

unbearable compassion

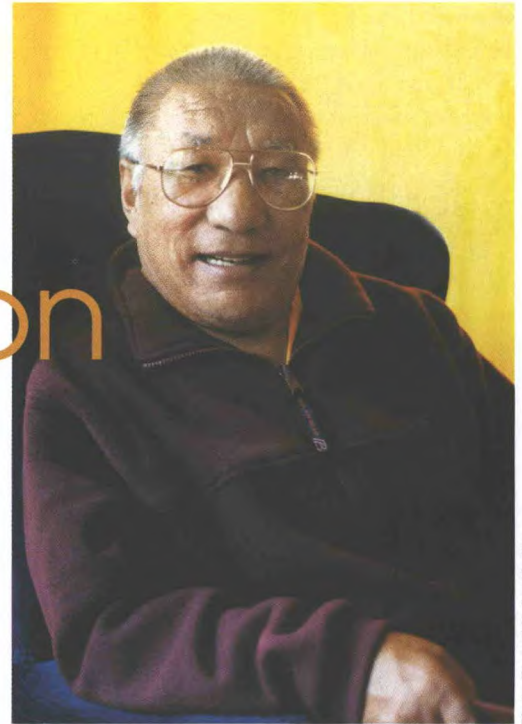


Photo: Ryszard K. Frackiewicz

A week after the World Trade Center/ Pentagon attacks in America, KHENPO TSÜLTRIM GYAMTSO RINPOCHE gave a lengthy teaching on compassion at the Shambhala Center in Paris, France, translated by Ari Goldfield. Sentient beings, he said, suffer as a result of clinging to the belief in self, as a result of believing that things are permanent, and as a result of believing that things truly exist. The practitioner needs to develop compassion for sentient beings based on these three reasons because these are the three causes of their suffering. He continues ...

In his song, *The Ten Things It's Like*, the Lord of Yogis Milarepa sings,

*When compassion wells up from within the depths of my heart
I see the three realms' beings like they're burning in a pit of fire*

We had a vivid example when the two towers [in New York] were burning, and how much did compassion arise within us for the people who had to suffer inside the burning buildings, for the people who tried to escape by hanging out of the windows? This is an example for the compassion that Milarepa feels for all sentient beings.

In his *Aspiration Prayer for Mahamudra*, the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje prays,

*Beings by nature have always been buddhas,
Yet not realizing this, they wander endlessly in samsara.
May we have unbearable compassion
For sentient beings whose suffering knows no bounds.*

"Beings by nature have always been buddhas" – this describes how it is that the true nature of mind of every single sentient being is the enlightened essence of the buddha nature. It is the buddha of perfect purity, the actual genuine buddha – the real buddha is the true nature of mind of every being. But, sentient beings don't know that, and as a result of not realizing their own nature of mind, they suffer endlessly, without inter-

ruption, in samsara. So this is an aspiration that compassion that is so strong, you can't take it – that this type of powerful compassion will arise within us for sentient beings, who suffer because they don't realize their own enlightened nature.

The prayer continues,

*This unbearable compassion radiates
unceasing love,
And as it does, its emptiness of essence
nakedly shines.
May we never leave this supreme and
unerring path of union,
May we meditate upon it all day
and all night.*

When this compassion arises within us that is so strong, we can't bear how powerful it is, it emits unceasing love for all sentient beings, at that very moment, its essence is emptiness. Here, emptiness refers to the true nature of mind, luminous clarity. So to give rise to this unbearable compassion and then rest in equipoise within the luminous clarity that is its true nature is the path of love and emptiness in union, of emptiness and compassion in union.

... In the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism, one needs compassion like that in order to attain the state of enlightenment. But not only that, compassion is something that is important if

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the world itself is to be a happy place. If we want the world to be like that, what we need to develop is compassion.

If you start out developing love and compassion, what happens when you perfect it, when you take it to its ultimate? In the Buddhist tradition, that's called enlightenment.

Q: Is it possible that very intense compassion becomes suffering for oneself?

A: This type of suffering that we experience as a result of experiencing unbearable compassion doesn't have the defining characteristics of suffering, because it is a cause of enlightenment. It is a cause of the accumulation of merit. So giving rise to this type of compassion that produces suffering for oneself – bodhisattvas like it! They're happy to have that type of feeling, because that's a cause of their attaining enlightenment. Actually, if we can experience suffering just as a result of meditating on compassion for beings who suffer, then think about the real suffering that they're experiencing. If just by meditating you can make yourself suffer, then how about the person who is actually going through it? When you think in that way, your compassion grows even more.

When, for example, you watch the video of the World Trade Center and you see the people and the suffering they experience, and that makes you feel compassion that's unbearable, then think about the people who were actually going through it.

Think about the people climbing out the window a hundred stories up because the fire was so strong they couldn't stay inside. There was nothing, absolutely nothing they could do. If that makes us feel bad, then think about the person who actually had to experience it. Even that, though, how terrible an ordeal it was, still, it only lasted a few minutes, then it was over. In the hell realms, however, beings experience the suffering of burning in flames for an incredibly long time with no break. In this way, we have to make our compassion expand. It's not enough to feel compassion for just one group of beings.

Q: When you feel compassion in this way, you feel sad, powerless, and discouraged. What can we do about that?

A: When you have that type of feeling, you have to remember that suffering is fleeting, and that the true nature of mind is unaffected by it. Since the true nature of mind of all sentient beings is the buddha nature, then even the people who felt that type of suffering can be reborn as human beings, practice the Dharma, and can attain complete and perfect enlightenment. That's the Buddhist tradition, and it's based on the understanding of the reality of suffering, which is that it doesn't

last, and it's not present in the true nature of mind. The true nature of mind is luminous clarity, completely without flaw.

We can see examples of how things can turn around in our own history. We know of times when whole nations hate each other and fight terrible wars against each other, considering themselves the bitterest of enemies, and destroy the whole land, with many people dying and suffering during that time. But then, it changes, and the countries become friends, those

who suffer become happy, and the lands that were devastated become prosperous, because the suffering and the anger is not truly existent, so it can change, and enemies can become friends. Therefore, seeing the examples of this in our own history, we see that we have no reason to despair.

There were some countries that when they fought wars, their people got so angry and wrapped up in ego-

clinging that their soldiers would commit suicide themselves in order to kill the enemy. Now, however, the countries that did that are wonderful aid donors and they help many others in the world. So they've gone from one end of extreme anger to being the world's helpers. This shows that the situation can change.

Since the true nature of mind is luminous clarity, transformation is possible. People who have a lot of anger can meditate on love and become loving people. People who are caught in the darkness of ignorance can learn the path and their knowledge will grow brighter and brighter. So transformation is possible – transformation of the whole outer environment into a pure realm, of the sentient beings who inhabit this environment into male and female bodhisattvas, endowed with compassion, and of one's own mind into wisdom. This is the type of transformation that the Mahayana describes, and this is the path – the path of the Mahayana is the path of transformation. The more confidence you gain in that, the more you can see that these temporary states of suffering are just that – temporary. They are not the actual nature of things; they are temporary and they change quickly.

In the Mahayana it is explained that the ten directions are filled with buddha realms. What causes them to manifest is when a sentient being purifies their own mind – makes their own mind noble and good. Then this very world appears as a pure realm, and that's a very nice experience!

*By the power of the great compassion of the Victorious Ones
and their sons and daughters of the ten directions,
And the power of all the immaculate virtue there is
May my own and all sentient beings'
Completely pure aspiration prayers be perfectly fulfilled! ❁*

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