

I

No Escape, No Problem

WE ALREADY HAVE everything we need. There is no need for self-improvement. All these trips that we lay on ourselves—the heavy-duty fearing that we're bad and hoping that we're good, the identities that we so dearly cling to, the rage, the jealousy and the addictions of all kinds—never touch our basic wealth. They are like clouds that temporarily block the sun. But all the time our warmth and brilliance are right here. This is who we really are. We are one blink of an eye away from being fully awake.

Looking at ourselves this way is very different from our usual habit. From this perspective we don't need to change: you can feel as wretched as you like, and you're still a good candidate for enlightenment. You can feel like the world's most hopeless basket case, but that feeling is your wealth, not something to be thrown out or improved upon. There's a richness to all of the smelly stuff that we so dislike and so little desire. The delightful things—what we love so dearly about ourselves, the places in which we feel some sense of pride or inspiration—these also are our wealth.

With the practices presented in this book, you can start just where you are. If you're feeling angry, poverty-stricken, or depressed, the practices described here were designed for you, because they will encourage you to use all the unwanted things in your life as the means for awakening compassion for yourself and others. These practices show us how to accept ourselves, how to relate directly with suffering, how to stop running away from the painful aspects of our lives. They show us how to work openheartedly with life just as it is.

When we hear about compassion, it naturally brings up working with others, caring for others. The reason we're often not there for others—whether for our child or our mother or someone who is insulting us or someone who frightens us—is that we're not there for ourselves. There are whole parts of ourselves that are so unwanted that whenever they begin to come up we run away.

Because we escape, we keep missing being right here, being right on the dot. We keep missing the moment we're in. Yet if we can experience the moment we're in, we discover that it is unique, precious, and completely fresh. It never happens twice. One can appreciate and celebrate each moment—there's nothing more sacred. There's nothing more vast or absolute. In fact, there's nothing more!

Only to the degree that we've gotten to know our personal pain, only to the degree that we've related

with pain at all, will we be fearless enough, brave enough, and enough of a warrior to be willing to feel the pain of others. To that degree we will be able to take on the pain of others because we will have discovered that their pain and our own pain are not different.

However, to do this, we need all the help we can get. It is my hope that this book will supply that help. The tools you will be given are three very supportive practices:

1. Basic sitting meditation (called *shamatha-vipashyana* meditation)
2. The practice of taking in and sending out (called tonglen)
3. The practice of working with slogans (called the seven points of mind training, or lojong)

All these practices awaken our trust that the wisdom and compassion that we need are already within us. They help us to know ourselves: our rough parts and our smooth parts, our passion, aggression, ignorance, and wisdom. The reason that people harm other people, the reason that the planet is polluted and people and animals are not doing so well these days is that individuals don't know or trust or love themselves enough. The technique of sitting called shamatha-vipashyana ("tranquillity-insight") is like a golden key that helps us to know ourselves.

Shamatha-Vipashyana Meditation

In shamatha-vipashyana meditation, we sit upright with legs crossed and eyes open, hands resting on our thighs. Then we simply become aware of our breath as it goes out. It requires precision to be right there with that breath. On the other hand, it's extremely relaxed and extremely soft. Saying, "Be right there with the breath as it goes out," is the same thing as saying, "Be fully present." Be right here with whatever is going on. Being aware of the breath as it goes out, we may also be aware of other things going on—sounds on the street, the light on the walls. These things may capture our attention slightly, but they don't need to draw us off. We can continue to sit right here, aware of the breath going out.

But being with the breath is only part of the technique. These thoughts that run through our minds continually are the other part. We sit here talking to ourselves. The instruction is that when you realize you've been thinking, you label it "thinking." When your mind wanders off, you say to yourself, "Thinking." Whether your thoughts are violent or passionate or full of ignorance and denial; whether your thoughts are worried or fearful, whether your thoughts are spiritual thoughts, pleasing thoughts of how well you're doing, comforting thoughts, uplifting thoughts, whatever they are, without judgment or

harshness simply label it all “thinking,” and do that with honesty and gentleness.

The touch on the breath is light: only about 25 percent of the awareness is on the breath. You’re not grasping or fixating on it. You’re opening, letting the breath mix with the space of the room, letting your breath just go out into space. Then there’s something like a pause, a gap until the next breath goes out again. While you’re breathing in, there could be some sense of just opening and waiting. It is like pushing the doorbell and waiting for someone to answer. Then you push the doorbell again and wait for someone to answer. Then probably your mind wanders off and you realize you’re thinking again—at this point, use the labeling technique.

It’s important to be faithful to the technique. If you find that your labeling has a harsh, negative tone to it, as if you were saying, “Dammit!,” that you’re giving yourself a hard time, say it again and lighten up. It’s not like trying to down the thoughts as if they were clay pigeons. Instead, be gentle. Use the labeling part of the technique as an opportunity to develop softness and compassion for yourself. Anything that comes up is okay in the arena of meditation. The point is, you can see it honestly and make friends with it.

Although it is embarrassing and painful, it is very healing to stop hiding from yourself. It is healing to know all the ways that you’re sneaky, all the ways

that you hide out, all the ways that you shut down, deny, close off, criticize people, all your weird little ways. You can know all that with some sense of humor and kindness. By knowing yourself, you're coming to know humanness altogether. We are all up against these things. We are all in this together. So when you realize that you're talking to yourself, label it "thinking" and notice your tone of voice. Let it be compassionate and gentle and humorous. Then you'll be changing old stuck patterns that are shared by the whole human race. Compassion for others begins with kindness to ourselves.*

Lojong Practice

The heart of this book is the lojong practice and teachings. The lojong practice (or mind training) has two elements: the practice, which is tonglen meditation, and the teaching, which comes in the form of slogans.

The basic notion of lojong is that we can make friends with what we reject, what we see as "bad" in ourselves and in other people. At the same time, we could learn to be generous with what we cherish, what we see as "good." If we begin to live in this

*If you've never tried sitting meditation before, you may wish to seek the guidance of a qualified meditation instructor. See the list of meditation centers at the back of the book for help in finding an instructor.

way, something in us that may have been buried for a long time begins to ripen. Traditionally this “something” is called *bodhichitta*, or awakened heart. It’s something that we already have but usually have not yet discovered.

It’s as if we were poor, homeless, hungry, and cold, and although we didn’t know it, right under the ground where we always slept was a pot of gold. That gold is like *bodhichitta*. Our confusion and misery come from not knowing that the gold is right here and from always looking for it somewhere else. When we talk about joy, enlightenment, waking up, or awakening *bodhichitta*, all that means is that we know the gold is right here, and we realize that it’s been here all along.

The basic message of the lojong teachings is that if it’s painful, you can learn to hold your seat and move closer to that pain. Reverse the usual pattern, which is to split, to escape. Go against the grain and hold your seat. Lojong introduces a different attitude toward unwanted stuff: if it’s painful, you become willing not just to endure it but also to let it awaken your heart and soften you. You learn to embrace it.

If an experience is delightful or pleasant, usually we want to grab it and make it last. We’re afraid that it will end. We’re not inclined to share it. The lojong teachings encourage us, if we enjoy what we are experiencing, to think of other people and wish for them to feel that. Share the wealth. Be generous with

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your joy. Give away what you most want. Be generous with your insights and delights. Instead of fearing that they're going to slip away and holding on to them, share them.

Whether it's pain or pleasure, through lojong practice we come to have a sense of letting our experience be as it is without trying to manipulate it, push it away, or grasp it. The pleasurable aspects of being human as well as the painful ones become the key to awakening bodhichitta.

There is a saying that is the underlying principle of tonglen and slogan practice: "Gain and victory to others, loss and defeat to myself." The Tibetan word for pride or arrogance, which is *nga-gyal*, is literally in English "me-victorious." Me first. Ego. That kind of "me-victorious" attitude is the cause of all suffering.

In essence what this little saying is getting at is that words like *victory* and *defeat* are completely interwoven with how we protect ourselves, how we guard our hearts. Our sense of victory just means that we guarded our heart enough so that nothing got through, and we think we won the war. The armor around our soft spot—our wounded heart—is now more fortified, and our world is smaller. Maybe nothing is getting in to scare us for one whole week, but our courage is weakening, and our sense of caring about others is getting completely obscured. Did we really win the war?

On the other hand, our sense of being defeated means that something got in. Something touched our soft spot. This vulnerability that we've kept armored for ages—something touched it. Maybe all that touched it was a butterfly, but we have never been touched there before. It was so tender. Because we have never felt that before, we now go out and buy padlocks and armor and guns so that we will never feel it again. We go for anything—seven pairs of boots that fit inside each other so we don't have to feel the ground, twelve masks so that no one can see our real face, nineteen sets of armor so that nothing can touch our skin, let alone our heart.

These words *defeat* and *victory* are so tied up with how we stay imprisoned. The real confusion is caused by not knowing that we have limitless wealth, and the confusion deepens each time we buy into this win/lose logic: if you touch me, that is defeat, and if I manage to armor myself and not be touched, that's victory.

Realizing our wealth would end our bewilderment and confusion. But the only way to do that is to let things fall apart. And that's the very thing that we dread the most—the ultimate defeat. Yet letting things fall apart would actually let fresh air into this old, stale basement of a heart that we've got.

Saying “Loss and defeat to myself” doesn’t mean to become a masochist: “Kick my head in, torture me, and dear God, may I never be happy.” What it means

is that you can open your heart and your mind and know what defeat feels like.

You feel too short, you have indigestion, you're too fat and too stupid. You say to yourself, "Nobody loves me, I'm always left out. I have no teeth, my hair's getting gray, I have blotchy skin, my nose runs." That all comes under the category of defeat, the defeat of ego. We're always not wanting to be who we are. However, we can never connect with our fundamental wealth as long as we are buying into this advertisement hype that we have to be someone else, that we have to smell different or have to look different.

On the other hand, when you say, "Victory to others," instead of wanting to keep it for yourself, there's the sense of sharing the whole delightful aspect of your life. You did lose some weight. You do like the way you look in the mirror. You suddenly feel like you have a nice voice, or someone falls in love with you or you fall in love with someone else. Or the seasons change and it touches your heart, or you begin to notice the snow in Vermont or the way the trees move in the wind. With anything that you want, you begin to develop the attitude of wanting to share it instead of being stingy with it or fearful around it.

Perhaps the slogans will challenge you. They say things like "Don't be jealous," and you think, "How did they know?" Or "Be grateful to everyone"; you wonder how to do that or why to bother. Some slogans, such as "Always meditate on whatever provokes

2

No Big Deal

THE PRACTICES we'll be doing help us develop trust in our awakened heart, our bodhichitta. If we could finally grasp how rich we are, our sense of heavy burden would diminish, and our sense of curiosity would increase.

Bodhichitta has three qualities: (1) it is soft and gentle, which is compassion; (2) at the same time, it is clear and sharp, which is called *prajna*; and (3) it is open. This last quality of bodhichitta is called *shunyata* and is also known as emptiness. Emptiness sounds cold. However, bodhichitta isn't cold at all, because there's a heart quality—the warmth of compassion—that pervades the space and the clarity. Compassion and openness and clarity are all one thing, and this one thing is called bodhichitta.

Bodhichitta is our heart—our wounded, softened heart. Now, if you look for that soft heart that we guard so carefully—if you decide that you're going to do a scientific exploration under the microscope and try to find that heart—you won't find it. You can look, but all you'll find is some kind of tenderness. There isn't anything that you can cut out and put under the microscope. There isn't anything that you

can dissect or grasp. The more you look, the more you find just a feeling of tenderness tinged with some kind of sadness.

This sadness is not about somebody mistreating us. This is inherent sadness, unconditioned sadness. It has part of our birthright, a family heirloom. It's been called the genuine heart of sadness.

Sometimes we emphasize the compassionate aspect of our genuine heart, and this is called the relative part of bodhichitta. Sometimes we emphasize the open, unfindable aspect of our heart, and this is called the absolute, this genuine heart that is just waiting to be discovered.

The first slogan of the seven points of mind training is “First, train in the preliminaries.” The preliminaries are the basic meditation practice—beneficial, supportive, warm-hearted, brilliant shamatha-vipashyana practice. When we say, “First, train in the preliminaries,” it’s not as if we first do shamatha-vipashyana practice and then graduate to something more advanced. Shamatha-vipashyana practice is not only the earth that we stand on, it’s also the air we breathe and the heart that beats inside us. Shamatha-vipashyana practice is the essence of all other practices as well. So when we say, “First, train in the preliminaries,” it simply means that without this good base there’s nothing to build on. Without it we couldn’t understand tonglen practice—which I’ll de-

scribe later—and we wouldn’t have any insight into our mind, into either our craziness or our wisdom.

Next, there are five slogans that emphasize the openness of bodhichitta, the absolute quality of bodhichitta. These point to the fact that, although we are usually very caught up with the solidness and seriousness of life, we could begin to stop making such a big deal and connect with the spacious and joyful aspect of our being.

The first of the absolute slogans is “Regard all dharmas as dreams.” More simply, regard everything as a dream. Life is a dream. Death is also a dream, for that matter; waking is a dream and sleeping is a dream. Another way to put this is, “Every situation is a passing memory.”

We went for a walk this morning, but now it is a memory. Every situation is a passing memory. As we live our lives, there is a lot of repetition—so many mornings greeted, so many meals eaten, so many drives to work and drives home, so many times spent with our friends and family, again and again, over and over. All of these situations bring up irritation, lust, anger, sadness, all kinds of things about the people with whom we work or live or stand in line or fight traffic. So much will happen in the same way over and over again. It’s all an excellent opportunity to connect with this sense of each situation being like a memory.

Just a few moments ago, you were standing in the hall, and now it is a memory. But then it was so real. Now I'm talking, and what I have just said has already passed.

It is said that with these slogans that are pointing to absolute truth—openness—one should not say, “Oh yes, I know,” but that one should just allow a mental gap to open, and wonder, “Could it be? Am I dreaming this?” Pinch yourself. Dreams are just as convincing as waking reality. You could begin to contemplate the fact that perhaps things are not as solid or as reliable as they seem.

Sometimes we just have this experience automatically; it happens to us naturally. I read recently about someone who went hiking in the high mountains and was alone in the wilderness at a very high altitude. If any of you have been at high altitudes, you know the light there is different. There's something more blue, more luminous about it. Things seem lighter and not so dense as in the middle of a big city, particularly if you stay there for some time alone. You're sometimes not sure if you're awake or asleep. This man wrote that he began to feel as if he were cooking his meals in a dream and that when he would go for a walk, he was walking toward mountains that were made out of air. He felt that the letter he was writing was made of air, that his hand was a phantom pen writing these phantom words, and that he was going to send it off to a phantom receiver. Sometimes we, too, have that

kind of experience, even at sea level. It actually makes our world feel so much bigger.

Without going into this much more, I'd like to bring it down to our shamatha practice. The key is, it's no big deal. We could all just lighten up. Regard all dharmas as dreams. With our minds we make a big deal out of ourselves, out of our pain, and out of our problems.

If someone instructed you to catch the beginning, middle, and end of every thought, you'd find that they don't seem to have a beginning, middle, and end. They definitely are there. You're talking to yourself, you're creating your whole identity, your whole world, your whole sense of problem, your whole sense of contentment, with this continual stream of thought. But if you really try to find thoughts, they're always changing. As the slogan says, each situation and even each word and thought and emotion is passing memory. It's like trying to see when water turns into steam. You can never find that precise moment. You know there's water, because you can drink it and make it into soup and wash in it, and you know there's steam, but you can't see precisely when one changes into the other. Everything is like that.

Have you ever been caught in the heavy-duty scenario of feeling defeated and hurt, and then somehow, for no particular reason, you just drop it? It just goes, and you wonder why you made "much ado about nothing." What was that all about? It also hap-

pens when you fall in love with somebody; you're so completely into thinking about the person twenty-four hours a day. You are haunted and you want him or her so badly. Then a little while later, "I don't know where we went wrong, but the feeling's gone and I just can't get it back." We all know this feeling of how we make things a big deal and then realize that we're making a lot out of nothing.

I'd like to encourage us all to lighten up, to practice with a lot of gentleness. This is not the drill sergeant saying, "Lighten up or else." I have found that if we can possibly use anything we hear against ourselves, we usually do. For instance, you find yourself being tense and remember that I said to lighten up, and then you feel, "Basically, I'd better stop sitting because I can't lighten up and I'm not a candidate for discovering bodhichitta or anything else."

Gentleness in our practice and in our life helps to awaken bodhichitta. It's like remembering something. This compassion, this clarity, this openness are like something we have forgotten. Sitting here being gentle with ourselves, we're rediscovering something. It's like a mother reuniting with her child; having been lost to each other for a long, long time, they reunite. The way to reunite with bodhichitta is to lighten up in your practice and in your whole life.

Meditation practice is a formal way in which you can get used to lightening up. I encourage you to follow the instructions faithfully, but within that form to

be extremely gentle. Let the whole thing be soft. Breathing out, the instruction is to touch your breath as it goes, to be with your breath. Let that be like relaxing out. Sense the breath going out into big space and dissolving into space. You're not trying to clutch it, not trying to furrow your brow and catch that breath as if you won't be a good person unless you grab that breath. You're simply relaxing outward with your breath.

Labeling our thoughts is a powerful support for lightening up, a very helpful way to reconnect with shunyata—this open dimension of our being, this fresh, unbiased dimension of our mind. When we come to that place where we say, “Thinking,” we can just say it with an unbiased attitude and with tremendous gentleness. Regard the thoughts as bubbles and the labeling like touching them with a feather. There’s just this light touch—“Thinking”—and they dissolve back into the space.

Don’t worry about achieving. Don’t worry about perfection. Just be there each moment as best you can. When you realize you’ve wandered off again, simply very lightly acknowledge that. This light touch is the golden key to reuniting with our openness.

The slogan says to regard all dharmas—that is, regard everything—as a dream. In this case, we could say, “Regard all thoughts as a dream,” and just touch them and let them go. When you notice you’re making a really big deal, just notice that with a lot of gen-

tleness, a lot of heart. No big deal. If the thoughts go, and you still feel anxious and tense, you could allow that to be there, with a lot of space around it. Just let it be. When thoughts come up again, see them for what they are. It's no big deal. You can loosen up, lighten up, whatever.

That's the essential meaning of the absolute bodhichitta slogans—to connect with the open, spacious quality of your mind, so that you can see that there's no need to shut down and make such a big deal about everything. Then when you do make a big deal, you can give that a lot of space and let it go.

In sitting practice, there's no way you can go wrong, wherever you find yourself. Just relax. Relax your shoulders, relax your stomach, relax your heart, relax your mind. Bring in as much gentleness as you can. The technique is already quite precise. It has a structure, it has a form. So within that form, move with warmth and gentleness. That's how we awaken bodhichitta.

3

Pulling Out the Rug

As I SAID BEFORE, the main instruction is simply to lighten up. By taking that attitude toward one's practice and one's life, by taking that more gentle and appreciative attitude toward oneself and others, the sense of burden that all of us carry around begins to decrease.

The next slogan is “Examine the nature of unborn awareness.” The real intention of this slogan is to pull the rug out from under you in case you think you understood the previous slogan. If you feel proud of yourself because of how you really understood that everything is like a dream, then this slogan is here to challenge that smug certainty. It’s saying, “Well, who is this anyway who thinks that they discovered that everything is like a dream?”

“Examine the nature of unborn awareness.” Who is this “I”? Where did it come from? Who is the one who realizes anything? Who is it who’s aware? This slogan points to the transparency of everything, including our beloved identity, this precious *M-E*. Who is this *me*?

The armor we erect around our soft hearts causes

a lot of misery. But don't be deceived, it's very transparent. The more vivid it gets, the more clearly you see it, the more you realize that this shield—this cocoon—is just made up of thoughts that we churn out and regard as solid. The shield is not made out of iron. The armor is not made out of metal. In fact, it's made out of passing memory.

The absolute quality of bodhichitta can never be pinned down. If you can talk about it, that's not it. So if you think that awakened heart is something, it isn't. It's passing memory. And if you think this big burden of ego, this big monster cocoon, is something, it isn't. It's just passing memory. Yet it's so vivid. The more you practice, the more vivid it gets. It's a paradox—it can't be found, and yet it couldn't be more vivid.

We spend a lot of time trying to nail everything down, concretizing, just trying to make everything solid and secure. We also spend a lot of time trying to dull or soften or fend off that vividness. When we awaken our hearts, we're changing the whole pattern, but not by creating a new pattern. We are moving further and further away from concretizing and making things so solid and always trying to get some ground under our feet. This moving away from comfort and security, this stepping out into what is unknown, uncharted, and shaky—that's called enlightenment, liberation. Krishnamurti talks about it in his book *Liberation from the Known*, Alan Watts in *The Wisdom of Insecurity*. It's all getting at the same thing.

This isn't how we usually go about things, in case you hadn't noticed. We usually try to get ground under our feet. It's as if you were in a spaceship going to the moon, and you looked back at this tiny planet Earth and realized that things were vaster than any mind could conceive and you just couldn't handle it, so you started worrying about what you were going to have for lunch. There you are in outer space with this sense of the world being so vast, and then you bring it all down into this very tiny world of worrying about what's for lunch: hamburgers or hot dogs. We do this all the time.

In "Examine the nature of unborn awareness," *examine* is an interesting word. It's not a matter of looking and seeing—"Now I've got it!"—but a process of examination and contemplation that leads into being able to relax with insecurity or edginess or restlessness. Much joy comes from that.

"Examine the nature of unborn awareness." Simply examine the nature of the one who has insight—contemplate that. We could question this solid identity that we have, this sense of a person frozen in time and space, this monolithic ME. In sitting practice, saying "thinking" with a soft touch introduces a question mark about who is doing all this thinking. Who's churning out what? What's happening to whom? Who am I that's thinking or that's labeling thinking or that's going back to the breath or hurting or wishing lunch would happen soon?

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The next slogan is “Self-liberate even the antidote.” In case you think you understood “Examine the nature of unborn awareness,” let go even of that understanding, that pride, that security, that sense of ground. The antidote that you’re being asked to liberate is shunyata itself. Let go of even the notion of emptiness, openness, or space.

There was a crazy-wisdom teacher in India named Saraha. He said that those who believe that everything is solid and real are stupid, like cattle, but that those who believe that everything is empty are even more stupid. Everything is changing all the time, and we keep wanting to pin it down, to fix it. So whenever you come up with a solid conclusion, let the rug be pulled out. You can pull out your own rug, and you can also let life pull it out for you.

Having the rug pulled out from under you is a big opportunity to change your fundamental pattern. It’s like changing the DNA. One way to pull out your own rug is by just letting go, lightening up, being more gentle, and not making such a big deal.

This approach is very different from practicing affirmations, which has been a popular thing to do in some circles. Affirmations are like screaming that you’re okay in order to overcome this whisper that you’re not. That’s a big contrast to actually uncovering the whisper, realizing that it’s passing memory, and moving closer to all those fears and all those edgy

feelings that maybe you're not okay. Well, no big deal. None of us is okay and all of us are fine. It's not just one way. We are walking, talking paradoxes.

When we contemplate all dharmas as dreams and regard all our thoughts as passing memory—labeling them, “Thinking,” touching them very lightly—then things will not appear to be so monolithic. We will feel a lightening of our burden. Labeling your thoughts as “thinking” will help you see the transparency of thoughts, that things are actually very light and illusory. Every time your stream of thoughts solidifies into a heavy story line that seems to be taking you elsewhere, label that “thinking.” Then you will be able to see how all the passion that’s connected with these thoughts, or all the aggression or all the heartbreak, is simply passing memory. If even for a second you actually had a full experience that it was all just thought, that would be a moment of full awakening.

This is how we begin to wake up our innate ability to let go, to reconnect with shunyata, or absolute bodhichitta. Also, this is how we awaken our compassion, our heart, our innate softness, relative bodhichitta. Use the labeling and use it with great gentleness as a way to touch those solid dramas and acknowledge that you just made them all up with this conversation you’re having with yourself.

When we say “Self-liberate even the antidote,” that’s encouragement to simply touch and then let go

of whatever you come up with. Whatever bright solutions or big plans you come up with, just let them go, let them go, let them go. Whether you seem to have just uncovered the root of a whole life of misery or you're thinking of a root beer float—whatever you're thinking—let it go. When something pleasant comes up, instead of rushing around the room like a windup toy, you could just pause and notice, and let go. This technique provides a gentle approach that breaks up the solidity of thoughts and memories. If the memory was a strong one, you'll probably find that something is left behind when the words go. When that happens, you're getting closer to the heart. You're getting closer to the bodhichitta.

These thoughts that come up, they're not bad. Anyway, meditation isn't about getting rid of thoughts—you'll think forever. Nevertheless, if you follow the breath and label your thoughts, you learn to let things go. Beliefs of solidness, beliefs of emptiness, let it all go. If you learn to let things go, thoughts are no problem. But at this point, for most of us, our thoughts are very tied up with our identity, with our sense of problem and our sense of how things are.

The next absolute slogan is “Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence.” We can learn to let thoughts go and just rest our mind in its natural state, in alaya, which is a word that means the open primordial basis

of all phenomena. We can rest in the fundamental openness and enjoy the display of whatever arises without making such a big deal.

So if you think that everything is solid, that's one trap, and if you change that for a different belief system, that's another trap. We have to pull the rug out from our belief systems altogether. We can do that by letting go of our beliefs, and also our sense of what is right and wrong, by just going back to the simplicity and the immediacy of our present experience, resting in the nature of alaya.

4

Let the World Speak for Itself

THE LAST of the absolute bodhichitta slogans is “In postmeditation, be a child of illusion.” This slogan says that when you’re not formally practicing meditation—which is basically the whole rest of your life—you should be a child of illusion. This is a haunting and poetic image, not all that easy to define. The way it’s phrased tends to encourage you to not define it. The idea is that your experience after you finish sitting practice could be a fresh take, an ongoing opportunity to let go and lighten up.

This slogan has a lot to do with looking out and connecting with the atmosphere, with the environment that you’re in, with the quality of your experience. You realize that it’s not all that solid. There’s always something happening that you can’t pin down with words or thoughts. It’s like the first day of spring. There’s a special quality about that day; it is what it is, no matter what opinion you may have of it.

When we study Buddhism, we learn about the view and the meditation as supports for encouraging us to let go of ego and just be with things as they are.

These absolute bodhichitta slogans present the view. “In postmeditation, be a child of illusion” or “Regard all dharmas as dreams” for example, are pithy reminders of an underlying way of looking at the world. You don’t exactly have to be able to grasp this view, but it points you in a certain direction. The suggestion that you view the world this way—as less than solid—sows seeds and wakes up certain aspects of your being.

Both the view and the meditation are great supports. They give you something to hold on to, even though all of the teachings are about not holding on to anything. We don’t just talk, we actually get down to it. That’s the practice, that’s the meditation. You can talk about lightening up till you’re purple in the face, but then you have the opportunity to practice lightening up with the outbreak, lightening up with the labeling. There is actual practice, a method that you’re given, a discipline.

The view and the meditation are encouragements to relax enough so that finally the atmosphere of your experience just begins to come to you. How things really are can’t be taught; no one can give you a formula: A + B + C = enlightenment.

These supports are often likened to a raft. You need the raft to cross the river, to get to the other side; when you get over there, you leave the raft behind. That’s an interesting image, but in experience it’s more like the raft gives out on you in the middle of

the river and you never really get to solid ground. This is what is meant by becoming a child of illusion.

The “child of illusion” image seems apt because young children seem to live in a world in which things are not so solid. You see a sense of wonder in all young children, which they later lose. This slogan encourages us to be that way again.

I read a book called *The Holographic Universe*, which is about science making the same discoveries that we make sitting in meditation. The room that we sit in is solid and very vivid; it would be ridiculous to say that it wasn’t there. But what science is finding out is that the material world isn’t as solid as it seems; it’s more like a hologram—vivid, but empty at the same time. In fact, the more you realize the lack of solidity of things, the more vivid things appear.

Trungpa Rinpoche expresses this paradox in poetic and haunting language. To paraphrase *The Sadhana of Mahamudra*: everything you see is vividly unreal in emptiness, yet there’s definitely form. What you see is not here; it’s not *not* here. It’s both and neither. Everything you hear is the echo of emptiness, yet there’s sound—it’s real—the echo of emptiness. Then Trungpa Rinpoche goes on to say, “Good and bad, happy and sad, all thoughts vanish into emptiness like the imprint of a bird in the sky.”

This is as close as you could come to describing what it means to be a child of illusion. That’s the key point: this good and bad, happy and sad, can be al-

lowed to dissolve into emptiness like the imprint of a bird in the sky.

The practice and the view are supports, but the real thing—the experience of sound being like an echo of emptiness or everything you see being vividly unreal—dawns on you, like waking up out of an ancient sleep. There's no way you can force it or fake it. The view and the practice are there to be experienced with a light touch, not to be taken as dogma.

We have to listen to these slogans, chew on them, and wonder about them. We have to find out for ourselves what they mean. They are like challenges rather than statements of fact. If we let them, they will lead us toward the fact that facts themselves are very dubious. We can be a child of illusion through our waking and sleeping existence; through our birth and our death, we can continually remain as a child of illusion.

Being a child of illusion also has to do with beginning to encourage yourself not to be a walking battle-ground. We have such strong feelings of good and evil, right and wrong. We also feel that parts of ourselves are bad or evil and parts of ourselves are good and wholesome. All these pairs of opposites—happy and sad, victory and defeat, loss and gain—are at war with each other.

The truth is that good and bad coexist; sour and sweet coexist. They aren't really opposed to each

other. We could start to open our eyes and our hearts to that deep way of perceiving, like moving into a whole new dimension of experience: becoming a child of illusion.

Maybe you've heard that the Buddha is not *out there*; the Buddha is within. The Buddha within is bad and good coexisting, evil and purity coexisting; the Buddha within is not just all the nice stuff. The Buddha within is messy as well as clean. The Buddha within is really sordid as well as wholesome—yucky, smelly, repulsive as well as the opposite: they coexist.

This view is not easy to grasp, but it's helpful to hear. At the everyday kitchen-sink level, it simply means that as you see things in yourself that you think are terrible and not worthy, maybe you could reflect that that's Buddha. You're proud of yourself because you just had a good meditation or because you're having such saintly thoughts. That's Buddha too. When we get into tonglen practice, you'll see just how interesting this logic is. Tonglen as well as basic shamatha-vipashyana practice leads us toward realizing that opposites coexist. They aren't at war with each other.

In meditation practice we struggle a lot with trying to get rid of certain things, while other things come to the front. In order for the world to speak for itself, we first have to see how hard we struggle, and then we could begin to open our hearts and minds to that fact. The view and the meditation—both shamatha-

vipashyana and tonglen—are meant to support a softer, more gentle approach to the whole show, the whole catastrophe. We begin to let opposites coexist, not trying to get rid of anything but just training and opening our eyes, ears, nostrils, taste buds, hearts, and minds wider and wider, nurturing the habit of opening to whatever is occurring, including our shutting down.

We generally interpret the world so heavily in terms of good and bad, happy and sad, nice and not nice that the world doesn't get a chance to speak for itself. When we say, "Be a child of illusion," we're beginning to get at this fresh way of looking when we're not caught in our hope and fear. We become mindful, awake, and gentle with our hope and fear. We see them clearly with less bias, less judgment, less sense of a heavy trip. When this happens, the world will speak for itself.

I heard a story about Trungpa Rinpoche sitting in a garden with His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. People were standing around at a distance, close enough to hear but far enough away to give them privacy and space. It was a beautiful day. These two gentlemen had been sitting in the garden for a long time, just sitting there not saying anything. Time went on, and they just sat in the garden not saying anything and seeming to enjoy it very much. Then Trungpa Rinpoche broke the silence and began to laugh. He said to Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, pointing across the

lawn, "They call that a tree." Whereupon Khyentse Rinpoche started to laugh too. Had we been there, I think we might have had a little transmission of what it means to be a child of illusion.

We can practice this way in our postmeditation now and for the rest of our lives. Whatever we're doing, whether we're having tea or working, we could do that completely. We could be wherever we are completely, 100 percent.

Take the whole teatime just to drink your tea. I started doing this in airports. Instead of reading, I sit there and look at everything, and appreciate it. Even if you don't feel appreciation, just look. Feel what you feel; take an interest and be curious. Write less; don't try to capture it all on paper. Sometimes writing, instead of being a fresh take, is like trying to catch something and nail it down. This capturing blinds us and there's no fresh outlook, no wide-open eyes, no curiosity. When we are not trying to capture anything we become like a child of illusion.

In the morning you feel one way; in the afternoon, it can seem as if years have passed. It's just astounding how it all just keeps moving on. When you write a letter, you say, "I'm feeling crummy." But by the time the person gets the letter, it's all changed. Have you ever gotten back an answer to your letter and then thought, "What are they talking about?" You don't remember this long-forgotten identity you sent out in the mail.

There was a Native American man called Ishi, which in his language meant “person” or “human being.” He was a good example of what it means to be a child of illusion. Ishi lived in northern California at the beginning of the century. Everyone in his whole tribe had been methodically killed, hunted down like coyotes and wolves. Ishi was the only one left. He had lived alone for a long time. No one knew exactly why, but one day he just appeared in Oroville, California, at dawn. There stood this naked man. They quickly put some clothes on him and put him in jail, until the Bureau of Indian Affairs told them what to do with him. It was front-page news in the San Francisco newspapers, where an anthropologist named Alfred Kroeber read the story.

Here was an anthropologist’s dream come true. This native person had been living in the wilds all his life and could reveal his tribe’s way of life. Ishi was brought on the train down to San Francisco into a totally unknown world, where he lived—pretty happily, it appears—for the rest of his life. Ishi seemed to be fully awake. He was completely at home with himself and the world, even when it changed so dramatically almost overnight.

For instance, when they took him to San Francisco, he happily wore the suit and tie they gave him, but he carried the shoes in his hand, because he still wanted to feel the earth with his feet. He had been living as a caveman might, always having to remain

hidden for fear of being killed. But very soon after he arrived in the city they took him to a formal dinner party. He sat there unperturbed by this unfamiliar ritual, just observing, and then ate the way everybody else did. He was full of wonder, completely curious about everything, and seemingly not afraid or resentful, just totally open.

When Ishi was first taken to San Francisco, he went to the Oroville train station and stood on the platform. When the train came in, without anyone really noticing, he simply walked away very quietly and stood behind a pillar. Then the others noticed and beckoned to him, and they all got on the train to San Francisco. Later, Ishi told Kroeber that for his whole life when he and the other members of his tribe had seen that train they had thought it was a demon that ate people, because of how it snaked along and bellowed smoke and fire. When Kroeber heard that, he was awestruck. He asked, "How did you have the courage to just get on the train if you thought it was a demon?" Then Ishi said, quite simply, "Well, my life has taught me to be more curious than afraid." His life had taught him what it meant to be a child of illusion.

5

Poison as Medicine

WITH THE SLOGAN “Three objects, three poisons, and three seeds of virtue” we begin to enter into the teachings on relative bodhichitta, the teachings on how to awaken compassion. We have so far been attempting to establish that the ground of all of our experience is very spacious, not as solid as we tend to make it. We don’t have to make such a big deal about ourselves, our enemies, our lovers, and the whole show. This emphasis on gentleness is the pith instruction on how to reconnect with openness and freshness in our lives, how to liberate ourselves from the small world of ego. We’ll keep coming back to this sense of freshness and open space and not making such a big deal, because we are now about to get into the really messy stuff.

In the Buddhist teachings, the messy stuff is called *klesha*, which means poison. Boiling it all down to the simplest possible formula, there are three main poisons: passion, aggression, and ignorance. We could talk about these in different ways—for example, craving, aversion, and couldn’t care less. Addictions of all kinds come under the category of craving, which is wanting, wanting, wanting—feel-

ing that we have to have some kind of resolution. Aversion encompasses violence, rage, hatred, and negativity of all kinds, as well as garden-variety irritation. And ignorance? Nowadays, it's usually called denial.

The pith instruction of all the Buddhist teachings and most explicitly of the lojong teachings is, whatever you do, don't try to make these unwanted feelings go away. That's an unusual thought; it's not our habitual tendency to let these feelings hang around. Our habitual tendency is definitely to try to make those things go away.

People and situations in our lives are always triggering our passion, aggression, and ignorance. A good old innocent cup of coffee triggers some people's craving; they are addicted to it; it represents comfort and all the good things in life. If they can't get it, their life is a wreck. Other people have an elaborate story line about why it's bad for you, and they have aversion and a support group. Plenty of other people couldn't care less about a cup of coffee; it doesn't mean much at all to them.

And then there's good old Mortimer, that person who is sitting next to you in the meditation hall, or perhaps someone who works in your office. Some people are lusting when they see Mortimer. He looks wonderful to them. A lot of their discursive thought is taken up with what they'd like to do with Mortimer. A certain number of people hate him. They haven't

even talked to him yet, but the minute they saw him, they felt loathing. Some of us haven't noticed him, and we may never notice him. In fact, a few years from now he'll tell us he was here, and we'll be surprised.

So there are three things, which in the slogan are called three objects. One object is what we find pleasant, another is what we find unpleasant, and a third is what we're neutral about. If it's pleasant, it triggers craving; if it's unpleasant, it triggers aversion; if it's neutral, it triggers ignorance. Craving, aversion, and ignorance are the three poisons.

Our experience would write the formula as "Three objects, three poisons, and lots of misery" or "Three objects, three poisons, and three seeds of confusion, bewilderment, and pain," because the more the poisons arise and the bigger they get in our life, the more they drive us crazy. They keep us from seeing the world as it is; they make us blind, deaf, and dumb. The world doesn't speak for itself because we're so caught up in our story line that instead of feeling that there's a lot of space in which we could lead our life as a child of illusion, we're robbing ourselves, robbing ourselves from letting the world speak for itself. You just keep speaking to yourself, so nothing speaks to you.

The three poisons are always trapping you in one way or another, imprisoning you and making your

world really small. When you feel craving, you could be sitting on the edge of the Grand Canyon, but all you can see is this piece of chocolate cake that you're craving. With aversion, you're sitting on the edge of the Grand Canyon, and all you can hear is the angry words you said to someone ten years ago. With ignorance, you're sitting on the edge of the Grand Canyon with a paper bag over your head. Each of the three poisons has the power to capture you so completely that you don't even perceive what's in front of you.

This "Three objects, three poisons, and three seeds of virtue" is really a peculiar idea. It turns the conventional formula on its head in an unpredictable, nonhabitual way. It points to how the three poisons can be three seeds of becoming a child of illusion, how to step out of this limited world of ego fixation, how to step out of the world of tunnel vision. And the slogan is just an introduction to how this notion works. Tonglen practice will give you a very explicit method for working with this kind of lojong logic or, you could say, big-heart logic.

There's nothing really wrong with passion or aggression or ignorance, except that we take it so personally and therefore waste all that juicy stuff. The peacock eats poison and that's what makes the colors of its tail so brilliant. That's the traditional image for this practice, that the poison becomes the source of

great beauty and joy; poison becomes medicine.

Whatever you do, don't try to make the poisons go away, because if you're trying to make them go away, you're losing your wealth, along with your neurosis. All this messy stuff is your richness, but saying this once is not going to convince you. If nothing else, however, it could cause you to wonder about these teachings and begin to be curious whether they could possibly be true, which might inspire you to try them for yourself.

The main point is that when Mortimer walks by and triggers your craving or your aversion or your ignorance or your jealousy or your arrogance or your feeling of worthlessness—when Mortimer walks by and a feeling arises—that could be like a little bell going off in your head or a lightbulb going on: here's an opportunity to awaken your heart. Here's an opportunity to ripen bodhichitta, to reconnect with the sense of the soft spot, because as a result of these poisons the shields usually come up. We react to the poisons by armoring our hearts.

When the poisons arise, we counter them with two main tactics. Step one: Mortimer walks by. Step two: klesha arises. (It's hard to separate the first two steps.) Step three: we either *act out* or *repress*, which is to say we either physically or mentally attack Mortimer or talk to ourself about what a jerk he is or how we're going to get even with him, or else we repress those feelings.

Acting out and repressing are the main ways that we shield our hearts, the main ways that we never really connect with our vulnerability, our compassion, our sense of the open, fresh dimension of our being. By acting out or repressing we invite suffering, bewilderment, or confusion to intensify.

Drive all blames into Mortimer. Someone once heard the slogan “Drive all blames into one” and thought it was “Drive all blames into Juan.” Whether you call him or her Juan or Juanita or Mortimer, the usual tactic is either to act out or repress. If Mortimer or Juan or Juanita walks by and craving arises, you try to get together by flirting or making advances. If aversion arises, you try to get revenge. You don’t stay with the raw feelings. You don’t hold your seat. You take it a step further and act out.

Repressing could actually come under the category of ignorance. When you see Juan or Juanita or Mortimer, you just shut down. Maybe you don’t even want to touch what they remind you of, so you just shut down. There’s another common form of repression, which has to do with guilt: Juan walks by; aversion arises; you act out; and then you feel guilty about it. You think you’re a bad person to be hating Juan, and so you repress it.

What we’re working with in our basic shamatha-vipashyana practice—and explicitly with the tonglen practice—is the middle ground between acting out and repressing. We’re discovering how to hold our

seat and feel completely what's underneath all that story line of wanting, not wanting, and so forth.

In terms of "Three objects, three poisons, and three seeds of virtue," when these poisons arise, the instruction is to drop the story line, which means—instead of acting out or repressing—use the situation as an opportunity to feel your heart, to feel the wound. Use it as an opportunity to touch that soft spot. Underneath all that craving or aversion or jealousy or feeling wretched about yourself, underneath all that hopelessness and despair and depression, there's something extremely soft, which is called bodhichitta.

When these things arise, train gradually and very gently without making it into a big deal. Begin to get the hang of feeling what's underneath the story line. Feel the wounded heart that's underneath the addiction, self-loathing, or anger. If someone comes along and shoots an arrow into your heart, it's fruitless to stand there and yell at the person. It would be much better to turn your attention to the fact that there's an arrow in your heart and to relate to that wound.

When we do that, the three poisons become three seeds of how to make friends with ourselves. They give us the chance to work on patience and kindness, the chance not to give up on ourselves and not to act out or repress. They give us the chance to change our habits completely. This is what helps both ourselves and others. This is instruction on how to turn un-

wanted circumstances into the path of enlightenment. By following it, we can transform all that messy stuff that we usually push away into the path of awakening: reconnecting with our soft heart, our clarity, and our ability to open further.

6

Start Where You Are

HERE ARE TWO SLOGANS that go along with the tonglen practice: “Sending and taking should be practiced alternately. / These two should ride the breath”—which is actually a description of tonglen and how it works—and “Begin the sequence of sending and taking with yourself.”

The slogan “Begin the sequence of sending and taking with yourself” is getting at the point that compassion starts with making friends with ourselves, and particularly with our poisons—the messy areas. As we practice tonglen—taking and sending—and contemplate the lojong slogans, gradually it begins to dawn on us how totally interconnected we all are. Now people know that what we do to the rivers in South America affects the whole world, and what we do to the air in Alaska affects the whole world. Everything is interrelated—including ourselves, so this is very important, this making friends with ourselves. It’s the key to a more sane, compassionate planet.

What you do for yourself—any gesture of kindness, any gesture of gentleness, any gesture of honesty and clear seeing toward yourself—will affect

how you experience your world. In fact, it will transform how you experience the world. What you do for yourself, you're doing for others, and what you do for others, you're doing for yourself. When you exchange yourself for others in the practice of tonglen, it becomes increasingly uncertain what is out there and what is in here.

If you have rage and righteously act it out and blame it all on others, it's really you who suffers. The other people and the environment suffer also, but you suffer more because you're being eaten up inside with rage, causing you to hate yourself more and more.

We act out because, ironically, we think it will bring us some relief. We equate it with happiness. Often there *is* some relief, for the moment. When you have an addiction and you fulfill that addiction, there is a moment in which you feel some relief. Then the nightmare gets worse. So it is with aggression. When you get to tell someone off, you might feel pretty good for a while, but somehow the sense of righteous indignation and hatred grows, and it hurts you. It's as if you pick up hot coals with your bare hands and throw them at your enemy. If the coals happen to hit him, he will be hurt. But in the meantime, you are guaranteed to be burned.

On the other hand, if we begin to surrender to ourselves—begin to drop the story line and experience what all this messy stuff behind the story line feels

like—we begin to find bodhichitta, the tenderness that's under all that harshness. By being kind to ourselves, we become kind to others. By being kind to others—if it's done properly, with proper understanding—we benefit as well. So the first point is that we are completely interrelated. What you do to others, you do to yourself. What you do to yourself, you do to others.

Start where you are. This is very important. Tonglen practice (and all meditation practice) is not about later, when you get it all together and you're this person you really respect. You may be the most violent person in the world—that's a fine place to start. That's a very rich place to start—juicy, smelly. You might be the most depressed person in the world, the most addicted person in the world, the most jealous person in the world. You might think that there are no others on the planet who hate themselves as much as you do. All of that is a good place to start. Just where you are—that's the place to start.

As we begin to practice shamatha-vipashyana meditation, following our breath and labeling our thoughts, we can gradually begin to realize how profound it is just to let those thoughts go, not rejecting them, not trying to repress them, but just simply acknowledging them as violent thoughts, thoughts of hatred, thoughts of wanting, thoughts of poverty, thoughts of loathing, whatever they might be. We can see it all as thinking and can let the thoughts go

and begin to feel what's left. We can begin to feel the energy of our heart, our body, our neck, our head, our stomach—that basic feeling that's underneath all of the story lines. If we can relate directly with that, then all of the rest is our wealth. When we don't act out and we don't repress, then our passion, our aggression, and our ignorance become our wealth. The poison already is the medicine. You don't have to transform anything. Simply letting go of the story line is what it takes, which is not that easy. That light touch of acknowledging what we're thinking and letting it go is the key to connecting with this wealth that we have. With all the messy stuff, no matter how messy it is, just start where you are—not tomorrow, not later, not yesterday when you were feeling better—but now. Start now, just as you are.

Milarepa is one of the lineage holders of the Kagyü lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Milarepa is one of the heroes, one of the brave ones, a very crazy, unusual fellow. He was a loner who lived in caves by himself and meditated wholeheartedly for years. He was extremely stubborn and determined. If he couldn't find anything to eat for a couple of years, he just ate nettles and turned green, but he would never stop practicing.

One evening Milarepa returned to his cave after gathering firewood, only to find it filled with demons. They were cooking his food, reading his books, sleeping in his bed. They had taken over the joint. He knew

about nonduality of self and other, but he still didn't quite know how to get these guys out of his cave. Even though he had the sense that they were just a projection of his own mind—all the unwanted parts of himself—he didn't know how to get rid of them.

So first he taught them the dharma. He sat on this seat that was higher than they were and said things to them about how we are all one. He talked about compassion and shunyata and how poison is medicine. Nothing happened. The demons were still there. Then he lost his patience and got angry and ran at them. They just laughed at him. Finally, he gave up and just sat down on the floor, saying, "I'm not going away and it looks like you're not either, so let's just live here together."

At that point, all of them left except one. Milarepa said, "Oh, this one is particularly vicious." (We all know that one. Sometimes we have lots of them like that. Sometimes we feel that's all we've got.) He didn't know what to do, so he surrendered himself even further. He walked over and put himself right into the mouth of the demon and said, "Just eat me up if you want to." Then that demon left too. The moral of the story is, when the resistance is gone, so are the demons.

That's the underlying logic of tonglen practice and also of lojong altogether. When the resistance is gone, so are the demons. It's like a koan that we can

work with by learning how to be more gentle, how to relax, and how to surrender to the situations and people in our lives.

Having said all that, now I'll talk about tonglen. I've noticed that people generally eat up the teachings, but when it comes to having to do tonglen, they say, "Oh, it sounded good, but I didn't realize you actually meant it." In its essence, this practice of tonglen is, when anything is painful or undesirable, to breathe it in. That's another way of saying you don't resist it. You surrender to yourself, you acknowledge who you are, you honor yourself. As unwanted feelings and emotions arise, you actually breathe them in and connect with what all humans feel. We all know what it is to feel pain in its many guises.

This breathing in is done for yourself, in the sense that it's a personal and real experience, but simultaneously there's no doubt that you're at the same time developing your kinship with all beings. If you can know it in yourself, you can know it in everyone. If you're in a jealous rage and it occurs to you to actually breathe it in rather than blame it on someone else—if you get in touch with the arrow in your heart—it's quite accessible to you at that very moment that there are people all over the world feeling exactly what you're feeling. This practice cuts through culture, economic status, intelligence, race, religion.

People everywhere feel pain—jealousy, anger, being left out, feeling lonely. Everybody feels that exactly the way you feel it. The story lines vary, but the underlying feeling is the same for us all.

By the same token, if you feel some sense of delight—if you connect with what for you is inspiring, opening, relieving, relaxing—you breathe it out, you give it away, you send it out to everyone else. Again, it's very personal. It starts with *your* feeling of delight, *your* feeling of connecting with a bigger perspective, *your* feeling of relief or relaxation. If you're willing to drop the story line, you feel exactly what all other human beings feel. It's shared by all of us. In this way if we do the practice personally and genuinely, it awakens our sense of kinship with all beings.

The other thing that's very important is absolute bodhichitta. In order to do tonglen, we've first established the ground of absolute bodhichitta because it's important that when you breathe in and connect with the vividness and reality of pain there's also some sense of space. There's that vast, tender, empty heart of bodhichitta, your awakened heart. Right in the pain there's a lot of room, a lot of openness. You begin to touch in on that space when you relate directly to the messy stuff, because by relating directly with the messy stuff you are completely undoing the way ego holds itself together.

We shield our heart with an armor woven out of very old habits of pushing away pain and grasping at

pleasure. When we begin to breathe in the pain instead of pushing it away, we begin to open our hearts to what's unwanted. When we relate directly in this way to the unwanted areas of our lives, the airless room of ego begins to be ventilated. In the same way, when we open up our clenched hearts and let the good things go—radiate them out and share them with others—that's also completely reversing the logic of ego, which is to say, reversing the logic of suffering. Lojong logic is the logic that transcends the messy and unmessy, transcends pain and pleasure. Lojong logic begins to open up the space and it begins to ventilate this whole cocoon that we find ourselves in. Whether you are breathing in or breathing out, you are opening the heart, which is awakening bodhichitta.

So now the technique. Tonglen practice has four stages. The *first stage* is flashing openness, or flashing absolute bodhichitta. The slogan “Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence” goes along with this flash of openness, which is done very quickly. There is some sort of natural flash of silence and space. It's a very simple thing.

The *second stage* is working with the texture. You visualize breathing in dark, heavy, and hot and breathing out white, light, and cool. The idea is that you are always breathing in the same thing: you are essentially breathing in the cause of suffering, the

origin of suffering, which is fixation, the tendency to hold on to ego with a vengeance.

You may have noticed, when you become angry or poverty-stricken or jealous, that you experience that fixation as black, hot, solid, and heavy. That is actually the texture of poison, the texture of neurosis and fixation. You may have also noticed times when you are all caught up in yourself, and *then* some sort of contrast or gap occurs. It's very spacious. That's the experience of mind that is not fixated on phenomena; it's the experience of openness. The texture of that openness is generally experienced as light, white, fresh, clear, and cool.

So in the second stage of tonglen you work with those textures. You breathe in black, heavy, and hot through all the pores of your body, and you radiate out white, light, and cool, also through all the pores of your body, 360 degrees. You work with the texture until you feel that it's synchronized: black is coming in and white is going out on the medium of the breath—in and out, in and out.

The *third stage* is working with a specific heartfelt object of suffering. You breathe in the pain of a specific person or animal that you wish to help. You breathe out to that person spaciousness or kindness or a good meal or a cup of coffee—whatever you feel would lighten their load. You can do this for anyone: the homeless mother that you pass on the street, your suicidal uncle, or yourself and the pain you are feel-

ing at that very moment. The main point is that the suffering is real, totally untheoretical. It should be heartfelt, tangible, honest, and vivid.

The *fourth stage* extends this wish to relieve suffering much further. You start with the homeless person and then extend out to all those who are suffering just as she is, or to all those who are suicidal like your uncle or to all those who are feeling the jealousy or addiction or contempt that you are feeling. You use specific instances of misery and pain as a stepping stone for understanding the universal suffering of people and animals everywhere. Simultaneously, you breathe in the pain of your uncle and of all the zillions of other desperate, lonely people like him. Simultaneously, you send out spaciousness or cheerfulness or a bunch of flowers, whatever would be healing, to your uncle and all the others. What you feel for one person, you can extend to all people.

You need to work with both the third and fourth stages—with both the immediate suffering of one person and the universal suffering of all. If you were only to extend out to all sentient beings, the practice would be very theoretical. It would never actually touch your heart. On the other hand, if you were to work only with your own or someone else's fixation, it would lack vision. It would be too narrow. Working with both situations together makes the practice real and heartfelt; at the same time, it provides vision and a way for you to work with everyone else in the world.

You can bring all of your unfinished karmic business right into the practice. In fact, you should invite it in. Suppose that you are involved in a horrific relationship: every time you think of a particular person you get *furious*. That is very useful for tonglen! Or perhaps you feel depressed. It was all you could do to get out of bed today. You're so depressed that you want to stay in bed for the rest of your life; you have considered hiding *under* your bed. That is very useful for tonglen practice. The specific fixation should be *real*, just like that.

Let's use another example. You may be formally doing tonglen or just sitting having your coffee, and here comes Mortimer, the object of your passion, aggression, or ignorance. You want to hit him or hug him, or maybe you wish that he weren't there at all.

But let's say you're angry. The object is Mortimer and here comes the poison: *fury*. You breathe that in. The idea is to develop sympathy for your own confusion. The technique is that you do not blame Mortimer; you also do not blame yourself. Instead, there is just liberated fury—hot, black, and heavy. Experience it as fully as you can.

You breathe the anger in; you remove the object; you stop thinking about him. In fact, he was just a useful catalyst. Now you own the anger completely. You drive all blames into yourself. It takes a lot of bravery, and it's extremely insulting to ego. In fact,

it destroys the whole mechanism of ego. So you breathe in.

Then, you breathe out sympathy, relaxation, and spaciousness. Instead of just a small, dark situation, you allow a lot of space for these feelings. Breathing out is like ventilating the whole thing, airing it out. Breathing out is like opening up your arms and just letting go. It's fresh air. Then you breathe the rage in again—the black, heavy hotness of it. Then you breathe out, ventilating the whole thing, allowing a lot of space.

What you are actually doing is cultivating kindness toward yourself. It is very simple in that way. You don't think about it; you don't philosophize; you simply breathe in a very real klesha. You own it completely and then aerate it, allowing a lot of space when you breathe out. This, in itself, is an amazing practice—even if it didn't go any further—because at this level you are still working on yourself. But the real beauty of the practice is that you then extend that out.

Without pretending, you can acknowledge that about two billion other sentient beings are feeling the exact same rage that you are at that moment. They are experiencing it exactly the way you are experiencing it. They may have a different object, but the object isn't the point. The point is the rage itself. You breathe it in from all of them, so they no longer have

to have it. It doesn't make your own rage any greater; it is just rage, just fixation on rage, which causes so much suffering.

Sometimes, at that moment, you get a glimpse of why there is murder and rape, why there is war, why people burn down buildings, why there is so much misery in the world. It all comes from feeling that rage and acting it out instead of taking it in and airing it. It all turns into hatred and misery, which pollutes the world and obviously perpetuates the vicious cycle of suffering and frustration. Because *you* feel rage, therefore you have the kindling, the connection, for understanding the rage of all sentient beings. First you work with your own klesha; then you quickly extend that and breathe it all in.

At that point, simultaneously, it is no longer *your* own particular burden; it is just the rage of sentient beings, which includes you. You breathe that in, and you breathe out a sense of ventilation, so that all sentient beings could experience that. This goes for anything that bothers you. The more it bothers you, the more awake you're going to be when you do tonglen.

The things that really drive us nuts have enormous energy in them. That is why we fear them. It could even be your own timidity: you are so timid that you are afraid to walk up and say hello to someone, afraid to look someone in the eye. It takes a lot of energy to maintain that. It's the way you keep yourself together.

In tonglen practice, you have the chance to own that completely, not blaming anybody, and to ventilate it with the outbreak. Then you might better understand why some other people in the room look so grim: it isn't because they hate you but because they feel the same kind of timidity and don't want to look anyone in the face. In this way, the tonglen practice is both a practice of making friends with yourself and a practice of compassion.

By practicing in this way, you definitely develop your sympathy for others, and you begin to understand them a lot better. In that way your own pain is like a stepping stone. Your heart develops more and more, and even if someone comes up and insults you, you could genuinely understand the whole situation because you understand so well where everybody's coming from. You also realize that you can help by simply breathing *in* the pain of others and breathing *out* that ventilation. So tonglen starts with relating directly to specific suffering—yours or someone else's—which you then use to understand that this suffering is universal, shared by us all.

Almost everybody can begin to do tonglen by thinking of someone he or she loves very dearly. It's sometimes easier to think of your children than your husband or wife or mother or father, because those relationships may be more complicated. There are some people in your life whom you love very straight-

forwardly without complication: old people or people who are ill or little children, or people who have been kind to you.

When he was eight years old, Trungpa Rinpoche saw a whimpering puppy being stoned to death by a laughing, jeering crowd. He said that after that, doing tonglen practice was straightforward for him: all he had to do was think of that dog and his heart would start to open instantly. There was nothing complicated about it. He would have done anything to breathe in the suffering of that animal and to breathe out relief. So the idea is to start with something like that, something that activates your heart.

So you think of a puppy being stoned and dying in pain, and you breathe that in. Then, it is no longer just a puppy. It is your connection with the realization that there are puppies and people suffering unjustly like that all over the world. You immediately extend the practice and breathe in the suffering of all the people who are suffering like that animal.

It is also possible to start with the puppy or your uncle or yourself and then gradually extend out further and further. Having started with the wish to relieve your sister's depression, you could extend further and breathe in the depression of people who are somewhat "neutral"—the ones to whom you are not that close but who also don't cause you fear or anger. You breathe in the depression and send out relief to all those "neutral" people. Then, gradually, the

practice moves to people you actually *hate*, people you consider to be your enemies or to have actually harmed you. This expansion evolves by doing the practice. You cannot fake these things; therefore you start with the things that are close to your heart.

It's useful to think of tonglen practice in four stages:

1. Flashing openness
2. Working with the texture, breathing in dark, heavy, and hot and breathing out white, light, and cool
3. Working with relieving a specific, heartfelt instance of suffering
4. Extending that wish to help everyone

The main thing is to really get in touch with fixation and the power of klesha activity in yourself. This makes other people's situations completely accessible and real to you. Then, when it becomes real and vivid, always remember to extend it out. Let your own experience be a stepping stone for working with the world.

7

Bringing All That We Meet to the Path

TODAY'S SLOGAN IS "When the world is filled with evil, / Transform all mishaps into the path of bodhi." The word *bodhi* means "enlightenment." This is the basic statement of lojong altogether: how to use the unwanted, unfavorable circumstances of your life as the actual material of awakening. This is the precious gift of the lojong teachings, that whatever occurs isn't considered an interruption or an obstacle but a way to wake up. This slogan is very well suited to our busy lives and difficult times. In fact, it's designed for that: if there were no difficulties, there would be no need for lojong or tonglen.

Bodhisattva is another word for the awakening warrior, the one who cultivates bravery and compassion. One point this slogan is making is that on the path of the warrior, or *bodhisattva*, there is no interruption. The path includes all experience, both serene and chaotic. When things are going well, we feel good. We delight in the beauty of the snow falling outside the windows or the light reflecting off the floor. There's some sense of appreciation. But when the

fire alarm rings and confusion erupts, we feel irritated and upset.

It's all opportunity for practice. There is no interruption. We would like to believe that when things are still and calm, that's the real stuff, and when things are messy, confused, and chaotic, we've done something wrong, or more usually someone *else* has done something to ruin our beautiful meditation. As someone once said about a loud, bossy woman, "What is that woman doing in my sacred world?"

Another point about this slogan is that part of awakening is to cultivate honesty and clear seeing. Sometimes people take the lojong teachings to mean that if you're not to blame others but instead to connect with the feelings beneath your own story line, it would be wrong to say that someone has harmed you. However, part of honesty, clear seeing, and straightforwardness is being able to acknowledge that harm has been done. The first noble truth—the very first teaching of the Buddha—is that there is suffering. Suffering does exist as part of the human experience. People harm each other—we harm others and others harm us. To know that is clear seeing.

This is tricky business. What's the difference between seeing that harm has been done and blaming? Perhaps it is that rather than point the finger of blame, we raise questions: "How can I communicate? How can I help the harm that has been done unravel itself? How can I help others find their own

wisdom, kindness, and sense of humor?” That’s a much greater challenge than blaming and hating and acting out.

How can we help? The way that we can help is by making friends with our own feelings of hatred, bewilderment, and so forth. Then we can accept them in others. With this practice you begin to realize that you’re capable of playing all the parts. It’s not just “them”; it’s “us” *and* “them.”

I used to feel outrage when I read about parents abusing their children, particularly physically. I used to get righteously indignant—until I became a mother. I remember very clearly one day, when my six-month-old son was screaming and crying and covered in oatmeal and my two-and-a-half-year-old daughter was pulling on me and knocking things off the table, thinking, “I understand why all those mothers hurt their children. I understand perfectly. It’s only that I’ve been brought up in a culture that doesn’t encourage me that way, so I’m not going to do it. But at this moment, everything in me wants to eradicate completely these two sweet little children.”

So lest you find yourself condescendingly doing tonglen for the other one who’s so confused, you could remember that this is a practice where compassion begins to arise in you because you yourself have been there. You’ve been angry, jealous, and lonely. You know what it’s like and you know how

sometimes you do strange things. Because you're lonely, you say cruel words; because you want someone to love you, you insult them. Exchanging yourself for others begins to occur when you can see where someone is because you've been there. It doesn't happen because you're better than they are but because human beings share the same stuff. The more you know your own, the more you're going to understand others.

When the world is filled with evil, how do we transform unwanted situations into the path of awakening? One way is to flash absolute bodhichitta. But most of the techniques have to do with relative bodhichitta, which is to say, awakening our connection with the soft spot, reconnecting with the soft spot, not only through the stuff we like but also through the messy stuff.

People have plenty of reasons to be angry. We have to acknowledge this. We are angry. But blaming the other doesn't solve anything.

Ishi had plenty of reasons to be angry. His whole tribe had been killed, methodically, one by one. There was no one left but him. But he wasn't angry. We could learn a lesson from him. No matter what's happening, if we can relate to the soft spot that's underneath our rage and can connect with what's there, then we can relate to the enemy in a way in which we can start to be able to exchange ourself for other. Some sense of being able to communicate

with the enemy—heart to heart—is the only way that things can change. As long as we hate the enemy, then we suffer and the enemy suffers and the world suffers.

The only way to effect real reform is without hatred. This is the message of Martin Luther King, of Cesar Chavez, of Mother Teresa. Gerald Red Elk—a close friend and teacher who was a Sioux elder—told me that as a young man he had been filled with hatred for how his people had been, and continue to be, treated. Because of his hatred, he was alcoholic and miserable. But during the Second World War, when he was in Europe, something in him shifted; he saw that he was being poisoned by his hatred. He came back from the war, and for the rest of his life he tried to bring back the sense of spirit and confidence and dignity of the young people in his tribe. His main message was not to hate but to learn to communicate with all beings. He had a very big mind.

Another slogan says, “All dharma agrees at one point.” No matter what the teachings are—shamatha-vipashyana instruction, lojong instruction, any instruction of sanity and health from any tradition of wisdom—the point at which they all agree is to let go of holding on to yourself. That’s the way of becoming at home in your world. This is not to say that ego is sin. Ego is not sin. Ego is not something that you get rid of. Ego is something that you come to

know—something that you befriend by not acting out or repressing all the feelings that you feel.

Whether we're talking about the painful international situation or our painful domestic situation, the pain is a result of what's called ego clinging, of wanting things to work out on our own terms, of wanting "me-victorious."

Ego is like a room of your own, a room with a view, with the temperature and the smells and the music that you like. You want it your own way. You'd just like to have a little peace; you'd like to have a little happiness, you know, just "gimme a break!"

But the more you think that way, the more you try to get life to come out so that it will always suit you, the more your fear of other people and what's outside your room grows. Rather than becoming more relaxed, you start pulling down the shades and locking the door. When you do go out, you find the experience more and more unsettling and disagreeable. You become touchier, more fearful, more irritable than ever. The more you just try to get it your way, the less you feel at home.

To begin to develop compassion for yourself and others, you have to unlock the door. You don't open it yet, because you have to work with your fear that somebody you don't like might come in. Then as you begin to relax and befriend those feelings, you begin to open it. Sure enough, in come the music and the smells that you don't like. Sure enough, someone

puts a foot in and tells you you should be a different religion or vote for someone you don't like or give money that you don't want to give.

Now you begin to relate with those feelings. You develop some compassion, connecting with the soft spot. You relate with what begins to happen when you're not protecting yourself so much. Then gradually, like Ishi, you become more curious than afraid. To be fearless isn't really to overcome fear, it's to come to know its nature. Just open the door more and more and at some point you'll feel capable of inviting all sentient beings as your guests.

It helps to realize that the Nelson Mandelas and Mother Teresas of the world also know how it feels to be in a small room with the windows and doors closed. They also know anger and jealousy and loneliness. They're people who made friends with themselves and therefore made friends with the world. They're people who developed the bravery to be able to relate to the shaky, tender, fearful feelings in their own hearts and therefore are no longer afraid of those feelings when they are triggered by the outside world.

When you begin to practice this way, you're so honest about what you're feeling that it begins to create a sense of understanding other people as well. A young man told this story in a discussion group during a lojong training weekend. He had gone into a bar in Los Angeles to play pool. Before starting to play, he put his brand-new leather jacket down on a chair.

When he finished playing, it wasn't there. The four other people in the bar were just sitting there looking at him with big smug smiles on their faces. They were really big guys. He felt extremely small and powerless. He knew that they had taken his jacket and that it wouldn't be wise to confront them because he was small and outnumbered. He felt humiliated and helpless.

Then, as a result of having worked with this practice, it occurred to him that he could feel empathy for people in the world who had been laughed at, scorned, and spat upon because of their religion or the color of their skin or their gender or their sexual orientation or their nationality, or for whatever reason. He found himself empathizing with all the people throughout time who had found themselves in humiliating situations. It was a profound experience for him. It didn't get him his jacket back; it didn't solve anything. But it opened his heart to a lot of people with whom he had not before had any sense of shared experience.

This is where the heart comes from in this practice, where the sense of gratitude and appreciation for our life comes from. We become part of a lineage of people who have cultivated their bravery throughout history, people who, against enormous odds, have stayed open to great difficulties and painful situations and transformed them into the path of awakening. We *will* fall flat on our faces again and again, we

will continue to feel inadequate, and we can use these experiences to wake up, just as they did. The lojong teachings give us the means to connect with the power of our lineage, the lineage of gentle warriorship.

Drive All Blames into One

I'D LIKE TO TALK A BIT about another slogan, "Drive all blames into one." When we say, as in a previous slogan, "When the world is filled with evil," we mean, "When the world is filled with the results of ego clinging." When the world is filled with ego clinging or with attachment to a particular outcome, there is a lot of pain. But these painful situations can be transformed into the path of bodhi. One of the ways to do that is to drive all blames into one. To see how this works, let's look at the result of blaming others.

I had someone buy me the *New York Times* on Sunday so I could look at the result of people blaming others. In Yugoslavia, there's a very painful situation. The Croats and the Serbs are murdering each other, raping each other, killing children and old people. If you asked someone on either side what they wanted, they would say they just want to be happy. The Serbs just want to be happy. They see the others as enemies and they think the only way to be happy is to eradicate the source of their misery. We all think this way. And then if you talked to the other side, they would say that they want the same thing.

This is true in Israel with the Arabs and the Jews. This is true in Northern Ireland with the Protestants and the Catholics. The same is true everywhere, and it's getting worse. In every corner of the world, the same is true.

When we look at the world in this way we see that it all comes down to the fact that no one is ever encouraged to feel the underlying anxiety, the underlying edginess, the underlying soft spot, and therefore we think that blaming others is the only way. Reading just one newspaper, we can see that blaming others doesn't work.

We have to look at our own lives as well: How are we doing with our Juans and Juanitas? Often they're the people with whom we have the most intimate relationships. They really get to us because we can't just shake them off by moving across town or changing seats on the bus, or whatever we have the luxury of doing with mere acquaintances, whom we also loathe.

The point is that if we think there is any difference between how we relate with the people who irritate us and the situation in Northern Ireland, Yugoslavia, the Middle East, or Somalia, we're wrong. If we think there is any difference between that and the way that native people feel about white people or white people feel about black people or any of these situations on earth, we're wrong. We have to start with ourselves. If all people on the planet would start with themselves,

we might see quite a shift in the aggressive energy that's causing such a widespread holocaust.

"Drive all blames into one"—or "Take the blame yourself," if you prefer—sounds like a masochistic slogan. It sounds like, "Just beat me up, just bury me under piles of manure, just let me have it and kick me in the teeth." However, that isn't what it really means, you'll be happy to know.

One way of beginning to practice "Drive all blames into one" is to begin to notice what it feels like when you blame someone else. What's actually under all that talking and conversation about how wrong somebody or something is? What does blame feel like in your stomach? When we do this noticing we see that we are somehow beginning to cultivate bravery as well as compassion and honesty. When these really unresolved issues of our lives come up, we are no longer trying to escape but are beginning to be curious and open toward these parts of ourselves.

"Drive all blames into one" is a healthy and compassionate instruction that short-circuits the overwhelming tendency we have to blame everybody else; it doesn't mean, instead of blaming the other people, blame yourself. It means to touch in with what blame feels like altogether. Instead of guarding yourself, instead of pushing things away, begin to get in touch with the fact that there's a very soft spot under all that armor, and blame is probably one of the most well-perfected armors that we have.

You can take this slogan beyond what we think of as “blame” and practice applying it simply to the general sense that something is wrong. When you feel that something is wrong, let the story line go and touch in on what’s underneath. You may notice that when you let the words go, when you stop talking to yourself, there’s something left, and that something tends to be very soft. At first it may seem intense and vivid, but if you don’t recoil from that and you keep opening your heart, you find that underneath all of the fear is what has been called shaky tenderness.

The truth of the matter is that even though there are teachings and practice techniques, still we each have to find our own way. What does it really mean to open? What does it mean not to resist? What does it mean? It’s a lifetime journey to find the answers to these questions for yourself. But there’s a lot of support in these teachings and this practice.

Try dropping the object of the blame or the object of what you think is wrong. Instead of throwing the snowballs out there, just put the snowball down and relate in a nonconceptual way to your anger, relate to your righteous indignation, relate to your sense of being fed up or pissed off or whatever it is. If Mortimer or Juan or Juanita walks by, instead of talking to yourself for the next four days about them, you would stop talking to yourself. Simply follow the instruction that you’re given, notice that you are talking to yourself, and let it go. This is basic shamatha-vipashyana

instruction—that's what it means by dropping the object. Then you can do tonglen.

If you aren't feeding the fire of anger or the fire of craving by talking to yourself, then the fire doesn't have anything to feed on. It peaks and passes on. It's said that everything has a beginning, middle, and end, but when we start blaming and talking to ourselves, things seem to have a beginning, a middle, and no end.

Strangely enough, we blame others and put so much energy into the object of anger or whatever it is because we're afraid that this anger or sorrow or loneliness is going to last forever. Therefore, instead of relating directly with the sorrow or the loneliness or the anger, we think that the way to end it is to blame it on somebody else. We might just talk to ourselves about them, or we might actually hit them or fire them or yell. Whether we're using our body, speech, mind—or all three—whatever we might do, we think, curiously enough, that this will make the pain go away. Instead, acting it out is what makes it last.

"Drive all blames into one" is saying, instead of always blaming the other, *own* the feeling of blame, *own* the anger, *own* the loneliness, and make friends with it. Use the tonglen practice to see how you can place the anger or the fear or the loneliness in a cradle of loving-kindness; use tonglen to learn how to be gentle to all that stuff. In order to be gentle and create an atmosphere of compassion for yourself, it's

necessary to stop talking to yourself about how wrong everything is—or how right everything is, for that matter.

I challenge you to experiment with dropping the object of your emotion, doing tonglen, and seeing if in fact the intensity of the so-called poison lessens. I have experimented with this, because I didn't believe that it would work. I thought it couldn't possibly be true, and because my doubt was so strong, for a while it seemed to me that it didn't work. But as my trust grew, I found that that's what happens—the intensity of the klesha lessens, and so does the duration. This happens because the ego begins to be ventilated. This big solid me—"I have a problem. I am lonely. I am angry. I am addicted"—begins somehow to be aerated when you just go against the grain and own the feelings yourself instead of blaming the other.

The "one" in "Drive all blames into one" is the tendency we have to want to protect ourselves: ego clinging. When we drive all blames into this tendency by owning our feelings and feeling fully, the ongoing monolithic ME begins to lighten up, because it is fabricated with our opinions, our moods, and a lot of ephemeral, but at the same time vivid and convincing, stuff.

I know a fifteen-year-old Hispanic guy from Los Angeles. He grew up in a violent neighborhood and was in gangs from the age of thirteen. He was really smart, and curiously enough, his name was Juan. He

came on really mean. He was tough and he snarled and he walked around with a big chip on his shoulder. You had the feeling that that was all he had going for him: his world was so rough that acting like the baddest and the meanest was the only way he saw to survive in it.

He was one of those people who definitely drive all blames into others. If you asked him a simple question, he would tell you to fuck off. If he could get anybody in trouble, he definitely would do so. From one point of view, he was a total pain in the neck, but on the other hand, he had a flair and brilliance about him. It was always mixed; you hated him and you loved him. He was outrageous and also sparky and funny, but he was mean—he would slap people and push them around. You knew that that was pretty lightweight compared with what he was used to doing at home, where they killed each other on a regular basis.

He was sent to Boulder, Colorado, for the summer to give him a break, to give him a nice summer in the Rocky Mountains. His mother and others were trying to help him get a good education and somehow step out of the nightmare world into which he had been born. The people he was staying with were loosely affiliated with the Buddhist community, and that's how I came to know him. One day he came to an event where Trungpa Rinpoche was, and at the end of this event, Trungpa Rinpoche sang the Shambhala

anthem. This was an awful experience for the rest of us because for some reason he loved to sing the Shambhala anthem in a high-pitched, squeaky, and cracked voice.

This particular event was outside. As Rinpoche sang into a microphone and the sound traveled for miles across the plains, Juan broke down and started to cry. Everyone else was feeling awkward or embarrassed, but Juan just started to cry. Later he said he cried because he had never seen anyone that brave. He said, "That guy, he's not afraid to be a fool." That turned out to be a major turning point in his life because he realized that he didn't have to be afraid to be a fool either. All that persona and chip on the shoulder were guarding his soft spot, and he could let them go. Because he was so sharp and bright, he got the message. His life turned around. Now he's got his education and he's back in L.A. helping kids.

So that's the point, that we tend to drive all blames into Juan because Juan is so obnoxious. We aren't encouraged to get in touch with what's underneath all our words of hatred, craving, and jealousy. We just act them out again and again. But if we practice this slogan and drive all blames into *one*, the armor of our ego clinging will weaken and the soft spot in our hearts will appear. We may feel foolish, but we don't have to be afraid of that. We can make friends with ourselves.

9

Be Grateful to Everyone

THE SLOGAN “Be grateful to everyone” is about making peace with the aspects of ourselves that we have rejected. Through doing that, we also make peace with the people we dislike. More to the point, being around people we dislike is often a catalyst for making friends with ourselves. Thus, “Be grateful to everyone.”

If we were to make a list of people we don’t like—people we find obnoxious, threatening, or worthy of contempt—we would find out a lot about those aspects of ourselves that we can’t face. If we were to come up with one word about each of the troublemakers in our lives, we would find ourselves with a list of descriptions of our own rejected qualities, which we project onto the outside world. The people who repel us unwittingly show us the aspects of ourselves that we find unacceptable, which otherwise we can’t see. In traditional teachings on lojong it is put another way: other people trigger the karma that we haven’t worked out. They mirror us and give us the chance to befriend all of that ancient stuff that we carry around like a backpack full of granite boulders.

“Be grateful to everyone” is a way of saying that we

can learn from any situation, especially if we practice this slogan with awareness. The people and situations in our lives can remind us to catch neurosis as neurosis, to see when we're in our room under the covers, to see when we've pulled the shades, locked the door, and are determined to stay there.

There's a reason that you can learn from everything: you have basic wisdom, basic intelligence, and basic goodness. Therefore, if the environment is supportive and encourages you to be brave and to open your heart and mind, you'll find yourself opening to the wisdom and compassion that's inherently there. It's like tapping into your source, tapping into what you already have. It's the willingness to open your eyes, your heart, and your mind, to allow situations in your life to become your teacher. With awareness, you are able to find out for yourself what causes misery and what causes happiness.

"Be grateful to everyone" is getting at a complete change of attitude. This slogan is not wishy-washy and naive. It does not mean that if you're mugged on the street you should smile knowingly and say, "Oh, I should be grateful for this," before losing consciousness. This slogan actually gets at the guts of how we perfect ignorance through avoidance, not knowing that we're eating poison, not knowing that we're putting another layer of protection over our heart, not seeing through the whole thing.

"Be grateful to everyone" means that all situations

teach you, and often it's the tough ones that teach you best. There may be a Juan or Juanita in your life, and Juan or Juanita is the one who gets you going. They're the ones who don't go away: your mother, your husband, your wife, your lover, your child, the person that you have to work with every single day, part of the situation you can't escape.

These situations really teach you because there's no pat solution to the problem. You're continually meeting your match. You're always coming into a challenge, coming up against your edge. There's no way that someone else can tell you exactly what to do, because you're the only one who knows where it's torturing you, where your relationship with Juan or Juanita is getting into your guts. Others don't know. They don't know when you need to be more gentle, when you need to be more clear, when you need to be quiet, and when you need to speak.

No one else knows what it takes for another person to open the door. For some people, speaking out is opening the door a little wider; for other people, being still is opening the door a little wider. It all has to do with what your ancient habitual reaction is to being in a tight spot and what is going to soften the whole thing and cause you to have a change of attitude. It's the Juans and Juanitas who present us with these dilemmas, these challenges.

Basically the only way you can communicate with the Juans and Juanitas in your life is by taking the

teachings and the practice very personally, not trusting anybody else's interpretations, because you yourself have the wisdom within, and you yourself will find out how to open that door. As much as we would like Juan or Juanita to get out of our life and give us a break, somehow they stick around, and even if we do manage to get rid of them, they seem to reappear with another name and another face very soon. They are addressing the point at which we are most stuck.

It's important, in terms of being grateful to everyone, to realize that no slogan, no meditation practice, nothing that you can hear in the teachings is a solution. We're evolving. We will always be learning more and more, continually opening further and further.

It is good to open your mind so that each situation is completely fresh. It's as if you've never been there before, a completely new take. But even with this approach, you can get trapped. Let's say you're a meditation instructor. Your student arrives for a meeting, and because you're very open and in tune, something magical happens. There's some real communication between the two of you, and you can see that something has helped, something has gotten through and connected with her own heart. She leaves and you feel great—"Wow! I did that wonderful thing. I could feel it." The next person comes in and you forget about the freshness because you're feeling so good about what you just did. He sits down and talks to you and you come out with the same answers that

you just gave the last person. But that just leaves this new person cold; he couldn't care less. You have the humbling experience of realizing that there's never just one solution to a problem. Helping yourself or someone else has to do with opening and just being there; that's how something happens between people. But it's a continuous process. That's how you learn. You can't open just once.

What you learn from the Juans and Juanitas in your life is not something that you can get a patent on and then sell as a sure thing that will always work. It isn't like that. This kind of learning is a continual journey of wakefulness.

A meditation student I was working with whom I'll call Dan had a serious alcohol and drug problem. He was really making great strides, and then he went on a binge. On the day I found out about it I happened to have an opportunity to see Trungpa Rinpoche. I blurted out to him how upset I was that Dan had gone on a binge. I was so disappointed. Well, Rinpoche got really angry; it completely stopped my heart and mind. He said that being upset about Dan's binge was my problem. "You should never have expectations for other people. Just be kind to them," he told me. In terms of Dan, I should just help him keep walking forward inch by inch and be kind to him—invite him for dinner, give him little gifts, and do anything to bring some happiness to his life—instead of having these big goals for him. He said that setting

goals for others can be aggressive—really wanting a success story for ourselves. When we do this to others, we are asking them to live up to our ideals. Instead, we should just be kind.

The main point of “Be grateful to everyone”—the “dig”—is that you want to get rid of the situations that drive you most crazy, the Juans and Juanitas. You don’t want to be grateful to them. You want to solve the problem and not hurt anymore. Juan is making you feel embarrassed, or degraded, or abused; there’s something about the way he treats you that makes you feel so bad that you just want *out*.

This slogan encourages you to realize that when you’ve met your match you’ve found a teacher. That doesn’t necessarily mean that you shut up and don’t say anything and just stand there breathing in and out, although that might be exactly what you do. But tonglen is much more profound than that. It has to do with how you open in this situation so that the basic goodness of Juan or Juanita and your own basic goodness begin to communicate.

Something between repressing and acting out is what’s called for, but it is unique and different each time. People have the wisdom to find it. Juan and Juanita have the wisdom, you have the wisdom, everyone has the wisdom to know how to open. It’s inherent in all of us. The path of not being caught in ego is a process of surrendering to situations in order to communicate rather than win.

Compassionate action, compassionate speech, is not a one-shot deal; it's a lifetime journey. But it seems to begin with realizing that when Juan or Juanita is getting to you, pushing every button, it's not as simplistic as just eating it, just becoming a worm, "Okay, let them attack me." On the other hand, it's not as easy as just saying, "I'll get *him*." It's a challenge. This is how the koan appears in everyday life: the unanswerable questions of our lives are the greatest teachers.

When the great Indian Buddhist teacher Atisha went to Tibet, he had been practicing the lojong teachings for some time. Like most practitioners, he had the feeling of being haunted by the fact that there are blind places that you don't know about. You don't know that you're stuck in certain places. So he valued the Juans and Juanitas in his life tremendously because he felt they were the only ones who got through to him enough to show him where his blind spots were. Through them his ego got smaller. Through them his compassion increased.

The story goes that Atisha was told that the people of Tibet were very good-natured, earthy, flexible, and open; he decided they wouldn't be irritating enough to push his buttons. So he brought along with him a mean-tempered, ornery Bengali tea boy. He felt that was the only way he could stay awake. The Tibetans like to tell the story that, when he got to Tibet, he realized he need not have brought his

tea boy: the people there were not as pleasant as he had been told.

In our own lives, the Bengali tea boys are the people who, when you let them through the front door of your house, go right down to the basement where you store lots of things you'd rather not deal with, pick out one of them, bring it up to you, and say, "Is this yours?"

These are the people who, when your habitual style is working just fine and everyone's agreeing with you, say, "No way am I going to go along with what you just asked me to do. I think it's stupid." You think, "What do I do now?" And usually what you do is to get everybody else on your team. You sit around and talk about what a creep this person is who confronted you. If the disagreement happens to be in the realm of politics or "isms" of any kind, you get a banner on which you write how right you are and how wrong this other person is. By this time the other person has got a team, too, and then you have race riots and World War III. Righteous indignation becomes a creed for you and your whole gang. And it all started because somebody blew your trip. It all turns into a crusade of who's right and who's wrong. Wars come from that. Nobody ever encourages you to allow yourself to feel wounded first and then try to figure out what is the right speech and right action that might follow.

Gurdjieff—a teacher in the early part of the twen-

tieth century, kind of a crazy-wisdom character—knew the meaning of this slogan. He was living not too far from Paris in a big manor house with huge lawns. All of his students came there to study with him. One of his main teachings was to be awake to whatever process you're going through. He liked to tighten the screws on his students. In fact, it's said that he would make you take the job that you most didn't want to take; if you thought you should be a college professor, he would make you become a used car salesman.

There was a man in the community who was really bad tempered. He was everybody's Juan; nobody could stand this guy because he was so prickly. Every little thing caused him to spin off into a tantrum. Everything irritated him. He complained constantly, so everyone felt the need to tiptoe around him because anything that might be said could cause him to explode. People just wished that he would go away.

Gurdjieff liked to make his students do things that were completely meaningless. One day there were about forty people out cutting up a lawn into little pieces and moving it to another place on the grounds. This was too much for this fellow; it was the last straw. He blew up, stormed out, got in his car, and drove off, whereupon there was a spontaneous celebration. People were thrilled, so happy he had gone. But when they told Gurdjieff what had happened, he said, "Oh no!" and went after him in his car.

Three days later they both came back. That night when Gurdjieff's attendant was serving him his supper, he asked, "Sir, why did you bring him back?" Gurdjieff answered in a very low voice, "You're not going to believe this, and this is just between you and me; you must tell no one. I pay him to stay here."

I told that story at a meditation center, and later they wrote me a letter saying, "We used to have two people here helping and there was a lot of harmony. Now we have four and the trouble is beginning. So every day we ask each other, 'Is somebody paying you to be here?'"

Cutting the Solidity of Thoughts

I ONCE HAD AN INTERVIEW with a student who began by saying, “This is all pretty depressing, isn’t it? There’s something sort of grim and discouraging about what we’re doing here. Where’s the joy? Where’s the cheerfulness in all of this?” We talked for a while. Then at the end of the interview, she had her own insight, “I guess the joy comes from getting real.”

That really struck me. Whether it’s connecting with the genuine heart of sadness and the messy areas of our lives, or connecting with vision and expansion and openness, what’s real is all included in well-being; it’s all included in joy. Joy is not about pleasure as opposed to pain or cheerfulness as opposed to sadness. Joy includes everything.

There’s a slogan that says, “Don’t wallow in self-pity.” That’s a good one to remember if you find that tonglen practice has you crying a lot. This whole approach could evolve into self-pity easily, and self-pity takes a lot of maintenance. You have to talk to yourself quite a bit to keep it up. The slogan is saying to get to know what self-pity feels like underneath the

story line. That's how the training develops a genuine, openhearted, intelligent relationship with the whole variety of human experience.

We're so funny: the people who are crying a lot think that they shouldn't be, and the people who aren't crying think that they should be. One man said to me that since he's not feeling anything when he does tonglen practice, maybe he should leave; he felt that he wasn't getting the point. He wasn't feeling mushy or warm; he was just kind of numb. I had to encourage him that a genuine experience of numbness is a genuine experience of what it is to be human.

It's all raw material for waking up. You can use numbness, mushiness, and self-pity even—it doesn't matter what it is—as long as you can go deeper, underneath the story line. That's where you connect with what it is to be human, and that's where the joy and well-being come from—from the sense of being real and seeing realness in others.

The slogan says that when the world is filled with evil, or when the world is filled with things that you just don't want, that can all be transformed into the path of awakening. Then there are various suggestions, such as “Drive all blames into one” and “Be grateful to everyone.” A third suggestion is that you can transform seeming obstacles into awakening by flashing on the nonsolidity of things—on shunyata or absolute bodhichitta.

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This slogan is quite a difficult one, and it's on this subject of shunyata: "Seeing confusion as the four kayas / Is unsurpassable shunyata protection." The part about seeing confusion is pretty accessible to all of us, but the rest of the slogan requires discussion.

The word *kaya* means body. The four kayas are *dharmakaya*, *sambhogakaya*, *nirmanakaya*, and *svabhavikakaya*. You could say that the four kayas are a way of describing how emptiness manifests and how we could experience it.

First there's a sense of the basic space of *dharma*—*kaya*—*dharmakaya*—*dharma body*. In our morning chants we say, "The essence of thoughts is *dharmakaya*; nothing whatever, but everything arises from it." *Dharmakaya* is the basic space from which everything arises, and everything that arises is essentially spacious—not fixed or clunky.

Sambhogakaya—the "enjoyment body"—points to the experience that space is not really emptiness as we know it; there's energy and color and movement. It's vibrant, like a rainbow or a bubble or the reflection of your face in a mirror. It's vivid, yet nonsubstantial at the same time. *Sambhogakaya* refers to this energetic quality, the fact that emptiness is fluid and vivid. Sound is often an image for *sambhogakaya*; you can't see or capture it, but it has vibration, energy, and movement.

Nirmanakaya—the third of the four kayas—

refers to the experience that emptiness manifests in form. Nirmanakaya is the means of communication with others. *The Heart Sutra* says, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” Nirmanakaya refers to the fact that phenomena actually manifest. Trees, grass, buildings, traffic, each of us, and the whole world actually manifest. That’s the only way we can experience emptiness: appearance / emptiness, sound / emptiness. They’re simultaneous. Whatever appears is vividly unreal in emptiness. Emptiness isn’t really empty in the way we might think of it; it’s vibrant and it manifests, yet usually all we see is the manifestation. We solidify it, we solidify ourselves, we solidify what we see. The whole thing becomes like a war or a seduction, and we are totally caught in the drama.

The fourth kaya is svabhavikakaya. Svabhavikakaya means that the previous three arise at once; they’re not really three separate things. The space, the energy, and the appearance arise together.

The slogan says, “Seeing confusion [the sense of obstacle, the things we don’t want, the sense of interruption] as the four kayas / Is unsurpassable shunyata protection.” Shunyata is protection because it cuts through the solidity of our thoughts, which are how we make everything—including ourselves—concrete and separate. It cuts through the way we’re over here and everything else is over there.

As we know from some of the other slogans we've discussed, when confusion arises, it is part of the path. When confusion arises, it is juicy and rich. The sense of obstacle is very rich and can teach us. In these practices it's the necessary ingredient for being able to do tonglen or work with lojong at all. But this slogan is saying that when confusion arises not only do you practice tonglen and connect with the heart, but also you can flash on the nonsolidity of phenomena at any time. In other words, you can just drop it. We all know spontaneously what it feels like just to drop it. Out of the blue, you just drop it.

For instance, on a meditation retreat there are noodles for breakfast. Maybe in the beginning it seems funny, but halfway through breakfast you find yourself—instead of being mindful of the food, the chopsticks in your hand, the other people, and the good instructions you've received—talking to yourself about what a good breakfast would be, how you'd like to have a good breakfast like your mother used to make you in Brooklyn. It might be matzo ball soup or tortillas and beans or ham and eggs, but you want a good breakfast: burned bacon, like Mother used to make. You resent these noodles.

Then, not through any particular effort, you just drop it. To your surprise, there's a big world there. You see all these little lights glimmering in your empty lacquered bowl. You notice the sadness on someone's

face. You realize that the man across from you is also thinking about breakfasts because he has a resentful look on his face, which makes you laugh because you were there just one second ago.

The world opens up and suddenly we're there for what's happening. The solidity of our thoughts becomes transparent, and we can connect automatically with this space—shunyata—in ourselves. We have the ability to drop our story line, to rouse ourselves.

That's an everyday experience of shunyata. But it's also a very advanced practice if you can do it when you don't happen to feel like it. If everything is solid and intense and you're wallowing in self-pity or something else, if someone says to you at that point, "Just drop it," even in the sweetest, kindest, most gentle voice, you want to punch the person in the nose. You just want to keep wallowing in resentment and self-pity.

The whole point of the practice of lojong is that you start where you are. The slogan "Abandon any hope of fruition" is also encouragement to just be where you are, with your numbness or resentment or whatever. Just start where you are. Then as a result of doing the practice, to your surprise you find that this week you can drop it more easily than last week; or this year you can drop it more easily than last year. As time goes by, you find that you can spontaneously just drop it more and more.

The same goes for compassion. We all have compassion. When we remember or see certain things, we can, without any effort at all, open our hearts. Then we're told to have compassion for our enemies, for the Juans of our life, for the people that we really hate. That's advanced practice. But as a result of doing lojong practice and giving up all hope of fruition, of just relating with who we are now and with what we're feeling now, we find that the circle of our compassion begins to widen, and we are able to feel compassion in increasingly difficult situations.

Compassion starts coming to us because we have the aspiration to do the practice and to get more in touch with our own pain and our own joy. In other words, we are willing to get real. We realize that we can't fake it and we can't force it, but we know we have what it takes to work with how we are right now. So we start that way, and both the ability to drop it and cheer up and the ability to open our hearts begin to grow of their own accord.

“Seeing confusion as the four kayas / Is unsurpassable shunyata protection” is really encouragement not to make such a big deal of things. We can at least entertain the thought that we could drop it and remember what it feels like when we do drop it—how the world opens up—and discover the big world outside of our little ego-bound cocoon.

This particular slogan is meant as meditation instruction. It's said that only on the cushion can you

really get into this one. In general, however, I'd like to encourage you to use the whole lojong and tonglen approach as practice even after you finish your formal meditation period. That's where it's most powerful, most real, and most heartfelt. As you're going about your day and you're seeing things that touch your heart, or you're feeling things that scare you or make you feel uptight or resentful, you can begin to think of doing the exchange, breathing in and breathing out on the spot. This is necessary and helpful. After meditation this practice feels quite real, sometimes a lot more real than in the meditation room.

This slogan about the four kayas points out that it's in shamatha-vipashyana practice that you begin to see the nonsubstantial nature of things. It's addressed to that part of the practice where we say, "Thinking." You're completely caught up. You've gone to New York City in your mind, and you're having that breakfast, and you're reliving resentments and joys, and then without any effort, you wake up. That's what happens, as you know, but it's not like you make yourself come back. It's that suddenly you notice and wake up, and then you're told to say, "Thinking."

That label, "thinking," is the beginning of acknowledging that the whole drama doesn't have any substance, that it arises out of nowhere, but it seems extremely vivid. Even though the story line goes away, there's energy and movement. It definitely seems to

manifest in terms of tables and chairs and people and animals, and it seems so tangible, but the moment you say, “Thinking,” you’re acknowledging that the whole drama is just a thought in your mind. That’s a recognition of shunyata, or emptiness. Maybe each of us has had some moments of how liberating that can be.

When the thoughts arise it might occur to you to wonder where they come from. Where *do* they come from? It seems as if they come from nowhere. You’re just faithfully following your breath and—Wham!—you’re in Hawaii surfing. Where did it come from? And where does it *go*? Big drama, big drama’s happening, big, big, drama. And it’s 9:30 in the morning. “Oooh. Wow! This is extremely heavy.” A car horn honks, and suddenly you’re not in that drama anymore, you’re in another drama.

I was once instructed to meditate on thoughts. I investigated the nature of thought for two whole months. I can tell you firsthand that you can never find a thought. There is nothing there of substance, but with our minds we make it Extremely Big Deal.

Another slogan says, “All activities should be done with one intention.” Breathing in, breathing out, feeling resentful, feeling happy, being able to drop it, not being able to drop it, eating our food, brushing our teeth, walking, sitting—whatever we’re doing could

be done with one intention, which is that we want to wake up, we want to ripen our compassion, and we want to ripen our ability to let go. Everything in our lives can wake us up or put us to sleep, and basically it's up to us to let it wake us up.

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Overcoming Resistance

THE SLOGAN of the day is “Four practices are the best of methods.” This slogan is about the four things that help us to practice both relative and absolute bodhichitta: (1) accumulating merit, (2) purifying our negative actions—usually called confessing our negative actions, (3) feeding the ghosts, and (4) offering to the protectors, which is sometimes translated as asking the protectors to help you in your practice.

Each of these four practices jumps right into the guts of unwanted feelings, emotions, and situations. Earlier we talked about how the best kind of protection is to see the empty, dreamlike quality of the confusion. Whereas seeing confusion as the four kayas is something we do on the level of absolute bodhichitta, the four practices are about actual things that you can do at the relative level in terms of ritual and ceremony.

However you talk about it, the crux of the matter is to overcome resistance. These four practices are four methods that Milarepa might have used to try to get the demons out of his cave. The punch line of that story was that when the resistance was gone, so were

the demons. Resistance to unwanted circumstances has the power to keep those circumstances alive and well for a very long time.

Accumulating merit. The first of the four practices is to accumulate merit. The way to accumulate merit is to be willing to give, willing to open, willing not to hold back. It is described as letting go of holding on to yourself, letting your stronghold of ego go. Instead of collecting things for yourself, you open and give them away.

As a result of opening yourself, you begin to experience your world as more friendly. That is merit. You find it easier to practice the dharma, you have fewer kleshas, and circumstances seem to be hospitable. You might think that the way to encounter circumstances in which you could practice the dharma is to use your same old habitual style. But the idea behind accumulating this kind of meritorious situation is to open, to give, and not to hold back. Instead of encasing yourself in a cocoon, instead of shielding your heart, you can open, let the whole thing dissolve. This is how merit is accumulated.

In Buddhist societies such as in Burma and Tibet and China, accumulating merit is interpreted as performing all kinds of good works, such as making donations to build monasteries or retreat centers. It's wonderful to fund-raise in Hong Kong and Taiwan because people feel that it's meritorious to give

money to build a retreat center or a monastery. If you give to these worthy causes, and if it's a gesture of real generosity—if you're giving without wishing for anything particular in return—then it works.

When we take the bodhisattva vow, we give a gift. The moment we give the gift is the moment we receive one of the marks of taking the vow. The instruction is to give something that you find it hard to let go of, something that hurts a little. If you give money, it should be just a little more than you really wanted to give.

In all of these traditional ways of accumulating merit, the inner meaning is that of opening completely to the situation, with some kind of daring. There's an incantation that goes along with this, the practice of which is said to be the ultimate expression of gaining merit because it has to do with letting go of hope and fear: "If it's better for me to be sick, so be it. If it's better for me to recover, so be it. If it's better for me to die, so be it." Another way this is said is, "Grant your blessings that if I'm meant to be sick, let me be sick. Grant your blessings that if I'm meant to recover, let me recover." It's not that you're asking some higher power to grant the blessings; basically, you're just saying, "Let it happen, let it happen."

Surrendering, letting go of possessiveness, and complete nonattachment—all are synonyms for accumulating merit. The idea is to open up rather than shut down.

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Confessing evil actions. The second of the four practices is to confess evil actions, or lay down neurotic actions. In Buddhist monasteries, this is done ceremonially on days of the full and new moons. Confessing your neurotic actions has four parts to it: (1) regretting what you've done; (2) refraining from doing it again; (3) performing some kind of remedial activity such as the Vajrasattva mantra, taking refuge in the three jewels, or tonglen; and (4) expressing complete willingness to continue this fourfold process in the future and not to act out neurotically. So the fourfold formula of laying down your neurosis consists of regret, refraining, remedial action, and the resolve not to do it again.

Bad circumstances may have arisen, but we know that we can transform them. The advice here is that one of the best methods is to confess the whole thing. First, you don't confess to anybody; it's a personal matter. You yourself look at what you do and go through this fourfold process with it. Second, no one forgives you. You're not confessing sin; it's not as if you've "sinned," as we were taught in the Judeo-Christian culture in which we grew up.

What is meant by neurosis is that in limitless, timeless space—with which we could connect at any time—we continually have tunnel vision and lock ourselves into a room and put bolts on the door. When there's so much space, why do we keep put-

ting on dark glasses, putting in earplugs, and covering ourselves with armor?

Confessing our neurotic action is a fourfold process by which we learn to see honestly what we do and develop a yearning to take off those dark glasses, take out those earplugs, take off that armor and experience the world fully. It's yet again another method for letting go of holding back, another method for opening rather than closing down.

1. REGRET. So, first, regret. Because of mindfulness and seeing what you do, which is the result of your practice, it gets harder and harder to hide from yourself. Well, that turns out to be extremely good news, and it leads to being able to see neurosis as neurosis—not as a condemnation of yourself but as something that benefits you. Regret implies that you're tired of armoring yourself, tired of eating poison, tired of yelling at someone each time you feel threatened, tired of talking to yourself for hours each time you don't like the way someone else does something, tired of this constant complaint to yourself. Nobody else has to give you a hard time. Nobody has to tell you. Through keeping your eyes open, you yourself get tired of your neurosis. That's the idea of regret.

Once someone who had done something that he really regretted went to his teacher and explained the whole thing. The teacher said, "It's good that you feel that regret. You have to acknowledge what you do. It's