

Letter From Lama Zopa Rinpoche Regarding the Disasters of the Elements

My dear loving compassionate readers,

You may wonder what to do, what prayers to make, when there are disasters such as tornados, hurricanes, heavy rain, storms, floods, earthquakes, or fires, as well as disasters that destroy crops; disasters that destroy entire towns and cities within one hour; disasters that cause so many billions of dollars of damage, and so much money is spent to rebuild the towns; disasters where so many hundreds and thousands of people die or become homeless, have no homes, no food or clean water, and so forth. So here I am offering some suggestions on what to do so that you can help the country and save so many peoples lives; some suggestions to prevent the destruction of houses, villages, and cities that are caused by the elements (fire, water, wind, and earth).

Even though these kinds of problems are so big, even though there are numberless buddhas, yet if someone with a very sincere heart takes refuge one-pointedly, without doubt, in even one buddha such as Chenrezig (Compassionate Eye Looking One), Padmasambhava, or Medicine Buddha, if someone takes strong refuge and prays to even just one buddha and recites the mantras (such as the name mantra), by doing this it can change the situation completely, it can change natural disasters and prevent war. Whatever problems there are can be loosened and even completely stopped. The weather can change in that very hour or in the next hour by the power of one person making prayers.

There is no question that if the person who makes the prayers actually has realizations – not even tantric realizations, even just the realization of bodhichitta, which is actually the best realization – if a person with bodhichitta prays, then every single word, every single prayer, has incredible power.

In the past there are stories of many bodhisattvas and great saints who were able to prevent flooding, who were able to change completely the direction of rivers and even stop the rivers altogether and walk right across it to the other side.

There is one story of Lama Kālsang Jamyang Mönlam who had bodhichitta realizations. When Tashi Lhunpo monastery was in danger of being flooded, he wrote on a stone, “If it is true that I have bodhichitta, then the water should turn back.” After writing this on the stone, the river actually turned and went backwards.

There are many stories of the power of bodhichitta. How it can control and affect the elements. There are even examples in Christianity, as well as many examples in Buddhism.

There is one story about the great St. Francis of Assisi. One time he was living and meditating in a cave with his disciples. His disciples asked St. Francis to stop the water that flowed inside the cave and that was disturbing their meditation. St. Francis went to the place where the water was flowing down the mountain and said, "Sister, my disciples can't meditate." Then the water stopped flowing from that time until the present day. It would be considered very inauspicious if the water would start to flow again. So the water stopped flowing due to the power of St. Francis's bodhichitta.

St. Francis is exactly like the Kadampa geshe, even in his external appearance, even though he was from another tradition. His mind was totally pure; there was no stain of the eight worldly concerns, and he was a totally renounced, pure, spiritual person. Like the Kadampa geshe St. Francis also asked his disciples to criticize him. He preferred to be criticized rather than be praised. You can even feel his gentleness from his statues and from his face, which is a sign of having bodhichitta and having a totally tame, subdued mind. He seems so peaceful and humble and very wonderful to look at, very inspirational. All those birds loved him and always stayed around him and on his body. This is also a sign that he was a great holy being, a saint having bodhichitta.

In the *Bodhicharyavatara (The Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life)* by the great Indian bodhisattva Shantideva, who was a great scholar and highly attained bodhisattva, it says:

If the inner enemy, delusion, is subdued
It is like having destroyed all the external enemies.

If, for example, you have leather under your feet then it is as if the whole earth, all the thorns and bushes, are covered by leather, because wherever you walk no thorns can go through the leather, and nothing can harm you.

So in the same way, once your enemy – the delusions – is extinguished, then even though there are numberless enemies outside, they too are stopped and destroyed, not only for this life but forever, in all future lives.

One time in Italy there was a wolf in the forest that harmed many people, and no one could go into the forest. St. Francis of Assisi said he wanted to go out and talk to the wolf. The people begged him not to go, but when St. Francis met the wolf, the wolf licked his feet, like a dog meeting his master, so happy to see his master, lying on his back and showing happiness. St. Francis asked the wolf not to harm the people and that in return he would beg food for the wolf and give it to him. After that, the wolf stopped harming others. Because St. Francis's mind was subdued and he had no ego, no self-cherishing thought, then even vicious animals could not harm him.

One great Tibetan master, who was a top scholar and ex-abbot of Sera Je (one of the largest monastic university around Lhasa where there were many thousands of monks studying), had a cat. From the moment the cat came to live with the abbot it stopped catching and eating mice. Even when the cat saw mice running around the room, it just stayed very quiet near the

abbot. This was due to the abbot's blessing, due to his tamed mind, his bodhichitta blessing, and his good heart. The abbot's bodhichitta transformed even the cat's mind so that it did not harm others.

By having bodhichitta realizations, your prayers become incredibly powerful. Similarly, if someone has realizations of emptiness, their prayers also become extremely powerful. Also, if a spiritual person who has a very pure heart, unstained by the 8 worldly concerns, makes prayers, their prayers will also have incredible power. Also, if a person who is living a pure life, in pure morality (lay or ordained, but especially ordained) prays, their prayers have a lot of power.

When someone with any of these realizations prays, then the devas, nagas, and all the other beings, including the eight groups of worldly beings (who are very connected with the weather and the elements and who cause the elements to be destructive), will listen more and obey these practitioners. Even if the practitioner does not have the other realizations mentioned but at least lives in morality, **then these beings will obey this person, and the harms and destructions from the elements can be stopped.**

Some years ago there was a hurricane in Madison, Wisconsin, USA, and it was coming toward Deer Park where my guru Geshe Sopa lives. Geshe Sopa is one of the great, rare, outstanding scholars, who is very learned, very pure in morality, and has a good heart. He is also the guru of Lama Yeshe. Geshe Sopa has been teaching in the university in Madison for about 20 years; now he is retired. On the day of the hurricane, Geshe Sopa was teaching at the university, and he thought that Deer Park would definitely be completely damaged. When Geshe-la was returning back to Deer Park, he wondered what might have happened to the monks and geshees there. On the road the police were stopping all the cars and not letting them go in the direction of Deer Park. Geshe-la explained to the police that he was returning to his home in Deer Park. Then the police found out that Deer Park was a Tibetan monastery. They said that a very strange thing had happened - the hurricane had been moving toward Deer Park, but then it went around Deer Park and didn't damage the center at all. Although the hurricane damaged many of the houses in the area, Deer Park itself was not touched. This was due to the monks living in the center, due to the power of their practice and pure morality.

Also, a few years ago there was a very heavy earthquake in Taipei, Taiwan. Many people died and many, many houses and buildings collapsed. One very simple family, who had a very good heart, were always helping people and were extremely devoted to Buddhism. They lived in a very shaky, old, simple house. Even by looking at it, the house looked as if it would easily collapse. However, after the earthquake hit, there was absolutely no damage to their house. Also they had many offering bowls filled in the upstairs room that they offered to the guru, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. They thought that the water would surely have spilled from the bowls, but when they looked, the bowls were still very full, not at all broken, and not a single drop of water had spilled out. The bowls were still completely full with water, not half full but filled up to the top (except for the width of one rice grain). This was because the family did many prayers and chanted Compassionate Buddha mantra every day, and they

were extremely devoted, very good, pure-hearted people. So the Dharma had protected them and their house.

Some years ago in Florida it was reported in the news that a hurricane was going to hit Florida. One long-time student, George Propps, rang me to ask me to do prayers. I did some Mickey Mouse prayer then I gave him a job (even though he had asked me to do it). I gave him the job of reciting the Bodhisattva Kshitigarbha's mantra. He made strong prayers by taking refuge in the Bodhisattva Kshitigarbha. The hurricane didn't hit Florida but went around. He was so astonished that he rang me and said, "It worked!"

There are so many various methods, but here are some drops for you to get some idea what to do when these problems arise. This is not only to protect yourself and your property, but also if there are problems happening in other places, other countries, you can definitely help by doing these practices, or whatever you can do, with a sincere heart, full of faith.

This will help save the lives of so many numberless people as well as so many animals, so much property, into which people put so much money, and also it helps the government. Even if we are not in danger, we have the responsibility to protect other sentient beings.

When we get sick, we take medicine or go to the hospital, and there is no question of religion, so in the same way, these are just methods to help. Here it is a question of staying alive or dying, so this is just simply to help. These are my suggestions to help; these different mantras and prayers to recite are just methods.

I sincerely suggest these practices and hope there is some benefit to rescue many others from the dangers of various disasters.

PRACTICES TO DO FOR VARIOUS NATURAL DISASTERS ¹
(TORNADOS, HURRICANES, HEAVY RAIN, STORMS, FLOODS, EARTHQUAKES,
FIRES, ETC.)

1. Tea offering to the merit field (which includes all the Three Jewels [Buddha, Dharma, Sangha], mind-seal deities, bodhisattvas, arhats, dakas, dakinis, and protectors who are beyond samsara.)
2. Offer tea to the eight worldly ones (*de gye*), especially, the eight groups of worldly devas, who are closely connected to the elements and who create the wind, water, earth, and fire and the violence and disasters that are created by these elements that are so destructive.
3. Lion-Face Dakini practice
4. Recite Kshitigarbha mantra
5. White Umbrella prayer
6. Padmasambhava prayer to remove obstacles
7. Medicine Buddha puja and mantra
8. Chenrezig mantra with tong-len
9. Take the 24-hour eight Mahayana precepts

When doing the prayers to the deities such as Lion-Face Dakini, etc., visualize the deity and then recite the mantra with full confidence. Rely upon the deity, thinking that the deity has all the power and has manifested for us, sentient beings, in different aspects for different purposes, for sentient beings who have that karma.

Medicine Buddha practice is not only for healing. In addition, it is very powerful for success and for solving any problems. Medicine Buddha practice is good for someone who has died, for family problems, for someone who is sick, for receiving happiness and freedom from suffering, for finding a job, for success in business, etc.

White Umbrella deity is very powerful to protect from the danger of the elements. With strong faith and strong refuge, you can even put the White Umbrella deity's mantra or picture around. Then you should visualize that rainfalls of nectar are emitted. This nectar

¹ Lama Zopa Rinpoche would like everyone to be perfectly clear and not to be confused by the term "natural disasters." While one could mistakenly understand this term to mean disasters that exist in nature without a "man made" cause, it must be understood that these events are the result of karma created by sentient beings. These disasters do not occur from their own side without a cause and while they manifest as forces in nature they are the result of the actions of body, speech and mind of sentient beings.

stops the fires, purifies the suffering of the insects, and purifies the negative karma of all the sentient beings. All are liberated.

THE PRACTICE OF GURU PADMASAMBHAVA THAT SAVES FROM EARTH DANGER

I request Urgyen Pädma Chung Na (Urgyen rising from the lotus).
Please bless the wishes to succeed naturally.

Prayer to Guru Rinpoche to Clear Away Obstacles on the Path

Precious guru, embodiment of all buddhas of the three times;
Great bliss, lord of all accomplishments;
Wrathful power, who dispels all hindrances and subdues demons:
Pray bestow your blessings.

Du sum sang gyä guru rin po chhe
Ngo drub kun dag de wa chhen pöi zhab
Bar chhä kün sel dü dü drag po tsäl
Sol wa deb so jin gyi lab tu söl

Please remove all outer, inner, and secret obstacles and
grant your blessings to accomplish my wishes spontaneously.

Chhyi nang sang wäi bar chhä zhi wa dang
Sam pa lhün gyi drub par jin gyi lob

Then recite the following:

When, due to the obstacles of the elements earth, water, fire, and wind, this borrowed
illusory body meets the time to perish, by requesting without the two-pointed mind of doubt
to Urgyen (Padmasambhava) and the goddesses of the four elements, there is no doubt that
the four elements will be naturally pacified.

I request Urgyen Pädma Chung Na (Urgyen rising from the lotus).
Please bless the wishes to succeed naturally.

OM AH HUM VAJRA GURU PADMA SIDDHI HUM (Recite many times.)

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Also, reciting OM MANI PADME HUM with tong-len practice for one hour each day can stop
the dangers of the earth element.

Also reading the Kshitigarbha Sutra can be done.

Colophon:

This advice was given in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, March 1995.

PROTECTION FROM EARTHQUAKE HARM

Write the following mantra horizontally on long paper. Then consecrate it with black agar incense and *gyiwong*. (*Gyiwong* is a special substance from the bodies of human beings, elephants, and cows. This doesn't mean that you have to have all three kinds. Usually a Tibetan doctor will have this.)

This mantra should not be shown to other people. Put this protection on the walls of the house. Also people can wear it.

OM AH BHARA CHAKRA SHRI TAY MUNAY YAY AH PAH NA YA
Protect this place from all the dangers of earthquakes RA KYA RA KYA

For protection that can be worn, write the whole mantra, and then write the following:
Protect the bearer of this mantra from all the dangers of earthquakes RA KYA RA KYA

These instructions come from Gampopa Dagpo Lhaje.

If there are good lamas close by, then the mantras can be blessed by them. If not, you should think that all the numberless buddhas' wisdom absorbs into this mantra and it is stabilized forever as protection. With strong faith wear this protection and put it around the house.

EARTHQUAKE ADVICE

Rinpoche has advised all the centers in Taiwan to do the following practices to prevent more problems from earthquakes. Rinpoche said these practices are important for the students there to do.

1. Every day, the geshe should recite *Nam tsa nan gya* and *Tra shi tseg pa*.
2. Students should take the eight Mahayana precepts as much as possible and make prayers that there be no more natural disasters there and every where else.
3. Recite Lama Tsongkhapa's Migtsema mantra as much as possible with prayers.
4. Recite the Padmasambhava prayer (The Practice of Guru Padmasambhava that Saves From Earth Danger), which Rinpoche said is very powerful. Do this at least three times in the morning and evening, or more, if possible.
5. Read the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Heart Sutra* to purify negative karma.
6. Recite prayers to Tara, especially the Praises to the Twenty-one Taras.
7. Recite the Lion-Face Dakini prayer.

Keep doing these prayers for 3 to 5 months.

PROTECTION FROM FIRE

On a square paper, put poisonous blood. Then write this mantra with ink mixed with powder of crystal.

TADYATHA OM TARE TUTTARE TURE EH KHA TZAA DI SHANKHARA SHANKHARA AGNI BAHAYA SHANKHARA TSARA TSARA TSIRI TSIRI BUHURU BUHURU BHARA MARA TAM BAHAYA BHARA MARA TAM BAHAYA JALA NAM JANA LAM SVAHA

Put this mantra into a white tsa- tsa. Sew this tsa-tsa together with auspicious substances of water, such as crystal, sea salt, or water tree. Hide this in the southeast, which is the direction of the fire deity, in a place where it will not get damaged. It is said that in this way, the place is protected from fire. It is even protected from the fire at the end of the world.

This is a terma, the hidden treasure of Guru Tseten Gyältsän.

With strong faith, these methods can help, but it doesn't mean that it purifies the karma of earthquake or dangers of fire. You have to do separate practices to purify that. But these practices can become the conditions to not experience earthquakes and dangers of fire. The most important solution that makes it possible not to experience earthquakes, hurricanes, fires, or floods is to purify the cause, which exists on your mental continuum – which is actually your own mind – to abstain from committing negative actions and to live in pure morality.

Therefore, these mantras can help. If one has mountains of gold and diamonds or millions of dollars, one can't stop these dangers, but these methods can help.

Colophon:

Protection from fire was scribed by Patricia Weill on 22 September 1999.

ADVICE FOR BUSHFIRES

Rinpoche would like to suggest that if the bush fires in Australia are still burning out of control, then the different Australian centers could do eleven Medicine Buddha pujas.

If these pujas are done with strong prayers to Medicine Buddha to stop the winds and to bring rain, this can definitely help the situation, especially if the center geshees also attend the pujas. In Rinpoche's observation, Medicine Buddha came out as being very beneficial.

Colophon:

Advice given in Jan 2002 to the Australian centers and scribed by Ven. Roger Kunsang.

As far as what the scientists say about the disasters of the elements, they never mention the mind, the creator who experiences. They merely explain the external evolution of how it happens. Even if this is correct, it is only a short-term explanation. It doesn't really explain why the whole evolution happened in the first place, why it had to happen. Similarly, why is a baby born handicapped to a particular family? It's the same question. Why did that baby have to be born to that family? Even if this is explained by genetics, why wasn't that child born to a different family with proper genetics? There are no answers to these questions, as long as we don't mention the mind.

In the simplest teachings of Buddhism you can understand where the hurricanes and earthquakes come from. They come as a result of the ten non-virtuous actions. The cause of these karmas can be from committing one of the ten non-virtues or as a result of committing several of the ten non-virtues. It could be the negative karmic result of stealing, it could be the result of ill will towards others, or it could be the result of wrong views, saying that reincarnation doesn't exist or Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha don't exist as objects of refuge. Part of the negative karmic result of heresy might be not having a guide or shelter after a disaster. These disasters could be the karmic result of killing or any of the other ten non-virtues. It could be the result of one or several. So that's karma, the mind that experiences the earthquake or hurricane as the result of the self-cherishing thought from either attachment or anger. But attachment and anger are closely related. The real root is ignorance, the unknowing mind, that which does not know the ultimate nature of mind, the I, or the aggregates.

So remember, there is the cause, karma, and then there are the conditions. The earthquake is not coming from outside; it is coming from your mind. We should also remember that even if outer precautions are taken, if there is still a cause for harm, then that result will ripen. For example, even buildings that were built with all the earthquake precautions have been destroyed during earthquakes, and buildings that were built without any earthquake precautions have been left undamaged. If there is cause for the building to be destroyed, it will happen; if there is no cause, then it will not happen.

This is according to the view of all four schools of Buddhism. According to all schools of Buddhist philosophers, Shakyamuni Buddha said, "You are your own guide and also your own the enemy." That is reality, because whether you have problems or happiness every day is due to what you do with your mind, which way you make your mind think. If you make your mind think positively, you will have peace. If you make your mind think negatively, then you will have problems.

Ultimately, the best solution would be not to experience these problems ever. This is possible if, in our everyday life, we purify the cause of these problems, which is within us, not outside, which is our negative, disturbing, emotional thoughts (the self-centered mind). In relation to this mind arise ignorance, anger, and attachment. Then we engage in actions that become negative with these negative attitudes and create the evil karma that harms others and harms ourselves. Any external explanation, even if it is correct, is just an explanation of the

conditions for these problems. Without the inner cause – the negative karma – the outer condition for this problem couldn't happen.

Every day, we should pray to purify our past negative karma. Every day, we should try to abstain from negative karma. This is why it is important to take vows (lay or ordination) and to live in morality and not create negative karma. By taking promises (vows), by mentally making the decision to not do it again, it helps us not to commit the negative karma again. Even if you cannot take the vows in the presence of holy objects or the community of Sangha or from your spiritual teacher, you can still strongly make the decision to abstain from negative karma and to live in morality.

So the best, the ultimate solution for problems is Dharma practice, especially actualizing the path within your own mind and purifying the causes – karma and delusion – of every suffering (rebirth, old age, sickness, and death).

This is also the best solution for all sicknesses, all health problems, such as cancer. Also this is the best solution in order to have a long life, to be healthy, to have wealth, power, and reputation, to have harmony, to be peaceful and happy, to receive help from others, to receive affection and love from others, to receive support, and so forth.

With much love and prayers,

Lama Zopa

Colophon:

Letter from Lama Zopa scribed by Ven. Holly Ansett in September, October, and November 2002, while driving across the USA, and in Kachoe Dechen Ling, Aptos, California.

Entire document (letter and included practices) has been lightly edited by Ven. Constance Miller, Taos, New Mexico, in March 2003.