

In Response to Appreciation after Following Rinpoche's Advice

The following is an excerpt from Rinpoche's wonderful response to a letter from a student in which the student explained how much benefit was clearly coming from following Rinpoche's advice. The text in italics is the student's letter.

“My very dear xxx,

Thank you very, very, very much for your kind letter, this is my reply, within some of your original letter.

Every day I dedicate much merit that your health will improve to your satisfaction and that everything you wish for will come true. On this auspicious day, I wished to write something to share with you about me, but as you will see you, everything I do is because of you. Thank you Lama.

If what you are doing is good, that's because of your wisdom, your faith and your compassion. Thank you very much.

I would like to explain, if you will allow me. I am President of a company that creates medical delivery systems between doctors and the government as well as other insurance companies around the world. WITH YOU AS MY EXAMPLE, I HAVE HELPED TENS OF THOUSANDS OF YOUNG, OLD AND PENNILESS PEOPLE FIND AND RECEIVE CARE FROM A DOCTOR. THANK YOU LAMA!

That is because your wisdom, compassion and faith opened your heart. Thank you very much.

Because of you, I learned how to care for a beautiful Mahayana Buddhist shrine with many thangkas and statues of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. I have photos of the Dalai Lama on my shrines. I am asked to set up shrines for important Buddhist teachers that come to our community. Thank you Lama!

WOW! Thank you. Can't imagine!

Because of you, I now have a strong motivation to start an FPMT Center in the area I live. I am in contact with FPMT International Office to help me along the path and I already have several doctors and sponsors as well who want to see an FPMT center manifest within a few years.

Thank you very much. Can you imagine how urgent it is to have a Dharma learning center? If you think of the world situation and how much suffering there is—think of all the problems, famine, disease and torture in all those Arab countries like Syria and so forth and in many places in the world; the demonstrations, killing and so forth; then all the new diseases that are coming, diseases the hospital cannot help; as well as tsunamis, the danger of fire, water, air and earthquakes.

Sentient beings in the six realms including oneself have unbelievable suffering. They experience the six types of suffering—the general sufferings of samsara; the eight types of suffering; and the three types of suffering—the suffering of pain, the suffering of change and pervasive compounding suffering. Particularly, there is the suffering of the three lower

realms: the eight major hot hells, eight major cold hells, four neighboring hells and the ordinary hells. Then there is the particular suffering of the pretas—the unbelievable, unbelievable great suffering of hunger and thirst. Some pretas don't get food and drink even for 10,000 years. Pretas have outer obscurations, food obscurations and inner obscurations. First of all, they have the suffering of not being able to find food and drink. Then at last they find it, they see food and drink from afar but when they go to get it they can't walk. They find it so difficult to walk, like a very old person, very shaky, and so unbelievably exhausting. Then there are karmic guardians blocking the way that don't allow them to pass. Then when they reach it, there's no food and drink there—it was like a mirage, a hallucination—and they are so disappointed. Unbelievable. They don't get food for thousands of years. Can you imagine the disappointment? Then even when they do find food and drink it's all garbage, pus and blood. The other thing is that when they try to take in the food or drink their mouths are so tiny like the eye of a needle. Then even if one drop does go in, the more suffering pretas have one or two knots that make it difficult to swallow, or the food burns them, so there is always the suffering of burning. And then of course even if they find food, there are tens of thousands of pretas, numberless pretas all trying to get it, so the powerful ones take away the food and drink. And for the pretas, even though the moon is cold, for them it's hot, and where they live it's like sitting on hot copper. Can you imagine?

Because the pretas have so much suffering, I try to make charity of water and food for them. It's very good to be able to try to do this. Each time you make charity of food 100 billion pretas not only find food but also get liberated from the preta realm—the mantra you recite has that power. I do mostly two types of charity and each one has that benefit, but there are more. So if I am at a place where there's water—a stream or spring, for example—I do more. Also I try to do the *sur* offering with burning *tsampa* but that somehow has more obstacles. If somebody makes a fire the *tsampa* gets burned but I'm not always able to do the prayer because often I am doing other things at that time, sometimes I'm doing letters or doing more of other things. So there are more obstacles to making the *sur* offering. The *sur* offering is making charity to the smell-eaters, the preta spirits. The smell of the burning *tsampa* is the food but they don't get the food just by burning the *tsampa*—you have to also recite a mantra given by the Buddha seven times. Due to the Buddha's kindness and power, this mantra has the power for them to get so much benefit.

One Tibetan man was in prison in Tibet and experienced great hunger there. The prisoners were only given one or two tea *momos* a day, very, very small about the size of three finger tips. So when they went for peepee they would look for bones in the field outside the house. If they found a dry bone they would put it in the mouth and that would help them, it would bring energy. Also when the Chinese who were looking after the prisoners made kaka, the prisoners would take off the outside of the kaka and inside there were many undigested beans, so they would eat that. And then when the Chinese cooked food in the house next door the prisoners could smell the food and that smell helped to nourish them, it was so useful. Therefore, ever since the Tibetan man left prison he has been doing *sur* every day because he had a clear experience of hunger and realized how important the smell of food is for these beings.

In Taiwan they sell packets of *sur* ingredients, but it's not really *sur*. It is some kind of plant and it doesn't have the smell of food, it has a plant smell. It's very sad that many of our Sangha there were buying this and using it. I told them not to use it because it doesn't smell

of food. So you must use *tsampa* because the *sur* must have a food smell. If possible mix the *tsampa* with some butter and also a special ingredient called the Twenty-five Substances. I made some of this in America. Each one of these substances has a specific purpose. If you want to learn more about this Holly can send you the benefits of the twenty-five substances. By doing the *sur* offering practice, you repay karmic debts to the sentient beings and it helps you to be successful, to be born in a pure land and to pacify obstacles.

Then there is the suffering of the animals. One major suffering that animals have is being eaten by one another. You eat one animal and another animal eats you. Also, being extremely foolish. Animals are used by human beings, even those that live with human beings are used for work, and so forth. They have unbelievable, unbelievable suffering.

Human beings have five types of suffering of birth. Many of us don't remember suffering in the mother's womb and when we were born. I met only one student who remembered coming out of the womb. She's Arabian. Then there is the suffering of old age; there are five outlines for that, so much suffering. Then, there is so much suffering from sickness and lastly so much suffering from death. Lama Tsongkhapa explained all these sufferings in five outlines. Then there is so much suffering due to meeting undesirable objects and so much suffering due to not finding desirable objects. Much of our life goes into trying to find desirable objects but even when we do find them, we can't get satisfaction. That's why even in the West millionaires and billionaires go to prison. After becoming famous rich people, billionaires, trillionaires and zillionaires go to prison because they are still not satisfied. They still do illegal things, like stealing, lying and killing, because they can't find any satisfaction. It is a huge suffering to become rich but still not be satisfied. You can't get any happiness and you are bored with what you have in your life. You experience unbelievable suffering in your relationships, with your possessions and in many ways. You don't get any satisfaction. On the other hand, those who are practicing Dharma and who renounce samsara by understanding the sufferings of samsara—the suffering of pain, the suffering of change and pervasive compounding suffering—even if they are living in a grass hut, just eating *tsampa* and water, or rice and *dahl*, have great satisfaction. They are very happy, so happy, more happy than the billionaires and zillionaires and trillionaires who are living their lives with the eight worldly dharma and self-cherishing thought.

Desire realm devas experience all three types of sufferings of samsara. They fight with the asuras, so they have unbelievable sufferings. In the form and formless realms the devas have renunciation to the desire realm and up through the levels of the form and formless realms depending on which they level are on, otherwise they have attachment. According to Geshe Sopa Rinpoche, the form realm gods have the suffering of change. They also have pervasive compounding suffering.

The formless realm has four categories: nothingness, limitless consciousness, limitless sky and the tip of samsara. In the formless realm there is the third type of suffering, pervasive compounding suffering, which is the foundation of the other two sufferings—the suffering of pain and suffering of change—in the other realms, the form realm and the desire realm where we are. The way they develop renunciation is the same as in Hinduism, through inner factors, through shamatha meditation. This is how they get reborn in the form realms and then the formless realm. The way they transfer to higher realms is by looking at the next realm as better, happier, by comparing the levels through analysis. This takes them through

to the last one, the tip of samsara. When they are born in the tip of samsara there is no other higher realm to compare it with, so when the karma to be born there is finished, because they still have karma to be born in the lower realms—or even in the hell realms or other desire realms—they get born there. They cannot get renunciation to that realm, the tip of samsara, by seeing how it is only suffering.

We have been born in the form and formless realms numberless times through the inner shamatha meditation by having no attachment to the desire realm and seeing the five sense pleasures as only suffering. So here in Buddhism renunciation includes the tip of samsara. It is said in the teachings that being in samsara is like sitting on the tip of a needle. If the tip of the needle is standing up out of the ground and you are sitting on that, there's no happiness at all. Buddha said in the *Mindfulness Sutra* that being in samsara is like that. It is like a naked body sitting in the middle of a fire.

However, this is all due to ignorance. All human sufferings are due to ignorance—the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change (temporary pleasures) and pervasive compounding suffering. I saw on the TV an insect on the branches of a tree on the river. Another animal like a gecko shot something like spit onto the insect's body from afar. Then after some time the fish in the water saw the small animal on the tree and shot water up at it. The animal fell down and the fish caught it in its mouth. All this suffering is due to ignorance. Then a snake was coming and there was a mongoose right in front of it. The mongoose bit the snake's face and the snake went away. One time I saw a snake up behind a mongoose and bite the back of its neck. The animal couldn't do anything. That's all due to ignorance. Then I saw on the TV some buffalo that came from very far to drink water. When the buffalo came to the water there was a crocodile under the water but you could just see the eye. So the first buffalo went to drink and the crocodile grabbed it. It tried to run away but it couldn't because of the mud and the crocodile dragged it away under the water. The rest of the animals ran away. So all these sufferings are due to ignorance.

All the human beings going by car, by airplane, by truck, by motorcycle, in a nice car, in an old car... People walking, people carrying things, people who have shops, restaurants, beggars who have nothing living on what they can get every day—and sometimes not getting anything... Rich people, billionaires, trillionaires, zillionaires, all these people, most of the human beings in this world are not Buddhist. They don't accept reincarnation and karma, they have no idea or they can't say. They only think of being happy this life. They have no idea what death means at all. Actually in the West scientists and especially intelligent people should study the mind and should study death. They should try to understand what death means, not only believing what is seen with the eyes, when the breathing stops and these signs. There are many people who look dead but who are not dead. The body is not moving and they can't breathe but they are not dead. Usually in hospitals in the West they are clinically regarded as dead.

In Dehradun one day I heard from the young driver of His Holiness Sakya Trizin that there was a young Tibetan lady in Dehradun who would often faint. One time her husband was away and she fainted and her breath stopped. Nothing was moving so they decided she was dead and took her to hospital. When the husband heard about it he didn't believe she was dead. He was the only one who knew that she would sometimes faint. So the husband came to the hospital and rubbed *tsampa* on her feet—you can also burn *tsampa* in the fire and put it

under the person's nose. Then the lady woke up. All the doctors in the hospital were completely surprised, unbelievably surprised, because they believed she was dead. Probably that's because it didn't follow the definition of death they had learned. The woman lived quite a number of years but recently passed away.

Geshe Lama Konchog said that a person can look completely dead because they are not moving, not breathing, and their hands are clenched tight like a rock, but if you burn *tsampa* and put it next to their nose they can wake up and come back to life. These things are not known in the West, people just believe the person is dead. In France, there was a child that doctors believed had no hope of survival. The doctors had completely given up. Then Geshe-la did one puja and the child completely recovered.

Some time ago in Nepal there was a family who decided their father was dead. They brought the body to Pashupatinath Temple to be cremated, washed the feet with water and put it on the firewood. Hindus take the body three times around the funeral pyre and then put it on top of the wood and set fire to some dry grass on the heart. When they started to burn the grass the man woke up. Then everybody came and hit him with the wood and killed him right there because they thought it was a spirit or something. They couldn't accept that he was alive. Of course, in the West people don't believe in spirits, so that's another matter, although sometimes they show movies about ghosts. But most people don't believe in ghosts. I saw stories about people being put in a coffin and carried to the cemetery, but they were not actually dead. They would scratch the inside of the box and the people could hear them scratching. So it looks like they didn't have the correct definition of clinical death. Besides that, my Guru Song Rinpoche told me that in Pagri, Tibet, near Bhutan, where I lived for three years, he saw a man without a head being fed with *tsampa* through the neck. The man would move his finger to his belly to show that he was hungry and he would shake to show that he was cold and people would carry him into the sun. But he had no head. Also I saw that Gungtang Tenpai Dronme said in his collection of teachings that in Kham there was a person without a head. The person was alive but had no head. So this is incredible karma. I wonder what answer they would have in the West? This is a very big question to the Western scientists.

My Guru Song Rinpoche passed away and then reincarnated. In his past life he was unbelievably expert in philosophy and in this present life he is also a great expert. He is in Ganden Monastery and he can remember his past life. When he was giving his first long life initiation in Spain, he was discussing with his attendant about the rituals. He said, "Oh, I remember that with the *gek-tor*, the first time you offer it you don't ring the bell, then the second time when you move it anticlockwise you turn the tormas and fire/butter lamp to face inwards." He said he remembered that and it was correct.

The conclusion is that all these sufferings are due to ignorance. So go to the city and watch. You can't imagine—people have no idea of the next life or the next lives. Not just one next life but the next *LIVES*. Life continues after this. They have to go through the six realms, the hells, hungry ghosts, animals and so forth, which they have been through an unbelievable number of times from beginningless rebirth and there will still be an endless number of rebirths and suffering if they don't practice Dharma and achieve the path—actualizing the Four Noble Truths in this life. So they can't remember at all the past rebirth and sufferings and they can't see at all the endless future rebirths and sufferings, unbelievable sufferings,

oceans of sufferings. Can you imagine? You can't stand this at all. You can see how much they are suffering due to ignorance—the ignorance not knowing karma, not knowing about reincarnation and not knowing Dharma. Because of not knowing Dharma they don't know what is right and what is wrong. That is the biggest problem in the world and in the West. Because of this, there are so many other problems. Parents do not know how to look after children and how to guide them and school teachers in the school have huge problems. Then besides the ignorance not knowing Dharma there is the simultaneously born concept holding the I as truly existent as well as the aggregates. These two are the root of samsara and the root of the oceans of samsaric sufferings. The hallucinated mind believes there is a real I in the sense of existing from its own side and so forth while there is no such thing, while the I exists by being merely labeled by the mind, as well as all the phenomenon—samsara, nirvana, hell, enlightenment, happiness, problems.

So therefore in Buddhism to eliminate ignorance and cut the root of samsara we need to realize the right view. Therefore you can see how urgent and important it is to actualize the right view. Can't wait even a second not realizing that. So now that's why the common path, the three principal aspects of the path to enlightenment is so important and particularly the right view. Without realizing right view there is no way to be free from samsara - only endless suffering again and again and again and again. So anything you do without the practice of right view is not the antidote to samsara. It becomes the cause of samsara and not the antidote to samsara, including visualizing yourself as the deity or any practice. But even playing football or cricket or actions such as having a party and so forth done with the meditation understanding that these things are empty and that what appears is merely labeled by the mind like an illusion or like a dream become the antidote to samsara. Even those actions, such as having a party, if they are done with the realization of emptiness or with the understanding that they are merely labeled, empty as they appear, merely labeled by the mind or a hallucination, like a dream or like an illusion, become an antidote to samsara and a cause to achieve liberation, the ultimate happiness.

[I appreciate the] FPMT online learning center and [want to] show others the great benefit of learning the Dharma in this way. Over the years, I have sponsored teachings of Gelug monks in my area and have been a co-sponsor for His Holiness the Dalai Lama's visits on many occasions. Thank you Lama!

It's really unbelievable, really great. Amazing, amazing, amazing good luck, merit, but also awakening the sentient beings, bringing them to enlightenment, causing them to stop being born in the lower realms and get a good rebirth, achieve liberation and full enlightenment. Amazing, amazing. Inviting His Holiness and the geshe, those who are really good in explaining Dharma that's really very good help, really needed, really the best thing, real help, really needed by the sentient beings to develop the basic qualities of compassion and wisdom. Many people want to contribute and to invite His Holiness and the great lamas but they don't have the money to do so.

Because of you, every day for over a year I have been reading the Exalted Sublime Golden Light. By doing this practice, I now understand the many teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha in relation to impermanence as well as having a deep understanding of my own personal bodhicitta. Thank you Lama!

That's excellent, excellent, that you have come to understand, are awakened, to the most precious teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, the teaching of the *Golden Light Sutra*. This is more precious than the whole sky filled with wish-granting jewels. It brings great peace to the country and to the world. It is a great help for leaders to get power and it stops the country from being attacked or taken over by enemies. Reading this sutra is very good protection for the country, other countries cannot attack it and if they do they lose their power. It is also mentioned that reading this sutra heals all the people in the city. This is really, really good for you. You get amazing, amazing benefits as mentioned at the beginning of the *Golden Light Sutra*. You become an unbelievable precious object for others to make offerings to or serve, an incredible precious object for other sentient beings to collect merits. The *Golden Light Sutra* has so much benefit.

Of course your bodhicitta is the source of happiness for all sentient beings including your enemy—temporary and ultimate happiness, liberation from samsara, up to enlightenment. It is the source of all happiness for all the numberless hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, suras and asuras. Your bodhicitta is what brings the highest meaning in life. That fulfills why you are born as a human being this time. However many hours, days, minutes or seconds you live bodhicitta makes your life most meaningful and beneficial for every sentient being including all the insects you see in the road, all the birds flying in the sky, dogs, cats, mosquitoes, the tiniest animals you can't see with the eyes just with machines up to the largest animals like whales, and the Himalayan yetis, the abominable snow man.

Because of you, I am reading as much as possible, Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand by the great Pabongka Rinpoche. Thank you Lama!

There are great, very deep and vast to understand lam-rim teachings by Lama Tsongkhapa: the *Great Lam-Rim*, *Middle Lam-Rim*, *Small Lam-Rim*, *Three Principles of the Path* and any teaching by Lama Tsongkhapa. The *Middle Lam-Rim* is not yet available as a book but it is in our study program, the *Basic Program*. For you, because you are very intelligent it's very good to study this *Middle Lam-Rim*, but *Liberation* has many stories and it's quite simple so it's very good to learn that first and afterwards read Lama Tsongkhapa. *Liberation* gives you the basis to understand Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings. So thank you very, very, very much.

Because of you, I am meditating for 30 minutes every morning and evening on emptiness and compassion. Recently, I have started a Dzogchen practice. Thank you Lama!

This means two very, very, very basic Buddhist realizations, compassion and right view. Lama Tsongkhapa said that if you only have the realization of emptiness you can't achieve enlightenment, but if there's compassion then it's possible to achieve enlightenment. So these two are very, very, very important. Without realizing emptiness you cannot be free from samsara and without compassion you cannot achieve enlightenment.

I have no idea about Dzogchen but ultimate Dzogchen could be mahamudra, the extremely subtle wisdom understanding emptiness experiencing infinite bliss.

Because of you, I am able to be a member of Tse Chen Ling Center; it is where I first met you. I received the Medicine Buddha Sadhana from you and received your blessings. I still keep my vows and mantras everyday that I promised. I STOPPED EATING MEAT ON THAT DAY IN YOUR HONOR. Because of your example, I support the Animal Liberation Fund,

Kopan Monk Sponsorship and other Buddhist charities all over the world. Thank you Lama!

I'm not sure if you received my blessings. I'm not sure I have blessings. I will have to look for that! Ha ha. I don't think so. But thank you very, very much. Tse Chen Ling Center has Geshe Dagpa and he is very learned so people receive correct teachings. The fact that you kept your vows and precepts means you are sincere and a person who can be trusted. Because you stopped eating meat, I say thank you with my ten fingers together at my heart. Thank you from all the numberless animals, the cows and sheep and frogs and spiders, the jellyfish, crabs, lobsters, dogs and snakes and all the animals. I thank you on behalf of all the numberless animal beings that are living under the ocean where there is no light. There are many millions of animals under the ocean that eat each other, the big ones eat the small ones and the small ones eat the big ones. Thank you very much because they can't speak. They can't demonstrate. Ants are too small to march in the road and demonstrate. No matter how many come there, they would get crushed under the shoes and the cars.

Of course when one person stops eating meat but the rest are still eating it that doesn't make much difference to the amount of meat being eaten. But if more and more friends stop eating meat because they are inspired by that one person, when it becomes hundreds and thousands of people who stop eating meat, then less and less animals are killed. Therefore one person eating meat does harm animals. And of course you have to understand that if a buddha, bodhisattva or great yogi eats meat there is incredible benefit for that animal to be liberated. It purifies the animal and its consciousness is liberated to the pure realm or to a higher realm from the lower realms.

When I was in hospital I saw on the TV so many hundreds of animals being sold to Indonesia to be killed. I think the business had been going on for many years but this was the first time it was exposed. In Indonesia the goats were standing in line waiting to be killed. They didn't show the slaughterhouse just the line. They showed one cow tied up with ropes and they were dragging it down to the place to be killed although they didn't show the actual place. I didn't see but I heard somebody say that they killed the cow by hitting it on the head. The cow didn't want to go down, it had great difficulty. I thought I can't stop this. I don't have that power. But in the future wherever I go to teach, even if the subject is tantra, I will request people to try to be vegetarian. I will try to announce this all over the place and in some places the number of animals killed may become less if more people become vegetarian. It may become less. I thought that if more people become vegetarian, it means the people who do the killing will have less opportunity to create negative karma and also less animals will be killed.

You may have seen that one young girl in Singapore decided to take precepts every day of her life when she heard that I got sick. I didn't know her before but later she came to Kopan and I met her. I told her to be careful when she is travelling. Sometimes she sends different soft toys from Singapore.

So I want to say thank you with my two palms together on behalf of all the animals for helping with animal liberation. Thank you on behalf of all the animals, then of course also the hell beings, pretas, human beings, suras, asuras and all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

This is so good, so fantastic. WOW, WOW!!!! Ha ha. So I hope to see you very soon. Thank you very much.

Even when I invite guests to eat in a hotel I don't order meat. It's possible that when you invite people for a meal, the hotel might kill goats or chickens just for those people. The exception is my Gurus. For them it is different and for Khadro-la. If you offer lunch to Khadro-la it's the same as offering to the deity and there is no question that the animal is so lucky. The animal was killed already, if it is offered to Khadro-la it is so lucky. By offering to my Gurus of course it benefits the animals but for guests whether they are lay or Sangha I usually only offer vegetarian food. But if I meet you, I might serve dinosaur meat!!!

In closing, can I tell you of my incredible dream, a Buddhist dream that has changed me in such positive ways. The dream starts, I am walking out from a beautiful tropical island into perfect surf, perfect temperature, perfect smells... Suddenly, I look far out to the horizon and see a giant tsunami wave coming towards me. At my feet the Water is being pulled out towards the wave. My first thought is to run to the island for help, but realize that I will not make it and why run for what would be the last few minutes of my life. At this moment for some reason, I wake up in my dream and realized that I am dreaming. I say to myself, I am a Buddhist I do not believe in a permanent death, why should I be afraid? Then I think to myself, if I am dreaming then surely not die in my real life, and lets see what happens. Turning my back to the wave, I hold my breath and wait for it to overcome me. I smile on last time at the island... The wave hits me and I am tossed and thrown until I can no longer hold my breath. I open my eyes. I can make out the delivery room at a hospital and someone holding me by my feet above his head. I scream, as I could no longer hold my breath. My voice sounds like a baby's cry. Could my last breath of this life be the first breath of my next life?

After death there is the intermediate stage. You have to go through the intermediate state unless you are going to be born in the formless realm. Therefore, the last breath of the previous life cannot be the first breath of the next life, no.

Please instruct me and be my Guru in this life as I have been your student in many past lifetimes. I hope in my next life it will not take me thirty years to meet you.

Of course, yes. Glad to accept. Of course, I don't have the qualities of a Guru but I'm glad to accept. You try and I try. Welcome to the happiness of future lives. Welcome to ultimate happiness, liberation from samsara. Especially welcome to full enlightenment and to free all sentient beings from the oceans of suffering and bring them to enlightenment.

With much love and prayers,
Lama Zopa"

*Colophon: Dictated to Ven Sarah Thresher, Tushita Meditation Centre, Dharamsala, India. May 2012.
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