




TEACHINGS AND ADVICE

BY LAMA THUBTENYESHE

ATTITUDE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ACTION

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THESE DAYS, even though many people realize the limitations of material comfort and are interested in following a spiritual path, few really appreciate the true value of practicing Dharma. For most, the practice of Dharma, religion, meditation, yoga, or whatever they call it, is still superficial: they simply change what they wear, what they eat, the way they walk and so forth. None of this has anything to do with the practice of Dharma.

Before you start practicing Dharma, you have to investigate deeply why you are doing it. You have to know exactly what problem you're trying to solve. Adopting a religion or practicing meditation just because your friend is doing it is not a good enough reason.

Changing religions is not like dyeing cloth, like instantly making something white into red. Spiritual life is mental, not physical; it demands a change of mental attitude. If you approach your spiritual practice the way you do material things, you'll never develop wisdom; it will just be an act.

Before setting out on a long journey, you have to plan your course carefully by studying a map; otherwise, you'll get lost. Similarly, blindly following any religion is also very dangerous. In fact, mistakes on the spiritual path are much worse than those made in the material world. If you do not understand the nature of the path to liberation and practice incorrectly, you'll not only get nowhere but will finish up going in the opposite direction.

Therefore, before you start practicing Dharma, you have to know where you are, your present situation, the characteristic nature of your body, speech and mind. Then you can see the necessity for practicing Dharma, the logical reason for doing it; you can see your goal more clearly, with your own experience. If you set out without a clear vision of what you are doing and where you're trying to go, how can you tell if you're on the right path? How can you tell if you've gone wrong? It's a mistake to act blindly, thinking, "Well, let me do something and see what happens." That's a recipe for disaster.

Buddhism is less interested in what you do than why you do it – your motivation. The mental attitude behind an action is much more important than

the action itself. You might appear to outside observers as humble, spiritual and sincere, but if what's pushing you from within is an impure mind, if you're acting out of ignorance of the nature of the path, all your so-called

spiritual efforts will lead you nowhere and will be a complete waste of time.

Often your actions look religious but when you check your motivation, the mental attitude that underlies them, you find that they're the opposite of what they appear. Without checking, you can never be sure if what you're doing is Dharma or not.

You might go to church on Sundays or to your Dharma center every week, but are these Dharma actions or not? This is what you have to check. Look within and determine what kind of mind is motivating you to do these things.

Many countries have their own historical religious cultures, but it's a misconception to think that simply following these customs makes your actions spiritual. First of all, what is culture, what is social custom? Societal conventions have nothing to do with universal understanding-knowledge-wisdom. And at an individual level, it doesn't matter where you come from – East or West – your society's traditions of eating, drinking, sleeping and other worldly activities have nothing to do with religion.

If you think they do, your understanding is really primitive. I don't mean your religion is primitive; I mean your understanding of your religion is primitive – whether you're Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or anything else, your view of your religion is a total misconception. If you go to your church or temple simply out of custom – "I go because everybody else does" – it's silly and illogical. There's no significance. You don't know what you're doing or why.

If you are going to practice Dharma, meditate, follow the spiritual path, do so with understanding. If you don't understand what you're doing or why, don't do it.

For example, when Lord Buddha formulated the rules of monastic conduct, the vinaya, he said, "If your motivation for becoming a monk or nun is simply to get food, clothing and shelter, you can't be ordained." Look at

BUDDHISM IS LESS INTERESTED IN WHAT YOU DO THAN WHY YOU DO IT – **YOUR MOTIVATION.**

why you became a member of your own religion in the light of what the Buddha said.

Often we adopt one faith or another for temporal reasons of reputation or comfort, or because "I like their

ideas.” How do you know that you like their ideas? What is it about them that you like? Have you really checked them out? Have you checked to see if those ideas fit your everyday life? Will they bring you spiritual realizations and an everlastingly peaceful mind? Or do they just sound good? “I like their ideas; they sound good.” How do they sound good? You have to check up.

Our grasping, superficial mind is always just looking outside. We never look to see how the ideas we hear suit our daily life. That’s why there’s always a big gap between us – the human beings – and the theory and practice of religion. Then, what’s the purpose of that path? It’s completely useless. Our ego is still immersed in its materialistic trip. Some people join a spiritual community because, “It’s so easy. They give me great food and I don’t need to work.” That’s so small-minded. Still, many people are like that. I’m not criticizing anybody in particular; I’m just generalizing. This is just a simple example. You’ll find people like that in every religion.

Therefore, when you decide to practice any religion, you have to know why. It’s not simply a matter of learning what that religion says. You have to check with your own mind, “Why do

spiritual psychology, perhaps you really are primitive. It’s possible. In the industrialized world, it’s very difficult to live in the experience of the teachings. The materialistic vibration of worldly objects is far too strong.

It’s possible that from the time you embarked on your spiritual journey up to the now, you’ve gotten nowhere, that you’re not the slightest bit spiritual. You check up. If your spiritual journey has been one of simply grasping at intellectual ideas, you’ve definitely gotten nowhere, you’re not at all religious – even though you claim to be a follower of this religion or that. If that indeed is what you declare, check up why you say it.

It’s very interesting to check different people’s ideas of what constitutes religious practice. Each individual has his or her own personal opinion. There’s no consensus. People’s limited minds have a limited view of religion and its value. Therefore, they say, “This religion is fanatical; this religion is that; that religion is this....” You can’t say that. It’s not the religion; it’s the opinion of the followers.

When we say, “This religion has degenerated,” what we actually mean is that we have degenerated; we lack knowledge wisdom. We say, “This religion used to be like this; now it has degenerated,” but it’s we who have degenerated. You can’t say the religion has degenerated. Religion is knowledge-wisdom. How can knowledge-wisdom degenerate?

Still, you’re going to say, “I practice religion; I meditate. I do this; I do that. I pray; I read Dharma books.” Anybody can say, “I practice this, I practice that,” but how does what you say you do relate to your mind? That’s what you have to check. Does your practice solve your mental problems and bring perfect

realizations and universal knowledge-wisdom? If your answer is “Yes,” then OK.

It’s strange but true that often, once we have accepted a certain religious point of view, we become complete fanatics: “This is the only way. All other paths are wrong.” However, this doesn’t mean that our religion is a fanatical religion; it simply means that we’ve become religious fanatics. Our minds close up and all we can see is our own narrow view. Therefore, we say, “This is that.” But even within Buddhism, there are many different ways to practice. Religious practice is a highly individualized thing.

Actually, according to the usual Western understanding of what constitutes religion, Buddhism shouldn’t be considered to be one. Most people have a fairly fixed idea of what religion is, and according to this, Buddhism doesn’t fit. Of course, Buddhism has

... LORD BUDDHA TAUGHT ACCORDING TO PEOPLE'S INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY. EVERY TEACHING SHOULD BE TAKEN **PERSONALLY.**

I accept this religion’s ideas?” That’s what you need to check. Otherwise, you can study your religion’s philosophy in depth and have a head full of beautiful ideas but still have no clue how those ideas relate to your life. That’s a total misconception of the purpose of religion.

If you think practicing religion means simply learning new ideas, you’d be better off sucking a piece of candy. At least you’d get a little satisfaction; you’d alleviate your thirst for a few moments. If you spend months and years studying new ideas, collecting information, you’re wasting your time; it all becomes garbage. I’m not criticizing religion here; I’m criticizing your primitive mind.

Now, you might be thinking, “This lama is from Tibet. He’s the primitive one. He must be joking, calling me primitive.” Well, you might be highly competent when it comes to conducting your modern, twentieth century life, but in terms of

its religious aspects, but it also has philosophical, psychological, scientific, logical and many other characteristics. Also, Lord Buddha gave many different levels of teaching, according to the various levels of mind of his many students. He himself said that sometimes his teachings appear to be contradictory. "I tell some students, 'This is like this'; I tell others, 'This is like that.' It depends on what each individual needs. Therefore, I never want my followers to say, 'This is correct because the Buddha said so.' That's totally wrong."

You have to check up. It's your responsibility to know whether something is right or wrong. You can't just say, "This is true because Buddha said, because God said." Lord Buddha himself made that very clear.

He explained, "I teach the same thing differently because people's minds are different. Since one explanation doesn't fit all, I present my teachings in a graded, systematic order." For example, while the Buddha taught more advanced students that there is no soul, he taught simpler ones that there was one. Why did he give such contradictory teachings? It was in order to prevent beginners from falling into a nihilistic extreme. Later on, when they were ready, he would also teach them that actually, there's no such thing as a permanent, self-existent soul.

The conclusion is that Lord Buddha taught according to people's individual psychology. Every teaching should be taken personally. If you look at the way Buddhism is practiced in different countries, you'll see that each one has its own particular practices, but you can't judge all of Buddhism by the practices of one individual group. For example, Tibetan Buddhists offer a lot of incense and butter lamps. Just looking at that might lead you to believe that these are essential practices and that there's no way to practice without offering these things. But Tibet's great yogi Milarepa lived in the mountains without food or clothes, let alone incense and butter lamps, and he was certainly able to practice.

Therefore, the way to practice religion is not according to custom or through simply superficial change. It is entirely to do with your psychological attitude of mind.

There's a Tibetan story that illustrates this point. Once, a famous yogi called Dromtönpa saw a man circumambulating a stupa, and said to him, "Circumambulating stupas is all well and good, but wouldn't it be better if you practiced Dharma?" and walked off.

The man was a little puzzled and thought, "Perhaps he means that circumambulating stupas is too simple a practice for me and that I'd be better off studying texts."

Some time later, Dromtönpa saw him reading holy books very intently and said, "Studying texts is all well and good, but wouldn't it be better if you practiced Dharma?" and again walked off.

The man was a little more puzzled and thought, "What, again? There must be something wrong with me." So he asked around, "What kind of practice does the yogi Dromtönpa do?" Then he realized, "He meditates. He must mean I should meditate."

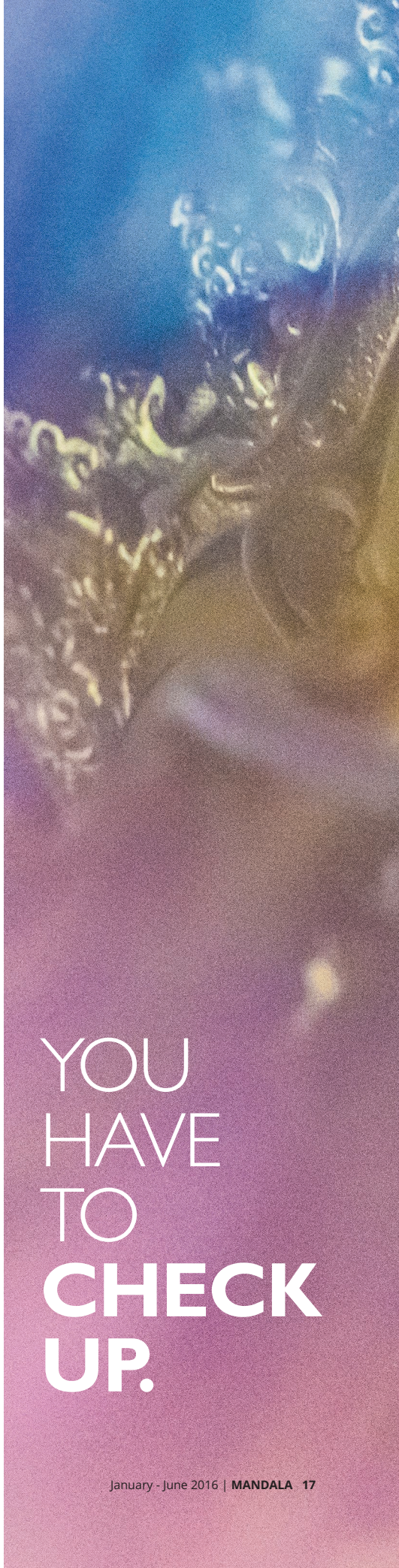
Some time later, Dromtönpa ran into him again, and asked, "What are you up to these days?" The man said, "I've been doing a lot of meditation."

Then Dromtönpa said to him, "Meditation is all well and good, but wouldn't it be better if you practiced Dharma?"

Now the man was completely exasperated and snapped, "Practice Dharma! Practice Dharma! What do you mean, 'Practice Dharma?'"

Then the great yogi Dromtönpa replied, "Turn your mind away from attachment to the worldly life."

You can circumambulate holy objects, go to churches, monasteries and temples, meditate in some corner doing nothing, but, Dromtönpa was saying, if you don't change your mental attitude, your old habits of attachment and grasping at objects of the senses, no matter what you do, you won't find peace of mind; your practices will be ineffective. If



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you don't change your mind, no matter how many external changes you make, you'll never progress along the spiritual path; the causes of agitation will remain within you.

These days, many people are interested in meditation, and, of course, many people benefit from their practice. Nevertheless, if you don't change the basic agitated nature of your mind and just think, arrogantly, "I'm meditating," there'll always be something wrong with your meditation. Don't think that

PRACTICES AREN'T GOOD OR BAD IN THEMSELVES. A METHOD THAT'S FANTASTICALLY GOOD FOR ONE PERSON CAN BE **POISON** FOR ANOTHER.

meditation is always right, no matter how you do it. It's an individual thing, and whether it benefits you or not depends upon what you understand and the way in which you practice.

However, if besides just knowing the theory, the dry ideas, of your spiritual path, you put what you know into action in your daily life as sincerely as you can, your practice of Dharma, religion, meditation or whatever you want to call it will be fantastically useful; very powerful. If, on the other hand, you have some kind of fixed idea that has nothing whatsoever to do with the truth – "This is religion" – you'll be running as fast as you can in the opposite direction, your mind still polluted by thoughts of "I am this, I am that." You must check up. It's very dangerous.

Therefore, Lord Buddha said that weak-minded people who lack the confidence to face life and turn to religion grasping for a way to make their lives easier are disqualified from becoming monks or nuns. He was very clear about this; he pointed directly at the mind. It's the same for us: if we join a religious community in order to earn a living, enhance our reputation or find other material benefits, we're dreaming; it's completely unrealistic. This is never the way to satisfaction. If we have that kind of inferior, spiritually primitive mind, we'll never solve our problems or gain higher realizations. It's impossible.

Therefore, as I said at the outset, Buddhism isn't interested in the actions you perform or your external aspect but in your state of mind. It's your psychological mental attitude that determines whether your actions become the path to inner realization and liberation or the cause of suffering and confusion.

Lord Buddha said, "Don't be attached to my philosophy and

doctrine. Attachment to any religion is simply another form of mental illness."

We see people all over Earth fighting each other in the name of religion, waging war, seizing territory and killing each other. All such actions are so totally misconceived. Religion is not land; religion is not property. People are so ignorant. How can any of this help? Religion is supposed to bring inner peace and a better life, but instead, people use it to create only more confusion and anger. None

of this has anything to do with any religion, not only Buddhism.

Dharma practice is a method for totally releasing attachment. But be careful. You may say, "I'm not interested in material development anymore; it's wrong" but then sublimate all your materialistic desires into your religion. Instead of eradicating your deeply rooted attachment, you channel it into something more acceptable. But it's still the same old trip. You see that possessions don't bring happiness but then grasp at your religion instead. Then, when somebody says,

"Your religion is rubbish," you freak out.

Another Tibetan story shows the lack of connection between intellectual knowledge and ingrained habit. A monk once asked one of his friends, "What are you up to these days?" and the friend replied, "I've been doing a lot of meditation on patience."

Then the monk said, "Well, big patience meditator, eat shit!"

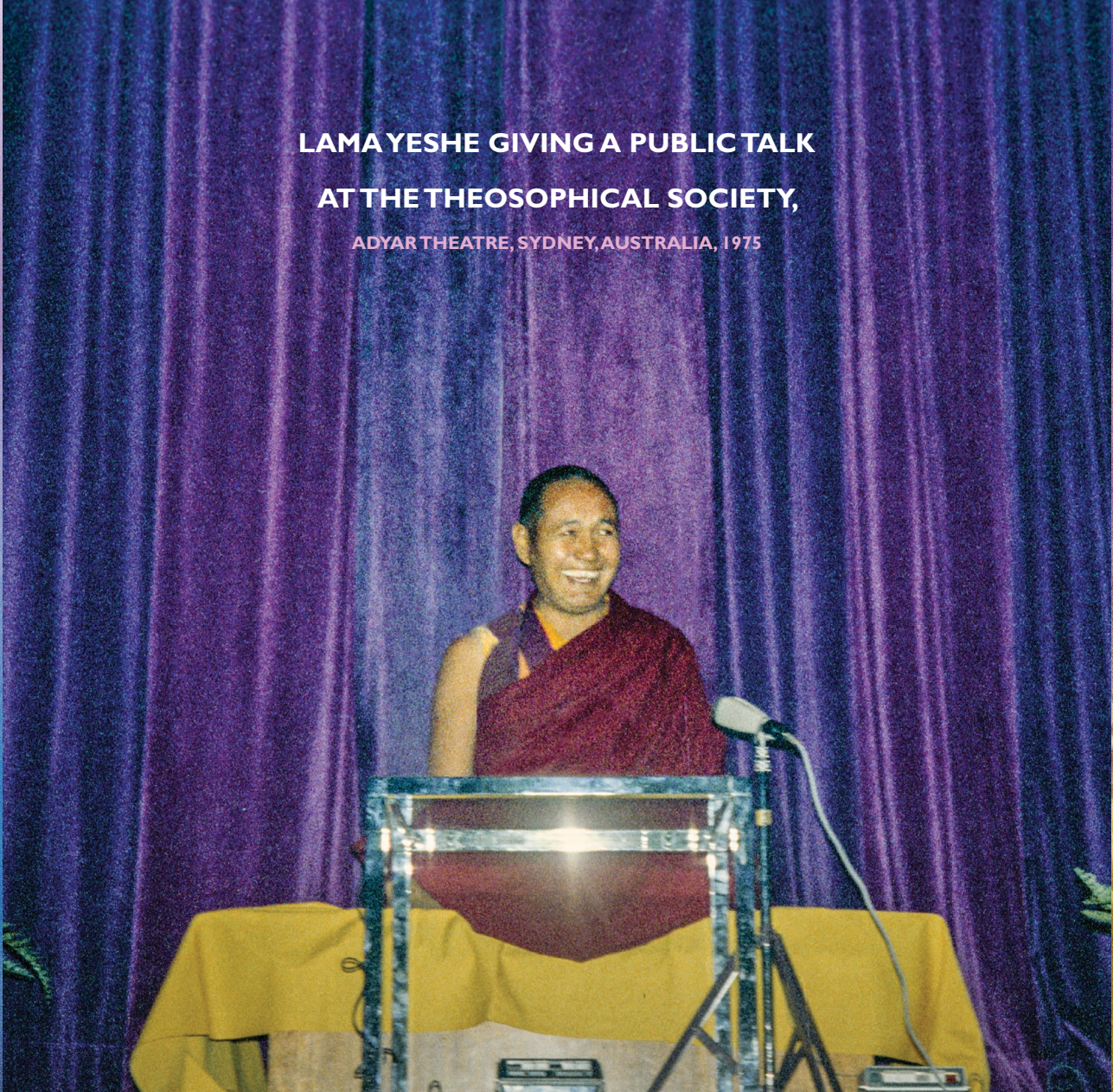
His friend immediately got upset and retorted angrily, "You eat shit yourself!"

This shows how we are. Meditation on patience is supposed to stop anger, but when the monk tested his friend, the meditator got upset at the slightest provocation. He hadn't integrated the idea of patience with his mind. Then, what's the point? It's like you spend your whole life making warm clothes; more and more clothes. Then one day you're out, get caught in a blizzard and freeze to death. This kind of thing is common. We've all heard of millionaires who die of hunger. So, in that last story, the meditator put all his energy into his practice in order to release anger and attachment, but when confronted with a real life situation, he could not control his mind.

If you really, sincerely practice religion with understanding, you will find complete freedom, and when you encounter problems, you'll have no trouble at all. This sort of experience shows that you've reached your goal; that you have really put your knowledge-wisdom into action.

When we're happy, superficially happy, we talk about religion with much energy – "This is great, so good, blah, blah, blah" – discussing all kinds of ideas with great enthusiasm, but the moment something horrible happens, the moment we encounter difficulty, we've got nothing. Our mind is completely empty: no

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understanding, no wisdom, no control. This sort of experience shows how utterly primitive our understanding of religion, Buddhism, Dharma, meditation or whatever you call it really is.

If you have right understanding and put yourself onto the right path with the right mental attitude, there's no doubt that you'll be able to put a definite end to all psychological problems. Therefore, if you want to be a true practitioner of religion, a proper meditator, instead of hallucinating with a mind polluted by theory and ideas, try to develop a clean, clear, realistic understanding and act gradually in the path to liberation. If you do, realizations will definitely come.

THE MIND THAT REACHES BEYOND DUALITY BECOMES THE BUDDHA MIND, ULTIMATE WISDOM, ABSOLUTE CONSCIOUSNESS, PERFECT PEACE, UNIVERSAL CONSCIOUSNESS ...

If a starving person suddenly gorges himself on rich food, he'll send his stomach into shock. Instead of benefiting, he'll just destroy himself. Rather than checking to see what's best at that particular moment, he just takes the idea "rich food is good for you" and stuffs himself with the best food available. Just because food is good doesn't mean it's good for you. It depends on the individual.

Similarly, before you launch into all kinds of spiritual practice, you need to check what's appropriate for you in your present situation. You need to be aware of your mental problems and lifestyle, examine the many different methods that exist, and then make a conscious decision based on your current situation and what approach suits you at the time. Before you engage in any practice, check to see if it's really right for you or not.

Practices aren't good or bad in themselves. A method that's fantastically good for one person can be poison for another. Something can sound great in theory but turn into poison upon contact with your nervous system; your body, speech and mind.

If you understand your own mind, you can definitely put it into the right space and gain control over it. With understanding, it's easy. But if you don't understand the key, you can't force it. Control has to come naturally. There's no such thing as instant mental control.

Therefore, my conclusion is that right mental attitude is much more important than action. Don't bring your materialistic way of life to your Dharma practice. It doesn't work. Before meditating, check and correct your motivation. If you do this, your meditation will become much easier and more worthwhile, and your right

action will bring realizations. You don't need to be hungry for realizations, grasping, "Oh, if I do this, will I get some fantastic realizations?" You don't need expectation; realizations will come automatically. Once you've set your mind on the right path, realizations will come of their own accord.

Nor should you grasp at your faith such that if somebody says, "Your religion is bad," you angrily turn upon that person. That is totally unrealistic. The purpose of religion is to free you from the agitated, uncontrolled mind. Therefore, if somebody says your religion is bad, why get angry? You should be trying to let go of that kind of mind as much as you possibly can. When you release the

deluded mind, inner peace, realizations, nirvana, God, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha – whatever you want to call it, there are so many names – will automatically be there. It's a natural thing.

Some people think, "I love religion. It has so many wonderful ideas." You love the ideas but if you never relate your religion's teachings to your mind, never put them into action, what's the point? You'd be better off with fewer

ideas. Too many ideas create conflict within your mind and give you a headache. If all you're interested in is religious ideas, if you're all hung up on ideas up there while your life's going on down here, there's a big gap between your body, speech and mind down here on Earth and your big ideas up in the sky. Then, because of the gap, the two things start to bother you: "Oh, now religion's not so good. My head hurts. I thought religion was fantastic, but now it's causing me more trouble." All you can do is complain. But the problem comes from you. Instead of putting two things together, religion and your life, you've created a split.

That's why Lord Buddha called the dualistic mind negative; it always causes mental disturbance. It makes you fight yourself. The mind that reaches beyond duality becomes the buddha mind, ultimate wisdom, absolute consciousness, perfect peace, universal consciousness – there are many things that you can call it.

You can see how your dualistic mind functions in your daily life. Whenever you find something you like, you automatically start looking around to see if there's anything better. There's always conflict in your mind: "This is nice, but what about that?" The advertising industry is built on exploiting this universal human tendency and the world of material development has grown exponentially because one mind is always competing with another.

Lama Yeshe gave this public lecture at the Theosophical Society, Adyar Theatre, Sydney, Australia, April 7, 1975 (Archive #329). Excerpted from *The Peaceful Stillness of the Silent Mind*, a free publication from Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive (lamayeshe.com).