddhist school that believes in this way, therefore it is not correct to say that one is a Buddhist depending on one's belief in a self or not.

This section on refuge has two parts: a general understanding of refuge and then the refuge as given in the root text.

III.A. General meaning of refuge

This section on the general meaning of refuge is from the commentary only. It has three parts: 1) causes of refuge; 2) nature of refuge; 3) categories or divisions of refuge.

III.A.1. Causes of refuge

The cause of refuge means the source of the refuge, or where the refuge comes from. Refuge comes from faith. There are four types of the faith:

- Inspired faith: the faith inspired by thinking of the immense compassion of the buddhas and the great teachers.

ⁱ Skt. *Trisharana a-saptati*, Tib. *Kyabdro dūn chupa*

ⁱⁱ Pratimoksha vows are vows of individual liberation associated with the Hinayana path.

ⁱⁱⁱ Padma Karpo translation: "There is an identity that I carry like a load./ I cannot say whether it is permanent or impermanent."

- Eager faith: comes from the eager wish to be free from suffering, and to attain liberation; thereby wishing to abandon negative actions and adopt positive actions.
- Confident faith: comes from complete trust in the qualities of the three jewels.
- Non-returnable faith: comes from complete trust with complete understanding.

Refuge is the last of these, the non-returnable faith that comes out of complete understanding.

III.A.2. Nature of the refuge

Khenpo Kunpal says the nature of the refuge is: in order to liberate oneself from all fears, to accept something as refuge and to commit to it.

Refuge should not be misunderstood as prayer. For example, if there is something negative happening to me, which is not good for me, and I ask somebody to protect me or to get me out of that problem, that is making a prayer. Or if somebody is in trouble, or somebody has made a big mistake, then he goes and asks some powerful person to help them or to protect them. That is prayer, but that is not refuge.

In the *Ornament of Sutras*ⁱ, it says that refuge is making the commitment that “whatever happens to me, whether it is good or bad, whether happiness or suffering, whether I am going up or going low, there is nothing else that I can rely upon but this.” I make this commitment to the three jewels as my place of refuge. It is important to understand the essence of refuge is this *acceptance* and *commitment*.²

[Believing that you can change]

In other religions, you have to believe in something before you are considered to be [a member] of that religion. To become a Christian, you have to believe in a God. What is the main prerequisite to become a Buddhist? What do you have to believe in?

I think, and this is my own understanding, that the main prerequisite to becoming a Buddhist is the belief that I can change, that I can improve. Because the main refuge from a Buddhist point of view is this understanding or this belief that what I am now, with my mental attitude, with my mental state, with this state of being, can be changed. And it can change so much so that I can even become a completely enlightened being. That is the main understanding of going for refuge: that you can improve your positive side [more and more], until you rediscover the ultimately clean or the pure side of yourself, which we sometimes call the buddha nature. That is the inner buddha. Wanting to realise that, and making a commitment to realise that, that is going for refuge to buddha. In the Mahayana tradition, going for refuge to the buddha is the most important thing, and going for refuge to the dharma and sangha is just a method in order to realise that.

Of course, first you go for refuge to the outer buddha, dharma and sangha. But that is mainly as a means [to reach the inner buddha, or buddha nature]. You go refuge to the outer buddha as a teacher, as an example, as a guide, as a leader, as an influence [in order to reach the true source of refuge, which is inside you]. That is the main thing. That’s why [Khenpo Kunpal makes the point that refuge is not prayer.] Refuge is not like I just ask somebody to help me, but it is something that I believe is in me, and I want to get it out. That is what we call the *damchawa*, I make this commitment that I would like to bring out my buddha-hood. And I would like to have others also do the same.

It’s not just somebody asking for help. There is an element of asking for help when you go the outer refuge. Then we also pray, more from reverence, from respect, and from appreciation. And also the understanding of their power and their intention, good intention and power and wisdom. But it’s not just praying. So that is the nature of the refuge that is described here.

III.A.3. Categories of refuge (based on the motivation of the person going for refuge)

The main categories of refuge are determined by the motivation of the person who goes for refuge. These are worldly refuge and transcendental refuge. The transcendental refuge is divided

ⁱ Skt. *Sutra-lankara*, Tib. *Do de gyen*

into the Hinayana and Mahayana. Within Mahayana refuge there is the causal refuge and the resultant refuge.

III.A.3.1. Worldly refuge

The *Dvajagra-sutra*ⁱ states:

People who are frightened by fear,
Mainly go for refuge
To mountains, forests, gardens,
Trees, and (non-Buddhist) stupas or objects of offerings.
But these are not the chief refuge.
Relying on these as refuge,
They will never be liberated from all suffering.

Khenpo Kunpal says that if we are afraid of temporary illnesses, obstacles, and things like that, and then we go refuge to the mountains, to the forests, to the gods—like Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva, eight different kinds of spirits and so on—those are themselves in samsara. They cannot give us a complete cessation from all the sufferings. Not only that, but it is not completely certain whether they can give us temporary protection from the problems at the moment also. Therefore these refuges are not considered as the supreme refuge.

Even if the object of the refuge is the buddha, dharma, and sangha, if refuge is taken with a worldly or samsaric motivation, then it is considered worldly refuge. For example, if we have some small problems and we pray, “May these little problems be solved, may we not have this or that suffering,” that is called worldly refuge. Therefore, even if we go for refuge to the buddha, dharma and sangha, if we go to solve our worldly or temporary problems, then it is the worldly refuge.

III.A.3.2. Transcendental refuge

The transcendental refuge is divided into two parts: the Hinayana way of refuge and the Mahayana way of refuge.

III.A.3.2.1. Transcendental motivation of the Hinayana

In the Hinayana way of refuge, we go for refuge to the buddha, dharma and sangha, where:

- *Buddha* is the chief or the most excellent human being. The literal translation is “the most excellent with two feet.” It’s the most excellent or the highest form of reincarnation. The buddha is the main refuge: the mind of the buddha who has attained the Dharmakaya, and the body of the buddha, as a human being.
- *Dharma* is peace, completely free from all the clinging or attachment. It is also the experience of getting rid of all the negative influences, like the mind poisons, right from the root, right from the seed. So dharma is the path as well as the cessation.
- *Sangha* is the chief or the most excellent of all the assemblies. That means human beings who have attained the realisation or the experience of the dharma. And this dharma, which is also cessation, and this person’s experience, are inseparable. This means that the sangha is that group of beings who have actualized the dharma. This is what we call the excellent assembly.

This excellent assembly is not an assembly that sometimes happens and then immediately disintegrates, and it is not just an ordinary sangha like us, who are just beginners. The excellent assembly is a sangha of beings who have completely realized the dharma; they are no longer in samsara. They are sometimes called the Arya sangha. There are four stages of the Arya sangha:

- Stream enterer: when you have the complete understanding of the truth; this is almost the same as the seeing stage in the Mahayana path.

ⁱ Tib. *Do Gyaltzen Dampa*

- Once-returner.
 - Non-returner.
- These first three stages are called the still-in-training stages.
- Arhat: the no-more-learning stage, or no-more-training stage.

So the Hinayana way of taking refuge is with the motivation that “I am afraid of the sufferings of the samsara, so I would like to get out of it. I see my body as though an executioner has his sword raised over it. I see all the elements as something very fearful, as if they were poisonous snakes that will bite me and kill me. I wish to be liberated from all this. Therefore, I go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, as long as I live or until I attain the perfect cessation of my path.”

III.A.3.2.2. Transcendental motivation of the Mahayana

Generally speaking, the Mahayana way of going for refuge is an unbearable compassion for all sentient beings, who are throughout space, and who I see as almost my own kind and most loving mother. And not only do I have this great compassion towards all of these beings, but I really want to liberate them from all the sufferings of samsara, I must liberate them. In order to liberate them, first I must find a way to liberate myself. Therefore I go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha—not only until I attain enlightenment, but until all the sentient beings get enlightened. Thus the Mahayana way of going for refuge differs from the Hinayana way in its attitude of wanting to get enlightened for the sake of all sentient beings.

The Mahayana way is divided into two categories: the causal refuge and the resultant refuge.

III.A.3.2.2.1. Causal refuge

The causal refuge is the temporary one. This is going for refuge to the other beings who already have realised the three refuges—meaning the beings who have already become enlightened, who have already realised the dharma, and who have already become a sangha. This is also called the *outer* refuge, because you are going for refuge to the *outer* Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. In this case:

- *Buddha* is the Buddha Shakyamuni, who first generated bodhicitta three countless kalpas before his enlightenment. Then after gathering the two accumulations of merit and wisdom for countless kalpas, at last he was born as the son of the king Shuddhodana in India, and then attained the perfect buddha-hood in Bodhgaya. Perfect buddha-hood means the embodiment of the three or four kayas; the same as the buddhas of the past, who have actually become a buddha. To all those beings who actually become buddha, I go for refuge to them.
- *Dharma* is the experience of those buddhas and bodhisattvas, and the teachings and instructions that they gave based on their experience.
- *Sangha* is the non-returning bodhisattvas, such as Manjushri and Maitreya.

That is the going for refuge as the cause. You call it the *cause* because in this case the buddha, dharma, and sangha are the *cause* that will make you enlightened. They will inspire you and give you teachings to bring you to enlightenment. This is also called the *outer* refuge, because you are going for refuge to an outer Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Usually in the outer refuge, the dharma becomes the most important thing, because the dharma is the experience of the buddha. It is through understanding and practicing the dharma that one becomes realized. In the inner refuge, the buddha becomes the important thing.

III.A.3.2.2.2. Resultant refuge

The *causal refuge* is the outer refuge, because you are going for refuge to something outside of yourself, as an inspiration and guide to attaining enlightenment. But the *resultant refuge* is the inner refuge, because you are going for refuge to something inside you. That is the real refuge.

It is said by Maitreya in the *Ornament of Clear Realization*ⁱ:

ⁱ Skt. *Abhisamayalankara*, Tib. *Din tenu döpe*

Understand that because this (person) wishes (to obtain in himself) the real (three jewels), his very acceptance is (born) out of compassion and love.ⁱ

This means that the promise to attain enlightenment comes from compassion. In order to dispel all the negative influences and suffering of myself and others, I make a commitment to realize the final three refuges in my own self. That means I make the commitment to become an enlightened being. That is going for inner refuge, or what we call the resultant refuge. As we discussed before, that means realizing that I have the ability to improve.

There are different ways of seeing it, but in the general Mahayana way of seeing, because I have the causes for becoming enlightened, therefore I can become enlightened. What is actually a fully enlightened being? A fully enlightened being is somebody who has completely unlimited wisdom and compassion.

What are the causes of enlightenment? The causes are having the seeds of compassion and wisdom. If that is the case, do I have a seedling of that compassion and wisdom or not? If I find in myself a very small seed, even an insignificant seedling, of compassion and wisdom, then, because I can improve that, and work on that, and develop that, then it is possible that I can become enlightened. And because all the sentient beings have these seeds, they too can become enlightened. In one way or another, every being has a little bit of compassion, every being has a little bit of the wisdom, therefore they can become enlightened.

The Vajrayana way of seeing: getting back to our true nature

The Vajrayana way of seeing things is that all of us have this buddha nature, and the buddha nature is a completely enlightened state. That is our true nature, which is not affected by any of these negative influences and conditions. Therefore if we can really go back to our true nature and completely experience that state, then we have no more problem, it's completely enlightened.

All the negative things, all the sufferings, just come out of a misunderstanding. Because of that misunderstanding, then layers and layers of assumptions, habitual tendencies, and so on, have covered our true nature, so we are not able to see it. These are the obscurations that we need to work on and get rid of. We need to get out of these habitual tendencies, these patterns, all these different kinds of concepts and misunderstandings. Once that is done, then we are completely enlightened, we are buddha naturally. There is nothing more to gain from outside, but just to bring out our true nature. That's more from the Vajrayana way of seeing.

Uttaratantra Shastra: the ultimate refuge is the Buddha

Khenpo Kunpal says that when at last we have accomplished the three refuges in ourselves, then we have eliminated all fears—not only of the samsaric fears, but also of the wishes and the attachments and the expectations of nirvana. There is no samsara and no nirvana. It is not that there is some samsara to leave behind and nirvana to get or go to. You realise that this is it. There is no samsara to leave behind, there is no nirvana to go to or attain from outside, so that's it. So that is what is called enlightenment from that point of view. That is the highest form of refuge.

This is described in the *Uttaratantra Shastra*ⁱⁱ:

Understand that the ultimate refuge
Is only the Buddha.
The Muni's (mind) is the dharmakaya
And is, therefore, also the ultimate gathering.

This means that in the ultimate sense, the final refuge of all beings is the buddha. The buddha has the body of the dharma; the buddha's understanding and experience is the dharma. The buddha is also the highest form of the sangha; all the different stages of becoming a completely

ⁱ Padma Karpo translation

ⁱⁱ Tib. *Gyü Lama*. English translations of this title are *Sublime Continuum* or *Buddha Nature*. The Sanskrit title is used in this text for clarity.

enlightened buddha is the different stages of sangha. Therefore, the buddha, dharma, and sangha are all included within the buddha; and that is also within ourselves.

Khenpo Kunpal says, generally, the real meaning of the *Uttaratantra Shastra* is refuge. The main meaning, the essence, of that whole treatise, is refuge. The last four chapters of the treatise talk about the resultant refuge. The causal refuge is not something that can completely liberate you from all the fears of samsara and also nirvana. Therefore it is not a final refuge.

The difference between resultant refuge and aspiration bodhicitta

You might ask, what is the difference between the resultant refuge and aspiration bodhicitta? Aspiration bodhicitta is: I would like to attain enlightenment for myself and for others. And the refuge is also, I would like to rediscover my true nature, which is the enlightenment, for myself and for others. So what is the difference between these two?

Khenpo Kunpal gives several different views on this. Acharya Sthiramatiⁱ, one of four main students of Vasubhandu, writes in his commentary to the *Ornament of Sutras*ⁱⁱ that aspiration bodhicitta and refuge are the same thing. Atisha says the difference is whether there are these two hooks of promise or not. [CHECK- what two hooks?] Finally, the Omniscient Longchenpa says that refuge and aspiration bodhicitta are two different aspects of the same thing. The aspect that says "For the sake of all the sentient beings," is the aspiration bodhicitta. The aspect that says, "May I attain enlightenment," is refuge.

III.B. Description of the verses in the root text

We come to the actual description of the root text. Generally, there are many different ways of talking about refuge. But here Khenpo Kunpal makes three distinctions: Hinayana way of refuge, Mahayana way of refuge, and the way of refuge that is common to both.

III.B.1. Description of the Hinayana way of refuge

The Hinayana way of refuge is: the intention that 'I' may get out of the samsaric fears and sufferings, and 'I' may get the peace of nirvana, and for that I go for refuge to the buddha, dharma and sangha until I die. So to whom we go to refuge is buddha, dharma, and sangha.

And what is buddha? First it is the buddha like Shakyamuni. He was born as an ordinary being with a karmic body to King Shuddhodana, he was called the Siddhartha. He practised and then he went through these five paths in one sitting and became enlightened, and then he became a buddha. Therefore the body of the buddha is not different from any other human body, so is not an object of refuge. That is what the Vaibashikas say.

In the Hinayana way, what we go for refuge to is the mind of the buddha, who has understood, who has attained the truth, who has actualized nirvana. The realization of the truth of the path is the buddha's mind, and that is the real buddha. And that is also dharma. The sangha is the realization of the dharma or the practice of the dharma in minds of the sangha members. The physical bodies of the sangha are not important. Their mind is the important thing. We go for refuge to the liberated part of the mind, and the dharmically-influenced part; both parts are also the dharma. Therefore in the Hinayana way of refuge, the dharma becomes very important.

III.B.2. Description of the Mahayana way of refuge

The root text here refers to the Mahayana way of refuge:

Until the essence of enlightenment is reached,
I go for refuge to the buddhas.
Also I take refuge in the doctrine,
And all the hosts of bodhisattvas. (26)

ⁱ Tib. Lobpön Yiknen

ⁱⁱ Skt. *Sutralankara*, Tib. *Do de gyen*

The intention here is the wish that all the sentient beings throughout the space will become completely enlightened. Toward that end, from now until I attain enlightenment, I go for refuge to the buddha, dharma, and sangha. I go for refuge to the buddha who has the four kayas and five wisdoms, and to the dharma, which is both the teachings and the experience, and to all the bodhisattvas, who are the Mahayana sangha. To all of them I go to refuge.

It is said in the *King of Aspiration Prayers*ⁱ:

They will soon go before the Bodhi Tree
And having gone there, they will sit there to benefit beings,
Awaken into enlightenment, turn the wheel (of dharma),
And subdue all maras and their hordes.

This is a prayer that we say in Bodhgaya. It is said that all the thousand Buddhas of this particular kalpa will get enlightened under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya. In the same way, all the buddhas of the three times attained enlightenment under a Bodhi treeⁱⁱ for the benefit of the beings. [Just like these beings, I too go for refuge:]

- Inwardly: until I realize my own true nature, *yeshe nyingpo*, the inner buddha, or the buddha nature. If you see the true nature of your buddha nature, that is buddha-hood, because that is not completely seen unless you have completely become buddha.
- Outwardly: for the sake of sentient beings, until I attain enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. That is becoming an outer buddha, becoming a buddha for the sake of others. The buddha that other people can see you as the buddha.

In the *Uttaratantra Shastra*, the Buddha Maitreya says:

Even highly realised beings can not see buddha nature completely,
Just as a new-born baby sees only the rays of the sun from the windows,
But not the true shape and brightness of the sun.

[Even the noble ones (cannot see the buddha nature),
Just as an infant cannot look at the shape of the sun from the house where
it has just been born.]

If you have a new-born baby, you wouldn't take them out into the full blaze of the sun. You leave the new-born baby in the house where they will see the sun only as the rays through the window. Only that much of buddha nature is seen even by the highly realised bodhisattvas.

Uttaratantra shastra: meaning of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha

Next, Khenpo Kunpal describes the meaning of the buddha, dharma and sangha according to the *Uttaratantra Shastra*:

1. Buddha

In the *Uttaratantra Shastra*, it says that the buddha has six qualities: three perfect qualities for one's own benefit, and three perfect qualities for others benefit. The three qualities for one's own benefit are:

- 1) *Uncompounded*: it is not created by cause and effects.
- 2) *Spontaneously arising*: all good qualities are spontaneous. Buddha nature is not something there or something not there, it is completely spontaneous.

ⁱ The complete title in English is, *King of Aspiration Prayers, The Aspiration for Noble Excellent Conduct*, Skt. *Arya-Bhadra-charya-pranidhana-rajā*, Tib. *Zangpo Chöpe Mönlam*

ⁱⁱ For example, Amitabha buddha attained enlightenment in front of the bodhi tree called *Illuminating Jewel Lotus*.

3) *Not realized through external conditions*: buddha nature is not understood because of certain outer conditions, or because of something you see, or something that is clear or unclear. It is understood from your own self-awareness. It's complete self-awareness.

The three perfect qualities for others benefit areⁱ:

4) *Wisdom*: "having realized the dharmadhatu (buddha nature) ... a buddha realizes that it is within all sentient beings alike."

5) *Compassion*: "in order to lead all other beings who are to be trained to this ultimate purity, he clearly demonstrates the path."

6) *Power*: "by means of his primordial *wisdom* and great *compassion*, he is able to cause the relinquishment of the suffering of beings."

These qualities are sometimes referred to as *six qualities* or *eight qualities*, depending upon how they are counted. If the qualities are counted as three for one's own benefit and three for others benefit, that is *six qualities*. However, if the two main categories (for ones own benefit, and for others benefit) are added to the six qualities, then this is referred to as *eight qualities*.

2. Dharma

In the *Uttaratantra Shastra*, it says there is dharma of cessation and dharma of the path. The three qualities of the dharma of cessation are:

1) *Non-conceptual*ⁱⁱ: it cannot be understood with our conceptual mind.

2) *Non-dual*: it is free from the two obscuring veils of karma and mental poisons; it is without concept, beyond all the grasping and grasped.ⁱⁱⁱ

3) *Free from thought*: all improper mental or conceptual activity, such as aversion and attachment, has ceased; therefore it is free from thought.^{iv}

That is the experience of the cessation or complete peace. These are the three qualities of the dharma as the cessation, the dharma as wisdom, the dharma as the experience of the complete truth.

The qualities of the dharma as the path are:

4) *Pure*: all stains or defilements have been purified.

5) *Clear*: it gives the clarity of wisdom to all the sentient beings.^v

6) *Remedy*: it gets rid of the three poisons: attachment (desire), aversion (anger or hatred), and ignorance (dull indifference).

These are the six qualities of dharma. If you add the two main categories (the dharma of cessation and the dharma of the path) then that is eight qualities.

Here the teaching dharma is taken as the path, and the experience dharma is explained as the cessation. You might ask, "Why can we call cessation the experience dharma?" Because cessation is a result of having realized the truth of the path. Cessation is not just getting rid of

ⁱ The following definitions are from: *Buddha Nature, The Mahayana Uttaratantra Shastra with Commentary*, Snow Lion Publications, page 104

ⁱⁱ This term (Tib. *sam tu mé pa*) is translated as "inconceivable" by Rosemarie Fuchs in *Buddha Nature*. In his commentary on this text, Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche said: "Please be aware that in this context, inconceivable means that it cannot be perceived by the conceptual mind, but it can be perceived by the self-luminous perception of the noble ones."

ⁱⁱⁱ From Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche's commentary, page 14: "It is free from the two obscuring veils of karma and mental poison."

^{iv} From *Buddha Nature*: "Since karma and mental poisons...are pacified, it is free from these two aspects. Since their cause, improper mental activity, has come to complete peace, it is freedom from thought."

^v From Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche's commentary, page 15: "It is endowed with the primordial wisdom that illuminates all phenomena."

something, it is a complete realisation that causes the negative things, the misunderstandings, to cease. It is the culmination, or the result, of the path.

3. Sangha

The sangha is the Mahayana sangha of the non-returning bodhisattvas. The *Uttaratantra Shastra* says these bodhisattvas have the understanding of the three awarenesses and the three liberations. The three awarenesses are:

- 1) *Seeing as it is*: aware of the true nature of yourself, which is the buddha nature.
- 2) *Seeing all*: aware of the true nature of the others, or seeing the buddha nature in everybody.
- 3) *Inner awareness*: being aware of that this is inside you.ⁱ

They have seen the buddha-nature as it is, so that is *seeing as it is*. And to see that that buddha nature is spread to all the sentient beings, every being has that buddha nature, that is *seeing all*. And having the awareness of that inside you, that is the *inner awareness*. So these three are the understanding or the awareness quality of the sangha. This is the awareness or the understanding or the enlightened quality.

The three liberations are:

- 4) Liberation from negative or afflicting emotions, the mind poisons.
- 5) Liberation from the *shedrib*, which is called the wisdom obscuration or the habitual tendency obscurations. Wisdom means the knowledge, understanding, the way you understand.
- 6) Liberation from the *mendrip*, which is the lowly kind of obscuration. This means is not having this clinging to your own self-centeredness. It's liberation from being small and self-centered.

So the sangha is somebody who has these six qualities of the three awarenesses and three liberations. So this is buddha, dharma and sangha from the Mahayana point of view.

III.B.3. Way of taking refuge, which is common to both

The main refuge for beginners is the dharma

Khenpo Kunpal says that the main refuge for beginners is the dharma. The Buddha has said "I can neither wash away your negative deeds with water, nor wipe away your suffering with my hand. Nor can I transfer my understanding to you. But by teaching you the peace of dharmata, your true nature, I can lead you to liberation." Therefore, the main refuge for beginners is the dharma. Going for refuge to the dharma means that I would like to study dharma, and to understand and practise dharma. I promise to make this dharma as my path and realise it. That is the practice.

It is said that in the Vajrayana teachings you sometimes go for refuge to *tsa, lung* and *tiglé* (channels, wind and vital energy). This does not mean that you say, "Please, *tsa, lung* and *tiglé*, you save me!" That is not possible. But you are saying: "I would like to purify my *tsa, lung* and *tiglé*, and through that way I will realise the true nature." Refuge is an acceptance and commitment. It is important to understand very clearly that refuge and prayer are two different things, and that dharma is something that you need to practise in yourself. If you understand that, then all the misunderstandings about the refuge will be cleared.

Buddha and sangha are the source of the dharma

Khenpo Kunpal says that the main thing is going for refuge to the dharma, and the main source of the dharma is buddha—dharma comes as the experience of the buddha. Therefore you go for refuge to the buddha as the teacher. Then the sangha is the beings who have kept the dharma

ⁱ From Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche's commentary, page 15: "self-awareness, inner primordial jnana"

alive and experienced the dharma; they are the genuine practitioners who are on the path of the dharma. That is why you go for refuge to buddha and sangha also. Since we receive these teachings only from the buddha and sangha, we have to respect them and go for refuge to them. It's not that other beings do not have good intentions, but they do not know the right way. Our parents and our friends and others want to give us the right instructions and the right way, but they do not know what is the best way to end all our sufferings. That's why this buddha and sangha are so important.

The precepts of refuge

The main thing is this promise that we will practise the dharma, and then attain enlightenment or buddha-hood, and towards that we make this commitment. To do that, we take refuge and follow the precepts of the refuge. The precepts of the refuge are described here in Khenpo Kunpal's commentary, but since you have very clear instructions on this in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, we will not go through them here.

IV. The branch of confession and purification

In the branch of confession and purification there are two parts: visualizing the objects of confession and then the actual confession.

IV.A. Visualizing the objects of confession

To perfect the buddhas and bodhisattvas,
In all directions, where they may reside.
To them who are the sovereigns of great mercy,
I press my palms together, praying thus: (27)

I make the confession in front of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas in all the worlds in all ten directions—that means to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas everywhere in the whole of space. The buddhas are those who have perfect bodhicitta, which is the perfection of the compassion and wisdom. The bodhisattvas are on the path, in the process in perfecting this great compassion and wisdom. I visualize all of them together in front of me and with great respect and reverence, I fold my hands togetherⁱ and make this confession (in the following verses).

IV.B. The actual confession

The actual confession has four parts, which are usually called the four strengths or four powers.

IV.B.1. The power of regret

Confessing negative deeds

"In this and all my other lifetimes,
Wandering in the round without beginning,
Blindly I have brought forth wickedness,
Inciting others to commit the same. (28)

"I have taken pleasure in such evil,
Tricked and overmastered by my ignorance.
Now I see the blame of it, and in my heart,
O great protectors, I declare it! (29)

"Whatever I have done against the triple gem,
Against my parents, teachers, and the rest,
Through force of my defilements,
By the faculties of body, speech, and mind; (30)

"All the evil I, a sinner, have committed,
The sin that clings to me through many evil deeds;
All the frightful things that I have caused to be,
I openly declare to you, the teachers of the world. (31)

"Before my evil has been cleansed away,
It may be that my death will come to me.
And so that, come what may, I might be freed,
I pray you, quickly grant me your protection!" (32)

Reflecting on death, impermanence, and the futility of samsara

The wanton Lord of Death we can't predict,
And life's tasks done or still to do, we cannot stay.
And whether ill or well, we cannot trust

ⁱ Folding my hands together is an Indian way of showing respect and giving your homage and reverence.

Our lives, our fleeting, momentary lives. (33)

And we must pass away, forsaking all.
But I, devoid of understanding,
Have for sake of friends and foes alike,
Provoked and brought about so many evils. (34)

My enemies at length will cease to be;
My friends, and I myself
Will cease to be;
And all is likewise destined for destruction. (35)

All that I possess and use
Is like the fleeting vision of a dream.
It fades into the realm of memory;
And fading, will be seen no more. (36)

And even in the brief course of this present life,
So many friends and foes have passed away,
Because of whom, the evils I have done
Still lie, unbearable, before me. (37)

The thought came never to my mind
That I too am a brief and passing thing.
And so, through hatred, lust, and ignorance,
I've been the cause of many evils. (38)

Never halting, night or day,
My life is slipping, slipping by.
And nothing that has passed can be regained—
And what but death could be my destiny? (39)

There I'll be, prostrate upon my bed,
And all around, the ones I know and love—
But I alone shall be the one to feel
The cutting of the thread of life. (40)

And when the vanguard of the Deadly King has gripped me,
What help to me will be my friends or kin?
For only goodness gained in life will help me:
This, alas, is what I shrugged away. (41)

Oh protectors! I, so little heeding,
Had hardly guessed at horror such as this—
And all for this brief, transient existence,
Have gathered so much evil to myself. (42)

The day they take him to the scaffold,
Where his body will be torn and butchered,
A man is changed, transfigured by his fear:
His mouth is dry, his eyes start from his brow. (43)

If so it is, then how will be my misery
When stricken down, beside myself with fear,
I see the fiend, the messenger of Death,
Who turns on me his fell and dreadful gaze? (44)

Who can save me, who can now protect me

From this horror, from this frightful dread?
And then I will search the four directions,
Seeking help, with panic-stricken eyes. (45)

Nowhere help or refuge will be found.
And sunk beneath the weight of sorrow,
Naked, helpless, unprotected—
What, when this befalls me, shall I do? (46)

Here we are trying to understand the uselessness of these negative deeds and thoughts; they are of no benefit whatsoever. We contemplate this, and think, doing negative things for this life's gains is not worth doing, because it is good for nothing. When we have that understanding, then we have an understanding of what is the best thing to do, because we want to do something that is good for ourselves and good for others.

So, whatever we have done before, we confess and try to let it go. And because we understand that doing negative things is neither good for us nor good for anybody, we have less inclination to doing this. And when we find ourselves doing those things, then we say that maybe it is not a good thing to do, and to try to avoid that.

The real practice is watching your mind

So doing negative things is mainly on the mind, the state of mind. In practice, first you have to have some understanding about the whole situation. But then the real practice is just watching ourselves in daily life. This does not mean you have to kind of meditate for long, long times, or we have to do solitary retreat for long, long times. Of course if you can do that, it is very good. But the main thing is to watch your mind, time to time, and then say, "What state of mind am I in now?"

Then if you find that you are in a negative state of mind that is full of hatred, bad feelings, or other negative emotions, say to yourself, "Well, this is not worthwhile. It does no good to anybody, it does not even benefit me, so it is completely useless." And even if you think that because somebody is causing me harm, therefore I feel like that, then that is even more of a reason for you not to feel like that. Because in this case, if somebody is trying to make me feel bad or angry, and then if I feel it, then I am giving in, I am just doing whatever he or she wants me to do. So if I want to be a good fighter, then I would not feel what he or she wants me to feel. I should feel the opposite, I should feel happy relaxed. In this way, I try to look at myself and then, at that moment, I don't need to completely change everything, but just try to relax. That is the key.

Also, if we don't hate or give into these negative patterns and habits, if we can be just completely natural, then the peace and relaxation comes naturally from us. That is our natural buddha nature, the basic goodness. So whenever we feel that there is some tension, something bad, then we just try to relax, even if you don't try to change everything. Of course you can reason and see how these negative feelings are not useful and so on. But then otherwise you just try to relax, and most of the time you can change. If you don't continue, if you can break the continuity of that negative feeling, that is the practice. On top of that, then if you can feel a little bit of bodhicitta, a little bit more spacious, and reason why we should feel like that, then we are generating the bodhicitta. And that is the whole practice.

IV.B.2. The power of support

Buddha as support

Thus from this day forth I go for refuge
To buddhas, guardians of wandering beings,
Who labor for the good of all that lives,
Those mighty ones who scatter every fear. (47)

[Being endowed with the ten powers of knowledge, the Buddha can teach the sublime dharma in a perfect way. If one practices according to his instructions, (the dharma) eradicates all fear of suffering such as samsara, the lower realms, and so forth.]

Dharma as support

In the Dharma that resides within their hearts,
That scatters all the terrors of samsara, (48, first half)

[With regard to the dharma, one should alternate between study, contemplation and meditation. Moreover, when one (as a teacher) is expounding the dharma, even though the words may not be eloquent, if one teaches while focusing at the same time on the meaning, this is also said to be meditation.]

Sangha as support

And in the multitude of bodhisattvas,
Likewise I will perfectly take refuge. (48, second half)

Gripped by dread, beside myself with terror,
To Samantabhadra I will give myself;
And to Mañjushri, the melodious and gentle,
I will give myself entirely. (49)

Here Shantideva invokes the great bodhisattvas. To all these great bodhisattvas I go for refuge. I ask for help and I take them as my guide or example. Because I don't want this samsaric state of mind for myself or anyone else. I want to go into that way where there is no more fear. I don't like this constant fear, therefore I would like to get on this path very quickly. Therefore anybody who can help me, please do help me.

And I ask for your help strongly and loudly. I'm not ashamed of asking for help. I have pride, but my pride is not going to stop me from helping myself. I'm not going to let it interrupt getting the best things for myself from others. Even if I have to humble myself and ask for help, I will do that so that I will get out of this fear forever.

Samantabhadra (great aspiration)

Then we ask for help from Samantabhadra (Tib. Kuntuzangpo), one of the eight great bodhisattvas. Samantabhadra made the greatest aspiration prayer, called *Samantabhadra's Aspiration Prayer* (Tib. *Kuntuzangpo mönlam*). It is very vast and imaginative and it includes everybody. I offer everything: my body, my belongings, everything, to you, Kuntuzangpo, the bodhisattva, and I ask you, I cry out to you with fear, to help me and all beings to get rid of this fear. I ask for your help without pretense or deceit, but genuinely, from the heart.

Mañjushri (father of the buddhas)

Next, I ask for help from Manjushri, who is called the father of all the buddhas, because all the buddhas have been helped or nurtured by him in one stage or another. I offer myself to him, my own body, without anybody instigating.

It is said that there are three different kinds of bodhisattvas: the king-like bodhisattva, the captain-like bodhisattva, and the shepherd-like bodhisattva. The king-like bodhisattva is like a king who says that I will become enlightened myself first, and then I will help all the sentient beings too. So the king first gets all for himself and then, if he is a good king, he tries to help his subjects also. Then the captain-like bodhisattva is like the captain who takes his passengers with him in his boat, and together they cross the ocean and get to the other shore. So the captain thinks that I would like to get enlightened, but I want to take all beings with me, so that we all get there together.

The shepherd-like bodhisattva is like the shepherds of the olden days, who used to follow his flock of sheep and look after them. In the evening, he would take the sheep down from the fields, put

them all into the barn, close the door, and then go home. The shepherd-like bodhisattva thinks that first I would like to help all sentient beings to reach enlightenment, and only then I will enter into enlightenment myself. It may not happen like that. The shepherd-like bodhisattva might get enlightened very quickly, but that's his motivation. You don't always get what you like.

Mañjushri and Avalokiteshvara are supposed to be shepherd-like bodhisattvas who made this very strong commitment that they would not become enlightened as long as there is anyone left behind who is not enlightened.

Avalokiteshvara (all compassionate and all seeing)

To him whose loving deeds are steadfast,
O my guardian, Avalokita,
I cry out from depths of misery,
“Protect me now, the sinner that I am!” (50)

Then I go for refuge to the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Tib. Chenrezig) who first made this commitment to be a bodhisattva in front of the buddha called Ratna-garbha (Tib. Sangye Rinchen Nyingpo). And from then onwards he never had even slightest selfish motive, not even as small as one hair of a selfish motive, and always worked for the benefit of all the sentient beings. He never made any mistakes in that, so therefore he is called one whose loving deeds are steadfast. So to him I cry out for help. *Avalokiteshvara* means looking down. He is also sometimes called ‘the one with never blinking eyes’. This means he is watching beings all the time, so much so that he doesn't even have time to blink his eyes.³

Akashagarbha, Kshitigarbha, and other protectors

Now to the noble one, Akashagarbha,
And to Kshitigarbha, from my heart I call.
And all protectors, great, compassionate,
To them I go in search of refuge. (51)

Akashagarbha's (Tib. Namkhe Nyingpo) main aspiration was to help the new bodhisattvas, who would make lots of mistakes. To help in the confession and purification and so on. Kshitigarbha's (Tib. Saye Nyingpo) main prayer was to give prosperity to the people who are a state of poverty or decline and who are trying to work on that.

Vajrapani (protector from obstacles)

And to Vajrapani, holder of the diamond,
The very sight of whom will rout
All dangers like the deadly host of Yama;
To him indeed I fly for safety. (52)

Vajrapani is the one who said I would like to defend all the bodhisattvas, from the time they enter the path, until they reach enlightenment, teach the dharma and pass into their parinirvana. So whoever has any obstacles on the path can pray to Vajrapani. It is said that Vajrapani wields a vajra in his right hand that he uses to protect the bodhisattvas from harm. He is also said to be the main bodhisattva who collected and preserved the teachings, especially the Vajrayana and Mahayana teachings.

These are just examples, but to all the buddhas, the dharma, and the host of bodhisattvas, I take refuge, I take their help, I want to get on with it.

I will take this help and work on the path

It's not enough that I have done something wrong, and I regret it, I am very sad about it, just sitting there feeling very sad and unhappy and small and helpless and full of self-pity. That is not enough, that is not the way. Say to yourself, “In the past, I have done all these negative things, but now I

will completely do the opposite, and I will take the help and I will work on this path. And I will do this.” So I am completely working on these things, that is the attitude in doing these practices. So whatever negative things I have done, I just let them go and now I go to the other side, the other way. I completely devote myself. So therefore the negativity is forgotten, there is not a trace, I just completely let go.

Swiftly save me from this fear

Formerly your words I have transgressed,
But now I see these terrors all around.
To you indeed I come for help,
And pray you, swiftly save me from this fear. (53)

Your words, means your words about the way that things are. Which is that if we do positive things, there will be positive results; and if we do negative things there will be negative results. Your words, or your teachings—about the way of life, the way of interdependence, the way of the nature of karma—I have transgressed. *Transgressed* means that either we didn't know about it, or knowingly, we didn't follow in the right way. We did not give up what was good to give up, and we did not take on what was good to take on.

Now I see that because of the negative things that I have done, the negative results are coming. I see the problems coming up and I am struck with terror. Therefore now I ask you for help. Please give me the right instructions so that I can get rid of this great terror and these great problems. I seek your refuge, I ask for your help, I will do what is right and avoid what is wrong, so that I may get rid of all the problems and torments.

With this understanding, then if I act accordingly, and I take the right way and purify myself and get rid of this strong clinging to the negative as well as positive, if I get rid of all my aversion and attachment, and then if I have the right view and see the true nature of everything and myself, then I will have the opportunity like Buddha had to have the complete understanding of enlightenment. Therefore I have this confidence. I would like to get on with it, from now onwards, to act on it in a very strong way, without wasting time and energy. This is what we call the support.

The support is: first, the possibility of getting out of it, knowing the resources from which you can learn how to do that; and second, the willingness, the commitment of wanting to do it now, on the spot.

IV.B.3. The power of antidote

The third power is the real antidote, the path. Khenpo Kunpal says that in the *Bodhicharyavatara* there is one chapter on how to generate heedfulness, one on how to generate mindfulness and introspection, and one on how to generate patience. But this chapter, the confession, is on really how to actually generate the antidote, the way through which we can get rid of our negative deeds or negative emotions that caused them.

Understanding karma and impermanence

In order to go about that, we need to have an understanding of karma and impermanence. First one has to meditate on the law of the cause and effect of karma. This is very basic. If we don't have any faith or any trust in the law of cause and effect, then we wouldn't bother with this practice. We wouldn't know what is causing what; therefore we would do things which cause negativity and suffering, but we wouldn't know that. And we wouldn't know what are the things that cause happiness and peace, so therefore we wouldn't be able to do this. So we need some understanding of the sequence of cause and effect, a little trust and faith in karma. That is something we try to reflect upon, and understand from our own experience.

Then we also need to reflect on impermanence. Khenpo Kunpal says that this is very important. Of course impermanence is something very obvious. It is not something secret or something mysterious or something we cannot see. But because we don't want to look at it, we don't have a

strong sense of impermanence, and we always act as if everything is permanent. So this understanding of impermanence is very important.

So that is what it is. We don't know when we are going to die. Therefore, we always plan or expect or have this idea that we are going to live forever. In that way, sometimes it becomes a problem. Even for a small thing, we fight with other people. We don't hesitate to waste lots of time or go and hurt people for a very small thing, which will last only for a short time. Because we expect that it is going to last forever. Therefore, understanding impermanence actually makes a lot of difference when you understand it practically.

According to Buddhism, reflecting on impermanence and getting this understanding deeply inside you is very important, even to develop patience and so on. We typically believe that something will last for a long time, for a lifetime, and then we cannot tolerate it. If it is just for one day then it is all right. For example, in this teaching, some students are sitting on the ground, others on a chair. If this is just for one day then it is all right. But if we say you have to sit in the same way for one month, then those sitting on the ground will start fighting with those sitting on chairs!

Another example is: two of my students in Europe had lived together as a couple quite happily for a long time, for ten years or more, and they were doing very well. Then they got married, and the next year they split up. Why is that? It is because when they were just living together, it could be for a longer time or a shorter time, it doesn't matter. But as soon as they got married, then it was for their whole life, for eternity. Then even small things become very big. This kind of thing happens very often. Therefore the understanding of impermanence is very important. Especially for those who initially don't have this mind or motivation to get rid of the negative things. If they can develop this understanding of impermanence, it will help them to generate this mind, this motivation, this inspiration, and the power to be able to get rid of all these things.

Sometimes we have a slight intention to work on these things like purifying ourselves, but because of our laziness and other distractions, we don't follow through. We don't really go for it, we do not train ourselves. In this case, we need to make this intention and this commitment stronger. We also need to work more with the understanding of cause and effect, impermanence, and interdependence. Then go into working with confession or purification, more strongly, more intensely.

Purifying negative deeds

So what is the antidote actually? It is anything that we do with a positive intention or motivation, and then act on that, and at the end make a good dedication. That becomes the purification. Purifying is not that we need to do something totally different. It is the willingness or the wish to get rid of all the negative things, and then doing something positive. And then dedicating it for the good of all others. That is the real practice.

Here, as in everything else in Buddhism, there are three parts: motivation, positive deed, and dedication. A positive deed is both doing something positive as well as refraining from doing anything negative; both of these are called positive. That is actually the way of purifying.

Even if somebody is doing a lot of good things during their whole life, that doesn't mean that if you do something negative then you don't have to purify it, you can just ignore it. This is not right. Khenpo Kunpal says that even if you do a lot of good things, if you do something negative it is better that you also purify that. In an example given in the commentary, if there are a few peas in a sack of barley, and you sow the barley, the barley grows but at the same time also the peas grow. So if you do a lot of good things, and within that you do something negative also, it has its own effect. Therefore you have to purify and cut off all the negative things.

Someone who has done a lot of good things in their life might think, "I have lived my life very well, I have done nothing really very bad or negative, therefore I don't have to do any of these confession and purification practices. They are not necessary for me." Khenpo Kunpal says that this is not the case. Even if you have led a good life, and have not done anything terrible or negative, still there may be even little negative things, so it is better that you purify them. Because of causes and

conditions, even small negative things can ripen into stronger things. One small thing can lead to another thing, and that can make you go into negative realms. Therefore it is better to purify them.

Analogy of the ill person, the doctor, and the medicine

For if, alarmed by common ills,
I act according to the doctor's words,
What need to speak of when I'm constantly brought low
By lust and all the hundred other torments? (54)

Why it is necessary to get rid of these negative things? For example, if we have a small physical problem, like a minor illness or a small headache, then we really try to find a way to get rid of it. We go to the doctor, get the right medicine, and take the medicine. If that is the case, then what about the negative deeds we do? That is not just a small headache or toothache. But it is something that might lead you to long term suffering, to the lower realms, for example, or cause a whole change of your personality. So it is very important to work on this, to be careful about it, to learn and to listen.

If you have a small disease you go to the doctor and do exactly what the doctor says. You don't ignore the doctor's advice. You take the medicine, even if it's not so tasty. In the case of negative deeds, it is much more important, because it is for a long-term problem. So why don't we listen to the buddhas and bodhisattva's and really act on it? Because otherwise it could lead us to much more serious problems. The Buddha is often referred to as the great physician, the great healer. The teachings heal our mind, heal our whole future. It is so important to think in this way and therefore generate our motivation and energy and get rid of our laziness, and our resistance to working on this.

And if by one of these alone,
The dwellers in the world are all thrown down,
And if no other remedy exists
No other healing elsewhere to be found (55)

By one of these alone, means by one of the negative emotions, like hatred for instance. *The dwellers in the world are all thrown down*, means that if there is a strong hatred, for example, if it's very strong, then that could actually devastate the whole world, completely destroy the whole world. There is *no other remedy* for these emotions such as hatred that than to apply these teachings, to work on yourself, to work from within, to get rid of these negative emotions, and ultimately to transform your way of being. In this way, you purify your negative emotions.

Than words of the omniscient physician,
Uprooting every ill and suffering,
The thought to turn on him deaf ears
Is raving folly, wretched and contemptible. (56)

The words of the omniscient physician, means the wisdom teachings of the past. If we apply the teachings to ourselves, it works deeply on our negative emotions and the way we see things. It works on how we feel, because we are directly working on the real cause of suffering, which is the three mind poisons of aversion, attachment and ignorance. Therefore it is uprooting every evil and suffering. If we turn *deaf ears* on these teachings, it is very foolish. It is something very wretched, which is worthy of contempt. It is something that we need to get rid of.

Consequences of not purifying negative karma

If along a small and ordinary cliff
I need to pick my way with special care,
What need to speak of the immense crevasse
That plunges down, unnumbered fathoms deep? (57)

Here again is another reason why we should get rid of negative deeds: if I am about to fall from a very small and ordinary cliff, then I have to be very careful and *pick my way with special care*. If that is the case, then *what need to speak of the immense crevasse that plunges down unnumbered fathoms deep*. This is saying that if we do negative things, and we go on doing that and we don't purify ourselves, then we can go on lower and lower, and the negative things will affect our state of mind and we will go deeper and deeper down. This type of fall is much worse than that from a cliff. If we fall from a cliff, the worse thing that happens is that we injure ourselves or that we die. But the fall that we can make from continuously doing negative things can bring us to very long-term negative karmic consequences. So therefore it is even more important to be aware of this.

Contemplating the uncertainty of the hour of your death

“Today, at least, I shall not die,”
So rash to lull myself with words like these!
My dissolution and my hour of death
Will come upon me ineluctably. (58)

Nobody knows when anybody will die; there is complete uncertainty. You can not even say with confidence, “*Today, at least, I will not die.*” We know with complete certainty only that there is a time when I will die. That is for sure, for everybody. But we don't know when it comes. It could come tonight, it could come after twenty years, thirty years, forty years, tomorrow—whenever. Therefore, there is no certainty that even today I will not die. If you wait until you are ready to take action, it might be too late. Therefore it is better to act now.

So why am I so unafraid,
For what escape is there for me?
Death, my death will certainly come round.
So how can I relax in careless ease? (59)

Why am I not acting quickly? Because out of ignorance, we think, “Nothing will happen to me.” But no one can say what will happen or not. Therefore, to just remain leisurely and without any effort, being lazy and not doing the most important thing—and that's to get rid of negative things—is not right. Who has given me the right, who has given me the escape, who has given me the assurance that I can do whatever I like to the end and nothing will happen? My death, *will certainly come around* at any time. So how can I relax in careless ease?

In the *Collection of Deliberate Sayings*ⁱ, it says:

Who knows whether or not you or I will die tomorrow?
Today, we must do what is necessary.
The great legions of the Lord of Death,
Are not friends of yours, are they?

And the *Letter of Consolation*ⁱⁱ says:

In this world, or in the world above,
Has anyone ever been born who will not die?
Have you ever seen someone like this?
Have you ever heard of someone like this?
Do you even suspect that there is somebody somewhere who will never die?

This uncertainty, which we take as the guarantee that we are not going to die soon, is just a habit, a negative habitual pattern. Therefore we should try to get rid of this habitual pattern and try to be more realistic.

ⁱ Skt. *Bhadra-karatrī -sūtra*; Tib. *Tsemo zangpé do*

ⁱⁱ Skt. *Shoka-vinodana*; a shastra by Ashvagoshā

Letting go of past experiences

Of life's experience, all seasons past,
What's left to me, what now remains?
By clinging to what now is here no more,
My teacher's precepts I have disobeyed. (60)

If I look at my life's experience, in the past, I have done lots of things, I have enjoyed life, I have experienced a lot. But everything that has gone is gone, and the only thing left is this memory, which is like a dream. There's nothing else left. And so it will be in the future.

In the present, whatever I experience now: good things, bad things, negative things, whatever, is going to pass. So what is the use of clinging to them? What is the use of getting attached to them? Because anyway, whether it is a positive thing or a negative thing, or whether you are experiencing something very pleasant or unpleasant, it's going to go. Therefore it is not useful; it's not necessary to cling to them. It's just being foolish to try to cling to them.

If I do cling to these past experiences and I don't let them go, then I have disobeyed my teacher and I have also accumulated negative karma and caused myself more suffering. Because as we have said, the main cause of suffering is trying to hold on to things that are not there. When you try to hold onto things, that will certainly bring you mental as well as physical problems, you will get agitated and frustrated, because you are trying to do something that is not possible.

Letting go of friends and enemies

This span of life and all that it contains,
My kith and kin are all to be abandoned!
I must leave them, sitting out alone,
What grounds are there for telling friend from foe? (61)

Everything in this life has to be abandoned. Everything leaves me, everything changes. And when I die, I go alone, nobody comes with me. Therefore one should not do negative things even for the sake of friends or foes. These friends and foes are a very temporary thing. Life sometimes turns enemies into friends and friends into enemies. If you have too much attachment to your enemies and friends, it will only cause you problems. It's going to change all the time. There is nothing real, nothing definite, nothing permanent called friend or enemy.

You can learn from everybody. Therefore, you can treat everybody is a teacher, as a friend, as your object of your compassion and love. There's no need to have somebody who you hate and somebody who you cling to. Everybody is the same, everybody changes. And you will be alone in the end anyway.

Purifying negative karma

And therefore, how can I make sure
To rid myself of evil, only cause of sorrow?
This should be my one concern,
My only thought both night and day. (62)

When we know that everything moves, everything changes, and the only thing that really stays with us is our state of mind, and that continuation is the determining factor in the cause and effect of karma, then we realize that the most important thing to do is to get rid of my negative thoughts and emotions, which is the cause of my sorrow and suffering. If I don't do it now, it will go deeper and it will mature into more sorrow and more problems.

The most important thing is not to please somebody, or not even to enjoy myself at the moment. Even if I enjoy for this moment, when the next moment comes, that enjoyment is just a memory.

Therefore it doesn't help me in the next moment that I have enjoyed this moment. So my real concern should be *how* should I get rid of these negative things that I have accumulated. Day and night, this should be my first concern, and the most important thing.

Therefore all the sins I have committed,
Blinded in the dark of ignorance:
Actions evil by their nature
Or the faults of broken vows, (63)

As we discussed, it is necessary to get rid of my negative deeds, and to do it quickly. Therefore I regret all the things that I have done out of my ignorance, out of my not knowing. I was blinded, I didn't know what was wrong and what was right. It is not anybody's fault, but it is something that needs to be completely got rid of.

There are different kinds of negative actions. Some actions are considered negative by their own nature, such as hurting somebody, killing somebody, or taking someone's property. These actions are naturally negative because they cause lots of problems to others. Other things are maybe not naturally negative, but are the faults of the broken vows. For example, if you make a commitment or a vow and you say this is what I am going to do, and then you don't do it or you do it in an incorrect way. Then it becomes negative because you have broken your commitment or vow. So any kind of negative thing, whether it is a naturally negative thing, or due to a broken commitment, I will get rid of.

Mindful of the suffering to come,
I join my palms and ceaselessly prostrate,
And all my evils I will now confess
Directly in the presence of the buddhas. (64)

Knowing that because of these negative actions, there is suffering to come, [I want to confess and purify them]. Why do you call certain actions negative? Because they cause suffering. Actually, from a Buddhist point of view, a negative action is something that you do with a negative emotion. That's the main thing. If you do something with hatred, with jealousy, with pride, with any negative emotion, that action becomes negative. Because the emotion and the motivation is negative, therefore your state of mind becomes more negative, and that is the cause of your suffering.

So knowing that these negative actions cause suffering, *all my evils I will now confess*. The word "confess" here is a translation of the Tibetan *shakpa*, which also means "to purify". *Shakpa* is not just saying, "I have done this." It's not just a confession. But it is also to get rid of, to purify. In the presence of the buddhas and of everybody, I would like to completely purify my negative actions.

IV.B.4. The power of resolution

I pray you, guides and guardians of the world,
To take me as I am, a sinful man,
And all these actions, evil as they are,
I promise I will never do again. (65)

I realize that these negative actions are no good and they only bring negative results. So from today onwards, whatever may happen to me, even if I die, I will not repeat these actions, because they are only causing me problems. I don't want to do these negative things. I will completely give them up. I will do positive things [instead, to purify my negative actions of the past, and as an antidote to repeating negative actions in the future].

Khenpo Kunpal says that as we make this commitment, we should visualize all of the buddhas and bodhisattvas in front of you. Then imagine different-colored rays of light streaming out from the buddhas and bodhisattvas and entering into your own body and into the bodies of all the sentient beings. Then try to feel that all the problems, all the negative things, all the effects of these

negative things that we have committed, are all completely purified and cleared away, as if the sun has shone causing the darkness to evaporate.

When the light enters into you and all sentient beings, it's very important to [allow yourself to let go of all of the negativity]. Try to let yourself feel that all the negative things are completely eradicated, that they are completely gone and done with, that you have completely let go of them. Try to generate that feeling again and again, just letting go of the negative things.

This is similar to the Vajrasattva practice, and sometimes when students do the Vajrasattva practice, they try to concentrate more on the negative things rather than the positive thing that has replaced it. So I think it is more important to focus on the feeling of being purified, of letting go of the negative, rather than focus on the negative things that you are trying to let go of. This is also mentioned very clearly in the commentary. You feel that everything is completely gone and you have completely gotten rid of all the negative things. That feeling, or the understanding, or the sensation of being completely purified is developed. That is the important thing.

Lastly, Khenpo Kunpal says, there are two ways of practising the Dharma: one is to raise the banner of the Dharma; the other is to cut down the banner of the *maras*. To raise the banner of the Dharma means doing positive deeds. To cut down the banner of the *maras* means purifying the negative deeds. [The one good quality of the negative deeds is that they can be purified.]

¹ The teacher will never give any precept, from the eight-fold *nyung né* precepts to the Vajrayana precepts, to one who has not taken refuge. The eight-fold *nyung né* precepts are the lowest precepts. They are a set of one-day precepts recommended to householders by Buddha. They includes the five main precepts, plus three more: not eating in the afternoon; not making too many decorations and ornaments and so on; not making music or dancing.

² PKT: Concerning going for refuge, the *Sutralakara* states, "It is also acceptance." (Going for refuge) is thinking, "From now on, whether I am happy or sad, in good or bad (circumstances), whether I am in a high or low (position)—whatever happens—I put all my hope and trust in you and no one else." (In this way), one accepts and commits to the three jewels as one's place of refuge. In short, it is important to understand that the essence of going for refuge is acceptance and commitment.

³ From khandro.net: In the phrase Chenrezig, *Watcher-with-Steady-Eye*, the verb *to watch* is used in the sense of 'look after' like a mother who always and continuously tries to provide care, benefit and protection for her children. Besides, 'looking after' all beings in this way, Chenrezi possesses "the five eyes and six super knowledges." In other words, the 'looking' is done in 5 ways: His physical eye can see clearly over great distances, his divine eye refers to his ability to see past and future - birth, life and death of all - as well as the events in the present, his wisdom eye is the knowledge that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence, his Dharma eye is his ability to gauge the nature of the disciple's intelligence, and his Buddha Eye is his "supreme and ultimate knowledge which directly knows all phenomena simultaneously". "Avalokiteshvara's teaching goes on perpetually till the end of cyclic existence" and since he has the supreme attributes of Buddha activity, he can appear in whatever forms best suit his disciples. Some well-known forms are The Thousand- Armed and Thousand-Eyed, Eleven-Faced, Sinhanada and so forth. Geshe Palden Dakpo says that the forms conform to the aspirations of specific disciples.

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