



## START THE DAY RIGHT

**VEN. KIRTI TSENSHAB RINPOCHE:**

"In the morning,  
when we sit on  
our cushion,  
after making  
offerings, etc.,  
and before  
beginning our  
practice, what  
should our first  
thought be?"  
Two teachers in  
the lineage of  
Lama Tsong  
Khapa, Ven.  
KIRTI TSENSHAB  
RINPOCHE and  
GESHE LHUNDUB  
SOPA, give their  
answers:

The most important thing before starting any form of practice is to go for refuge as this opens the door to Buddhist practices. And your attitude should be simple, sincere and from the heart, rather than just your reciting the words. Having entered into Buddhist practice, you then need to generate the mind of bodhichitta.

These virtuous thoughts have an accumulative effect, even if you just spend a couple of minutes each day generating them. If you look at having generated this virtue over a period of a year, this becomes an important achievement.

Either first thing in the morning, or at the beginning of your session, it is important to recognize that you are still alive. Many people went to sleep last night, and didn't make it to see the dawn of this day. Think that by some incredible fortune, you are still alive today, and how important it is to try to generate the mind of bodhichitta – to engage in your practices not only so that you may experience happiness in this or future lives, but also to bring those still suffering in cyclic existence to enlightenment. Think "this is why I am going to start my practice now."

Then before going to work you can think that whatever type of job you do, whatever services you provide, that you will do them for the benefit of all. Then you can go out, secure in the knowledge that whatever you do, you are always creating some sort of wealth. At the end of the day conserve what you have created – just as you would deposit your money in the bank, so save your positive virtue in the form of a dedication.

The Tibetan word *gom* is often translated as 'meditation' in English. It actually means to familiarize yourself with something. So whatever practice you do is a constant familiarization with a certain topic. We should therefore always be checking where the mind is directed. We set a certain goal or a certain object of meditation, and we check the course of the mind towards that object. We will be kept on track through recollection and conscientiousness. Recollection will ensure that you are con-

centrating and remembering the right things. Through conscientiousness you check on how you're holding the object, whether you're holding it the right way and how you're proceeding towards it.

You have to become clear about the stages of development and the steps that need to be taken. You should have this familiarity/understanding that from step one, you go to step two, from two you move gradually to three, and so forth. Often in our practice we are not very clear, we don't even know what the starting point is. So the first thing is to become absolutely familiar and clear with the process. Repeat it to yourself over and over. Then the mind will automatically start moving towards those steps. When you reach the top of the mountain, you look down and can see the smaller hills, the valleys, water, maybe crops – slowly you too should have this complete overview of everything that you have to do.

Ven. Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche was born in 1926 in Amdo, Eastern Tibet. At age 8, Rinpoche was recognized as the reincarnation of a local abbot. At age 26, having completed 18 years of monastic studies, Rinpoche was appointed abbot of the Dialectical School of Kirti Gumpa. Rinpoche fled Tibet for India in 1959. In 1971, he entered solitary retreat, where he remained for 15 years, studying sutra and tantra.

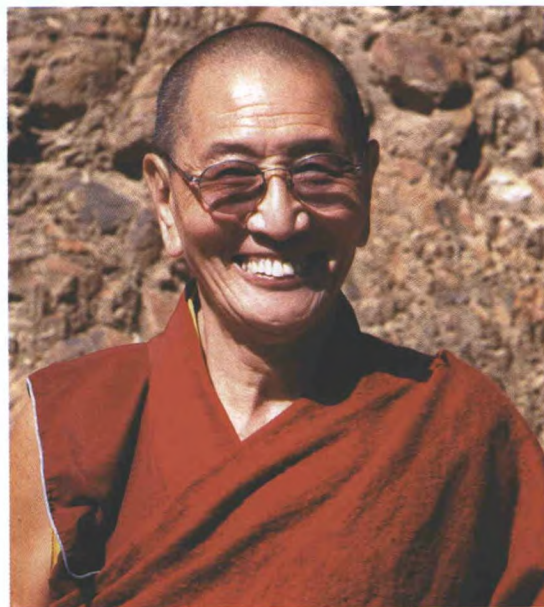


Photo Bob Cayton

Ven. Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche



## GESHE LHUNDUB SOPA:

In that first moment [of sitting down to practice] start by contemplating impermanence. Think, last night I could have died. How fortunate that I still have this human life. Nagarjuna says life is so delicate like a bubble on water. A bubble looks shiny and firm but it can be so easily destroyed by just one touch. Between this life and the next, there's only the breath, in and out. If one time you breathe out and you don't breathe in, that's it. So therefore reflect on how fortunate you are to still have this life that provides a special opportunity for spiritual practice, and determine that you will not waste it. Then go on to think about the advantages of this precious human rebirth as the graduated path (Lam-rim) explains.

Je Tsong Khapa says that without the thought of renouncing samsara you cannot give rise to bodhichitta. Without bodhichitta you can't enter the Mahayana path. So, you have to first give rise to renunciation. The whole thought of renouncing samsara is difficult for many people, who for the most part cling to this life, always wanting a successful, wealthy, healthy life, and never thinking about the spiritual. If you first start with meditating on death and impermanence, and the advantages of a human rebirth, you will destroy the mind clinging to this life, which will lead you to focus on concern for future lives, and as a result you will be inspired to practice. You will realize how important it is that you utilize this very opportunity to protect yourself from falling into the hell realms and even the god realms, right now while you are still alive and endowed with this human form.

After that you should reflect on the problem of clinging to future lives by thinking about karma, the law of cause and effect, and the four noble truths, etc. Whether you will be born in the lower realms or higher realms doesn't matter, any life in samsara is impure and tied to suffering due to the power of karma and delusions. You have to meditate on the nature of these births in samsara. You should think, I want to get rid of these types of rebirth, I want complete freedom from samsara. Only with this basis can one then develop the Mahayana attitude.

Whether you practice Mahayana or Tantra you must turn your mind toward the goals of sentient beings. You must try to generate bodhichitta. Think, what can I do to help sentient beings fulfill their wishes, and determine that you, yourself, will help them reach their goal. When that mind becomes strong, then one develops bodhichitta. Try at least through words to get one's mind to think, "How good it would be if all sentient beings had happiness, if all sentient beings were free from misery," etc. Think

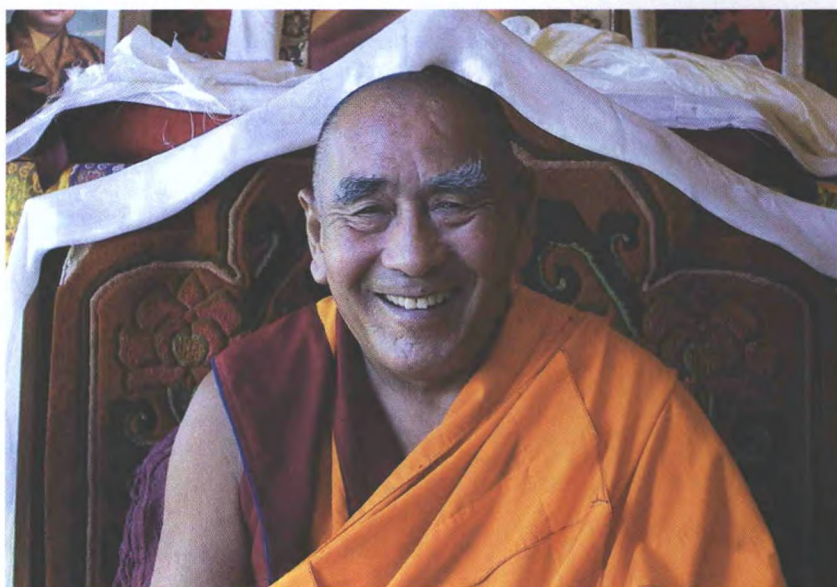
about those things and generate equanimity, compassion, love, etc. Then determine to quickly obtain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, in order to lead them to that perfect state. It may be difficult for those kinds of thoughts to be earnest at first, but at least say the words, and try to think about them seriously. You must do this *repeatedly*. You shouldn't look for some new interesting practice, jumping from practice to practice, like looking for fresh food or new tastes. Stay with these same topics until the mind is transformed.

So whatever practice you do, advanced or beginner, you should meditate on impermanence first, and then how fortunate you are to have this human rebirth, renunciation, and then bodhichitta etc. These meditations are most effective.

Do these practices until your mind *really* turns to the Mahayana, where you sincerely think about the benefit of others rather than of your own goals and wishes, where your self-centered mind is reduced and you spontaneously focus on concern for others. This is the *real* practice. Without this bodhichitta mind there is no real sadhana practice – merely visualizing and reciting empty words is not the correct sadhana practice. ☸

Geshe Lhundub Sopa was born in 1923 in Tsang, Central Tibet. He was ordained aged nine and entered Ganden Monastery. In 1941, aged eighteen, he joined Sera Je Monastery, and was chosen as one of His Holiness's debate examiners during the annual Prayer Festival in 1959. That year he fled Tibet for India, took his geshe exam in Buxador and received the (highest) Lharampa degree. In 1967, Geshe Sopa was invited by Professor Richard Robinson to join the faculty at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He has recently retired from his professorship, and was granted Professor Emeritus. He founded the Deer Park Buddhist Center in Wisconsin in 1979 and remains to this day its spiritual head and director.

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Geshe Lhundub Sopa

Photo Martin Chavez