

The Three Vows (Talk 6)

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This is my last talk and I would like to do a kind of review about where we have come.

It seemed that everything we looked at through these 6 talks was seeped with motivation/intention and I would like to come back to that over and over again. It is a very important theme of this particular talk as well; that is, understanding that our motivation/intention is really the deciding factor in what our lives look like, how our activities manifest in the world, what our state of mind is.

Usually, of course, we don't know that. Usually, we have this experience of suffering that pervades our life, a sense of unsatisfactoriness, of restlessness, of anxiety and a sense that there is something wrong, but we are so caught up in a kind of speedy approach to our life, a blaming approach, we feel victimized, we feel there is something coming at us from the outside world. We feel that, if other people in our life would just get it together, everything would be OK. "If Gampo Abbey would get itself together, my life would be more peaceful". "If my family, friends and circumstances..." I just got off the phone talking to my father and mother about funeral arrangements for my aunt who is slowly dying and if this could just work out, everything would be fine.

We constantly look for external circumstances to change so that our lives will be more peaceful and happy, but the incredible, subtle, extremely grounded wisdom of the Buddha is that it will never change from the outside. Circumstances outside of us are not going to make our life better. The only thing that will make our life better is for us to work with our minds.

The most fundamental teaching of the Buddha is the one we just got, over and over again. We forget, we hear it intellectually, we see it over and over again and somehow we miss it, we ignore it, we say "oh! yes," I know that and then we move on. It is an utterly profound teaching, utterly profound and our lives would look quite different if we took this very much to heart and lived this way.

The territory we have traversed through these talks is really looking at what it means to work with our minds. On the most fundamental level, it is to look at *kunjung* of klesha and *kunjung* of karma. *Kunjung* of klesha we have from beginningless time developed with habits of falling into torturous, tormenting states of mind. They arise because of our past habitual patterns, we are caught in them, we are addicted to them, we are kleshaholics: "My name is Judith and I am a kleshaholic." We are addicted to kleshas, but we have not admitted, we have not accepted and understood that. That's the reason why we constantly blame external circumstances in our lives.

So when we look at the *kunjung* of klesha, we see that that addiction to kleshas is really the root of all of our suffering and we must admit, acknowledge, accept and experience that if we are to go on. *Kunjung* of karma: Karma is neutral, it is merely the fact of cause and effect, but it is our intention

that determines how our klesha is projected into the world. If our klesha poisons our intention, then we develop karma of body, speech and mind that is poisonous, that is torturous, that is tormenting. We project out that harm, from a momentary explosion in our mind, into storylines, into things that we say and do.

When we do that, we have started with something small and we have made it bigger and have guaranteed that kleshas will arise again, because once kleshas are acted on with the three gates of body speech and mind, results will be created that will confirm our kleshas and tell us we are right to have that klesha. “I am right to be angry, because the world is out to get me”. “I am right to be competitive because everybody is competing with me,” “I am right to be passionate because all of those beautiful, desirable objects are there and I want them and really need them”, etc., etc. All of our klesha activity is played out in karma and the result is to confirm the necessity of our klesha, the reality of our klesha, it is my klesha and this is what I am caught in.

When the Buddha asked us to work with our minds, he asked us to look very deeply at this pattern that we have established of klesha arising because of causes and conditions from the past, because of circumstances we have developed from past kleshas and karma. Kleshas arise, they are easy there, comfortable there, addictive and we act on them and we create our world of suffering.

Once we recognize and accept and, really, get deeply in the *kunjung* of klesha and karma, we recognize that because it is created, because we have created it, we can stop creating it. Because it has arisen through causes and conditions, it can cease, it can change. Everything is subject to change and if we understand that we have created this particular scenario of samsara for ourselves, we have the possibility of abandoning those habitual patterns and experiencing our world differently.

The utter fluidity of our life, of our experience, is the gift, the insight of the Buddha that everything that arises through conditions will cease. This is the potency of those short four lines: “All Dharmas arise from causes...” in the morning liturgy, in the Sanskrit mantra. This potency is at the heart of the Dharma, the truth of cause and effect. If the causes change, then the effects change. If our *kunjung* of klesha and *kunjung* of karma are looked at and we take responsibility for them, we can break our addiction. We have the possibility of transforming our life. This is the foundation of our entire path. This is the foundation of renunciation of our habitual patterns, the most fundamental renunciation.

The practice of the Vinaya is the renunciation of our habitual patterns, the way we have created and recreated samsara over and over again. The way we contribute to the pattern of samsara in the entire world. If we could begin, wholeheartedly and without a sense of religiosity, renounce those habitual patterns we will begin to experience, at least moments of freedom and extend that freedom in more extended periods. This kind of freedom allows us the ground of growing our motivation.

So, I want to go back to motivation. I talked in the beginning that initially our renunciation may come out of a sense of fear, or some kind of worldly agenda. We renounce because we want to be better people, or we renounce because we are terrified of the life that we are living. When we begin to grow our renunciation, we are growing it from a mere reaction against, trying to avoid situations that are difficult in our lives and just find another cozy corner of samsara to curl up in. We begin to

want to renounce, not that external world, which is problematic, but renounce our habitual patterns; that's the real renunciation.

Renouncing our habitual patterns, renouncing kleshaholism and be willing to transform our life. This is the genuine renunciation, beginning to see that, that which comes from kleshas causes more suffering. So, so simple; so, so simple. Our foundational Hinayana renunciation is based on that recognition and that commitment. But, that kind of renunciation will take us only so far and we can forget about that renunciation and fall back into our habitual patterns. One of the reasons to grow our motivation is to begin to, more strongly, more confidently, with greater sense of a burning heart of love, to practice renunciation. This takes us to the topic of the three vows.

In our tradition, there are many different kinds of teachings on the three vows. I want to go particularly into Panchen Pema Wangyal's teaching and Dudjom Rinpoche's wonderful commentary on the practice of the bodhisattva vow. This is when we grow our motivation from the middle level to the great motivation. There is no greater motivation than to practice based on the vow of the bodhisattva.

Panchen Pema Wangyal's text defines the vow in two parts: The nature of the bodhisattva vow (and it is a lovely translation!) "The nature of the bodhisattva vow is in mind moist with love and compassion that wishes to attain full enlightenment for others". That's the first part. The second part is: "The intention to abandon all faults of the three gates (body, speech and mind) for the benefit of others".

This is really the core of the bodhisattva vow and how it is a further extension of the fundamental renunciation of our own habitual patterns, our own tendency to generate klesha and karma. We do not abandon the fundamental renunciation of klesha and karma, but we redouble our efforts, we become more committed because of others.

As we begin to renounce klesha and develop some kind of wholesomeness in our lives, they settle down a little bit, there's not quite so much turmoil in our lives. We begin, actually, to notice that there are others in the world besides ourselves. There are others and they are kleshaholics as well and going through the same difficulties we are. They may or may not have discovered the Dharma, may or may not have understood that the secret to happiness is working with one's own mind and so they really need some support and some help. We also begin to recognize that there is no boundary between our suffering and the suffering of others.

There is no way to sort out: this is my suffering and this is where your suffering begins and my suffering ends. There is no way that we can say: "OK, I am going to work with my suffering and you work with your suffering and everything will then be fine". We begin to discover that suffering is boundaryless and so it is natural to begin to understand the interdependence of all beings based on their fundamental nature of emptiness and the way in which our experience of suffering is tied with the suffering of others.

This gives us a very strong sense of urgency about beginning to take on more than what we thought of as our individual unshared karma. We begin to see our part in the shared karma of the pain of the world and this gives us some kind of ground to practice the bodhisattva vow.

In Panchen Pema Wangyal's text and in Dudjom Rinpoche's commentary, there is a very simple presentation about how one practices from the point of view of the bodhisattva vow. It should be very familiar to all of you. It boils down to: not causing harm, gathering virtue and benefiting others, very old in our tradition. There are extensive commentaries on what it is to practice the Bodhisattva vow from the point of view of not causing harm, gathering virtue and benefiting others.

I would like to give you the basic teachings of Panchen Pema Wangyal and Dudjom Rinpoche because it is very helpful to see their particular take on it. I know these are teachings you have studied a lot here at Gampo Abbey and you have little signs around to summarize your training this way. This is the Mahayana training of joining the vow of Pratimoksha on whatever level you are practicing it and the vow of the bodhisattva.

In Panchen Pema Wangyal's text, the way the first one is expressed, "not causing harm" is called "refraining from all conduct of the three gates that may impair our bodhisattva vow". That is, to make sure that our conduct of body, speech and mind is in accord with the bodhisattva vow. Under this presentation there are very detailed root downfalls, from the point of view of the tradition of Nagarjuna. The entire section of this text presents the Nagarjuna tradition and the Asanga tradition of following this precept. For the Nagarjuna tradition, there are 20 root downfalls and 80 branch downfalls. In the Asanga tradition it boils down to only 10 categories for root downfalls.

Many of these categories are quite familiar to us, from the Pratimoksha, from the precepts, but there is a slightly different flavor about these root downfalls and auxiliary downfalls, branch downfalls. One of the qualities is that it is a violation to denigrate the Hinayana in any way. It is a violation to cause discursion for someone practicing the Hinayana path; it is a violation to, in any way, say that the Hinayana does not bring happiness and peace of mind. There is a wonderful tone of making sure that the Mahayana practitioner does not become sectarian about the Mahayana view. The Mahayana view is a very big view, very inclusive, so there are lots of perspectives about that.

In the tradition of both Asanga and Nagarjuna, Dudjom Rinpoche says that all of various downfalls and root and branch downfalls of both traditions can be summed up in one simple downfall, which is wonderful. I love it when our teachers are great Rime teachers bringing it together and make it into one thing that is very, very much to the point. What Dudjom Rinpoche says is that the one downfall that is the ground of all others, is that it is important never to forsake or abandon a single sentient being. Of course, the Vidyadhara said this all the time, that he never gave up on anybody and this was the core of our Bodhisattva vow—never give up on anybody.

This is a very subtle vow, a very subtle way; it is also very obvious in a certain sense. When we say never give up on anybody it means including ourselves. Never giving up on ourselves, never giving up on any sentient being, anyone, the most impossible person in our life, the most irritating, problematic person. Maybe you don't have such people in your life, but I do.... This is the most challenging to practice but it is the core one that fulfills all of the others. It is very interesting to think about what it means to never give up on anyone.

I think about it as a lay person, as a wife and mother and family person, that it is very natural to love one's close family members, natural to love my children, my husband, my parents, my aunt, my

siblings. It is very easy for us to love those who are dear to us, yet when we show the bias of loving those who are dear to us and not loving others, this is an issue in our life and one of the things that is a constant practice for me is to take the people who I find the most difficult to love, or people I would just ignore, and recognize that there is no reason to have a bias against them as less dear to me than those in my close family.

Seeing the video footage of the horrible tsunami disaster, I realized that every single person who died was dear to someone and someone is grieving them. To realize that in any kind of report of a crime and those who are the criminals, who have committed incredible violence toward others, that they are dear to someone and it is very important that they be dear to me. That sense of never giving up on anyone, of holding all beings tenderly as one holds those who are easy to love. Very important not to have the bias of preferring certain loved ones and ignoring everybody else, otherwise we are just like everyone. Bodhisattvas treasure all beings, and even if we don't like them, to love them, to hold them tenderly and to never give up on them. That is the core discipline which is the digest of the root and branch versions of Nagarjuna and Asanga.

The second, of gathering virtue is, for Panchen Pema Wangyal and Dudjom Rinpoche, to practice through the practice of the Six Paramitas. As we practice the Six Paramitas, we are gathering virtue for the benefit of others. We are gathering wholesomeness and a sense of overcoming addiction to kleshas for the benefit of others. As you are studying Shantideva's Bodhicharyavatara with Pema, or on your own, it is a monumental text for showing how, as bodhisattvas, it is more important than ever to work with our kleshas. There is no more beautiful text, in all of Buddhism that I have encountered about working with our kleshas intimately and urgently, than the Bodhicharyavatara, because it is really saying that we have removed ourselves from care for others by self preoccupation and klesha-holism. It is important that we continue to overcome the kunjung of klesha for the benefit of others.

So, gathering virtue is not just a Hinayana understanding of gathering virtue, it is gathering virtue all the more urgently and tirelessly as bodhisattvas practicing the Six Paramitas and important to understand it as a Mahayana discipline. Dudjom Rinpoche and Panchen Pema Wangyal summarize it thus:

1. Generosity is meeting the needs of others.
2. Discipline is abstaining from all harm and that is a virtue which benefits others.
3. Patience disengages from conflict, which is a virtue that benefits others
4. Joyous exertion is taking great joy in our practice for the virtue of benefiting others
5. Meditation is single mindedly directing all of our practice toward virtue for the benefit of others
6. Prajna is possessing unmistakable wisdom again for the benefit of others

In each one we are more and more clearly developing our aspiration for the benefit of others, developing virtue, developing wholesomeness, developing a klesha-free existence for the benefit of others. Think of wholesomeness or virtue as breaking the addiction to the kleshas, that is the core understanding through all the teachings that I am giving. It is the core understanding in Mipham Rinpoche; it is the core understanding in Pema Wangyal and also in Dudjom Rinpoche.

That's the second one of gathering virtue, it is a Mahayana virtue. Gathering virtue is building steam for breaking addiction to kleshas and developing power in our addiction-free systems

The third one, benefiting others, we would, maybe, normally think that this is practicing the Six Paramitas, but for Panchen Pema Wangyal or for Dudjom Rinpoche, this one is going further and this is associated with what I call the Four Means of Gathering. Once we have developed a certain mastery of the Six Paramitas and a level of confidence and ability to understand the Dharma, then it is important that we begin to teach others. The Four Means of Gathering are the four ways that we could skillfully lead others on the path of Dharma.

This is considered a continuation of our practice of the Paramitas; it is a further extension of the Paramitas practice. These four, which are usually associated with developing skilful means on the seventh bhumi, I believe, are associated with: first, the generosity of bringing together those who are difficult to take, that is, magnetizing people to the Dharma. They are not going to be magnetized to you unless you have, really, their welfare at heart. They will not be magnetized to you unless you have developed wholesomeness and cooled kleshas and a sense of groundedness and wholesomeness.

1. So, first, the generosity of bringing together those who are hard to tame, perhaps a bit unruly.
2. Second, once you have attracted and magnetized them in some way, teaching the Dharma skillfully, accurately, engagingly, in a way that they can connect with, appropriate to where they are, what they need and helping them to connect personally with the Dharma. All of this is so important for Gampo Abbey, for all of you to become teachers, very, very important.
3. Third, to lead them and inspire them to practice. That means, not only do you feel really good in your own practice, really awake in your own practice, but become a really skillful meditation instructor to inspire them, to help them connect very personally with practice.
4. Fourth, perfectly practicing what you are teaching, in case you have forgotten.

These are the categories associated with benefiting others, so just to review these three, especially because you have them all over Gampo Abbey.

1. Not causing harm is never giving up in any sentient being
2. Gathering virtue is, with great dedication and for the benefit of others, practice the Paramitas of the Bodhisattva.
3. Benefiting others. Of course you have done that with the second one, but you are going further, more directly magnetizing and inspiring others to practice the Dharma.

These three are considered the core practices, the core vows fulfilling the vows of the Bodhisattva and as we can see there is nothing in them that could possibly conflict with the Hinayana vow, the vow of the Pratimoksha. Can we have any questions about this? I think I am going to pause and check in if you have questions about practicing the bodhisattva vow.

Morgan: Did Trungpa Rinpoche say "I never give up on anybody" or did he give instruction to his students?

JS-B: He said, “I never give up on anybody”, but he also asked us not to give up on anybody. He personally often said, “I never give up on anybody”.

Vajrasakhi: When you talked about a list of difficult people I thought of one difficult person who affected me very strongly, Margaret Thatcher. Before I got involved in Buddhism I was quite politically active and found a big turn around to try and hold in my heart people who were otherwise demonized and seen as bad people. Public figures can take that sort of projection quite frequently.

JS-B: I can’t even imagine what it would be like to be those public people and how much hatred and projections they receive, how much they need loving kindness practice from us. And how much loving kindness practice for them could help and support them to be wholesome themselves, hopefully. That’s a very good point

Rachel: Is it possible to be studying the Mahayana well before you have been grounded properly in the Hinayana?

JS-B: That’s a great question! In this text it says that in the tradition of the Sangha you have to have a grounding of the precepts before you can practice the bodhisattva vow. Nagarjuna doesn’t agree he says that sometimes the bodhisattva vow is what people are grabbed by and the through that they develop the desire for virtue and then, the practice the precepts.

Obviously, in our tradition things have become much more standardized over the centuries where people do not receive the bodhisattva vow before receiving the refuge vow disciplines as they are presented by the teacher. There’s an interesting difference of opinion on this. I find it interesting that Nagarjuna, the great master of emptiness, understood that, sometimes, it is the bodhisattva vow that grabs you and then, one wants to practice the precepts. Certainly, as an Acharya, I meet with people receiving the bodhisattva vows who say, “I really don’t want to take refuge. “I don’t want to be a Buddhist, but I want to be a bodhisattva”. That’s how it works for people, sometimes.

Jampa: This is a question about the vow to never denigrate the Hinayana. It is among Asanga’s root vows, you said?

JS-B: It is in Nagarjuna’s and Asanga’s, both.

Jampa: I just remembered that it was Asanga who converted Vasubandu to the Mahayana and the way that I remember is that he practically frightened him away from the Hinayana. I am wondering how that fits, also in light of the fact that here we learn about the Hinayana in some context we learn about it, pretty straight forwardly, in terms of philosophy. Sometimes we learn about it in terms of something which is to be transcended. It is not clear to what extent it is even applicable to our practice here, if that makes sense.

JS-B: For the first part of the question, there are lots of legends and stories that come with the tradition that may or may not have any validity at all. We love stories, but they are more like rumors. (Laughter) The great master Asanga was such a profound teacher and had such profound understanding, I can’t imagine that he would denigrate the Hinayana, I can’t imagine. I know the various stories you are talking about, I have read them, I have told them, but I don’t give them a lot

of credence, beyond a kind of mythology that entertains us, gives us a kind of context at times but, I know that it is said that Asanga converted Vasubandu, but Asanga was a great yogin, very deeply realized being, as was Vasubandu, who was a little more of a nerd. It may have taken something to get Vasubandu going in a different direction. Don't quote me that Vasubandu was a big of a... (Burst of great laughter). It is not all bad to be a nerd.

Jampa: Then, the second part of my question, to try to be clearer about it, is: Sometimes it is confusing that we say, "Never denigrate the Hinayana" and in the same breath we say, "but it is not enough".

JS-B: I know, that is exactly right and when I get into the part of my talk when we talk about the three vows, this is what we are constantly working with, these various points of view about the three vows and about whether they are the same, different or whatever. I think there is some finessing that needs to be acknowledged. But it is very important that we have deep respect and regard for the Hinayana, understand also that the Hinayana is not the Lesser Vehicle, but the Foundational Vehicle. It is like denigrating the earth because it is what we stand on. The Hinayana is the grounding that makes our practice real and not trippy and not purely ahead of ourselves. It is the Hinayana that keeps us honest in our practice. There is always this kind of thing going on when we touch the topic of the three vows. I hope we can come back to this after I talk a little about the various views of the three vows.

.... Very briefly, I am not going to say a lot. I hope that here at Gampo Abbey you have studied these texts on the three vows because I think it is a very helpful thing, very profound. This text is one, but there are others as well and I will talk about that in a moment. Even though I am covering this briefly, I think especially for those of you who Vajrayana practitioners, it is extremely important to study the relationship between the three vows and how the Vajrayana vow goes with the Mahayana and the Hinayana vows.

According to Panchen Pema Wangyal, the essential nature of the samaya vow is to maintain awareness of skilful means and wisdom through all actions of the three gates. Dudjom Rinpoche's commentary is that this means to guard our merely conceptual understanding of the Dharma in everything that we do through body speech and mind. The way I understand this is that we need an intimate and personal connection with the Dharma and particularly with the nature of our minds in everything that we do.

It is very easy for us to fall into a conceptual approach and, just because we read something, or because we think it, to think that it is true. Our samaya vows require that we have some kind of genuine authenticity in our experience of the Dharma, that we have meditation, that we have done retreat, that we have some sense of the nature of reality in general, but mostly, especially the nature of our minds.

Without that, we are just pretending completely, there is no authenticity in what we are practicing and what we are doing. It requires a level of intimacy with our experience in order for the Vajrayana vow to be kept and it means that the samaya vow is extremely difficult to keep because the violations are constant, we are constantly discursive, we are constantly straying from the true nature, constantly ahead of or behind ourselves and not on the dot of our experience. This is a very

demanding vow. It is said that it is the easiest to break and most important to renew regularly and we can renew it, constantly, through our devotion. It is why devotion is so important in the Vajrayana. Through devotion we can repair our samaya vow. The way Dudjom Rinpoche expresses it is that we must be constantly acting, speaking and thinking from the experience of the inseparability of bliss and emptiness in everything that we say, think and do so that we are coming from the experience of the inseparability of bliss and emptiness.

In the Vajrayana section of the text there are lots of root downfalls, they are listed. They are specific to lineages and to tantras and that kind of thing. They are listed as the 25 uncommon activities, these are the ones that go with anuttarayoga yana and for the Vajrayana students it is a very interesting part of the text. The 25 uncommon activities, the 5 buddha-family vows and the 14 root downfalls. They are detailed and it is quite interesting how they are laid out.

The 25 uncommon activities look very much like a Vajrayana Pratimoksha. A great deal of emphasis on not killing, not stealing, not lying, not committing adultery and not indulging in intoxicants, meaning especially, doing these things for any conventional purpose. But they are very precise about the levels of killing. For instance, in the Vajrayana vow, the killing is never killing anything, the tiniest insect, not doing any kind of killing at all, any kind of stealing at all. It is not talking about human beings, or gross objects, but the kind of subtle, subtle level, more precise Pratimoksha with the subtlest intention exposed.

These are very interesting to study and that would be a whole series of talks in and of themselves. In “Perfect Conduct” it is very beautifully laid out and described. I am sure there are commentaries on these 25 uncommon activities. Of course, the samaya for the five buddha families associated with the mandala, there are samayas associated with each point in the mandala and the skillful activities associated with each and the fourteen root downfalls. Everybody who has taken the samaya vows receives the 14 root downfalls which in and of themselves are very comprehensive about one state of mind.

The samaya vow is relating of course to behavior and to speech, but especially to one’s mind, one’s intention and the ways in which one strays from sacred outlook by having any moment of doubt in the teacher, any moment of question of relationship with the yidam, any moment of question about the protectors, any way of denigrating any sentient being. There are root downfalls making sure that women are not denigrated, for example. The way one takes care of one’s practice materials; all of the ways in which one guards one’s samaya through attitudes. They are vows relating very much to our fundamental motivations, especially with regard with rejecting anything.

The emphasis is very much on beginning to recognize that everything in our world is completely sacred and the sacredness includes the sacredness of the kleshas. That the problem with kleshas is not the kleshas themselves, but the ego clinging at the heart of kleshas, that concept that they are “mine”, so there is a very precise sense that we do not throw out anything. Everything that we find in our world is part of our full and sacred mandala world.

The fundamental disciplines of the Vajrayana, Dudjom Rinpoche and Panchen Pema Wangyal talk about this, is that primarily through what is called a creation stage or generation stage practice and completion stage practice. I wanted to say something about this: when we study the Hinayana well,

we understand that we are constantly creating our world through *kunjung* of klesha and *kunjung* of karma. We are creating a samsaric visualization every day of our life and we are doing the samsaric practice of perpetuating suffering through the visualization of ourselves as victims and through external circumstances as the oppressor, or whatever version we have.

Our samsaric sadhana practice is that we do perpetuate suffering for ourselves and for all beings. We are used to doing this, we have been doing this from beginningless time, we wake up in the morning and we arise as “me”, we walk through the world as a samsaric deity (Laughter) full of problems created by other people in our mandala. So, the samsaric world that we live in is a world that we have created through a samsaric creation-stage practice. What we find through our samaya vows is that we are asked to use our habitual patterns of arising as “poor old me who is having another day of problems” and generate an enlightened form given to us by our lineage, full of power and blessing. We are asked to see ourselves as hollow and as unsubstantial as a creation, which is shockingly easy on some kind of level and shockingly difficult on another, because we want so much to grasp to ourselves.

We find that it perfectly fits our luge groove of creating ourselves as samsaric beings and we use that same habitual pattern with a completely different form that has been blessed and is constantly being filled with blessings from our guru and from the lineage and we begin to discover that our habitual patterns of *kunjung* of klesha and *kunjung* of karma begin to be transformed in our duty of the practice. It takes time, it is why we have to do these practices and stay with them. We then begin to feel that our hold on samsaric patterns begins to loosen and we begin to feel a transformation of *kunjung* of klesha and *kunjung* of karma through the generation stage practice. We begin to feel that the world is not ours and there is some kind of self-liberating quality about appearances.

Then, of course, we become attached to these practices, forms, deities and the blessings of the lineage. Then we are asked to dissolve it all into space. The blessing of the completion stage practice is that it weans our addiction to the practice. Creation-stage practice weans our addiction to samsara and particularly to *kunjung* of klesha and karma. Completion stage practice weans our addiction of the practice so that we can actually see the nature directly.

In brief, that is a sense of the disciplines of the three vows. I’d like to address the issue of what it is like for us to practice all three vows at once and to raise some questions of things that have come up in the lineage. I want to thank Lama Kunga for loaning me, last night, this gorgeous book, Jigme Lingpa’s “Treasury of Precious Qualities”. This book is so wonderful. Thank you!

There is a treasure of a text that really you are dealing with the issue of the relationship between the three vows. Jigme Lingpa’s text is so lovely because it is addressing some of the core issues that came up in different lineages. When we think about the vows of the Pratimoksha, specifically the monastic vows, I am not speaking of the Pratimoksha generally—as Dudjom Rinpoche does, I am here speaking specifically about the monastic vows. The monastic vow of the Pratimoksha, the bodhisattva vow and the samaya vow.

The questions that have arisen in the tradition are: are these vows contradictory? Are they successive? (lower to higher) When we try to practice all three, does one nullify the other? If the Vajrayana samaya vow is a superior vow and it contains the others, then, why do we take three? Do

we need to drop out the lower vows and if so, why are we taking three vows at all, why not just go for the Vajrayana vow. How are these three vows to be understood?

There are varieties of these kinds of questions and they sound theoretical, but they also come up in people's actual practice of the vows. Panchen Pema Wangyal deals with this in a very Nyingma way and Dudjom Rinpoche supports him in that, so I would like to summarize some of the issues involved and how Dudjom Rinpoche answers them. Then, I would like to touch on Jigme Lingpa's interpretation.

There are lots of other things that Jigme Lingpa writes about that I am not going to comment on. He goes on the six ways in which other schools besides the Nyingma deal with how the three vows go together. It is brilliant, just amazing! First of all, each vow has its own lineage, its own ceremony, its own form, its own intention and every lineage is concerned to not just dump the differences between the three vows. That is, the Pratimoksha vow has its own lineage, its own tradition, its own ways of being prepared for the way the ordination goes, the way the vow is held. That needs to be respected and each has different kinds of commitments. How do we actually understand this?

It is also important to understand that each vow, having its own integrity and infractions of the vow, needs to be repaired in distinct ways for each of the three vows. This is why it is an issue and you can see that this could go on and on. It could have a scholastic aspect, a practical everyday aspect, or whatever. In the Nyingma school, it is said that each of these three vows had the same purpose and serve as antidote to the same thing so that there is a kind of basic view that all three vows are antidotes to the poison of the kleshas and that they fulfill the purpose of freeing the mind.

This is very succinct and it is what I talked about in the very first talk. Jigme Lingpa uses the poison-plant image with regard to the kleshas. It is used in many, many different places, I have seen different versions of it, he is very clear, saying it is a poison plant. I have heard it as a poison tree, or whatever. His version is very simple. With the poison plant, the gardener may feel that that poison plant is really a problem, a danger to beings and so the poison plant must be uprooted and destroyed. The gardener, of course, is the Hinayana practitioner. The physician takes the poison plant and makes medicine out of it to treat beings. A Vajrayana practitioner takes the poison of the plant and makes it more potent, almost like a serum, like culturing it and making it more intense. Then it becomes very useful in a different way than ordinary medicine. The Dzogchen practitioner, who as a peacock eats the poison of the plant and gets more beautiful, has more lovely feathers. The more poison flowers the peacock eats the more beautiful are the colors of the feathers. All of them are transmuting or transforming in some way the poison of the kleshas.

Dudjom Rinpoche, Panchen Pema Wangyal, Jigme Lingpa are all very concerned to acknowledge the separate traditions and separate aspects of the vows, but say that when a person is following all three vows, with each successive level, one's motivation becomes deeper, more subtle and more deeply informs the practice of each of the levels of the vows. So there's a sense that the motivation becomes transmuted and expanded with each addition of a vow. That's basically how Dudjom Rinpoche and Panchen Pema Wangyal present this.

Jigme Lingpa, however, has some concerns with this. He said it is very important not to see the vows as a kind of ladder with a lower one, a middle one and a higher one, each one destroying the

integrity of the lower. He uses the image of three rivers flowing into a huge ocean. He says each river has its own integrity, each its own speed, banks and flow and all go to a vast ocean. They are to be respected as separate traditions and separate streams. However, the motivation with which one practices each of the vows is the key element and the motivation of each informs the one above it without in any way making the streams into one stream. So, more and more profoundly, one understands the meaning of the other vows through practicing successive levels of vow.

He says, above all, that the practice of the Vajrayana samaya vow gives one such a sense of clarity about the true nature of mind that what seemed defiling and problematic before becomes not a problem at all. There is a sense of clarity about how to behave appropriately in a world full of pitfalls and poisons. It is simply not a problem at all and one of the things that Jigme Lingpa says is that it means that, when under certain circumstances where there is any chance of misunderstanding, you follow the finest level of vow without being hooked by a sense of pollution. What I am reminded of, and he doesn't use this quote here but it is the famous Dzogchen quote, that if we are to understand how to practice we descend from above with the view and ascend from below with the practice. This seems to be the perfect way to join the three levels of vow. That is, descend from above with the sense of the completely pure nature of mind, the completely pure nature of phenomena, while practicing the absolute, finest, most compassionate, most precise understanding of virtue, ascending from below.

This seems to be the perfect way to join together respects for the streams of traditions while developing, honing and one's inner motivation so that one is not bothered by any seeming contradiction between the practices of each of the three vows.

I think I will stop there and see what questions you have.

Ani Trime: I clearly hope that here at the Abbey the three vows are studied more.

Ani Pema: For me the main thing is going beyond biased mind, sectarian mind, "I am better", "this view is better" kind of mind. "This is really hard to do", so you would say, "Better not to talk three and just talk about one", the truth is that the world comes in threes and twos and all these different views and since you still need to deal with the relative truth of differences, keep developing the mind and not the bias against one or the other... When you have three, there is this wonderful opportunity, because of the three different views all of which are complementary, this is a wonderful opportunity to go beyond bias altogether. If you are just stuck with one tradition or the other, you have your biases.

But what I find is that then people have their Vajrayana bias and look down at the others, and that is what you are saying, it gets communicated, "We honor this, but ... really the others are better" sort of. You know, as you go through the three yantras, each is presented in its integrity and then there is this subtle feeling that the next one is better. It is really hard to come up with a way to teach so that it undermines bias. Many people would love to just teach the absolute truth, because that doesn't have any bias in it, but it doesn't do you much good when you are faced with your ordinary life, filled with relative challenges where you completely close down around this issue.

For me, in teaching this or hearing teachings on this, what always resonates is, if you could develop any bias about the three vows you are undercutting the Buddhist teachings. Somehow you have to find a way to work with it as a liberating thing rather than something that further imprisons you, but that is so difficult, you know. But it has to be emphasized in the way it is taught, that is what I am thinking.

JS-B: One of the things that I find inspiring is that Jigme Lingpa is considered the founder before his time of the Rime movement and Rime means without bias. The Vidyadhara was such a Rime person, had this approach of being concerned especially about the practice traditions that might be lost and within that concern, wanted to preserve and respect each one on its own. If you look at Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye and Patrul Rinpoche or Mipham Rinpoche, what they did was to voluminously collect and preserve, with their own integrity, all of these lineages of practices and hold them in their own integrity in this kind of very big view of respect, without trying to make them all one.

This is so hard for us. I am very involved with the inter-religious dialogue and we always want to make things the same in order to be comfortable. To respect things in their own ground and remain open is the most difficult thing for us. I watch my own mind in dialog situations and want to say: Oh, that's just like our this... rather than hearing that it is what it is and just appreciating and responding without trying to make one thing.

Ani Pema: In the early discussions of this place with the Vidyadhara, something that would be interesting to see if it ever happens, he presented this image of a central building and around it were all these other buildings. The other buildings would have pure Theravada, pure Zen, pure different views, maybe different lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. The idea is that they would practice as they always did, keep their lineages, but in the beginning they would all challenge each other and work with it so that nobody got stuck in their own view.

He had the same view for Naropa, he wanted us to have a yogi school, again preserving practices that were going to be lost otherwise and he felt we would be kept awake by contact with people different from us, wanting either to lay things out in hierarchies, where we know that one thing is lower and the other thing is higher, or making it all the same... When I study the Rime movement, I feel very inspired about how challenging it is to remain free from bias in diversity, because that is not what we usually do. And there's something about it here, especially reading Jigme Lingpa and realizing his quality of no bias that really comes through in this text "The Treasury of Precious Qualities".

Yeshe Norbu: Thinking about what Rachel asked you, you said that you have a personal opinion how the three can be practiced simultaneously. Could you say something about what you thought. I am thinking about it as someone who will be taking samaya vows soon and really having to establish what my relationship to all three levels of vows is, how I should be studying them and on what level and how to relate that back to my practice.

JS-B: My own personal way of understanding to think about the Vidyadhara and the way he was. I don't mean his reputation or stories about him, but the way he was. He was the most remarkable person for the way he manifested all three vows at once, without any sense of contradiction. The

level of attention to detail, the level of lack of aggression and being present with situations were absolutely remarkable. In his presence, there was a kind of cleanness that spoke wholesomeness; decency, he used to call it. The kind of way he was in the world in a very precise, not kleshaholic, completely present, available to his immediate world and then not giving up on anybody. His way of practicing the Mahayana was exquisite, his qualities as a vajramaster were immeasurable.

My personal inspiration, I realized conceptually or in all these texts, there is a lot that you can go through, but for me it all comes together when I think of my teacher and recall the way he was in the world and the way he, in a very short life, put a great deal of very generous, tireless energy in the creation of places like this. The precision about the color of the doors, walls in any of our centers. He picked out the colors and the way everything would be, that kind of precision and gentleness. It really all comes together for me in that way.

The best way I can do, it is hard to express in words, but it is through my training with him, my time with him, watching and learning from him and his incredible respect for all three levels of vow. Ani Pema and I had some conversations with him about Vinaya and the sense of how much he wanted Gampo Abbey to be the real thing and more pure in certain ways than things had become in Tibet; definitely avoiding legalism, always staying with this sense of gentleness, that precision, as well. That was my experience with him, the absolutely perfect joining of the three levels of the damsung.

Jampa: I just wanted to say something more about what I started saying earlier. First, I wanted to thank you for the explanation because it really clarified a lot of things for me about the three vows and also made me realize a mistake that I think I have been making for a long time in thinking about their relationship. I think I mix up my groups of threes a lot and thought of the three vows and the relationship between them in terms of the relationship between the three turnings...

JS-B: OH!

Jampa: ... there are a couple of problems that that confusion creates.

JS-B: there are Three Turnings and the Three Vehicles and the Second and Third Turnings are both Mahayana turnings. The Third Vehicle is not sutra, it is tantra.

Jampa: I mix up those two also....but in this case, thinking of the Three Turnings as each one being the rug pulled out from the one before it, like Ani Pema taught last winter.

JS-B: It's lovely! Yes!

Jampa: ... except that if you apply that to the Three Vows, like I think I am always doing, one problem is that, if you don't feel like you are standing on the rug, then having the rug pulled out is not going to do anything (Laughter) The second problem is, if you know that the rug is going to be pulled out, what idiot is going to stand on it? (Laughter)

JS-B: The tricky part is that you are going to stand on the rug, wherever you are standing gets pulled, the brilliance is that it roots out wherever you are standing, before you take a step.

Jampa: Definitely, but I guess what I am talking about is the attitude towards them. With Rachel asking about dealing with the foundation in the Hinayana first, if we already know it is going to get pulled out from under us, why study it in the first place? Both of those examples are just ways of confusion about the vows that I realize and I think your explanation really helped clear up for me.

JS-B: I think that the other point is that, what I said about the Vajrayana, about how important it is to have an intimate personal experience of every teaching you study is so very important and how easy it is to get ahead of ourselves conceptually with studying the text that may not be the things we experience in our practice. The constant challenge of joining study and practice together is that you are constantly developing your understanding of both, in your practice and in your study. Your study brings you questions that are fabulous for you to take to your practice. In your practice you develop questions that you take back to your study, in that kind of back and forth quality so that it becomes intimate, personal and you have confidence that you actually know the Dharma in your bones.

Without the Hinayana, we don't know anything in our bones, I am so sorry.... It just is not going to be true. Hinayana is what gives us that kind of knowing-in-our-bones certainty, because suffering is the ground of our experience in the way we come in. We constantly have to go back and worry and think and examine our experience of suffering in order to really have a Dharma practice. So, even if our motivation is the Mahayana we have to really work with suffering. Thank you Jampa.

Dawa Chotso: I am going to say thank you as well because I have trouble articulating ideas. One question I heard from friends and fellow Sangha members is, why does a Vajrayana student want to be a nun? What's the benefit? Why do that? Well, it is the experience, that's what it is! For me the Vajrayana can get very heady and then nothing happens.

JS-B: And then it is not Vajrayana

Dawa Chotso: Right, and then you start saying, what's the point, why do that practice? Then I started exploring how do you get out of that? Becoming a monastic seemed like every time I looked at that it became closer and closer. As my understanding of it grows, what it means to keep the discipline of body and speech and how that supports the discipline of mind. For me the answer is just the experience, which is what you are clarifying.

JS-B: Again, I think that the Dzogchen slogan about descending from above with the view and ascending from below with the conduct is the very best way for a Vajrayanist to practice all three vows.

Lama Kunga: My name is Kunga, I am an addict addicted to klesha meltdown, especially if it contains chocolate and I am a nerd (Laughter). I absolutely loved the Nyingma teaching on the nine yantras and because of that, the Nyingma is really my secret, beloved school. The nine yantras which end with the characterizations of the three inner tantras, Maha, Anu and Ati state very clearly, that in Mahayogatantra you can obtain liberation at the time of death. And for Anuyogatantra you can accomplish this during your lifetime. They really say that it is only through Atiyoga Dzogchen that you can do it in this very short life. So, we hear of Vajrayana as being a very short path and so forth, which leads us into thinking, why would the Vajrayana students want to practice the lower paths and

so forth. But isn't there a sort of a bias built into that because one reads that and then one says with all one's Western intelligence, well would you want to practice this lower stuff... go for Dzogchen! Isn't that something that is really obtained in our Western culture?

JS-B: There are lots of things one can say in answer to that, but my fundamental understanding is that we could be on any particular path and any particular situation, practicing Dzogchen with the very finest of Dzogchen teachers and going on long retreats, but without the proper motivation, nothing is going to happen. Motivation is the most important thing for us to be looking at. There is no guarantee on any practice that we do, or any teacher that we are with, whatever lifestyle we are in, whether it is monastic or lay, or a three-year retreat, whatever, if we do not have some kind of developed motivation and really look at our motivation, grow our motivation, expand our motivation....it is all artificial.

I think it is, in some way, very simple. In some ways, that is depressing, because it means we really have to look at that and develop that. From my understanding of the Dharma, that's where it comes back to. Of course, every teacher says this, we have heard so much and every teacher begins the teaching session about motivation.... We don't even hear it any more, it is incredibly simple and it is up to us. Because our motivation is so unstable, so fickle and habitual in a samsaric direction it does require a kind of nakedness with ourselves that is really shocking. This is why we need teachers because they help us acknowledge our motivations and self deception about our motivation, it comes down to that. I am sorry to be simple minded about it, but....that's my understanding.

Lama Kunga: I wanted also to thank you for what you are leaving here with us, pointing out in a subtle way that we have a lot of work to do in trying to learn more. We have a lot to carry away from here about the Three Vows and we will never be through really examining. I am very grateful for the rug analogy and I think it is the pure beings who stand on the lower rug and the scruffy bodhisattvas on the middle rug and I will leave you with the thought that it is probably the nerds on the upper rug (Laughter)....

JS-B: ... and they need to be brought down by the rugs being pulled, speaking from one nerd to another.

Gelek: When the talk started about what Jampa was mentioning, the thing that sprung immediately to my mind was when we watched Trungpa Rinpoche talking about the tantric path, the first talk that he gave. After sitting there for ten minutes waiting for him to talk, he finally says: Who's practicing tantra? Then he went on in this big spiel about how, if you haven't understood the basic teachings of the Hinayana, you are just kind of playing some weird funny movie. It was inspiring, it was the first thing he mentioned, which answers the people who are asking, like Dawa Chotso, why would you bother? Also, with the motivation, which seems pretty obvious that it is what we have been focusing on, but practicing the Hinayana bears certain fruits in terms of actually taming your mind in a real general way. If you have been unable to do that, I think there is a line in the 37 practices, "If you can't tame your own mind, your wish to benefit others is just a joke." I watched this video with some monk talking to His Holiness the Dalai Lama saying he had this big aspiration when he decided to become a monk he wanted to learn about Madhyamika and master the Vajrayana meditation and he said actually none of that ever did anything, he wasn't able to get that, but by just keeping his vows he saw his life completely transformed and changed in a way that he could not

possibly have imagined. To me, in a really simple minded way, why we practice the Hinayana is, if we can't give up our soda, if we can't tame our mouths, how are we going to tame our minds? . How can you do any of these higher practices without understanding the most basic thing about how to sit shamatha, or whatever practice that is actually simple; but how many people have passed the third stage of shamatha? Not me....and I spend hours doing it. Thought I would share that....

JS-B: It is really like a KA meeting, isn't it? We are doing confessions, I love it. KA.

Ani Tsultrim: One of the things Ani Pema talks a lot on her tapes is honesty. You spoke about motivation, but I think that there is another aspect, which is about being honest about one's own ability. For myself, Vajrayana is incredibly difficult, because I have quite an easy access to visualization in a inner state and it just overwhelms me. So, trying to sustain the vessel which is hermetically sealed in which the transformation process can actually take place is incredibly difficult, it just knocks me on my back all the time. So, that example shows the need to get something that I can actually achieve, like some basic vows. Also, here we talk a lot about not conceptualizing, we talk about the sacredness of life. I am not sure of the term, but the emptiness and relative together you know, unless I can, actually, do some shamatha like, Gelek was saying, I don't really see how I can make that real. But it is also, at the same time, as practitioners experience, of being a Vajrayana practitioner, as actually tasting some transformative process within his/her own being, which means that one may not need this higher level of shamatha and can still go through a transformation within the hermitic vessel of the Vajrayana. It's a lot of yacking on my part, but I just wanted to share that.

JS-B: I think that honesty point is so important and really does help if we have a teacher or meditation instructor or someone to work with us. I remember when I first met the Vidyadhara, I was in this big question of why we even need a teacher. This was in 1974 and I had been a Zen practitioner for three years, my teacher had died, did I really need another teacher? Rinpoche's response was, we do need a teacher because we are so hard on ourselves. So, honesty can sometimes be very harsh unless we have a teacher we are working with. The kindness of a teacher isn't always necessarily nice, but it may provide a counterbalance to our underestimation of what we can do.

Sevgi: I want to comment on what Gelek said, that if we cannot tame our mind everything else is a joke. I kind of feel that way, because it will take me a few lifetimes before I can actually tame my mind. It feels like that, but does it mean one has to wait and never take those vows? It seems to me those vows go parallel rather than one has to wait until the mind is tamed. As to benefiting others, we can put the seed that we want to benefit others and take the vow and then work with that, work with the Hinayana. They seem like tools to me, we need all the tools that we can use in order to tame our mind, because if we don't have the aspect of emptiness from the Mahayana we will be stuck in the Hinayana and trying to...

Gelek: Don't denigrate it ...(Laughter)

Sevgi: ...Can you please comment on that?

JS-B: I think you raise a very important point and it is also true that once we get some flavor of how extensive and painful suffering is for others, we may have greater motivation to tame our minds than we had before. It is very important to understand that it is often our bodhisattva vows that really mean that we roll up our sleeves and say, I am really going to do this. When I have been somewhat half-hearted, too hooked on my habitual patterns, too much kleshaholism going on to really feel that, I can overcome it. The sense of urgency often comes when people get really touched through the experience of bodhicitta with what's really going on and also the sense of how we can do this. It is very easy to become discouraged by samsara and to feel that it is impossible for us to awaken, but one of the powerful things about bodhicitta is that absolute bodhicitta gives us a sense that we can do it, that it is possible. It is not so much a closed, hopeless system and we are always going to slide backwards because we begin to understand something about the true nature. The energy of this realization, even if it is tiny and in glimpses, liberates some kind of energy that gives power and magic to our intention to tame our own minds. We still have the work to do. That's what so fabulous about Shantideva, he has the sense of magic and power but he is also willing to do the hard work of relating to his mind. I am so glad Pema is publishing this book on Shantideva, because if people are going to have just one Dharma book that they are going to really study for years and keep close, that is the one, the most powerful, direct way to fire up our intention to overcome kleshaholism.

Ryumon: I really love how you have just presented the three vows, it has helped me to clarify many things, bows to you.

JS-B: The books are much, much better, so please...

Ryumon: You mentioned some texts and you used a couple, but I am wondering if there are others that you are going to share with us.

JS-B: There one that Lama Kunga showed me, which is by Sakya Pandita on "Distinguishing the Three Vows", a very technical book. This one is called "Treasure of Precious Qualities" by Jigme Lingpa and there is a middle section on the three vows that is lovely. The other two are, "Perfect Conduct" that I have been teaching from all the way through, it is an absolutely beautiful book, very to the point, it doesn't have all the categories, it is very clear in its view and very Rime in its intent. It is not trying to bring a lot of controversy, it is really resolving, that's the reason I chose this one to teach. "Buddhist Ethics", from Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye, from the Gampo Abbey library, is an amazing and very rich collection looking in depth at the issue of the spiritual teacher, so this is another one. And much more richly footnoted, there is a lot in this text that is very useful. So, four texts: "Treasury of Precious Qualities", by Jigme Lingpa; "Buddhist Ethics", by Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye; "Perfect Conduct", Dudjom Rinpoche; and "Distinguishing the Three Vows", Sakya Pandita. There are lots of other places where the three vows are talked about, I am sure there are lots of texts that I don't know, that I haven't studied that also talk about this.

Ryumon: It also occurred to me, as I was hearing the presentation, that as a Westerner it is very difficult to hear three different things that can all be of equal value without categorizing them from better to worse. It seems to me that is a function of our dualistic mind and we are so trained to see either/or rather than both/and so there could be multiple truths of great value. Personally, I realize

that it has given me insight into some confusion of how I go about with the Mahayana aspiration, actually practicing Hinayana vows.

JS-B: One of the things that Jigme Lingpa says is that these three vows are useful for beginners, people in the middle place on the path and advanced on the path, but they are not different in their value and their power. It is more that they are useful for beginner, middle and advanced. It is more in the mind of the person, rather than there is any way that you would rate the vows themselves. That's a lovely way to say it. The vows themselves are complete, they have their traditions and their aspects, but it is in our motivation how we use and understand the vows that we may find them more useful at the beginning, then in the middle and then, when we are further along on the path.

Well, I think that probably wraps it up. What I am hoping is that this series will whet your appetite for more of these kinds of things. I do not mean for this to be in any way definitive, or to be comprehensive, but more a sense of threads, of things to think about in terms of the motivation for practicing the vows, some kind of confidence that comes from understanding that they are very specific things that we can do moment to moment to overcome the sense of suffering we experience in our life and that through renunciation, through benefiting others and through sacred outlook we could actually transform our experience from this current experience of suffering that we have. And it has been my very great pleasure to be here. Thank you!