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Lake of Lotus

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*The Lineage Traditions of the Nyingma School
of Tibetan Buddhism*

*Shocking Revelations:
Scenes Before Death*

*"The Planning of Time" and
"The Principles for Usages
& Wastages of Time"*



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English Version

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Yeshe Thaye & Pema Lhadren*

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The Contemporary Mahasiddha with Many Prophecies --- **Our Lord of Refuge, His Holiness Chadrak Gyatso Rinpoche (3)**

by His Holiness' Humble Disciples Yeshe Thaye & Pema Lhadren



Namo Gurubhya!

We bow down at the Lotus Feet of our most beloved Lord of Refuge, the precious Wish-fulfilling Gem!

Palden Tsa'wai Lama Channo!

Glorious Root Guru, please pay heed to us, and bless us with your Body, Speech and Mind!

Emaho!

How wonderful and marvelous! With such an exceptional and rare opportunity to hear this story!

Collections of the Holy Dharma into the Heart and Mind of This Great Dharma Practitioner

There were so many teachers that His Holiness Chadrak Gyatso Rinpoche had received teachings from, and those teachings are as numerous as the stars in the sky. If not for the great depth and breadth of his wisdom, it would be hard for His Holiness to integrate them all and then merged them with his own mind. Similarly, without his great courage, tenacity and perseverance of will-power, as well as his steadfastness in upholding the pure Dharma, it would be difficult for His Holiness to carry them out through his "conduct". Among the many teachers that His Holiness had followed, there were quite a few that he had also given his own transmissions to them. Yet, because of his humility of heart, His Holiness never mentions this fact and just plainly states that they were all his teachers. Herein is a list, as supplied by His Holiness himself, of the very learned and accomplished masters:



1. Kathok Khenchen Ngawang Palzang (Root Guru)
2. Terchen Dungsay, Dorje Dradul
3. Terchen Jigdrak Yeshe Dorje
4. Daki Sera Khandro, Dewai Dorje
5. Kyabje Jamyang Khyentse, Chökyi Lodrö
6. H.H. XVI Gyalwang Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje
7. Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche, Karma Rangjung Kunkhyab
8. The fifth Dzogchen Tulku, Thupten Chökyi Dorje

9. The fourth Kathok Chak-tsa Tulku, Pema Thrinley Gyatso
10. The fifth Kathok Siddhi, Chokyi Gyatso
11. Palyul Zong-gag Chok-trul Rinpoche
12. A-pang Tertön, Orgyen Thrinley Lingpa
13. A-dzom Gyalse, Gyurme Dorje
14. Tsepu Terchen, Jowo Tashi Rabten
15. Thog-gö Tulku, Melong Dorje of Traleck Gompa
16. Drupwang Chok-trul, Thupten Chokyi Langpo
17. Zhechen Kongtrul, Pema Drimed
18. Situ Penchen, Chökyi Gyatso
19. Chok-trul Chökyi Dorje
20. Getse Chok-trul, Gyurme Tenpa Namgyal
21. Minling Tri-tsab, Ngawang Chökyi Drakpa
22. Chok-trul Jampal Dewai Nyima
23. The sixth incarnation of Drime Zhing-kyong, Jigme Dechen Dorje
24. Go-tsa Khenchen, Orgyen Tenpel
25. Khenchen Nuden Khyentse Lodrö
26. Khenchen Lek-she Jor-den Dul-we-de
27. Khenchen Norbu Wangyal
28. Khenchen Ngawang Norbu
29. Palyul Khenpo Lodrö
30. Ase Bigo Tulku, Nyima Gyaltzen
31. Rishur Khenchen Drimed Ozer
32. Gong-ri Chok-trul Rinpoche
33. Dza-mi-ra Tulku
34. Doong-kar Tulku, Ngedön Gyatso
35. Gar-long Dungsay, Pema Namgyal
36. Muksang Tulku
37. Moktsa Jigdral Chokyi Langpo
38. Garwa Lama, Gelek Gyatso
39. Nyung-ne Lama, Rinchen Dargye
40. Mani Lama, Pema Siddhi
41. A-kyab Lama, Karma Döndrub
42. Hashur Lama Chödrak
43. Tra-kya Lama Palden
44. Doong-kar Tse-tsam Lama
45. The reincarnation of De-shur Lama
46. Shuksep Jetsun Lochan, Chönyi Zangmo
47. The fourth Dodrupchen Rinpoche, Thupten Thrinley Palbar

Thus, in the presence of over forty such learned and realized Masters, His Holiness engaged in the comprehensive study, contemplation and practice of all the sutras, tantras, and sastras. As a result, His Holiness became known as a great authentic Pandit (scholar) in the various subject matters.

At the same time, he has received the most precious golden lineages of the past Saints (all the way from the Adi-Buddha Samantabhadra, through the various Lineage Masters, to His Holiness himself), and he became their main lineage-holders, and thus fulfilled

the prophecy that he is the **Regent of all Awareness-holders**. The followings are His Holiness' main lineages of (for more details, please refer to the Issue No. 3 of the "Light of Lotus", published by the Dudjom Buddhist Association, 2000, pp.43-46):

- (1) the Dzogchen Longchen Nyingthig Tradition;
- (2) the Main Lineage of the Dudjom Tersar Tradition;
- (3) the Other Lineage of the Dudjom Tersar Tradition; and
- (4) the Special Lineage of Tersay Drimed Ozer and Daki Sera Khandro Tradition.

In this way, His Holiness Chadrak Rinpoche is the only one who holds the most complete and most direct teachings and transmissions of the Dudjom Tersar Lineage in this whole world --- its Vajra Regent!

Through the merging with his mind, he collects all the streams of Dharma teachings into one, The secret oral pith instructions, in merging with his wisdom, shone forth as pure conducts, The golden declarations by the Lords of Dharma, the precious Wish-fulfilling Gems (Root Gurus), As the Vajra Regent, he unifies all the streams of the precious golden lineages!

His Holiness' Boundless and All-Pervasive Wisdom That Shines Forth In All Directions

For his unsurpassed excellent wisdom, even people from other religions come to pay their great respects to him, and to show their admiration for him. For instance, many disciples of Hinduism in both India and Nepal adore His Holiness Chadrak Rinpoche as a great Holy Saint. Then, in the western world, there was a Trappist monk, by the name of Father Thomas



Kathok Khenchen Ngawang Palzang, the Root Guru of H.H. Chadrak Rinpoche



Wisdom Dakini Sera Khandro Dewai Dorje, Guru of H.H. Chadrak Rinpoche



H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche and H.H. Chadral Rinpoche Offered Teachings to Each Other

Merton, who was the most skillful interpreter of Zen Buddhism in the West. D.T. Suzuki, the great scholar of Zen Buddhism in Japan, once remarked that no Western had ever understood Zen as well as Merton (refer to Francine du Plessix Gray in *The New Republic*), In his book *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (edited by

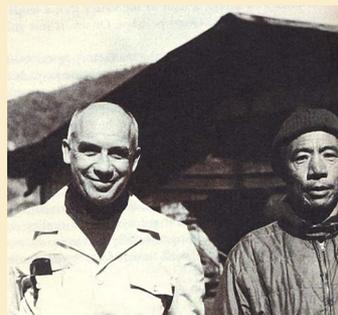
Naomi Burton Stone, Patrick Hart and James Laughlin. New York: New Directions, 1975), Merton wrote about his meeting with His Holiness Chadral Rinpoche on November 16, 1968 as follows:

“... and there was Chatral, the greatest rimpoche that I have met so far and a very impressive person. Chatral looked like a vigorous old peasant in a Bhutanese jacket tied at the neck with thongs and a red woolen cap on his head. He had a week’s growth of beard, bright eyes, a strong voice, and was very articulate, ... We started talking about dzogchen and Nyingmapa meditation and ‘direct realization’ and soon saw that we agreed very well. We must have talked for two hours or more, covering all sorts of ground, mostly around about the idea of dzogchen, but also taking in some points of Christian doctrine compared with Buddhist: dharmakaya... the Risen Christ, suffering, compassion for all creatures, motives for “helping others”--- but all leading back to dzogchen, the ultimate emptiness, the unity of sunyata and karuna, going “beyond the dharmakaya” and “beyond God” to the ultimate perfect emptiness. He said he had meditated in solitude for thirty years or more and had not attained to perfect emptiness and I said I hadn’t either. The unspoken or half-spoken message of the talk was our



H.H. Chadral Rinpoche

complete understanding of each other as people who were somehow on the edge of great realization and knew it and were trying, somehow or other, to go out and get lost in it – and that it was a grace for us to meet one another. I wish I could see more of Chatral. He burst out and called me a Rangjung Sangay (which apparently means a “natural Buddha”) and said he had been named a Sangay Dorje. He wrote “Rangjung Sangay for me in Tibetan and said that when I entered the “great kingdom” and “the palace” then America and all that was in it would seem like nothing. He told me, seriously, that perhaps he and I would attain to complete Buddhahood in our next lives, perhaps even in this life, and the parting note was a kind of compact that we would both do our best to make it in this life. **I was profoundly moved, because he is so obviously a great man, the true practitioner of Dzogchen, the best of the Nyingmapa lamas, marked by complete simplicity and freedom....** If I were going to settle down with a Tibetan guru, I think Chatral would be the one I’d choose....”



H.H. Chadral Rinpoche with Father Thomas Merton in Darjeeling, India (1968)



Kyabje Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro and H.H. Chadral Rinpoche Offered Teachings to Each Other

Mr. Harold Talbott, who was present at their meeting, recalls Merton remarking to him after the meeting: **“That is the greatest man I ever met. He is my teacher.”** (As according to Ven. Tulku Thondup’s description of His Holiness in his book *Masters of Meditation and Miracles: The Longchen Nyingthig Lineage of Tibetan Buddhism*. Boston, Ma.: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1996, pp.296-7.)

The manifestation of Guru Rinpoche in human form,
 With his boundless wisdom surpassing all others in this world,
 His holy and glorious name of “Chadral” should be spread far and wide,
 The darkness of this Degenerate Age will be gone when the sun comes out!

..... (To be continued)

The Lineage Traditions of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism (1)

By Vajra Master Yeshe Thaye

The lineages of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhist teachings are classified into three major types: the long transmission (Ring Gyu) of the extensive Kama Lineage, the short transmission (Nye Gyu) of the profound Terma Lineage, and the extremely short transmission of Pure Visions (Dang Nang) when teachings were directly received by the Masters in pure visions from gurus and/or deities. We will first describe the first type in this issue, with the remaining ones to be described in later issues.

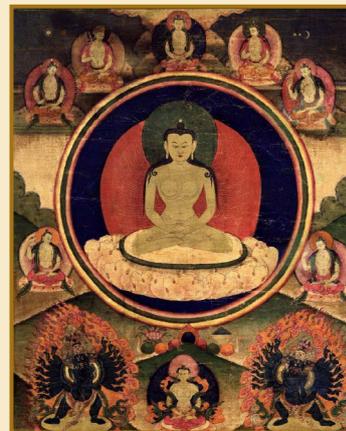
(A) The Dzogchen Nyingthig Lineage of the Long Transmission (Kama)

According to the “**Nine Yanas**” (Theg-Pa dGu) of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism (which includes: (i) the Three ‘Sutric Yanas’ of Sravakayana, Pratyekabuddhayana, and Bodhisattvayana; (ii) the Three ‘Outer Tantric Yanas’ of Kriyayoga, Caryayoga, and Yogatantra; and (iii) the Three ‘Inner Tantric Yanas’ of Mahayoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga), the highest teaching is known as the ‘**Great Perfection**’ (Skt.:Atiyoga; Tib.: **Dzogpa Chenpo**), which is the direct method for realizing the nature of the mind and for attaining Buddhahood in this very body and in this very lifetime, and is considered as the summit of the “Nine Yanas”. The “**Heart Essence**” teachings (known as “**Nyingthig**”) explain precisely the various methods for directly actualizing the innermost teachings of Dzogpa Chenpo. Thus, the “**Dzogchen Nyingthig**” fundamentally deals with the expression of the doctrine of the Three Perfect Bodies (Kayas) of a Fully Awakened Being, and the tradition of this

teaching has been transmitted through three different lineages of spiritual transmissions:-

(a) **The Wisdom Mind Lineage of the Buddhas** – this spiritual transmission is from the Primordial Buddha Samantabhadra (Tib.: Kuntuzangpo) of Dharmakaya to the Five Self-Manifesting Buddhas of the Sambhogakaya. In this lineage, the teacher transmits the teachings to a disciple, without using words or any other indications, only with his all pervading wisdom mind.

(b) **The Symbolic Lineage of the Awareness-Holders (Vidyadhara)** – the Sambhogakaya Buddha Vajrasattva (Tib.: Dorje Sempa) transmitted all empowerments and teachings to the Nirmanakaya Prahevajra (Tib.: Garab Dorje), the first Master in human form. It was from Prahevajra that this transmission was passed onto Manjushrimitra (Tib.: Jampal Shegnyen), Shri Simha (Tib.: Palgyi Senge), Jnanasutra (Tib.: Yeshe Do), Mahapandita Vimalamitra (Tib.:



Dharmakaya Samantabhadra



Sambhogakaya Vajrasattva



Nirmanakaya Prahevajra



Manjushrimitra



Shri Simha

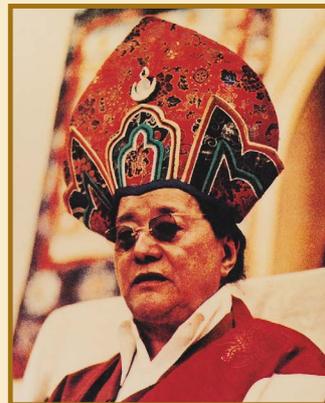
Drimed Shegnyen) and Guru Padmasambhava (Tib.: Guru Pema Jungne, or more commonly known as Guru Rinpoche to the Tibetans). Here, an Awareness-Holder, a being who has direct and pure vision of the nature of reality, manifests to a receptive disciple and transmits the teachings by means of pronouncing a mantra or showing a sign.

(c) The Oral Lineage of the Realized Beings – here the complete set of oral transmissions (lung), empowerments (wang) and pith-instructions (tri) are transmitted by word of mouth from the Masters to their disciples. This lineage of spiritual transmission in Tibet initially spread through two traditions at around the eighth century. One tradition which originated from Mahapandita Vimalamitra is known as the **“Vima Nyingthig”**, while the other tradition which originated from Guru Padmasambhava is came to be known as the **“Khandro Nyingthig”**. Then, it was later that both of these ‘Innermost Essence’ transmissions meet in Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjampa, from whom the uninterrupted oral transmission of these teachings have extended until the present day.

Kunkhyen Drimed Ozer Longchen Rabjampa (1308-1363), the great Omniscient Lord of Dharma (Kunkhyen Choje), was one of the greatest Dzogchen Masters in the Nyingma tradition, and also the most brilliant and original writer. He was the author of about 270 works, of which only about twenty-five survive, and amongst which the “Seven Treasuries” (Dzo Dun) and the “Three Trilogies” are most well-known to this very day. Longchenpa’s “Seven Treasuries” were written to elucidate the extraordinarily profound meanings of the Seventeen Main Tantras of Dzogpa Chenpo and of the Nine Yanas. In order to transmit the actual practice of Dzogchen, Longchenpa collected his own “Concealed Treasures” (Terma), together with those of Chetsun Senge Wangchuk and of Pema Ledreltsal

(the immediate previous incarnation of Longchenpa himself), into five sets of “Nyingthig Yabzhi”, in which he synthesized the “Khandro Nyingthig” of Guru Rinpoche and the “Vima Nyingthig” of Vimalamitra, and explained all the practical details in light of his own realizations as the “Three Inner Essences” (the Lama Yangtik, the Khandro Yangtik and the Zabmo Yangtik).

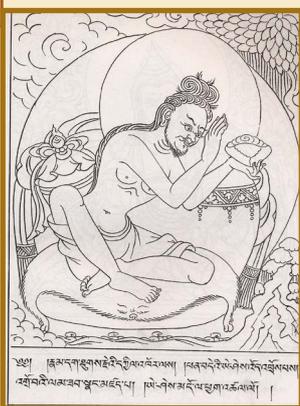
The “Canonical Teachings” (Kama) have thus been transmitted in an unbroken lineage directly from the Primordial Buddha Samantabhadra, all the way down to the present day. These Kama teachings were collected by Terdak Lingpa (1646-1714, founder of the Mindroling Monastery) and his brother Lochen Dharma Shri (1654-1717), and was later re-edited (and published in fifty-eight volumes) by the late His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche Jigdral Yeshe Dorje as the “Nyingma Kama”.



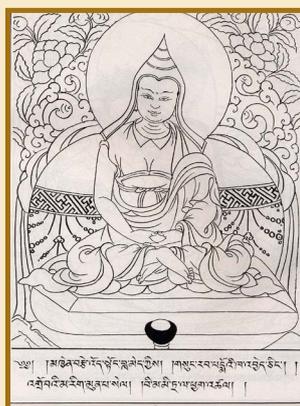
H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche II



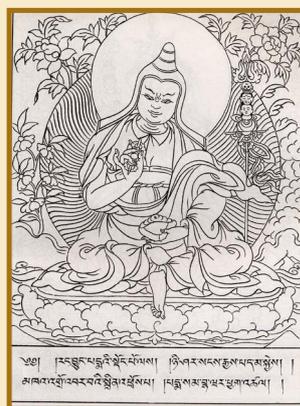
H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche III



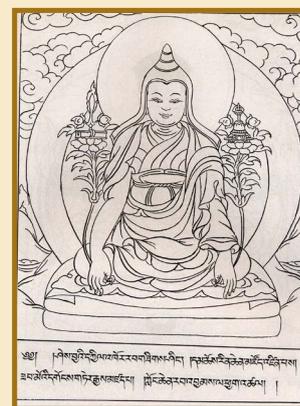
Jnanasutra



Vimalamitra



Padmasambhava



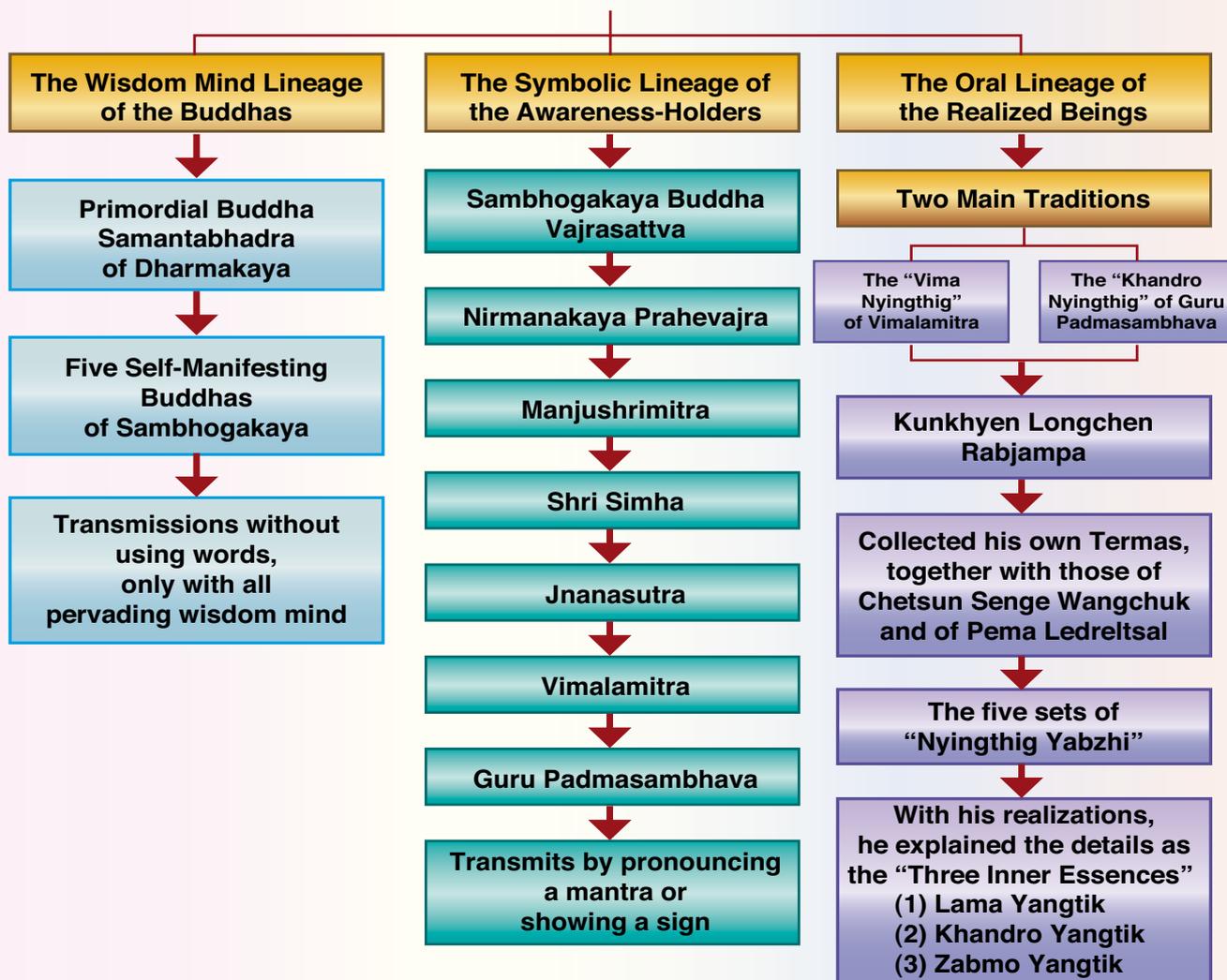
Longchen Rabjampa

A Sketch on The Tradition of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism

Three Main Transmissions of the The Nyingma School



(A) The “Dzogchen Nyingthig” Lineage of the Long Transmission (Kama)



The Profound Abstruseness of Life and Death : The Meaning of Near-Death Experiences (8)

By Vajra Acharya Pema Lhadren
Translated by Simon S.H. Tang

The Different Phases of Death

Most of the descriptions given by Near-Death Experience (NDE) survivors about the situations after death were rather exquisite, and that only a minor portion of which were considered as miserable encounters. Data of some researches and investigations about NDE showed that about one seventh of the cases were miserable ones, while the remaining ones were of good or mediocre encounters. This is, in fact, not yet a situation of “entering into real death”. The exquisite embodiment stems from the release of entanglement as a result of achieving the initial stage on the partial revival of the functions associated with the “primordial nature” (please refer to the essays of “The Meaning of Near-death Experiences” in Issues 4 and 5 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

Hence, the numerous NDE survivors that had returned from death had, indeed, the **misunderstanding** that “death” is not so horrible, or that they would even like to **go after** the feelings of its “tranquility, relaxation, wisdom, great power and compassion”. This kind of misunderstanding has made many NDE survivors to have overlooked the “**spiritual training**” of the religious aspect, and thus merely yearn for a “**universal religion**” without any restrictions upon one’s own behaviours, nor having any kinds of trainings on the basic foundation of “spiritual elevation”, but would only go for the provisions on the solace of mind.

If they could realize that the training of Emptiness (Sunyata) in Buddhism (please refer to the VCD on “Emptiness: Neither Existence Nor Voidness”, published by Dudjom Buddhist Association) is the only means through which they could really enter into and sustain the feelings of “tranquility, relaxation, wisdom, great power and compassion”, and thus being able to **revive the “primordial nature”**, then they would not be wasting their valuable and precious time and opportunities by circling round and round in this “cycle of karmic existence” (Samsara). In order to realize how this kind of misunderstanding **was formed as well as its disadvantages**, one must first clearly understand the different phases of death.

According to the descriptions in the “Tibetan Book of the Dead”, death can largely be classified into different phases as follows:

1. **The Gradual Entering into the Phase of “Death”**: The functions of the physical body are debilitating gradually.

Metabolism slows down until the person enters into the phase for the medical “definition of death” – with the stop of breathing, the stop of heartbeat and the cease of all brain functions. As the “physical body” and the “spiritual body” are still in connection at this phase, any changes or reactions in the “physical body” would directly affect the sensations and feelings of the “spiritual body”. **The dead person, before the cease of breath, might see certain scenes**, which can generally be stemmed from several sources:

- (1) Projections from **memories**;
- (2) **Illusions** due to confusions of the mind;
- (3) Projections from the **external** environment;
- (4) Influence from **specters** of the supernatural world;
- (5) From the **physical changes** during the decomposition of the “physical body”.

The Phase of Separation between the Physical Body and the Spiritual Body

2. **The Entering into the Phase of Separation between the “Physical Body” and the “Spiritual Body”**: The substances of the “physical body” underwent decompositions relentlessly, and the process continues from the point of entering into “death”, until three-and-a-half days after death. This process of decomposition is a “physiological change” that creates “psychological changes” in the “spiritual body”. The sensations and sights on



Buddha Vairocana

the surrounding scenes would also relentlessly change accordingly, and painful feelings would also follow. Those sorts of changes and scenes can be generally classified as follows:

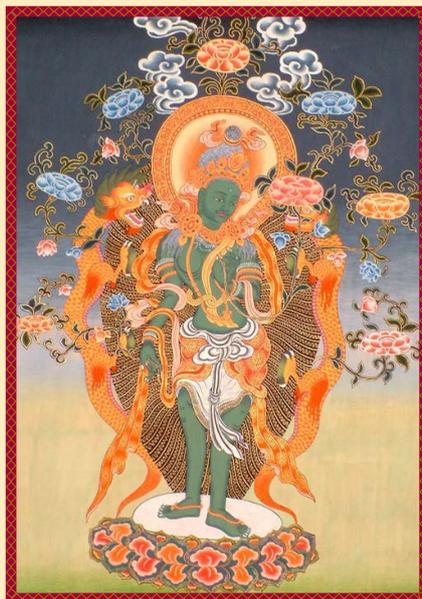
- (i) **The Decomposition of Solid Substances**: solid substance such as skeletons, muscles, cells and so on would start debilitating and decomposing. The solid substances that had lost their vitality started to secrete liquids. For instance, fluids would come out from the various orifices of the deceased. The most commonly seen is the discharge of urine and stool. On the verge of death, sweats and vapours containing poisonous elements came out from all the pores of the body.

If a person who takes care of dying patients or corpses does not put on gloves, the fluids containing those kinds of poisonous substances would infiltrate into his/her body and the person might be infected with various kinds of diseases, among which less severe sicknesses such as arthritis, dermatological diseases or when the person is weak, convulsion of muscles without a cause would occur. The physical changes in this “phase of solid decomposition” would make the dying person feel a **sense of pressure** of being pressed upon by heavy load, and was rather **weak**. **The scene perceived becomes yellow colour like soil. The visions involved are related to collapse, dispersion or wash-away.** The deceased might sometimes see smog with twinkling dim light. This is the physical phenomenon arisen when solid substances decompose. The special terminology used in the “Tibetan Book of the Dead” is known as the **“Decomposition of the Earth Element”**.

- (ii) **The Decomposition of Liquid Substances**: The liquid in the body starts to evaporate and dissipate in large quantities. When the liquid in the body expels from all the cells of the organs, the deceased person would **feel very wet and the scene becomes greyish in colour, with all the visions involved to be related to being besieged by flood, overflowing or drowning**. The deceased might see the trembling of “solar flames”. The vision of “solar flames” resembles the time when the sun-rise at dawn help to evaporate the water dews formed during the night, due to the warmth of the rising sun. The vapour makes the beams of sunlight as if light waves in vibration. Thus it is called the “solar flames”. This is the physical phenomenon arisen when the liquid substances decompose upon death, and is classified as the “phase of liquid decomposition”. Observers would

find the corpse to become dehydrated gradually. The special terminology used in “The Tibetan Book of the Dead” is known as the “**Decomposition of the Water Element**”.

(iii) **The Decomposition of Heat and Energy:** The heat and energy within the body would be expelled from all the cells of the organs and dissipate gradually. During the process, the deceased would **feel the heat of burning, and the scene becomes crimson in colour. The visions involved are related to being besieged by fire, volcanic eruption, or suffocation in a smoky environment.** Occasionally the deceased might see light of fireflies twinkling up and down. This is the physical phenomenon formed during the decomposition of heat and energy upon death and is in the “stage of the decomposition of energy”. Since heat energy dissipates gradually, the deceased person, before the cease of breath, would find both the vision and the hearing to become blurred. After the cease of breath, the deceased would feel like being trapped in a thick fog, and all sorts of illusions relating to fire or heat appear. Observers would find the corpse turn cold gradually. The special terminology used in the “Tibetan Book of the Dead” is known as the “**Decomposition of the Fire Element**”.



Green Tara

(iv) **The Decomposition of the Gases:** The gases inside the body gradually stop functioning and start dissipating away. Before the cease of breath, the deceased would feel too weak to maintain normal breathing until it stops totally. When the exchange of the gases from both inside and outside of the body cease, while there is the dissipation of energy, then all the organs can no longer sustain to maintain the gases inside the body, all sorts of gases would then follow different channels by slowly leaking out from the body. During the process of gas expulsion from all the cells into the various directions, the deceased one, after the cease of breath, would **feel the roaring of strong wind and deafening thunderbolt. The scene would turn pale green in colour, and the visions involved are relating to the impact of gusty wind, whirling of things in strong gale,**

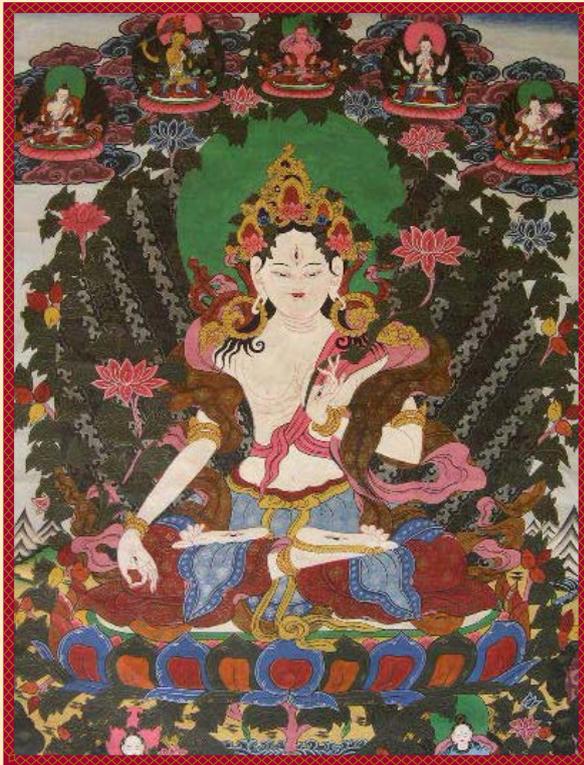
and feeling of being choked. Sometimes the deceased would see lights swaying in the wind. This is the physical phenomenon on the decomposition of the gases, which is in this “phase of the decomposition of the gases”. Observers would discover that the corpse would start deflating and shrinking gradually. The special terminology used in “The Tibetan Book of the Dead” is known as the “**Decomposition of the Wind Element**”.

The above-mentioned decompositions have special terminologies in “The Tibetan Book of the Dead”, namely: “**the Separation of the Four Elements: Earth, Water, Fire and Wind**”. When the process of decomposition of these “four basic elements” advances into its subtle level, the “**energy**” that is radiated from the “**physical body**” becomes very weak and there is no way to confine the “**spiritual body**” in retention. Like a disconnected flying kite, the “**spiritual body**” would naturally depart from the “**physical body**”, trail in accordance with the “**tractions**” from all directions (that is, the “**karmic forces**”) and will drift along to different places.

In general, the “**spiritual body**” of a mortal would disengage from the confinement of the “**physical body**” within a period of three-and-a-half days after death. However, there are some Dharma practitioners who can retain the “**spiritual body**” inside the “**physical body**”, for the special elevation in the spiritual domain, by their own “**forces of mental concentration**”. Then, the “**three-and-a-half day time-frame**” could be prolonged to an “**unpredictable**” period.

If medical technology is being utilized to prolong the duration on the decomposition of the “**physical body**”, the “**three-and-a-half day time-frame**” could also be extended. NDE survivors must satisfy the medical definition of “**clinical death**”: **the cease of breath, the cease of heartbeat and the cease of brain functioning**, before their experiences could be taken as a genuine embodiment of “**after-death**”.

NDE usually takes place when the “**physical body**” is in a critical and dangerous moment, at which time the metabolism of the “**physical body**” is so low that it could not retain the “**spiritual body**” to stay behind, and so the “**spiritual body**” ends up by departing from the “**physical body**”. Therefore, some Dharma practitioners and ascetic monks would **purposely torture** their own bodies in order to reduce the rate of metabolism of the “**physical body**” to an extremely low level,



White Tara

for the sake of the separation of the “spiritual body” from the “physical body”. They want to gain the “out-of-body” experience.

Once the “spiritual body” has left the “physical body”, the maintenance of life will rely merely upon the “energy thread” which maintains the linkage between the “spiritual body” and the “physical body” (please refer to “The Meaning of Near-Death Experiences” in Issues 2 and 3 of the “Lake of Lotus”). If the “energy thread” is ruptured, due to any accidental impact, then the person would truly enter into “death”, and the “spiritual body” would never be able to re-enter back into the “physical body”. Hence, the medical definition of “clinical death” is not the “genuine death” in either the spiritual realm or in the religious realm. If the “energy thread” is still in connection, the decomposition of the “physical body” and the changes due to these physical phenomena could still render their various levels of influences upon the deceased person’s “spiritual body” via this thread. However, the influence would become weakening under such kind of circumstance. In comparing with the situation while the “spiritual body” is still inside the “physical body”, the effect of influence has a much bigger difference. So long as the “energy thread” remains to be connected, the deceased person can still have the chance of “revival from the dead”, and to be able to return back to the “physical body”.

Ancient traditions and customs would allow the corpse to be placed under room temperature

for three to seven days, or even longer, without doing anything to it. Hence, there were more reported cases about the “revival from the dead” in ancient times than the present. Contemporary cases of the “revival from the dead” mostly take place during the moment of “clinical death” before the “physical body” is being sent into the mortuary for freezing. Once after being freezed in the mortuary, the “physical body” could no longer be able to be “re-vitalized”, and thus it is no longer possible to have the “revival from the dead” again.

There are people who can apply their “mental energy” to act against the impedance of energy in the “physical body”, and thus allowing the “spiritual body” to leave the “physical body”. Hence, no matter whether it is the utilization of the “mental energy”, or it is some sort of special impact, it is feasible to withdraw the “spiritual body” from the “physical body” of either a deceased person or a living one. Some “false gurus”, or those “Gurus” of low levels of wisdom, might utilize use these sorts of approaches to urge their disciples to withdraw their “spiritual bodies” out of their “physical bodies”, so making them being trapped in an extremely dangerous “brink of death”. However, it does not help in the training on “Emptiness” (“Sunnyata”).

It is, indeed, a big mistake to think that if one could see the “light”, or visualize scenes of different domains of existence, upon one’s departure of the “spiritual body” from the “physical body”, then it is a sign of “accomplishment” in one’s “Dharma practice”. Similarly, it is extremely wrong to think that “death” is exquisite. Even though one might be able to see the “light”, yet if one is not able to unite with the “light” in order to revive one’s own “primordial nature”, then it is still futile.

Only the training on “Emptiness” (“Sunnyata”), as well as the training on how to mingle oneself with the “light”, are the only pragmatic practices that pertains to the final goal of “Dharma practice”. With that, real results can be then be effected. Having departed from the “physical body” and being drifted along anywhere, the “spiritual body” (that is, the “mind”) would merely be more tumultuous, more confused and easier apt to fall into real “death”. This kind of misunderstanding is, indeed, also the most serious misunderstanding among the NDE survivors.

The Phase for the Exposure of the “Primordial Nature”

3. The Entering into the Phase for the Exposure of the “Primordial Nature”: when the “spiritual body”

leaves the “physical body” and uses one of the “exit doors of life and death” to depart, the deceased would see the “light” (please refer to “The Meaning of Near-Death Experience” in Issue 3 of the “Lake of Lotus”). The appearance of the “light” stems from the fact that all irksome negative sentiments and energies, about eighty types in total under the catchall name of “greed, hatred and ignorance”, would come to a complete halt at that very moment, and so it is just this natural capability, which is possessed by all beings and exists since time immemorial, that is being exposed completely.

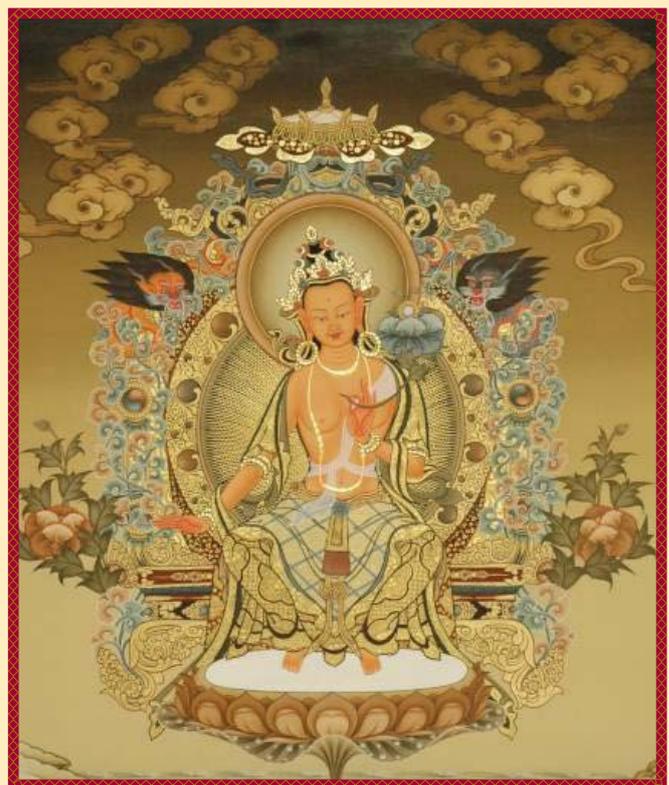
In Buddhism, this is called the “intrinsic nature”, “Buddhata” or the “primordial nature”. A deceased person, upon the partial revival of this “primordial nature”, would disengage oneself from this kind of intertwining, and thus he/she can have the feelings of rejoice and splendour. There are no other secular feelings that can excel this. The ability so arisen at this moment is also the most powerful. However, those who have not been trained on “Emptiness” (“Sunyata”) could not, by all means, hold on to this kind of condition.

Therefore, a mortal, regardless of whether he/she could “return from death”, would swiftly leave this stage. According to the numerous researches on the case studies of NDE, it has been found that not all the NDE survivors could see the “light” and recover part of the functions associated with the “primordial nature”. Hence, the topic of whether a Dharma practitioner is able to see the “light” and to recover the “primordial nature” becomes the most important objective of his/her “Dharma practice”, and is also a “gauge of success” on their methods of “Dharma practice”. Due to this kind of experience during the process, numerous NDE survivors have misunderstood that “death” is not too scary.

Law of Cause and Effect”, published by Dudjom Buddhist Association)].

During this period, the structure of the “material body” is sparse and is known as the “Intermediate Body” in Tibetan Buddhism (Tib.: Bardo, the body in this transitional period). While in other “religions”, this is known as the “soul” or “spiritual body”. Since the structure of “material body” in this period is sparse, and so its influence and traction is much less than that “while alive”. The impedance on the “primordial nature” would be greatly reduced. Therefore, the ability and the freedom in movement after death are much greater than that “while alive”.

Many NDE survivors have found that after departing from their “physical bodies”, their “spiritual bodies” could fly, could go through any obstacles, would become strong in precognition, and could drift along according to the turn of their “minds”. The most special feature in this period is that scenes of “extreme rejoice” and “extreme sadness”, “extreme splendour” and “extreme horror” might pop up at any moment. The formation of such overwhelming sensibility stems from the fact that the proceeding of the “mind” is going too fast, while the body is being directed by the “mind” during this period of time. Furthermore, given the fact that the structure of the network of “karmic forces” is extremely complicated, the deceased would be subject to relentless illusions, disturbances and tortures from the external “tractions” without a single moment of rest.



Lord Maitreya, the Coming Future Buddha

“Transitional Period” and the Phase of Standby for Rebirth

4. The Entering Into the “Transitional Period” and the Phase of Standby for Rebirth: This is the most dangerous and also the most critical stage. Having departed from the “physical body”, the “spiritual body” swiftly leaves the “light” and the deceased would then enter into the “transitional period before being fixated” (that is, the transitional period before rebirth) which is governed by his own “mind”, together with the network being weaved by various “karmic forces” [due to the “virtuous or evil” deeds amassed over countless past lives, then a network of “tractions” shaped by the intertwining forces derived from the “mind” of that person as well as that of other persons being affected. This network is thus known as the network of “karmic forces” (please refer to the VCD on “The Inconceivable



Kshitigarbha

In general, there are “cycles of every seven days” in this period of time, and the excruciating experience of death would be repeated at the end of each cycle. The reason for the repeating of these cycles is due to the **periodic rule of “Mother Nature”** that the **“memory systems of the deceased persons”** are triggered to copy and reproduce the various footages. The deceased thus unconsciously repeats the dying process. Thus, the dying process would be repeated seven times, and so the deceased person would undergo seven cycles of death, that is, a total of forty-nine days before rebirth would take place. This periodic rule of “Mother Nature” resembles the ebb and flow of tides, or the self-spinning of the planet earth, such that for a certain period of time, the thing will repeat itself once again.

According to the information provided by those people who can recall their previous lives, or those who did it under hypnosis, this **“transitional period”** sometimes could be rather long. The main reason is because the forty-nine days is not counted in the “human time-scale”. If the deceased was a human being when he/she died, then the first half of the “forty-nine days” would be based on the “human time-scale”; while the latter half of the time period would have to depend upon the time-scale of the realm where the deceased is going to be reborn. In other words, in different “realms” and “dimensions”, the time scales will vary. **The period of “forty-nine-days”** is, in fact, a very difficult time period to estimate, and should merely be considered as composed of “seven cycles”.

If the **negative sentiment** in the “mind” of the deceased person is too strong at the moment of dying, **the “seven cycles” could turn into unpredictable number of cycles**. Therefore, according to information provided by those who can recall their previous lives, it has found that a person who died by committing “suicide” will not only could not see the “light” after death, but will also relentlessly repeating the agonizing scene of the “suicide”. It is so miserable that even observers would not be able to endure the mishap. Therefore, the “seven cycles” is only referring to a general situation. Whether the “mental strength”, together with the “karmic forces”, is strong or not would either reduce or prolong the period of the “seven cycles”. Hence, Dharma practitioners would endeavor for their “spiritual uplift”, that is, **the training on the strength of the “mind” and the improvements of one’s own “karmic forces”**. It is hope that they would not have to go through this stage and will be able to directly **revive their “primordial nature” while they were still in the “phase for the exposure of the ‘primordial nature’”, in order to be liberated from rebirth once and for all**. These are the true objectives of “Dharma practice”. The so-called “supernatural powers” would merely be a subject being yearned for by people **without any wisdom**. There is no benefit from it in terms of the training on the “mind” and the improvement of the “karmic forces”, but will only be **“more harmful than good”**. The objective is not to learn to be “an acrobat or a magician”, nor is it aiming for performances in a circus, then why should one yearn for it?

Hence, “death” is not a playful game since it is right at **the critical moment of change** during this “transitional period”. If a person is not careful about it, one would end up in a realm or dimension of long-term suffering. If the deceased is to be reborn as an “animal” of **low intelligence**, then the odds that he/she could be reborn later as a human being again is rather low. Even if the person could be reborn as a human being, and though under hypnosis, it is still hard to recover the “memory of foolishness” during that period when he/she was an animal. It was not until the final attainment of “Buddhahood”, when the supreme abilities of the “primordial nature” can be revived, that the history of all of one’s countless past lives can then be visualized clearly and **seamlessly**. Even though this is the case, with the information provided by those people who could recall their previous lives, or those who did it under hypnosis, there are exceptions whereby some of them could **still remember that they had been “animals”** in their past lives. In other words, when a deceased person without any “spiritual training” is going to be reborn, then he/she would trail under the “tractions” of “karmic forces” and drift like a light feather. The person would then **be connected to the material substance** present in the place where he/she would be drifting upon. One would then be involuntarily

“fixated” to some kind of a life with a “physical body” of those material substances. While those people who have received “spiritual training” could insert one’s own forces arising from one’s conscious efforts of the “mind” to act against the “karmic forces”, in such a way that **the fate of “being trapped for a whole life” could be altered.**

Since “all matters are arising out of “Emptiness” (“Sunyata”)", in order for one to revive the original “primordial nature”, it is necessary for one to return to the condition of “Emptiness” (“Sunyata”). If and only if under such a condition that one would no longer be entangled by any “tractions” to be reborn again, neither will one become “fixated” again and be trapped in a material “physical body”. Therefore, the most thorough and powerful “spiritual training” is the training on “Emptiness” (“Sunyata”) in Buddhism. **There is no other “spiritual training” that can go beyond “Emptiness” (“Sunyata”).** “Tibetan Buddhism” has very detailed explanations about “death”, to be **excelled by none others.** Indeed, there are no other religions, or sects, that can give better and more meticulous descriptions. There are no other “spiritual teachings” that can excel Tibetan Buddhism for its teachings in preparing oneself to cope with each of the “phases of death” as a **significant “turning point” or “critical juncture” of liberation from rebirth,** as well as for its uniqueness and “up-to-the-point” trainings to help Dharma practitioners for their “spiritual elevation”.

On mastering the essence and depth in the practice of “Emptiness” (“Sunyata”) in Tibetan Buddhism, just take a look at the teachings of the “Great Perfection” (“Dzogchen”) and its ultimate attainments (**please refer to “The Eight Manifestations of Guru Padmasambhava (Lotus Born)” in Issue 7 of the “Lake of Lotus”**), people can then appreciate that it is a **top-notch practical training.** **The teachings of “Tibetan Buddhism” can be**

said to have excelled “sciences” in its utilization of the laws and treasures of “Mother Nature”.

Shocking Revelations: Scenes Before Death

Some of the experiences of NDE survivors, as well as the last words of the deceased persons, could have given us shocking revelations as if a “blow onto our heads”. The last words of these deceased persons have talked about the “scenes before death” which can be both exquisite and miserable.

For instance, Mr. S.M. of Suita, Osaka Prefecture in Japan, remembered the last words of his sister, who passed away at the age of six, saying “Mommy, please grip hold of me quickly. I’m about to **fall into the hole.** Grip hold of me quickly !” This case resembles some of the cases that had happened in Tibet. According to those “Lamas” who can communicate with the deceased persons [the Tibetan word “Lama” literally means the “Guru (in Sanskrit)”, or “spiritual teacher”], they said that many deceased persons, during the “transitional period before rebirth”, saw different sorts of **“black holes”** with strong **attractive forces** that sucked them in. The “black hole” mentioned here is not the same as the “black tunnel” as described by most NDE survivors in general. These “black holes” have very strong attractive forces, and the sucking power so generated is **formed by the “tractions” of the network of “karmic forces”.**

Any deceased person would **certainly go through this kind of sucking force after death.** The only difference among them is in terms of the duration periods and the number of times. Furthermore, the occurrences of the sucking force also differ in time, with some occurring sooner while others can be much later. It could be as early as the afore-mentioned six-year old girl who had experienced it on the verge of death, even before her breath stopped. **If the sucking force is too strong, the deceased person might “take rebirth” just right after the cease of breath, without going through the “transitional period”.** It is very difficult for those who have no “spiritual trainings” at all to resist such kind of situation.

There are two methods to resist these “sucking forces”:

1. **Auxiliary Forces:** if the deceased has accumulated enough “virtuous merits” while still alive, or since many previous lifetimes, the “tractions” so induced by these “virtuous karma” would be able to act against the “sucking forces” derived from the “evil karma”, such that the deceased could avoid the “black hole” to await for better opportunities to be reborn in a good place. Therefore, the majority of the religions, including the numerous “**sutras**”



Black Manjushri

in Buddhism, are urging people to perform as many “virtuous deeds” as possible, because they understand the “Law of Mother Nature” in that “negative forces should be suppressed by positive forces”, in order that one could temporarily avert the entanglements.

2. **Main Force:** if the deceased person has received **correct and proper** trainings on “spiritual elevation” while still alive, then he could apply his own “strength of the mind” as the directing force to act against the “tractions from evil karma”, so to avoid the “black hole” and to select a good place for his own rebirth. One might even be able to disengage oneself from those attracting forces forever; that is, to totally disengage oneself by becoming “liberated” from the overriding processes of “deaths and rebirths” (the so-called “cycle of karmic existence” – Samsara in Sanskrit). **It is a question of whether the “training on spiritual elevation” for the deceased person is really up-to-the-point or not.**

If the two afore-mentioned methods are included in one’s training and can be strictly applied, **the odds for one’s own success is extremely high, indeed.**

What is the Up-to-the-Point “Training on Spiritual Elevation”?

A book authored by the famous Japanese Monk Gensin, known as “*The Essentials of Rebirth*”, has detailed descriptions on the scenes of “the Hell and the Ultimate-Rejoicing World”. It also provided guidance on how to help people in their terminating stage. These methods include:

1. Put a **statue or painting of the Buddha Amitabha** in front of the dying patient’s bed.
2. Tie a piece of “**five-colour threads**” onto the hand of the Buddha statue, with the other end to be held by the dying person.
3. Ask the dying person to concentrate on the “**white subtle light spot**” at the centre of the forehead of Buddha Amitabha, and then **focus on chanting the “Holy Name of Buddha Amitabha”**.
4. With other people **helping to chant the “Holy Name of Buddha Amitabha”** beside his/her death-bed.

During that time, a group of the upper class **elites** in the Japanese society had form an organization, headed by Monk Gensin, and is called the “Twenty-Five Samaya Congregation for Buddha Chanting Society”. There were totally twenty-five members in their group. For every fifteenth day of the month, they gathered together for the chanting of the “Buddha Name” overnight. If there was any member passing away, other members would go to help with the chanting. At one time, there

was a dying member, and in order to provide a suitable venue for both chanting and caring, a lodging was specially built for him named as the “**Rebirth House**”. There were at least two members tending after him around the clock. Thereafter, whenever there was a member going to die, other members would render assistance mutually.

The special point was that members would keep on asking the dying person as to what he had seen in his dying experiences, and the dying person would honestly answer everything. The scenes described were then recorded accordingly, and so a collection of the articles was later published for future generations, under the name of “*Past Accounts of the Twenty-Five Samaya Rooted Congregation*”. The outcomes were extremely shocking because some of the members proclaimed that they “only see a stretch of darkness, and nothing else”. Some other members had seen “the Hell”. Some reported “being besieged by fire”. Some said “being burnt to charcoal by great flames”. Some proclaimed “being embraced by the light, and see Buddha Amitabha coming to fetch for them”. For the twenty-five members, the outcomes were not only different from one person to another, but they tended to be more on “dismal” rather than on “rejoicing”.

These scenes of dying also occur in other religions as well. Some reported “being embraced by light, and see either Jesus or Mother Maria come to receive them.” Why is that? So, in fact, what does this “scene of dying” represent? **When a person sees a bad scene, does it represent a worrisome result and a miserable ending? By using the same methods of practice, and uniting together diligently for their practices, why did the twenty-five members still have different and miserable “scenes of dying”? In which aspect(s) did the problem arise? Other religions also have the experience of having “God” coming to fetch for the deceased person. Then, does it mean that all religions have the same effects? How to carry out one’s practice in order to be sure that the “scene of dying” can be good? In case a bad “scene of dying” appeared, are there any others means of rescue? So, in fact, what are some of the necessary conditions for the methods of Dharma practice in order to make it “up-to-the-point” for the “training of spiritual uplifting”?**

From the articles on the “Meaning of Near-Death Experience” throughout the Issues 1 to 8 of the “Lake of Lotus”, can you derive some reasonable answers to those questions? We may conduct a “brain-storming session of wisdom” and give these some thoughts. In the future articles, we will try to verify the answers which can adhere to both “science” and the “Buddhist teachings”. How about that? ...(To be continued).



The Application of Wisdom

The Wisdom in Directing One's Dharma Practice (8)



By Vajra Acharya Pema Lhadren
Translated by Amy W. F. Chow

Excerpt of Last Issue: The Skills in the Setting-up of "Plans"

The primary condition for "success" is the setting-up of an "objective" (please refer to Issue 2 of the "Lake of Lotus"). In the setting –up of an objective with regards to one's preference, capability and ideal, to be supplemented with the skills in the setting-up of an "objective" (please refer to Issue 3 of the "Lake of Lotus"), a blueprint of grandeur for the ideal of one's life has more or less been drawn up. Then, what is the next step to proceed in order to ensure success "in achieving the objective"?

The next step is to draw up a detailed and concrete "plan" which is also strategic and efficient in nature. To work out a series of "plans" for the major, medium-term and small objectives is like the building up of a network of interconnected highways which would eventually lead to "success". In designing the numerous "plans", attention must be paid to the following items:

1. **Complementarity and the Enhancement of Effectiveness:** The links between "plans" should have compatible, complementary and interdependent effects...(Please refer to "The Wisdom in Directing One's Dharma Practice (4)" in Issue 4 of the "Lake of Lotus").

2. **A thorough elimination process to decide what to "adopt and abandon":** Irrespective of working out major, medium-term and small "plans", there must be a process to prioritize and eliminate with regards to some designated elements and conditions. A thorough elimination process to determine what to "adopt and abandon" ...

Designated Elements & Conditions in Determining What to "Adopt and Abandon"

- (i) **Importance:** To what extent would the "plan" help in achieving the "objective"? To what extent would this "objective", in which one is prepared to achieve, help in achieving the major objective"?..... (please refer to "The Wisdom in Directing One's Dharma Practice (5)" in Issue 5 of the "Lake of Lotus").
- (ii) **The Price to be Paid:** Life is short and limited. All the resources that you presently possess could be lost at any moment. One must clearly understand the characteristics of the "Combination of Resources" and its relations with Destiny in one's own life before making any changes, to realize the price that one has to pay for the different "plans", and then go through the processes of elimination and deployment in order to "adopt and abandon"



in these various “plans”. In this way, this would enable the limited resources to become “ever-renewing, inexhaustible and of unusual value for money” within a limited framework of time and space (please refer to “The Wisdom in Directing One’s Dharma Practice (6)” in Issue 6 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

(iii) **Strengths and Weaknesses:** Every person has his/her own strengths, merits, skills, as well as his/her weaknesses and the Achilles’ heel (weakest point). In order to achieve success of any “objective” or of any “plan”, one must be very clear of one’s own strengths and weaknesses; and then through various skillful arrangements, try to complement and make use of one’s strengths and weaknesses in designing the contents and procedures of the “plans”. This is an “important strategy” in eliminating and deploying the “plans”, and thus should not be underestimated (please refer to “The Wisdom in Directing One’s Dharma Practice (7)” in Issue 7 of the “Lake of Lotus”).

(iv) **The Factors of Time and Effectiveness:** In drawing up any “plan”, one must take into account the “planning of time”. The “principles for the usages and wastages of time” must be clear, and have to be linked up with the effectiveness of the “plan”. Hence, time should be spent on those “plans” which are most effective and can bring the highest rate of return. One should prioritize one’s different “plans” according to the long or short durations of time used and their relative effectiveness. “Plans” that require one to put in a lot of time and effort, but with low rates of return and low effectiveness, should be scrapped. One should refine and improve one’s “plans” by making reference to the “principles for the usages and wastages of time”. This is a major direction in the selecting, eliminating and refining process of one’s “plans”.

The spending of huge amounts of time and energy does not guarantee oneself to have any success.



Many hard-working people have the misconception that the more time they spent on their works, the closer the distance it will be towards their goal of “success”. Those who work around the clock, and are on the brink of exhaustion, would tend to feel their own “value of self-existence” and a sense of “self-importance” through their hard works, and thus they are contented with their present state of affairs. When their hard works, with countless time and energy spent, are met with success, they will be further convinced that such a theory does work. Indeed, had they been more skillful in their application of the “planning of time”, they could get the results with much less energy and efforts, or even accomplishing several “plans” all at the same time, instead of just accomplishing only one “plan” with great many efforts and hard works.

Being a wise person, one must deeply admit that the time and energy in one’s single lifetime are extremely limited. If one does not want to waste one’s time and energy, one must learn how to use them effectively on important matters. One should correctly target one’s efforts on the “critical position” of the matter. So what are “the planning of time” and “the principles for the usages and wastages of time”?

“The Planning of Time” and “The Principles for Usages and Wastages of Time”

1. **“Proportional” Allocations of Time and Energy According to the “Importance” and the “Effectiveness” of the Matters:** Many people do not know how to weigh the matters that appear before them, and “readily accept all kinds of things”. Worse still, they do not know how to say “no”. As a result, they are loaded with all kinds of promises and responsibilities, in such a way that their unbearably heavy workloads will finally make them collapsed. As they have too many things to take care of at the same time, and their energies are spread out so thin, that most of the jobs that are under their charge are all “half-way done”. Their lives are a mess and they themselves are subject to criticism from others. On the other hand, there are others who give equal allocations of time and energy to all jobs under their charge without ever assessing the “importance” of each matter, resulting in an “ineffective reward” with the efforts made in an uneven manner. Thus, in their whole lives, their achievements are often very “limited”, or sometimes they even become



the “losers”. Hence, “the principles for the usages and wastages of time and energy” should be “to allocate time and energy directly proportional to the ‘importance’ and the ‘effectiveness’ of the matters.” Matters which are important and can produce effective results should be accorded with high priority and can thus be worked with to its successful completion.

2. **Set the Priority of Matters According to Their “Importance” and “Effectiveness”, so as to Tackle Them in the Best Timeslot and State of Fitness:** Many people start their days with the habit of reading newspapers and letters, chatting with colleagues and make some routine calls. This is the best time when their bodies have lots of energy and their minds are fresh, sound and clear. So, what a waste! After dealing with these trivial matters, they then slowly start doing their more important works. Thus, in dealing with the important works when their mind is already preoccupied with insignificant things, and when they are feeling a bit tired, will only result in their low efficiency and effectiveness. Thus, “the principles for the usages and wastages of time and energy” should be that “the best time and energy should be assigned for dealing with the most important and most effective matters, in accordance to the relative importance of matters”. This will ensure that the most important

and most effective matters can be smoothly accomplished with the highest quality and most innovative results.

3. **Concentration of One’s Time and Energy to be Focused on The “Critical Positions” of The Important Matters:** Everything has its “central point” and “critical position”. How to identify and master the “central point” and “critical position” of an important matter is a major lesson for all wise persons, and is also the key to all the quick solutions for all major problems. Similarly, there must have a “central point” and a “critical position” to every “plan”. To devote one’s time and energy on the “critical position” is the key to swift success. The “critical position” or “critical moment” is normally the “connecting part” of different matters; or that it is the time when the matter is undergoing transformation at which the matter will either be settled, or be broken down into tiny parts, or be moving “either forward or backward” during this transitional period of juncture. As the “people or matters that are in this critical period” are still in the process of consolidating, and so their characteristics are normally “fragile, susceptible to change and sensitive”. One must know how to seize every opportunity available when one is in such a juncture at the crossroads, in order to move ahead towards the “critical position”. Insofar as mastering the time is concerned, irrespective of whether one decide to “either slow down its progress, stop and await new developments, or take prompt and swift actions”, one must exercise one’s discretion to ensure accuracy. For instance, in the case of “Dharma practice”, “death” itself is a “critical turning point” and a “transforming period” in one’s life, which is the most important “critical moment”. If one does not learn the ways to master it so as to seize this “once and for all” opportunity, but instead just let it go, the consequences will be unthinkably very fatal. The fact that even though one has been a very successful person throughout one’s life does not really matters. It is only when death really comes to us that this is, indeed, “the moment” to determine whether one will be successful or otherwise!
4. **The Setting of a Deadline for Every Matter:** If one wants to become the master of one’s own “time”, then one must have to form the habit of setting a deadline for accomplishing everything.

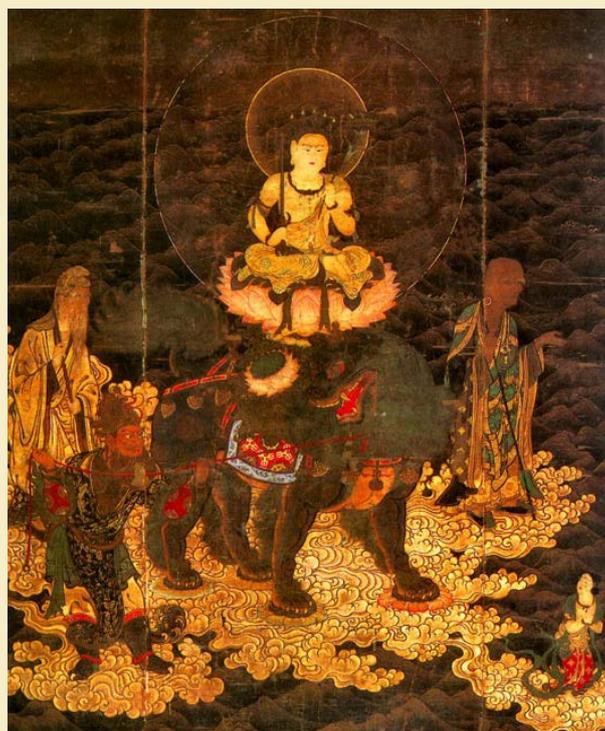


One must learn to set deadlines, particularly for the “plans” of one’s “Dharma practices” which will extend well beyond one’s life time, no matter how long or short it might be: be it for several minutes, one day, several days, several months, several years, several tens of years, and even one’s whole life. With fixed “objectives”, “plans”, “deadlines”, one can be assured that a pathway, with its principles involved, leading to “success” has been formed. So long as one can proceed

along this pathway, with its principles involved, one can be assured of “success”. For matters that are without deadlines, they are usually of **low efficiency and effectiveness**; or matters are allowed to **drift away, and eventually they will be doomed to “failure”**. However, if an inappropriate deadline has been set, the consequence will also be of **low efficiency and effectiveness**. Prolonged deadlines will result in the delaying of the progress and of its time for the successful completion of the “plan”. While, on the other hand, if too little time is being given in setting the deadline, one will work under great pressures and slippage cannot be avoided, thus bringing about demoralization. Hence, **when one sets the deadlines, they must be reasonable, careful and realistic**. In the setting of a deadline, one should take into account **the practical situations and needs** so as to make the decision carefully and realistically.

5. **Making The Best Use of “Small Bits”, as well as “Long Stretches”, of Time:** There are many “small bits” of time in one’s daily schedule. Some people just sit idly and let it passed away. There are also many trivial matters during one’s life time but some people just spend a lot of time and energy on these unimportant things. There are only a very few people in this world who actually know how to apply the “planning of time” in order to achieve “success”. Thus, the knowing of how

to make use of “small bits” of time to deal with trivial matters can become an important item in the “planning of time”. If we divide one day, one year and one’s life into several timeslots to deal with matters or plans of different degrees of “importance”, it will enhance our efficiency and chance of success. There are bound to be sudden and unexpected things in one’s life, and there are times for one to enjoy life. Hence in drawing up one’s own time schedule, one should reserve some **“secondary” timeslots** for attending to some **sudden and unexpected events** which are of less importance, yet nevertheless need to be attended to. For example, one can divide up one’s everyday matters into three categories. **The first category should be for the “most important” matters or plans that will bring the highest rate of return**, for which one should assign the earliest and best timeslot in the morning when one is in high spirits for dealing with them swiftly, with the duration of this timeslot to be proportionally the longest. **The second category is for the “secondary” matters or plans that would enable them to continue on but will not bring significant returns**. They can be put in the middle of the day when one starts to feel a bit tired, and when the things can be dealt with at a slower pace. **The third category are those matters or plans which have to be done, but will not bring any return;** or else those things that have no relations at all to the matters or plans that we are dealing with.



They can be done very slowly at the later part of the day when one is rather tired.

In order to achieve high efficiency and effectiveness for the “success” in any matters or plans, one must know how to “prioritize” them (in terms of primary or secondary levels), and handle them clearly and systematically, with due regard to their relative “cost-effectiveness”. The above-mentioned items on the “price to be paid” and the “allocation of time and energy” are the “cost factors” within the factor of “cost-effectiveness”. While the above-mentioned items on the “importance” and “strengths and weaknesses” are the important elements that will affect the “effectiveness” within the factor of “cost-effectiveness”. If one wishes to achieve highly effective success in one’s “Dharma practice”, then how should one go about in applying the “planning of time” as described above?

The Impact of “Time” Upon Successes and Failures

Time is, indeed, an important element that would have an impact upon one’s own successes and failures. Take the example of “Dharma practice”, the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni had classified “success” into three stages according to their relative degrees of difficulty:

1. **The Perfect Age of the True Dharma (Skt.: Saddharma):** The Perfect Age of the True Dharma refers to the period within one thousand years after the Lord Buddha’s Maha-parinirvana. [According to the “Grove of Pearls in a Dharma Garden” (“Fayuan Zhulin”), and also on page 111 of the “Tipitaks Dharma Lists from the Canon” (“Sanzsang Fashu”), owing to the fact that Buddha had placed his pewter staff in the Dragon’s Cave for forty years, the Perfect Age of the True Dharma had been prolonged for four hundred years and so this period were to be extended to one thousand and four hundred years in total]. True Dharma teachings were evident in the world, and so the Dharma practitioners could practice accurately. As a result, there were many Dharma practitioners who had succeeded in attaining the “Fruits of Realization” (“Fruits of Realization” refer to the fruits that one can attain through various “Dharma practices”. Different “Fruits of Realization” refer to the different

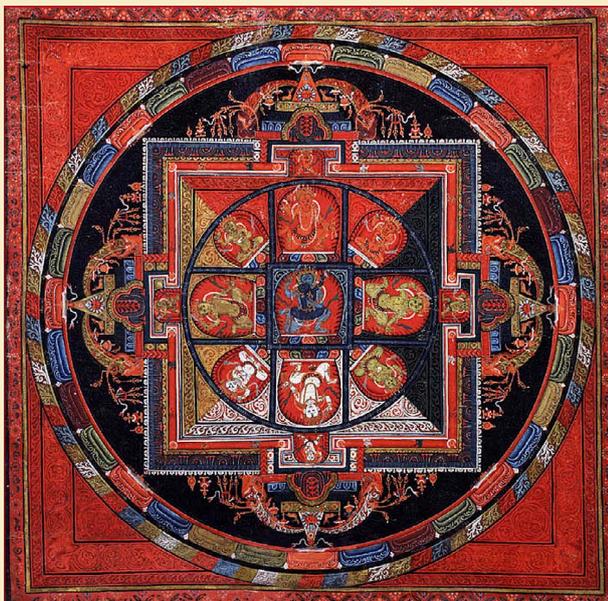
degrees and levels in the recovering of one’s own “intrinsic nature”, namely: “Solitary Realizer”, “Srotapatti”, “Sakrdagamin”, “Anagamin”, “Arhat”, “Buddhahood”). In sum, “there were people who taught the Dharma teachings, people who practiced the Dharma practices, and people who had attained the various Fruits of Realization” during this period.

2. **The Dharma Semblance Age (Skt.: Saddharma-pratirûpaka):** The Dharma Semblance Age refers to the period within one thousand years after the Age of the True Dharma. [According to the “Grove of Pearls in a Dharma Garden” (“Fayuan Zhulin”), and also on page 111 of the “Tipitaks Dharma Lists from the Canon” (“Sanzsang Fashu”), owing to the fact that Buddha had placed his pewter staff in the Dragon’s Cave for forty years, the Dharma Semblance Age had been prolonged for one thousand and five hundred years and so this period were to be extended to two thousand and five hundred years in total]. Although some of the Buddhist teachings still continued to exist in the world, most of them only “resembled and looked like the True Dharma teachings” on the surface. In actuality, the essence of Buddhism and its connotations had already disappeared, and the true teachings on the “Dharma practice” had been twisted and distorted. Although there were Dharma practitioners who had continued to practice the Dharma teachings, there were only a



very few people who knew the true teachings of the “Dharma practice”, and so only a very few people had attained the “Fruits of Realization”. In other words, this was a period when a diluted form of the Dharma Teachings existed but Enlightenment was rarely attained. In sum, “there were still many people who taught the Dharma teachings, but only a few of them who practiced the Dharma practices, and even a smaller amount of them had attained the various Fruits of Realization” during this period.

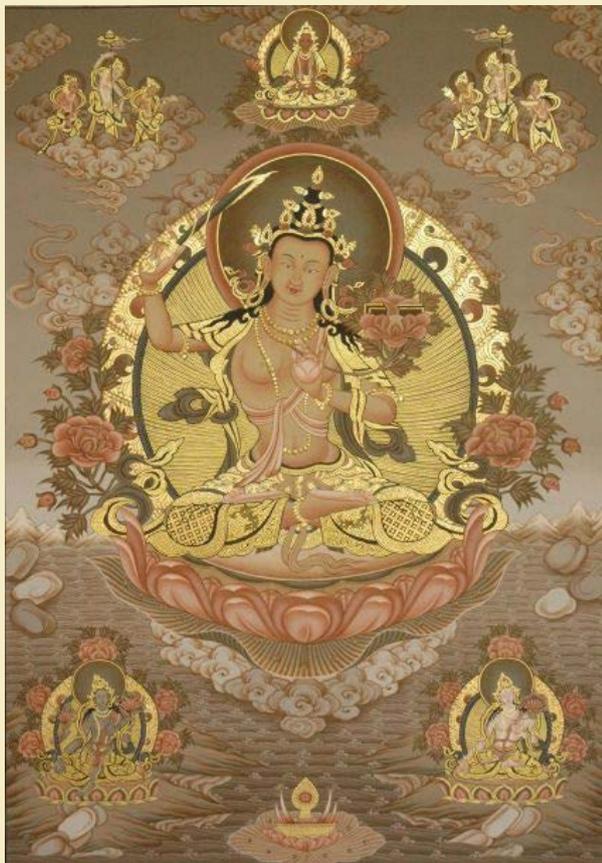
3. **The Dharma-Ending Age (Skt.: Saddharma-vipralopa; Tib.: Kaliyuga):** The Dharma-Ending Age refers to the period within ten thousand years after the Dharma Semblance Age. [According to the “Grove of Pearls in a Dharma Garden” (“Fayuan Zhulin”), and also on page 111 of the “Tipitaks Dharma Lists from the Canon” (“Sanzsang Fashu”), owing to the fact that Buddha had placed his pewter staff in the Dragon’s Cave for forty years, the Dharma-Ending Age had been prolonged for twenty thousand years and so this period were to be extended to thirty thousand years in total]. During this period, although the Buddhist teachings still continued to exist in this world, there were no longer any Dharma practitioners who could continue to truly practice the Holy Dharma, and so none would have attained the “Fruits of Realization”. In sum, “there were still people who taught the Dharma teachings, but none of them would practice the Dharma practices, and so nobody would have attained the various Fruits of Realization” during this period.



Why is it like that? This is because the longer the period that the Buddhist teachings had been promulgated, the situation of the Buddhist teachings to be either lost or distorted would become more serious, resulting in the gradual disappearance of its essence. The number of people who really knew the true teachings for Dharma practice would be getting smaller, and those who were willing to accept strict and serious teachings and would put them into practice would slowly further diminish. This would further lead to the stage of “no practice and no realization” of the Dharma-Ending Age to be drawing closer upon us. Gradually, in this way, the Buddhist teachings would slowly enter into the stage when it will “cease to exist, but will only exist in name”. If one wishes to attain any “achievements” from one’s Dharma practice during the Dharma Semblance Age, one must devise an appropriate “plan” with the proper “planning of time” for one’s Dharma practice. Furthermore, one must first understand the history for the propagation of Buddhism and the reason for its losing the essence. It is only then can one compare and contract the past with the present before devising a “plan”. A “plan” so devised in this way would then be an appropriate one.

Reasons for the Distortion and Loss of the Buddhist Essence During Its Period of Propagation

1. About two thousand and five hundred years ago, after the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni had attained “Buddhahood”, he began to walk barefooted in spreading the Buddhist teachings for forty-nine years (while some would say it was forty-five years). At that time, papers had not yet invented and there were no systems for writing down the teachings for records. The propagation of Buddhism had to be dependent upon the words of mouth from one person to another, and thus the teachings were to be passed on through the ears of the disciples. The disciples would then use their own brains and minds to memorize these teachings. In fact at that time, there were no Buddhist scriptures in existence. In order that the true methods of the “Dharma practice” could be remained for a long period, the disciples had recited them by heart so that the teachings could be passed on from one generation to another. In order to make them easy to be memorized and remembered, these teachings were turned into verses. This method of propagating the Buddhist teachings was known as the “Mouth-Ear Lineage”. Because of the necessity for “the



enhancement on the memorization” of the verses, so as to “pass them down to the next generation”, the habit of “reciting the verses of the scriptures” was thus slowly formed. At that time, there were more than one hundred of various dialects in India. The more common dialect was known as ‘Pali’, while the more refined dialect was known as ‘Sanskrit’. The Brahmins used ‘Sanskrit’ to spread their own teachings as an illustration of their noble status. However, the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni encouraged his disciples to use different dialects to spread the teachings in the different places, adopting **the principles of “being easy to learn and understand; clear and direct”** in the propagation of Buddhism. They should help to train the **minds** of the Dharma practitioners. This act would **enhance the effectiveness of the propagation of the Buddhist teachings to its highest point**. According to the Volume Six of the “Vinaya in Five Parts” (“Mahisasakavinaya”), the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni **had criticized** those lay people who were **skeptical** about those disciples who used dialects in reciting the verses (of the later-developed “sutras”, which were not yet in existence during the lifetime of the Lord Buddha).

2. After the “Maha-parinirvana” of the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, one of his closest disciple named Mahakasyapa **called upon** 500 monks to gather at the Saptaparni Cave. Whereupon, another close disciple of the Buddha, Ananda, well known for his being heard all the teachings of the Lord Buddha, was responsible for **reciting out** all the Buddha’s sayings (Sutta). Another disciple, Upali, well known for his strict observances of the rules and disciplines, was responsible for **reciting out** the monastic disciplines and rules (Vinaya). Thus, through this method of collective verifications and conclusions, these 500 monks tried to unify all the Buddhist teachings. This process had taken seven months to complete, and is now being referred to as the **First Buddhist Council**. However, as Mahakasyapa belonged to the Path of voluntary ascetic practices (Dhutavga) and represented only a small part of the Sangha community. Besides, Mahakasyapa was not always with the Lord Buddha to serve him, and so he himself had not personally heard many of the sayings by the Buddha. Despite all these, he rejected some of the sayings of the Lord Buddha which he himself had found not agreeable. For example, one of the Buddha’s close disciple named Punna-Mantaniputta had personally heard some of the teachings that the Lord Buddha had said, but this was also rejected. Since the “First Five Monks” that followed the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni in his First Sermon was not included in the five hundred monks that were appointed to verify the teachings, they then called for a separate meeting of their own with other monks to verify the Buddhist sayings that they had heard. As Ananda himself had not followed the Lord Buddha in the early dates when he started preaching, there were some teachings that he had not heard of and thus could not be verified. As a result, different groups held on to their own views of the Buddhist teachings.

After one hundred and ten years, the different viewpoints had further led to the split of Buddhism. In order to solve the “ten controversies and disputes” on “precepts and monastic disciplines”, seven hundred monks gathered together at Vaishali to verify the teachings and the “precepts and monastic disciplines” that had come down through recitations and had thus gradually been twisted. This was known as the **Second Buddhist Council**. However, this Second Council was unable to reach a common “consensus” among



all parties concerned. The outcome was the widening of the split, and had thus resulted in the formation of the later “Mahayana Buddhism (Great Vehicle)” and “Hinayana Buddhism (Small Vehicle)”. (“Vehicle” is a transportation tool, like cars, boats, and airplanes, etc. “Mahayana (Great Vehicle)”: the objective for Mahayana practitioners was not only for the salvation of oneself but also for the salvation of all sentient beings. Hence they required the use of bigger transportation tools for the salvation of people, and thus they are known as the “Great Vehicle”. “Hinayana (Small Vehicle)”: the objective for the Small Vehicle practitioners was for the salvation of oneself. They only require a small vehicle to transport themselves out from this cycle of transmigration known as ‘reincarnation’. Hence it is called the “Small Vehicle”).

Two hundred years after the “Maha-parinirvana” of the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, the split had become even more serious than before. “Precepts and monastic disciplines” had become lax and some “cheaters” had slipped into the Sangha community. As different sects fought fiercely for their offerings and disciples, they started to attack each other. Emperor Asoka had to send his envoy in trying to mediate among the various sects. Unfortunately, the sects refused to compromise with each other, and thus ended up in further heated debates. The envoy was so angry that he killed one of the monks. Because of this, the Emperor Asoka personally went to

ask for forgiveness. However, the different sects again argued on how to punish King Asoka for his sin. Emperor Asoka thus held the **Third Buddhist Council** at Pataliputra, in which he called upon one thousand monks to participate, and asked them to work on the book known as the “**Katha-Vatthu**”. He also adopted an “oral examination”, which was used as a means for eliminating those who failed in it and were thus driven out of the Sangha community. This process had taken nine months to complete. For the further propagation of the Buddhist teachings, Emperor Asoka sent envoys to far away places like Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, other North African countries, as well as the neighboring countries of Ancient Greece, Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka (Ceylon).

Emperor Asoka also sent his own son Mahinda who, through the words of mouth, brought the Buddhist teachings to Sri Lanka (Ceylon). After two hundred years in duration, which was about five hundred years after the Maha-parinirvana of the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, another meeting was held at Asokarama Monastery in the city of Pataliputta, which was in the middle part of Sri Lanka. They used “Pali” to record the “oral accounts of the Buddhist teachings” onto the palm leaves, and so this was later known as the “Palm-leaf Books”. At that time, papers had not yet been invented, and so these “Palm-leaf Books” were considered to be the earliest Buddhist scriptures in writing.

3. About six hundred years after the Maha-parinirvana of the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, in seeing the confusions caused by the different sects in their own interpretations of the Buddhist teachings, the Emperor Kaniska (A.D.125-150) of India at that time called for the holding of the **Fourth Buddhist Council** by five hundred monks at a monastery in Harwan of Kushan Empire (currently the place of Kashmir). They compiled “hundred thousand verses” for each of the “Sutras, Vinaya, Abhidharma” in writings with explanations on the Buddhist teachings. These were to become the “Mahavibhasa-sastra” which were later carved onto the bronze plates. This was also considered as the early Buddhist scriptures in writing.

In the one thousand years after the appearance of the “written scriptures”, there were more “Mahayana” sutras that appeared in written

form. For example, the appearance of “the Three Sutras of the Pure Land”: “[The Amitabha Sutra](#)”, “[The Sutra on the Buddha of Eternal Life](#)” and “[The Sutra of Meditation on Amitabha Buddha](#)”, which occurred around six hundred years after the Maha-parinirvana of the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni. Bodhisattva Nagarjuna used his supernatural powers to go to the “Dragon Palace” and took back the “Hundred Thousand Verses of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra” (Watasahasrika Prajnaparamita-Sutra), which was around seven hundred years after the Maha-parinirvana of the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni.

Around five hundred some years after the Maha-parinirvana of the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, all the “sutras” were passed down by “words of mouth”. In order to differentiate whether these “sutras” were considered to be true or not, the “[Three Dharma Seals](#)” that were stipulated by the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni were used as the yardstick for verifying and measuring their truthfulness. The “Three Dharma Seals” are:

1. **All Acts are Impermanent:** the life and death in this world, all sentient beings, all dharmas, all things are ever-changing, and there is nothing that would be permanent.
2. **All Dharmas are Having “No-self” (“Anatta”):** the life and death in this world, all sentient beings, all dharmas, all things are all interrelated and are parts of one another. There is no existence of a real and permanent individual “self” (an independent and unchanging entity).
3. **“Nirvana” is Full of Tranquility:** “nirvana” means “extinction”, the extinction of all “attachments”, and the returning to “Emptiness” (that is, [neither Existence nor Voidness – please refer to the VCD on “Emptiness: Neither Existence Nor Voidness”, published by the Dudjom Buddhist Association](#)) and the recovering of one’s own “intrinsic nature” (that is, the “Dharmata”) ([please refer to the articles on “ the Meaning of Near-Death Experience” in Issues 4 & 5 of the “Lake of Lotus”](#)).

The meaning for the existence of the “Sutras” is to guide our “Dharma practices”, to explain and clarify doubts, as well as to pacify disputes and confusions. Irrespective of whether the different “Sutras” appeared either in the early stage, or in the middle stage, or in the later stage, they all came from the time of the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni through “words of

mouth”. Even during the time when the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni was still alive, it was already possible to have discrepancies in the reciting and spreading of the Buddhist teachings among his disciples, let alone those “Buddhist scriptures” which came down from a long period of five hundred years through this “Mouth-Ear Lineage”. Hence, the using of “the period when a certain sutra appeared” in order to judge its authenticity was a rather meaningless argument. **To attack each other within Buddhism would not only hinder the propagation of Buddhist teachings, but would also hinder the “absorption of wisdom from all sides” in one’s own Dharma practice. How could one practice well with these endless confusions and disputes? The “outsiders” would only laugh at our own internal disputes and seize the opportunity to attack Buddhism itself. As a result, “those who were close to Buddhism felt sad, while the enemies would be happy” in seeing such a chaotic situation to have happened. Isn’t it worth it?**

Just one step backward, and think about it that the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni was not the only “Buddha”. There had been many “Buddhas” before the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni since time immemorial. Then, does it mean that all the teachings from those previous “Buddhas” will have to be considered as fake? It would be unwise and dogmatic to reject any Buddhist teachings on the ground that “the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni had not said it”. On the other hand, the right attitude should be to verify all the “Sutras” in accordance to the “Three Dharma Seals”. So long as the teachings are **in line with the “Three Dharma Seals” of Buddhism, they are authentic “Sutras” that could be relied upon to guide our “Dharma practices”.**

The propagation of Buddhism has been spread all over the world. Despite the fact that Buddhism originated from India, the Buddhist teachings had nearly vanished in India, its place of origin. The main reason being that,





during the propagation of Buddhism, the teachings were “too academic”, focusing on “metaphysics” and dogmas, and thus tended to become so profoundly abstruse and difficult to understand, that it was not easily accessible to the crowd for its propagation. When India was attacked by outsiders, Buddhism was destroyed by the believers of other religions. As it was too distant from the crowd, it was too difficult to “stage a comeback”. On the other hand, the propagation of Buddhism in other countries **continued to expand**, and was easily accessible to the crowd. As a result, it had spread all over the world.

The main thrust of the present propagation of Buddhism is “people-based”, because it has to be easily accessible to the crowd, easy to understand and to obtain success. However, the objective of Buddhism has now been **downgraded** from either being “liberated from reincarnations”, or the “attainment of Buddhahood”, to “attaining spiritual relief” or “having consolation of the mind” so that one will be reborn as a “human being” again in future. The practice methods focus on “the reciting of mantras” and/or “the reciting of the Buddha’s Name”, so as to accumulate merits. As for the method of propagation, it is mainly on the “explanations of the Buddhist teachings”, with very few practical teachings on concrete practices. Relatively speaking, both the “Hinayana” and “Vajrayana” focus more on the practical teachings of concrete practices. However, **there are only a very small number of people who really know how to teach people on the practical methods. Most of them would rather talk about the teachings without actual practices, or else they will only organize many “initiation” ceremonies in order to attract the crowd.** As a result, many of the extremely important essence of the Buddhist teachings could not be propagated, or even will be lost in the end. In terms of its “breadth”, the present day propagation of Buddhism could successfully assimilate with the crowd, and has been welcome by them. From the perspective of “secular” practicality, “the reliefs provided by the charitable acts” of the Buddhist groups could meet the needs of the community and society at large. Yet, from the perspective of an individual’s “other-worldly” concern,

of whether one has adequate “power of Dharma practice” to enable oneself to become “liberated from reincarnations”, it appeared to be rather thin. Hence, **in terms of its” depth”, particularly in the aspect of “practical trainings of Dharma practice”, there is still room for further improvement in the propagation of Buddhism.** Since the doctrines of Buddhism are so “all-rounded”, with its smoothness and harmony that is all-encompassing. Hence, if we could have the wisdom of adopting a more “all-embracing attitude” in the propagation of Buddhism by focusing **both on its “depth” as well as its “breadth”,** it would help to build up a harmonious and ideal place for all on this earth that would benefit countless sentient beings.

Conditions for Dharma Practice in the “Dharma Semblance Age”

It would not be easy for one to practice the Dharma in the “Dharma Semblance Age”, and to have “attainments”. In order to do so, one must have to fulfill the following three conditions:

1. **To be able to have a “Guru” who knows the teachings for genuine “Dharma practice”,** is strict and serious about it, easy to communicate with him, would follow up with your practice and is willing to give further guidance through teachings. You need to have “complete confidence” in the “Guru” and be able to **follow each and every step of his instructions.**
2. **To have complete and strong determination and perseverance of one’s own “will-power”,** and to be able to **draw up** “plans”, “objectives” and the setting of “deadlines” for one’s Dharma practice. Upon its **implementation**, one would need to carry through them to the very end so as to ensure a successful completion
3. **To accurately master and apply the “planning of time” and the “principles for the usages and wastages of time”;** and will focus on the “critical position” and to get hold of the “critical timing”.

Think about this: during the “Perfect Age of the True Dharma”, the Dharma practitioners would spend **most** of their time and energy on their Dharma practices. They would strictly adhere to **the “planning of time” and the “principles for the usages and wastages of time”** during their **implementations.** Together with environmental conditions, the above three conditions have been fulfilled, and so their success rate would of course be very high.

Dharma practitioners of the modern world will have to spend time both on their careers and in their Dharma practices. If they were to have any “accomplishments”, it is **necessary** that they **must have** a set of **accurate practical methods that they could apply in their daily life**, together with the fulfillment of the above three conditions. However, for the present day Dharma practice, they will tend to focus “more on teachings than on real practice”, and will lack of concrete practical skills and key essentials. Hence, they could hardly be “up-to-the-point” and will usually miss the target.

Take for example the most popular and simple practical methods of these days are the “reciting of mantras, Buddhas’ Names and prayers”. Yet how many people can really know about the practical methods on the “**three key points in Dharma practice**”: **the application of “mental concentration, meditational power and power of the mind”**? (e.g. “the clearing up of the channels using the power of mantra, and thus help one to enter into the stage of Emptiness, etc.... please refer to the VCD on “Emptiness: Neither Existence Nor Voidness”, as well as the Discs 2 and 3 of the set of 10 CDs on “Mind Training and Dharma Practice”, both published by the Dudjom Buddhist Association).

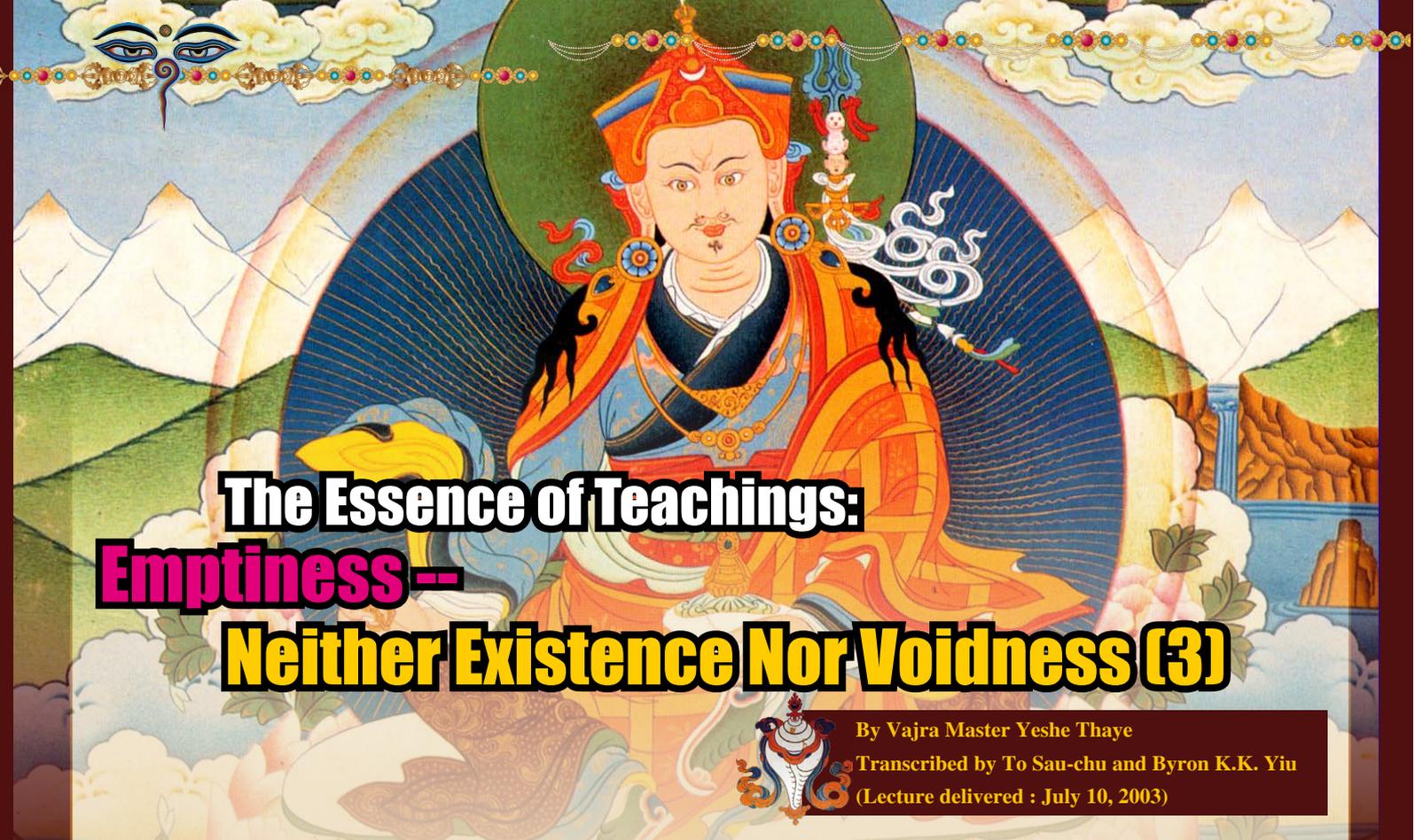
How many people really know the **real effectiveness** of these practical methods? What are the **rationales** behind all these? **How much** time and energy need to be put into it in order to have **real “effects”**? Can these practical methods help one to achieve **the “objective” of “being liberated from reincarnations”**? How many of them would **really understand** the “objective” of their own “Dharma practices”? (please refer to the four “objectives” of “Dharma Practice” in the article on the “Wisdom in Directing one’s Dharma Practice” in Issue 2 of the “Lake of Lotus”. And also on the article “Introduction to Guru Padmasambhava, the Founder of Tibetan Buddhism” in the First Issue of the “Lake of Lotus”, in which there is a section on the “Hierarchy of the Nine Yanas” where it describes the different practical methods, as well as the various levels and speed of achievements). The number of people that can **accurately** answer the above questions without being “superstitious” is, indeed, less than **one in ten thousands**.

Given that some of the practical methods of “Vajrayana” **could be retained**, together with the prediction of Guru Padmasambhava (the Founder of Tibetan Buddhism) with his more than a thousand years of efforts in this world, the “Perfect Age of the True Dharma” has actually been extended for one thousand four hundred

years. This period of the “Perfect Age of the True Dharma”, together with the one thousand years of the “Dharma Semblance Age”, has now lapsed since Buddhism has already been propagated for over two thousand and five hundred years by now. Hence, we have now reached the “**critical stage**” of whether the stage of the “Dharma Semblance Age” could still be further extended or not.

Hence, the present day Buddhist teaching has, indeed, gradually entered into the “Dharma-Ending Age” of “**only having Buddhist teachings but without any practice, no attainment of realization, and not being able to be liberated from reincarnations**”. This stage is a very important “transitional period”, and is a “**critical juncture**”. So, whether the propagation of Buddhism has really entered into the “Dharma-Ending Age” as predicted by the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, or whether it can be that, as recorded in the “**Grove of Pearls in a Dharma Garden**” (“Fayuan Zhulin”) that because Buddha had placed his pewter staff in the Dragon’s Cave for forty years, the influences and effects of the Buddhist teachings will be able to be further extended?

Even though the prediction have said that the “Dharma Semblance Age” could be further extended for another one thousand five hundred years, we must remember that all predictions are based on the “Law of Cause and Effect” (please refer to the section on the relationship between ‘Predictions’ and the ‘Law of Cause and Effect’ in the article on the “Meaning of Near-Death Experience” in Issue 6 of the “Lake of Lotus”). For a wise Dharma practitioner and a preacher with foresight, depth of thinking, planning skills and abilities, he should be **well aware** of the fact that whether the “Dharma Semblance Age” can be extended or not will have to depend upon whether the “**collective karma**” (the ‘**karmic forces**’ that have been **collectively accumulated** through the various ‘karmas’ or behaviours of the general public) of the present world would have been led to the “correct path and method for its extension”. If it is hope by all that the “Dharma Semblance Age” could really be extended, **more efforts would need to be placed on the “planning” for the propagation of Buddhism**. We should not only focus on its “breadth” and forget about its “depth” ! It is sincerely hope that all those people who are really serious about this in the Buddhist community should seize this important opportunity of the “critical period” which is fast fading away ! We have high hopes from you all ! (To be continued)



The Essence of Teachings: Emptiness -- Neither Existence Nor Voidness (3)

By Vajra Master Yeshe Thaye

Transcribed by To Sau-chu and Byron K.K. Yiu

(Lecture delivered : July 10, 2003)

View of the Cosmology: The Shape of the Universe

Now let us look at the shape of the universe. How would Buddhists look at the shape of the universe ? In the “Agama Sutra”, the Lord Buddha has mentioned: “The cluster of thousand worlds is in general like a topknot”. A topknot is spherical in shape but somewhat flattened. So this is what the Lord Buddha has mentioned in terms of the shape of the universe. While there are some contemporary cosmologists who believe that the universe is spherical in shape, while some others believe that the universe is a flatten ellipsoid. Hence, the difference between the two can be a difference in terms of their definitions. For example, if the definition of the “thousand world” refers to the “universe” itself, then it can be spherical in shape. On the other hand, if the definition of the “thousand world” is referred to as the “super universe”, then it can be a flatten shape instead. Hence, because of the differences in terms of the definition of the “thousand world”, there might be differences in terms of how the shape of the universe is being defined by different scientists. Furthermore, is this definition of the “thousand world” equivalent to the present day scientific definition? It may not be so, and hence the differences involved.

View of the Cosmology: The Beginning and End of the Universe

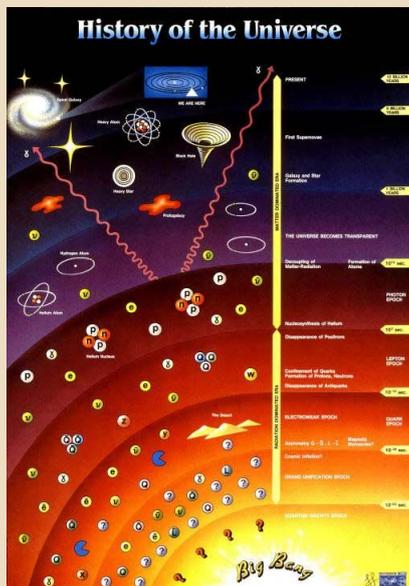
As far as the universes are concerned, another question has to do with whether a universe has a beginning and has an end to it ? From the Buddhist perspective, it has been clearly stated by the Lord Buddha that the universe has no beginning and it has no end. This kind of understanding is very different from the “common sense” concepts of our everyday

life experiences, since we were socialized from birth that everything must have a beginning and an end to it. This is due to the fact that all our concepts are “relative” in nature, and so this concept of beginning and end is also a relative concept.

According to Buddhism, the universe is formed due to the matching of all sorts of root and contributing circumstances, which we can generally call as causal conditions. When all causal conditions interact with each other, then the formation of the universe starts to exist. Then it goes through the four different stages of “formation, persistence, deterioration and annihilation”. After all these four stages, there comes the stage of Emptiness (or Sunyata in Sanskrit). Then, from Emptiness, again the whole cycle of “forming, persisting, deteriorating and annihilating” is experienced again and again restlessly and endlessly. This is the wheel of causal conditions as revealed in the “Agama Sutra”, etc.



The Universe



History of the Universe

Hence, this is how the Buddhist perspective look at the universe as having no beginning and no end. Then, how about from the scientific perspective? Many scientists believe that the universe began with the “Big Bang”. Due to the big explosion, various elements were generated and smaller explosions continued to take place subsequently. Hence, “light and energy” were thus generated, thus causing the different elements to keep on changing, and combining with one another, so as to form all sorts of materials. And with that, our whole universe came into existence. And this is the view of the scientific community in terms of the beginning of the universe.

However, as what we have just mentioned, the Lord Buddha had mentioned more than 2,500 years ago that the universe has no beginning and it has no end. You might question why? Our common understanding of the developmental processes of events and happenings that occur in our everyday life is built upon this “relative” concept of beginning and end. And so, if we look at what we have just mentioned about the four stages of “formation, persistence, deterioration and annihilation” of the universe, then these four stages can be seen as the process upon which the universe is being formed, and then later on is being destroyed. But, again, the so-called beginning and end is just a “relative” concept in itself.

Furthermore, we can always say that there are certain spans of time and space in between, and that the ending of certain time span is the beginning of another time span. So that, let’s say, the annihilation of a “Universe A” may coincide with the formation of another “Universe B” at the same time. So, to that extent, again the so-called beginning and end is only “relative” in nature. Hence, it is in this way that the Buddhist perspective will see that all things are only perpetually developing and evolving themselves. Then, somehow we will decide at a certain stage to cut at a certain point and we said that “this is the beginning”. But in actuality, this is not really the beginning, or the starting point, of that thing or event.

Similarly, at other point in time, we decide to stop at that very point and we say “this is the end”. But, in reality, the happening of that thing or event is still

continuing on. So, this clearly demonstrates that there is “no beginning and no end” at all to all things or events that are happening in our universe. Are there any scientists who are wise enough to understand this kind of thinking behind the Lord Buddha’s experiential knowledge of the universe? The answer is yes ! There is the outstanding contemporary scientist, Professor Stephen Hawking, who believes that “the universe has neither beginning nor ending”.

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View of the Cosmology: The Formation of the Universe

Furthermore, what about the formation of the universe ? The “Avatamsake Sutra” mentioned that “at the beginning of the world, Emptiness is here first”. Now, we are coming to a very important concept in the Buddhist teachings, which is also very hard to understand in Buddhism. So, what is meant by Emptiness? Many people might think that Emptiness is the “non-existence” (“voidness”, or “nothingness”) of all things. Here, the concept of Emptiness (or Sunyata in Sanskrit) in the Buddhist teaching is not of this kind. Emptiness, in the Buddhist teachings, means “Neither Existence, Nor Voidness”.

The reason why we have to touch on this very important concept in the Buddhist teachings is for the simple fact that this will help us to really understand what the Lord Buddha has been trying to tell us all along. This is not just for our intellectual curiosity, but for the fact that, in recognizing this most important and fundamental truth, it will be able to help us in breaking away from our own limitations in our thinking patterns. By breaking away from the limits of our thinking, we can start to liberate our own inner potentials and capabilities. And that is why we need to practice the Dharma in order to liberate ourselves from our human bondages of the “cycle of karmic existence” (we call “Samsara” in Sanskrit). It is only through this means that we can really practice the Buddhist Dharma.

There are many people who have studied Buddhism for a long time and some even for their whole lives. And yet they don’t understand this very important point on



The Earth’s Outer Space



The Universe

Emptiness. So, because of that situation, we believe that it is important that we should try to explain and interpret this very important concept clearly so that people will really know and understand its importance. Hence, when you talk to these people that with the realization of the higher stages of “Emptiness”, it will enable one to become enlightened, these people will usually be at a lost as to what you are talking about. And that is the reason why we have to talk about this important concept of Emptiness, which we will come back to later on.

The Lord Buddha has mentioned that “Emptiness” creates everything and everything is being attributed to “Emptiness”. So “Emptiness” can be seen as the nature of all things, whether it be the universe, be the nature of sentient beings, it is this “Emptiness” which is the “intrinsic nature” of all things. Now, let us look at how scientists will look at this important point. Recently, scientists have used high-speed cyclotron to discover “neutrino”, a microscopic building block of matters, which has no shape, does not occupy any space, has no smell, and does not have any interior “structure”. Basically, it is made up of “Emptiness”. In fact, most scientists have admitted that matters are created by “Emptiness”, and so this material “Universe” is also having its source from “Emptiness”.

To this extent, you can see that the scientific community has now come to recognize the importance of “Emptiness”, but this has been mentioned by the Lord Buddha more than two thousand five hundred years ago. Furthermore, the Lord Buddha has also mentioned that there is a kind of matter which we can call as the “Particle that is adjacent to voidness”, a microscopic minute particle which is almost equal or adjacent to Voidness. So, this particle is very similar to the “neutrino” that were discovered by scientists in recent years. Again, it was more that two thousand five hundred years ago that the Lord Buddha has told us the truth of reality, of what the universe is made up of, how it is being composed, how it is being formed, and so forth. So, all these come into existence well before science came into existence, and long before scientists come to discover all these scientific discoveries.

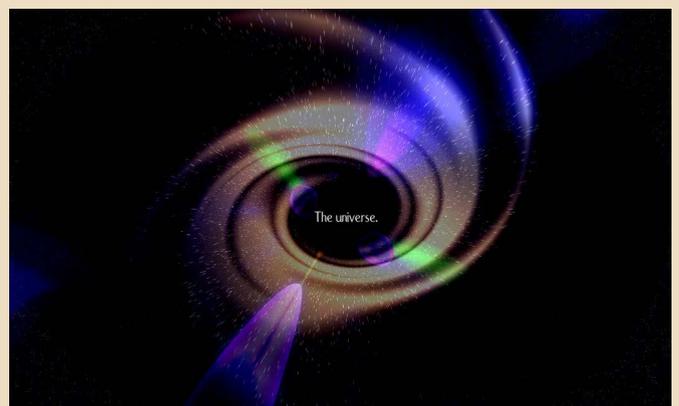
Another example that can be used to illustrate this truth of reality here is like this: at one time, the

Lord Buddha asked one of his disciples not to use miraculous power when drinking water, because there were millions of living beings inside a cup of water. If the disciple saw this and still drank the water, he would lose his compassion for all sentient beings. So that’s why the Lord Buddha asked his disciples not to use miraculous power when drinking water, in order that they would not lose their compassion. So, does it mean that the Lord Buddha asked his disciples to have self-deceptions in doing this ? The answer is of course no, this is not so !

The Lord Buddha wanted his disciples to know that all these sentient beings have used their lives to nurture their own bodies so that they would not die of thirst, so that they can continue to practice the Dharma in order to become liberated. Hence, the Lord Buddha asked his disciples to be even more diligent in practicing the Dharma, so that they can help all other sentient beings in the future to become liberated as well. Hence, this is the reason why the Lord Buddha had asked his disciples not to use miraculous power in drinking water.

Now, this example just help us to illustrate the simple fact that both the Lord Buddha and his disciples can have miraculous powers and be able to see the fact that there are millions and millions of living beings inside a cup of water. But, this was more than two thousand five hundred years ago when microscopes were still not yet developed. While people with ordinary eyes would not be able to see that, it was the Lord Buddha and his disciple who were able to see these sentient beings through their miraculous powers. Through his “perfect enlightenment”, the Lord Buddha came to realize the truth of reality, and thus he was “omniscient”.

Hence, this fact in itself has shown us that the Lord Buddha has the pure vision to see the true reality of the universe, and thus the kind of knowledge, on the mysteries of the universe and of human existence, that what the Lord Buddha had taught us is indeed a true and pure reflection of the truth that the Lord Buddha himself had seen. And it is only through the Buddhist teachings and practices that we might be able to realize the truth of this reality one day ! (To be continued)



The Universe



EPILOGUE

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