

Lama Caroline

Where are my inner elements?

**Introduction to the gross,
subtle and very subtle elements**

EH YAM RAM LAM BAM

Transcript - day 2

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Kunpen Lama Gangchen, Albagnano, Italy

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Transcript: Introduction to the gross, subtle and very subtle elements
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Lama Caroline, Dorje Kanyen Lhamo, was born in England in 1965. As a child she was fascinated by science, astrology and space exploration. Whilst at the university of London, she began to feel that the scientific approach to reality was too external and conceptual and so began to investigate reality through Buddhist meditation and explore inner space.

From 1986 to 1991 she studied Gelugpa Buddhism in Cumbria, England, with Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. Then in 1991 she met her spiritual master, Lama Gangchen Rinpoche, and, impressed by his open modern approach to spirituality, she began to study and collaborate with him. For the past 28 years she has accompanied him on numerous teaching tours and pilgrimages worldwide, promoting non-violence, non-formal education, the NgalSo tradition of Tantric Self-Healing and an inter-religious spiritual forum for world peace. She is the chief editor of Lama Gangchen Peace Publications, which publishes books on Buddhism, peace media and peace education. She is presently editing the NgalSo Gyatso – the collected works of Lama Gangchen that form the basis of the NgalSo tradition.

In August 2000, in Tibet, she was recognised by Lama Gangchen as Lama Dorje Khanyen Lhamo (Goddess Who Upholds and Transmits the Vajra Speech of the Buddha) and is one of the two lineage holders of the NgalSo teachings.

She has done numerous meditation retreats of the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions and teaches courses and workshops on Buddhist philosophy, tantra, medicine, yoga and astrology. She has a diploma in Inter-religious Studies from the Open University (UK), an MA (with merit) in Buddhist studies from the University of Sunderland (UK) and is about to embark on a BA in Tibetan and Sanskrit.

We were very fortunate to receive a commentary on the Five Supreme Healers and Five Element Mothers during a course from the 2nd to 12th August 2017 at Albagnano Healing Meditation Centre in Italy. The course was given by Lama Caroline who since 28 years has worked alongside Lama Gangchen recording his teachings and producing the books and sadhanas we now have. The following is a lightly edited transcript of the second half of this course - concentrating on the Great Element Mothers and the element absorption practices.

To follow this text it will be useful to have the following books and sadhanas from Lama Gangchen Peace Publications:

- *Making Peace with the Environment*
- *Crystal massage method to create the pure energy form of light and nectar - the secret commitment assembly of Guyusamaja*
- *The process of death, bardo and rebirth according to tantra*

Day 2

Let's start with a brief summary. We're talking about the Five Great Element Mothers. It's a very interesting subject and we have this beautiful book made by Lama Gangchen, in 1993, called *Making Peace with the Environment*. The first practices that Rinpoche shared with everyone in the West were the mantra **OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNI SHAKYAMUNIYE SOHA** and the Four Limitless Meditations. Then he shared healing sadhanas like White Tara and Open-eye Chenrezig. In 1992, he started teaching the *NgalSo Self-Healing* practice: how to transform our five principle delusions into what we call the five exalted wisdoms, the Five Supreme Healers. Then he taught the second part of the practice, which goes together, called *Making Peace with the Environment* - teaching us how to recognise and work with what we call the five *pranas*, the five winds, and the five elements on the gross and subtle levels.

We talked yesterday about how we are no longer in touch with the natural elements, how we are very isolated from nature because of our modern lifestyles. If we are going to work with the elements it means that we need to do it on many different levels because it's rather difficult to wake up our subtle *pranas* if we have no feeling whatsoever of the elements on a gross level. As in any of Lama Gangchen's practices we first need to establish a foundation, a basis. For example, in tantra we want to develop the exalted wisdom of non-dual great bliss and emptiness. Rinpoche says to develop that we need to start first by being nice to our parents! We need to do basic, simple things in order to achieve these high realisations. Often we don't have the foundation, so we don't have the complete cause for the realisation to come out. To make the foundation is very important. We need to be more aware of the five elements on many different levels. Rinpoche's environment practice, of which he has many versions, is very good because it makes us sensitive to the elements on many

different levels. In many of the tantric texts, the commentaries on the tantras, they talk about the five winds, the five *pranas*. I thought we might look at it in terms of the Guyusamaja commentary because it has very good and clear explanations.

When Rinpoche made the *Making Peace with the Environment* book we actually took the information from various sources, but the main source of information about the elements was from Guyusamaja. It talks about both the outer and inner elements. The commentary is divided into different parts, and in the part that is called the types of body isolation - about how to generate yourself as a buddha, separate from the 'normal' experience - it talks about the Five Supreme Healers, the five aggregates, the five chakras, the five elements and the Five Great Mothers. What is so fascinating about the tantric healing systems is they talk about the subtle body: the channels, the subtle energy system, the chakras where all the channels meet and then the winds or *pranas*, the energies that flow through our subtle bodies, then the drops which we call the *bindu*, the essence of life drops, that circulate through our subtle body. We need to first recognise these things and then purify them so we can use them as a means of enlightenment.

Last week we talked a little bit about transforming the five basic emotions, the five deluded emotions like ignorance, desire, hatred, pride and jealousy into the Five Supreme Healers. What we didn't talk about last week is that every time we have a thought, an emotion, there is actually a wind, an energy, that supports it. Without energy, there would be no emotion, no thought. They say that the mind, the emotion of thought, and the *prana* is like a blind horse ridden by a disabled rider, only together can they go anywhere. What it means is they couldn't function apart, on their own they couldn't reach their destination, they have a symbiotic relationship. Together they are a fantastic team! We could teach these practices the other way around, first the five element practice and then the practice of Self-

Healing to transform the five delusions because they are two sides of the same coin. Although they are not the same thing, they work together.

Let's examine our ordinary experience. When there's a storm everything is pumped up, the more wind there is the bigger the storm. This is the same when we have a negative emotion. There is this nice expression: everything arises out of the clear light, everybody wants to return to the clear light. That's the fundamental desire of all beings. But, the further away we are from the clear light, the more wind there is and the more turbulent it gets. This means our experience is shaking more and our mind is getting more and more disturbed. What we want is to come back to the clear light, to the very simple mind where the winds are very pure and calm. We have a lot of emotional storms. So, we want better weather inside.

Within one energy, let's say the energy of Vairochana, there is also a part of energy of all the other Supreme Healers - there are many levels, many divisions. In the Indian and Tibetan way of thinking there are five elements: space, wind, water, earth and fire but within each element are present all the other elements but the proportion is different. If we call it fire, obviously the main percentage is the fire element but there's also some earth and water, wind and some space. There are many different mediations we can do based on this idea. When we do Self-Healing, for example, we can do Vairochana at all the five chakras because we have transform our ignorance that is connected to all the five aggregates.

Guyusamaja, the Secret Assembly Tantra, is a very popular practice. Especially because of Lama Tsongkhapa, he was the founder of the Gelugpa tradition in the 14th century in Tibet, because this was his main spiritual practice. It talks about transforming the five negative emotions into the five exalted wisdoms, transforming the five impure elements into the five pure elements and so on. It is about

transforming the impure, the normal everyday, part of our bodies into 32 different pure aspects of ourselves. The root tantra of Guyusamaja says the earth element is Lochana, water element is Mamaki, fire is Pandaravasini and wind is Tara. These are the names of the Great Element Mothers, the purified forms or personifications of the five *pranas*. Actually, in the very beginning of the Guyusamaja Tantra, which I know because I have a copy of it in both Tibetan and Sanskrit, it says there are five elements and Lama Gangchen always refers to five elements. It refers also to the Great Space Mother. In the text it doesn't say but if we go back to the Root Tantra it does, so Rinpoche is right of course. So, we have five main winds. Yesterday we were saying we also have five fingers, five senses, five limbs and five *pranas*. We are like a pentagram, as it's been known in esoteric systems throughout the ages. There are five elements: space, wind, water, earth and fire. So, space is like the basic element because without space there is no possibility for the other elements to exist. They couldn't exist without space to be in.

In Indian Buddhist cosmology, there is an explanation about the creation process of the elements. In the west, we talk about the big bang and it's, more or less, a similar idea. The difference in the Indian Buddhist world view is that they include consciousness in the creation of the universe. The Buddhist big bang is caused because the universe is cyclic: it appears, it grows, it stays and then it's destroyed. They say that the next time our universe will be destroyed by fire, but that won't happen yet so don't worry. This is also what scientists say, that the sun will expand and eventually burn up the earth. They are talking about some billions of years in the future, but our solar system will definitely be burnt up by fire. Who knows what our descendants will look like as a race when the universe is burnt up by fire. What happens to them? Are they just incinerated or what? According to the Buddhist point of view consciousness cannot be destroyed, also in science energy cannot be destroyed it can only be transformed - so our consciousness cannot be totally annihilated. If

the universe is destroyed what would happen through the collective karma, the collective energy, of all beings is their minds together will start to form a new universe and it will produce a new big bang. The Buddhist world view is that the universe is growing and then collapsing and then another big bang and then it all starts again and then billions of years later it's destroyed - like us it is born, it arises and then dies, born and dies - it's a continuum. Everybody asks what happened before the big bang and the Buddhist response would be that there was another universe before that one. When I first went to university in London I was studying physics and there is this world view of multiple big bangs. It's considered in theoretical physics so it's not just all the 'OM OM OM' Buddhists with this idea, also our physicists are considering such views these days. In fact, I started to read *The Tao of Physics* by Fritjof Capra, and I thought I won't bother with this highly conceptual mathematical part I'll just go straight to the Dharma. Why waste my time with physics, I'll just go to the meditation part and try to experience reality directly. Fritjof Capra, a physicist, had a kind of mystical experience and as a result he linked theoretical physics with Hinduism and I thought he's got the point, although personally my subsequent path was a Buddhist one.

Question

I wondered about this continuity of our soul, our non-soul, our existence as we talked about yesterday. In your opinion, we never die, we come back as a different combination of experience. What about when the cosmos or the universe is dead?

Answer

That's what we're talking about now. Honestly, I cannot personally remember the last time it happened! I'm having a bit of amnesia on the subject!! Anyway, it's said, and I don't know how long this takes, that the collective consciousness of all the beings starts to reform so maybe we do have to pass through being an amoeba or a fish. Maybe some of us are luckier and hang out in a more developed world.

Because, remember, there isn't just one universe there are billions of multi-universes so maybe we just go to another one because they don't all disintegrate at the same time. Another possibility is that we could move - this place is really rubbish its getting burned up by fire let's go somewhere else. I mean not consciously, but our mind creates the reality according to our imprints - if we have the imprint to experience a world and mountains, trees, lakes and stuff like that then perhaps it's in another universe. Now they're finding out that there are many earth-like planets all around the universe and sooner or later, maybe not in our lifetime, they're going to find another inhabited planet. Buddhism already tells us that they exist. It's really amazing what our ancient ancestors knew. For example, our solar system goes around the sun but now we're discovering that in the centre of our galaxy is a black hole. It says in the Vedic astrological teachings that there are two points of energy that we turn around. One is the sun and the other is Mula Nakshatra which corresponds to the black hole. So the ancient Rishis knew, I have no idea how but they knew that there was a black hole in the centre of the universe. It's incredible. We think we're so smart and advanced but our spiritual ancestors knew all kinds of incredible things. Many of these things we're only re-discovering now.

Comment

Relating to the wisdom of emptiness and the wisdom of the buddhas - they represent aggregates. Everything is made from parts and nothing exists by itself. I was trying to see everything as an agglomerate like the agglomerate of consciousness, form, discrimination, feelings and compositional factors. The biggest poison that we have is thinking that everything is permanent. In this way we create the 'I' and 'me' that is so strong and instead of stamping the buddhas or aggregates we stamp 'me'. If we stamp emptiness then we can dissolve all this poison ourselves. Like a country is made from states, from cities, made up of each house. We see everything as a unit but it's made up of parts and we give this a name.

What he is saying is actually very good because someone else asked: how is it we go from life to life? It's like we're talking about Mahamudra - like a seal or a stamp - so we're stamping 'I' on everything so that's what's going from life to life. Actually, we need to stamp emptiness. We need to change stamps. Something is going to continue so we can either continue to stamp 'permanent I' on everything and be miserable from life to life or we can stamp 'I'm a buddha' and have a positive experience and come back in a happy and positive way.

Let's say the universe has collapsed. The minds, this collective consciousness, of all these beings in the universe start to reform. So first, there's space. All of these minds are energy and so movement starts in the universe. Wind is the movement of this energy. Then this wind causes friction and starts to heat up, this heat is the fire element. What happens is this incredible heat spreads out and then starts to cool down and as it cools down it condenses and cold energy, the water energy, manifests. From this things solidify and the material elements of the universe appear. This is, more or less, the ancient Indian way of explaining the big bang and the subsequent evolution of the universe. This is also what scientists say but they can't quite get the first part of it, the consciousness part. This is the Indian point of view: that everything manifests from consciousness, that the universe appears due to countless minds re-manifesting. There's also an explanation of how the universe forms in a similar way to how a baby is formed.

When we're conceived we do not arise from material or animated by God. The idea is that a previously existing stream of consciousness through the force of a wish to help others, if we're a higher being, or through ignorance and delusion, if we're not, enters into the semen and ovum of our parents. If we're going to be human, then there's the whole process of the embryo evolving in the womb. This explanation is similar to the development of the universe. First there's the wind, then fire, then water and then the solid mass of the body forms, all this

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is explained very precisely in embryology even though the parents can't see this. How did they know these stages of embryology, that we've only recently been able to see. Perhaps the later stages we can see with our eyes but the earliest stages we can only see by looking through a microscope, so how did they do that without microscopes? In Tibetan medicine we have ancient manuals on embryology that are scientifically correct from the first moment of conception onwards. It's really amazing what our ancient ancestors knew.

Comment

When I was six months pregnant I was only 22 years old and I knew nothing then. I had a problem with my kidneys and when I was at the point of almost having fainted I asked for an injection of morphine. Later I read a book on Tibetan medicine by Lama Gangchen, it spoke of the senses of the embryo which are formed six months into pregnancy and when my son was born he was almost blind in one eye and also had problems with one of his ears. This also proves that what is being said is true.

I have met many people over the years who know very little of the theory of buddhism or Ayurveda or tantra but who have come to meet Lama Gangchen and have shared their experiences with us. Many times they have said things that have confirmed our teachings - why? Because the buddhist teachings are based on observation of actual human experience over many centuries.

Anyway, we have to agree that we are part of the universe and are made-up of the same elements. I was reading an article recently, and I don't know how they worked this out, saying that 60% of the elements inside our body are from stars that have collapsed outside our universe. So we are actually made up of stardust. That's a really nice thought. This is not something New Age, this is what astrophysicists are saying. We're 60% recycled galaxies, I don't know where the other 40% comes from! Maybe it's from round here, from

our universe, hence why the universe has an effect on us: because we're made of it. Like it says in Kalachakra: "*just as it is in the outer world so it is in the inner world*". It's the same. This is the premise of Lama Gangchen's *Making Peace with the Environment* practice - when we meditate and take care of our inner elements it also affects the outer elements and vice versa, the outer elements affect us.

In some ways we accept that the outer elements affect us, for example when it's too wet and cold we get ill, but it's harder for us to accept that through meditation we can have an effect on the environment, not just in terms of making it dirty but also a positive way. The idea is that if we bring ourselves back into balance, not just one of us but many of us, it's going to have a healing effect on the environment around us. It works both ways. We often think: *how can I change the world?* Often we feel there is nothing we can do and we feel depressed about it. It's like the famous 100 monkeys story. It's not just our group meditating around the world, it's many people and groups meditating and sending positive thoughts and wishes. We might be the 100th or 100,000th monkey. The story, which is true, is that some monkeys started washing their yams, their fruit, in the sea and at the same time, somebody noticed that on another island the monkeys there started doing it as well. They didn't have email. How did they know? They knew because it's a change in collective consciousness. Monkeys don't have cell phones, so how come the monkeys on one island knew that the monkeys on another island were doing it? If there are enough people doing something, it does have an effect on the collective. When we do positive things we create a positive effect on the collective consciousness and the environment. That's the idea. It's not just us but all other groups who are doing something similar. So there are many similar groups working for peace, the environment, for healing and so on, so there is hope.

In the Guyusamaja commentary it says the outer earth element is divided into five. Mount Meru, the Southern, Western, Northern

and Eastern continents. Basically, it's saying that the earth element is the world. Because Mount Meru and the four continents are what is known as the world these days. It's the same as the sutra teachings: all the material things and our sensorial experience. There's an outer earth element and then there's what we call an inner earth element, that means the earth element related to us. The inner earth element is basically the hard parts of our body. Here in the commentary, from which we took lots of information for the Self-Healing practice, it says: the inner earth element is the hair, bones, excrement, liver, and heart. Also, body hair, nails, puss, teeth, skin, flesh and again the heart. Then again ligaments, muscles, ribs, and heart. Then waste products, intestines, bile and heart again. When we talk about the earth element in the body these are the things we mean. Actually these ancient commentaries are incredibly detailed and it takes time to process all this information, to work with it and then to gradually understand the truth of it.

When we're born and we grow up, all of these elements develop within us. As we start to age, depending on which Buddhist teaching we read; the very depressing ones say we age from the moment of birth but normally we start ageing a bit later than that. Until the age of 16 they say our energy is developing and after that we start ageing - we reach a certain point of complete energy and after that we start declining. Ageing is the process of degeneration of the elements, usually the earth element is the one that shows the first sign of ageing. All this esoteric information is simply based on observing what happens to us. The first signs of ageing is the weakening, the degeneration, of the earth element. What happens when we start to age? Maybe our hair is not so good anymore, it gets brittle and starts falling out and going grey and our teeth also start to rot and fall out. We start to see the signs in our nails, our teeth, our hair, and our bones getting weaker. These are the first classic signs of ageing. Those who had a lot of muscles see them less and less, ladies of a certain age see the skin on their arms becoming looser... But, don't worry about this

because we have prostrations! Buddha has the answer! Ageing is really rubbish and nobody likes it. What can we do about it? Another thing related to ageing is the eyes. We have the 5 *pranas* and then there's a secondary wind related to the senses. When our earth element starts to degenerate so does our eye sense power, everybody starts to squint and finds it more difficult to see or like me you need a selfie stick to read anything. But luckily Buddha again has the solution for that, the Open Eye Chenrezig practice. Its amazing because there are so many dharma solutions to the problems we encounter over the course of our lives, but many times we need to recognise that Buddha, in the guise of our guru, has already given us the solutions - we need to start to put them into practice.

The outer earth element is the world and then there is what we call the inner earth element, the *prana*. Here, in the commentary of Guyusamaja, there's a quotation from the Vajra Garland. It's the whole collection of initiations, one of the most important initiation cycles in our Gelugpa tradition. It says that: "*as for the hearts there are 5 (related to the earth elements), arising from the 5 continuums, endowed with the 5 winds and enjoying the 5 objects of desire*". What this means is that underlying the 5 elements there are the 5 *pranas* or winds. When we hear this kind of quotation it is quite difficult to understand at first what they are saying - there is an outer earth element, the earth or the world, there's an inner earth element, the bones, teeth and so on, and then there's an earth wind, a fire wind, a space wind. There are five major winds and the five sense winds. For example, the earth wind has a secondary wind that is related to our eyes, which is also why if we get jaundice we can see it in our eyes. It is all related. Tibetan medicine explains all these things about the winds, the structure of the body and how it functions - many things that we never understood, well that I never understood!

The next element is water, it's related to the kidneys and the ears. The first thing people realise as they age is that they need glasses and

the second thing is that they are starting to go deaf. This deafness is the degeneration of the water element which is also related to the kidneys and to the emotions of grief and fear, because everything is connected. All of these things are happening to us, so what can we do about it and how can we use this information positively? Obviously, we want to have as much energy as possible, a good quality of life and get enlightened. Why not? Let's have everything and if we have the right information at least we can try.

In *NgalSo Tantric Self-Healing* when we purify the aggregates by meditating on emptiness the exalted wisdoms that arise we call the Five Supreme Healers, Amoghasiddhi and so on. In the Environment practice we are purifying the five *pranas*, the five energies inside our subtle bodies which has a positive effect on our health and on our ageing process. If enough of us do the practice, it also has a positive effect on the environment around us. It's very similar to the meditation of Chulen, which is taking the essence of rejuvenation. Nowadays, people think Chulen is taking a little pill, not eating so much and doing some meditation. This Tibetan practice of rejuvenation is getting famous and it's one of the subjects explained in the Tibetan medical tantras, the rGyud-Bzhi or Four Tantras. Maybe we don't take the pills, which are made of substances from holy places and different flowers and minerals, but we are doing the meditations: *NgalSo Tantric Self-Healing* and *Making Peace with the Environment*. This is more than Chulen. Maybe we don't notice because we see each other all the time, but when I go back to England and see normal people of my own age, from my hometown, I always think they look really old and worn out. Between us we don't notice, we only notice when we go out of here and make comparisons. Maybe when we're 20 it's not so obvious, but if those of us who are older compare ourselves with people of our own age we can see that *Self-Healing* really works. This is a side effect of the practice, but it's a good side effect and we like it! Rinpoche's practices work on many levels: we become more emotionally balanced, healthier and we age more slowly and if we want we can try and use this as

a way to enlightenment, but in the meantime our quality of life is definitely a lot better. It's not true that Buddha didn't care about such things. He gave a lot of advice to normal people about how to live a good life in all senses. Even in the Theravada sutras there are many pieces of advice from Buddha Shakyamuni to normal people. People were telling him: I have problems with my wife, I don't have money or I want to improve my business and Buddha would give them an answer or solution. Generally we have the impression that Buddha's focus was on getting out of Samsara and achieving enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. We feel that Buddhism has nothing to say about daily life and this is not true. Buddha had a lot to say about these things. The historical Buddha was interested in improving poor people's existence, improving the condition of servants and so on. He wasn't just saying - let's get out of samsara and ignore the whole of society. He was interested in the rights of women, the poor, and the oppressed.

Earth

I'm going to read a part of the Guyusamaja commentary on the relationship with the elements which we can also find here in the *Making Peace with the Environment* practice. I already explained what it says about the earth element. The purification of the earth element is what we call Lochana, which means the Eye of the Buddha. Maybe it means what an enlightened person could see or that we need to see the world in a pure and peaceful way because now we see it negatively, based on ignorance. We see everything as dirty, everything as wrong, but we need to see the world through the eyes of an enlightened, awakened person. Then we see only good and positive things. For example, I have this bad habit of reading the news all the time. It always looks like there's only negative news but they say it's because that's what people want to see, that if they just put good news people wouldn't buy it. I don't know if that's true, but this is why Lama Gangchen made his own newspaper 'Peace Times' for 10 years. Lochana is the personification of the pure earth

element. Amoghasiddhi is the personification of the exalted wisdom of infallible realisation. I don't know if we could sit down and have tea with Mrs. Lochana or Mr. Amoghasiddhi but they're powerful forces within our subconscious and within the world. They're not limited by the ego consciousness, they're something bigger.

Water

Then it says the water element Mamaki is divided externally, for example, the rivers and seas, and internally, phlegm and tears, menstrual blood, ordinary blood, saliva, and urine. Outer water elements are waterfalls, rivers, springs, ponds and oceans. Everything can be divided into the Five Supreme Healers, and each one has the sub-divisions of Vairochana, Amitabha, Akshobya and so on. All the five consciousnesses and all the five elements are everywhere. Everything is within everything (in an esoteric sense) but in different proportions. This is a very important idea. The Hindu god Indra has a jewelled net that stretches across the universe. Inside every jewel we can see everything in the universe. This is like physics or like William Blake said: *'To see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower. Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, an eternity in an hour'*. It doesn't mean that everything is the same but that everything is like a big table cloth. If we pull it then everything that is on it will fall on the floor because everything is connected. The huayen world view is a bit different from the view that is taught in the Gelugpa school but it's very beautiful and very meaningful. This world view is illustrated in the Gandhavyuha sutra on the sides of Candi Borobudur - if we go there we should try to be aware of what we are looking at.

Mamaki means literally Mine-Maker: that's mine, that's mine and that's mine as well, the whole world is mine! One very nice thing is that we have the Four Limitless Meditations: limitless love, limitless compassion, limitless joy, limitless equanimity, which are linked to the four elements. If I remember rightly, limitless equanimity is the water element. Why? Because water goes everywhere, it doesn't stay in one

particular place. Mine-Maker means everything is equally mine. Not in an egotistical way but with equanimity, it's like: *'I love you, I love you, I love you, I love everybody.'* We have this nice image in Rinpoche's house of a Chinese porcelain Arhat with lots and lots of babies, like he is running a dharma kindergarten. That's how Rinpoche feels about all of us, we are his children: all mine. However, we are like different fingers on the same hand, we all have different karma so each one has their own role and relationship with the guru, but he has the same equanimity towards all of us and that's why we like him so much, he treats us all so very nicely, he loves all of us and we can all feel it. The names of the Supreme Healers and Great Element Mothers are very meaningful and it's important to know what all of them actually mean because then we understand on a deeper level what the buddha was trying to say.

Fire

Next it says, the fire element Pandaravarsini is divided internally into the heat of the head, the heat of the navel, all the limbs, the stomach and the heart. The outer fire element is divided into heat from stones, fire, crystals, wood, forests, and the continual fire. All these are divided into the Vairochana of the fire element, Amitabha of the fire element, Akshobya of the fire element, and so on. Within fire there are all the other elements and wisdoms. Here we can see it's like in Tibetan medicine. We need to have the three humours (wind, bile and phlegm) and the five elements (space, earth, water, fire and wind) in balance in order for us to be healthy. When they're out of balance we get tired and sick and eventually we die. We have two basic systems in the body: the hot energy, in the stomach and the digestive system and if this gets out of balance it rises up and we get heat in the head; the other one is the cold phlegm energy, and this is in the upper part of the body and when it's out of balance it manifests in the lower part of the body, in the legs, joints and so on. The fire element is also located in the heart. There are five biles and one of them is the bile energy of confidence and courage in the heart.

This text is from ancient times. It's nice that it says fire from stones. They were probably heating up crystals or using them as a magnifying glass to make fire. In ancient times, they didn't have lighters or matches they had to get two pieces of wood, a fire board and a fire drill, which they rubbed together rapidly to cause friction which creates heat which then bursts into a flame. When they talk about emptiness in the ancient Indian texts they use this example - they would ask where does the fire come from? Is it in the fire drill or the fire board or somewhere else? Part of our problem of why we don't understand the old dharma texts from almost 2000 years ago, is that we don't connect with their examples as our society is very different from theirs. They would also use a crystal as a magnifying glass to focus the sunlight and start a fire. Here it says that the fire element is also the continual fire. In Kathmandu for example, they have Vajrayogini temples, like in Sankhu and Parping, and in some of these they have a continual fire. We don't say eternal fire because we are Buddhists, we have to say continual (and changing) fire!

When we see any kind of fire, for example when we cook, the sun or any kind of warmth, we have to imagine that this in its pure form is Supreme Healer Pandaravasini. The Tibetan translation of this name means the white-robed lady. I think this means that the outside looks cool but inside is the inner fire. Ours is the digestive heat and we can transform it in a spiritual way if we apply certain techniques. This is just my idea. When I find a better explanation, I'll let you know!

Wind

Then the wind element Tara or Samaya Tara is divided internally into what we call the five pranas: pervading, downward-flowing, upward-flowing, fire-accompanying and life-sustaining winds. These are what we would call the autonomic nervous system that means even when we're asleep or in a coma they function. It's not something conscious, it's a system that keeps us alive regardless of what we're doing. Some tantras say the life-sustaining wind is in

the heart some say it's in the head or we would say in the brain. As long as that winds there we're still alive. Then there's a wind that allows us to breathe, breathing is automatic we don't have to think about it, it just happens naturally. The wind of breathing is called the *udanaprana* or upward-moving wind it's also the upper part of the peristaltic motion so if we swallow automatically it moves through our digestive system. Because speech is related to breath, we can't speak when we're not breathing, we have to breathe out, which is why we call it both the upward-moving and outward-moving wind. The *samanaprana*, the fire-accompanying wind, means the digestive energy here in the digestive system. What separates the essence of the foods from the waste products? It's the digestive process, stimulated by this digestive fire. According to Tibetan medicine it's very important we don't put out our digestive fire, otherwise we can't digest and then we get weak and sick. There are certain things, like eating processed foods and a lot of cold things in the winter, that put out our digestive fire. What we need to do to keep our digestive fire going is eat a lot of warm things, a lot of cooked things. Then there's the *apanaprana* or downward-moving wind. All the waste of food and liquids that we put into our body need to be excreted. This wind is also responsible for menstruation, ejaculation and giving birth. Many ladies can definitely feel this energy working during their menstrual cycle, like a wind. These winds are not somebody's weird fantasy, they're physiological experiences. Next we have the *vyanaprana* or pervading wind that gives us the ability to move, it's moving through the whole body. This seems to be the nervous system because it runs through the whole of our body. That's why even when we're asleep we move. Of course we also have a conscious part as well, but we're talking about the autonomic nervous system now.

Externally the winds are the upper southern, western, northern and eastern winds that we experience outside. I have heard that in Spain there is a place called Tarifa, near the straights of Gibraltar, where there are very strong winds coming from the ocean into the Mediterranean

- the Spanish people say that there is a good chance of going crazy in this place because of all this wind all the time. I've also heard that in the Mediterranean when they have this Sirocco coming across Italy, France and Spain there are much higher instances of domestic violence because people go crazy with the wind. It doesn't mean just a little wind, but a strong wind all the time. I think we would agree that the outer elements have an effect on our behaviour. For example, when it's really hot we get grumpy. When we start using these tantras, what we're doing is getting back in touch with nature, with reality. Many people live a very industrialised lifestyle and they think it's all rubbish - that natural things like the moon don't affect us when in fact it does. It's not just esoteric or New Age or weird, it's based on observation over many, many generations. If we live a 'modern' lifestyle we probably live in a city with so many things to do, we are far away from nature so it's more difficult to feel these things. A lot of things in daily life - food, drink, our smartphones, our lifestyle - are cutting us off from natural feelings, and then we say that it isn't true because we've become desensitised to natural cycles.

When we practice we're getting back in touch with the things that have always been around us and always been inside of us. The natural human experience. We're not going out of reality we're going back into reality. In the teaching called Tantric Grounds and Paths, a very important teaching within our Gelugpa system, it explains very clearly about the elements, winds and emotions. Why? Because, we need to learn to recognise and to use them positively. Particularly in the tantric teachings, we use them for transforming the process of going to sleep, dreaming and waking up or entering into meditation. Many, many centuries ago the awakened ones and rishis understood the natural cycles that we experience each day, so to them sleeping, dreaming and waking up were similar to going into a deep state of meditation, using our subtle mind during meditation and coming out of meditation. Finally, they also figured out that it was similar to dying, the dreamlike after death state and the process of being reborn.

All these processes are different octaves of the the same cycle. We might ask how they knew, because no-one comes back from death to tell us about it and so on, but these are questions from an ordinary person's perspective. The great yogis, and fortunately some of them are still with us, have a completely different experience. Their minds are much purer and more powerful so they experience things that the average person can't. For them having what we would call near death experiences are normal, everyday experiences, nothing unusual, just getting in touch with their actual deep human experience. It can be done through training in meditation and yoga. It's not a Tibetan fantasy, it's definitely true, and it's one of the reasons why Vajrayana Buddhism is so interesting.

It says in Guyusamaja and other tantras that every wind is associated with a particular colour and emotion. Rinpoche calls the transformation of our emotions the Dhyani Buddhas or Supreme Healers because he says it gives us a better feeling. The life-supporting wind in the heart is white and we call it the Great Water Mother, it's associated with Supreme Healer Akshobya. The downward-moving wind is yellow, we call it Lochana the Great Earth Mother, and t's associated with Ratnasambhava, yellow is the earth element. In the *Making Peace with the Environment* practice the earth element is in the secret chakra, the wind is in the navel, the water element is in the heart, and then fire is in the throat chakra and space is in the crown chakra.

Question

Do we always visualise these winds in the same way or are they constantly changing?

Answer

Many people ask why it's different from the *Self-Healing* practice. We didn't just think: oh, what shall we do today- let's make something up. Rinpoche just put clearly what it says in the Tantric Buddhist teachings. There are many different systems and it's something we

have to get used to, because they are all interesting and useful. Maybe it's because we are influenced by Western religion and philosophy on an unconscious level - we always want one answer, one ultimate thing, one God, one truth and so on, but Asian thought is not like that - there are many complementary truths and methods for people with different levels of openness and different levels of experience. There are many different element systems and they are all right, all true. The interesting thing is what happens when we meditate on them. What happens? What do we feel? I think that's the point. I'm sharing with you the sources of the *Making Peace with the Environment* practice. The element sequence is from the Tantric Grounds and Paths teaching. It's completely in accordance with our Gelugpa tradition. Each of the element systems have their own validity, what we need to know is where exactly it comes from. Bit by bit, as I find the time, I will write down all this kind of information as I've worked together with Lama Gangchen for many years on his books and sadhanas so I know the background. It's important that we know these things, then there are no doubts. It takes time to appreciate what Rinpoche has been doing, but definitely studying the tantras, medicine, yoga and astrology helps.

I was explaining before about entering the mandala. We enter through the east door and then we go clockwise, like the sun, meeting the Supreme Healer Buddhas one by one: Akshobya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, Amoghasiddhi and then finally Vairochana in the centre. When we come out we spiral outwards in an anticlockwise direction, following the female energy. Turning to the left, we meet the great element mothers: **EH YAM RAM LAM BAM**, the great space, wind, fire earth and water mothers. This is like the sequence in the *Tantric Self-Healing* practice. All this is clear and completely coherent if we understand where it comes from. Everything in Buddhism has a clear reason, either we can work it out ourselves or we can ask somebody to explain to us what it is. We're not saying **OM COCA- COLA SOHA** or something without meaning.

There is this idea that maybe we should only practice one tantra and one meditational deity, the great Master Atisha said: *you Indians practice thousands of buddhas and you haven't got any realisations, but I just do one and I have all the realisations.* Actually he was just saying this to get the Tibetans to focus on their practice, he himself did many practices. In our Gelugpa school all the knowledge that we need to become enlightened is too big for one tantra so its spread over several highest yoga tantras. That's why Lama Gangchen is showing us the correct way of practicing - which is to combine the practices of Guyusamaja, Heruka, Vajrayogini, Yamantaka, Kalachakra and Cittamani Tara, because we need to know all of these things. We need to know all the element systems and use them in the appropriate moment. There isn't just one system, there are many very useful element systems and healing practices in our lineage, and we need to recognise what they are and apply them at the right moment.

Question

Why is the earth element yellow **LAM** and so on?

Answer

LAM is a mantric seed sound or *bija*, and is a square or cube made of golden coloured light. This sound and visualisation is a wisdom key that helps us to get in touch with the earth energy inside of us. The other day I was explaining that when we say **LAM** for earth, it's not because we just decided to say **LAM**, it's because it comes from the Sanskrit language. In Sanskrit they have something called semi-vowels which are **YA, RA, LA, VA**. For the last 6000 years, **YA** means wind, **RA** means fire, **LA** means earth and **VA** means water. The elements have a sound and a colour. I don't know how but somebody discovered that making those sounds and visualising those colours created a vibration in our body and stimulated these inner pranas. We continue to do it, because it works. We can visualise the letter in English, Sanskrit or Tibetan because the point is the vibration **LAM LAM LAM LAM** - we should be able to feel it. In Sanskrit when

we say something we have to put our tongue in a certain position in our mouth. So, there are actually two vibrations, one's up here in our mouth/throat and one's down in the chakras and winds. That's also why we use Sanskrit for mantras, we could say **OM jewel in the lotus HUNG** instead of **OM MANI PEDME HUNG** but we don't because energetically it works better in Sanskrit. Of course, these *pranas*, these inner winds, are influenced by our breath and from this comes the fascinating science of pranayama, making peace with our breath, which we do have in Tantric Buddhism.

The Buddha made for us a selection of the best bits of ancient Indian culture. In the Tantric commentaries, they explain how to practice pranayama - how to gather our winds into the central channel - and how this influences the five *pranas*, changing the functioning of the autonomic nervous system. Yogis and yoginis who practice this can change the function of their bodies. There are still yogis in India, who can have themselves buried alive for weeks - they're showing off a bit really - but they do all of these incredible things just to prove they can. Obviously don't try it at home! Please don't go on YouTube sitting up to your neck in a box of ice or have yourself buried alive, because that's just showing off! We need to do our practice thinking about bodhichitta and emptiness instead. For example Tsangyang Gyatso, the 6th Dalai Lama - and those of us who've been to Tibet know that the Potala Palace is very high, in the centre of Lhasa - used to stand on the roof of the highest tower and pee off the side and then he would make it come back up again. He could do this because he had control over his winds. That was one of his party tricks or let's say him showing some of his realisations. Anyway if anyone does develop realisations, and obviously we all hope to, then please use them to help and heal others like Lama Gangchen does.

Another thing they say - and this is a practical thing we can all do - is to wet one finger and put it under our nose, then we just feel our breath going in and out. Is the breath from each nostril the same or

is it stronger from one nostril or the other? What do we feel? Some people feel the breath is more on the left or more on the right. This is also something we never think about, we don't know, because nobody ever told us at school. We have this cycle of breathing but our breath doesn't flow equally, there's a biorhythm that flows through the day so our breath is switching between one nostril and the other and this shows the quality of the energy. We can start to understand which wind is flowing more predominantly in our body by using this high-tech tool called a wet finger to analyse the winds flowing in our body.

I'm trying to explain clearly the theory behind the *Making Peace with the Environment* practice so we can recognise the winds and learn how to use them, then when we do this practice hopefully it will have very much more meaning. We spent one year, 1993 to 94, taking out all this amazing information and putting it together in this very nice package. It's like a greatest hits compilation so we don't have to do it all, in an extensive way, unless we want to but probably most of us don't have the time. When I have explained the theory we'll focus one by one on the Element Mothers and try to feel something.

To recap. We have explained how the elements manifest out of the big bang. Then we talked about how the Guyusamaja Tantra explains that the earth is Lochana, meaning the Great Earth Mother. Then it explains about the inner earth, outer earth and the earth wind energy. One thing the Guyusamaja says very clearly is that within every element there are all the other elements, so within earth there are the other four elements and this applies to all the elements. Even though there is mainly earth in the earth element there is also fire, water, wind and space - but in a much smaller percentage. Then there's the inner earth element that manifests as bones, teeth, nails... All the details about this are in the book, I'm just explaining what's already in the book *Making Peace with the Environment*. So there's the outer earth element, the inner earth element and then there's the earth energy, the wind or *prana*. Then it explains the five winds which all

have names in Sanskrit and Tibetan but in English they're: the life-sustaining wind, the upward-moving wind, the fire-accompanying wind, the downward-moving wind and the pervading wind. These five winds keep us alive. They are fundamental for our experience. When we do **EH YAM RAM LAM BAM** in the *Self-Healing* practice, we know that it comes from the Yamantaka Root Tantra.

I also showed a map of entering the mandala. If we enter the mandala, the Borobudur Mandala way, we meet first Supreme Healer Akshobya then Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, Amoghasiddhi and finally we enter the centre and meet Supreme Healer Vairochana. This is the father energy going clockwise, like the sun rising and setting. Supreme Healer Vairochana is in the centre. The female energy goes anticlockwise. We enter the mandala in a clockwise way, and coming out we go anticlockwise. So, we go in and get a high spiritual realisation then we come out again to help everybody else, that's the vow of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra: to descend back to the normal world and bring what we've learnt into society to help other people. The Mahayana point of view is to become as awakened as possible and to use our wisdom and compassion to help and heal others. When we go out, anticlockwise, we pass Vairochana, Amoghasiddhi, Amitabha, Ratnasambhava and Akshobya. This means we pass by **EH**-space, **YA**-wind, **RAM**-fire, **LAM**-earth and **BAM**-water. Does this sound familiar? It's like in *Ngalso Tantric Self-Healing*.

After this we say **SHUDDHE SHUDDHE** which means clean or purify in Sanskrit. Tibetan and Sanskrit sound nice because they have a rhythm, a beat, and sometimes we add in a few extra syllables to keep that rhythm. Different numbers of beats create different kinds of emotions and moods. It's very interesting. The rhythm is a little difficulty we have when we translate into European languages, because although we can translate the meaning perfectly well it doesn't have the same rhythmic structure. When we chant the energy is not the same. That's why in the NgalSo tradition we prefer to keep in Tibetan

the already existent texts like Lama Choepa, it sounds better and it's blessed. We have the exact translation of each verse by the side of the Tibetan. However, many of Lama Gangchen's sadhanas and books like *Making Peace with the Environment* and *Ngalso Tantric Self-Healing* were first written in English. Nowadays, they are been translated into Tibetan for the new generation of young monks in Asia.

In most Tibetan texts it says **SHUDDHE SHUDDHE**, but in some of the texts like Kalachakra, where it's very well-written according to Sanskrit, it says **VISHUDDHE VISHUDDHE** which means purifying the dualistic vision of phenomena. **SHUDDHE** is a simpler way of saying **VISHUDDHE**. **VI** actually means two or duality in Sanskrit, but in classical Tibetan there are many abbreviations.

I also explained that one of the sources of the element practices is the Tantric Grounds and Path teaching. When we start in Buddhism we have the Lam Rim or Gradual Path teachings which explains about definite emergence, bodhichitta, the correct view of reality, the importance of relying on a guru, the details of the basic spiritual things we need to know to take the first steps of the ladder. Then, like an extendible ladder, part two is the Tantric Grounds and Paths, because there are many steps that we need to climb up to reach enlightenment.

Here in the Temple of Heaven, our guru, Lama Gangchen, has put beautiful pictures and statues of the Supreme Healers and the Great Element Mothers. We can see Amoghasiddhi with Samaya Tara, Ratnasambhava with Lochana, Akshobya and Mamaki, Amitabha and Pandaravasini and Vairochana and Akasha Devi. These are the Five Fathers and Five Mothers. Many people ask why the Great Water Mother (white) is together with Supreme Healer Akshobya (blue) - in the sense why are there not two blue or two white buddhas together. Actually, it can be a blue or white buddha with a white or blue female buddha - there are many possibilities. There is never just one system,

there are many important systems in the Gelugpa school that we need to know about. Lama Gangchen has given us the keys to the Gelugpa tantric treasury and now it's up to us to appreciate what we have.

Previously I was referring to the Guyusamaja text but now I'm referring to the Tantric Grounds and Paths teaching. In this teaching it explains about the five *pranas*, the winds, their colours, which element they represent, where they are in the body, what they do and how we recognise them. This information is in a chart, Appendix 4, in the back of the *Making Peace with the Environment* book. In this book there's some extra information from the Kalachakra Tantra, but the main information is the same as in the Tantric Grounds and Paths.

People always ask me why the systems are different in *Making Peace with the Environment* and *Tantric Self-Healing*. It's because they are methods to achieve different things. People think they've understood everything when they've understood one system, then when they see something different they get upset. In the Tantric Grounds and Paths teaching it explains two different versions of the mandala of the Five Fathers and the Five Mothers. The first system is like in the *Self-Healing* practice where we have in the centre, in our heart, the life-supporting wind. It's white in colour, this is the Great Water Mother Mamaki, a white female buddha, and she is with white Supreme Healer Vairochana. Then, if we follow this system, in the east, the blue side, is the Great Space Mother who is the purification of the pervasive wind. Then in the south, the yellow side, there is the Great Earth Mother and she is the purification of the digestive wind, which is also called the equalising wind or the fire-accompanying wind. In the west, red side, is the Great Fire Mother, the purification of the upward-moving wind, the throat chakra. In the north, green side, is the Great Wind Mother who is the purification of the downward-moving wind, the secret chakra. So that is one possible system of the elements which is explained here in the Tantric Grounds and Paths teaching.

The *Making Peace with the Environment* practice follows another system - in the text it says each wind, each energy, is associated with a different colour and Supreme Healer. For example, the life-supporting wind is white and associated with Akshobya, who is blue. The downward-moving wind is yellow and associated with Ratnasambhava and the secret chakra. People get confused because in the *Self-Healing* system Ratnasambhava is here in our abdomen, the navel chakra. We need to develop a flexible mind. The life-supporting wind is white, here in our chest, and is associated with water and Akshobya. Here in our head is the space element which is associated with Supreme Healer Vairochana, the Space Mother, the pervasive wind and the ability to move. This is more or less summarising what I said before, but it's also quite useful information which is why I'm repeating it.

Now, back to the breath. So, using this high-technology tool called a finger, no need to buy one we've already got more than one, we wet it and hold it underneath our noses and then breathe in and out through the nostrils. What we will observe is that the breath is going out more on one side than the other. We need to experiment. Check when we get up in the morning, then see how it is at 10.30, how it's going at lunchtime - is it the same is it different? The winds and how they move are a very fascinating subject. At different times of the day different pranas are manifesting, once we know which *prana* is manifesting we can understand the dominant element in the body so we can use that energy to make peace with that element. If we feel that the air is going through our right nostril that's the fire energy, the upward-moving wind. The left side is the downward-moving wind. If it's coming from both nostrils it's the water element, the heart. Important question, why do buddhists get up and meditate at dawn? Because we like getting up? No! Because at that time the two energies of day and night are balanced. There's more chance at that time that the two energies, the left and right nostrils, are balanced. Two times a day, at dawn and dusk, the two energies are balanced and that's why these are very good times to meditate. There are

two possibilities it can either be the earth element which is in both sides and going forwards or the water element. We need to try and discover this for ourself. It doesn't cost anything so try it. There are four possibilities for the breath: right side, left side, both sides down or both sides forward. The *pranas* are the four elements: earth, water, wind and fire. Earth is forward, water is down, wind is on the left and fire is on the right. There's also a fifth element that comes out but only at the moment of death which is the pervasive wind. This is very specific information but all these incredible things, *Tantric Self-Healing*, the Tibetan medical system, astrology, and Kalachakra are all linked through the elements. We always wonder how these things affect us and how we affect them - it's all through this flow of these element currents and the emotions. For example, I can look in the Tibetan calendar at what element it is today and if it's really strong maybe I should be meditating on it. We use the elements around us to our advantage, so it's easier to get some meditation experience. We need to work with the flow of energies in the environment, not against them.

The most important thing we need to do with the information about the elements is practice what is called absorbing the elements. For example, every night when we go to sleep our mind shuts down in a sequence, just like a computer it goes through a process of shutting down. It is always the same process. It's the same with our mind. It goes through a process of shutting down and that is what we describe as the elements absorbing into each other. There is a specific process: earth absorbs into water, water into fire, fire into wind, wind into space. We have this very beautiful book on the element absorption practice based on Rinpoche's teachings that we can use. The most important reason for learning to use this information about the elements is so that we can start to gain some experience of this meditation. One of the main subjects of the Tantric Grounds and Paths teaching is explaining this fascinating process, but fortunately for us Lama Gangchen has already explained this many, many times, in

a very simple and practical way. I think for me one of the nicest things about the way Rinpoche teaches is how he puts a lot of emphasis on the important parts of the practice - for example, the element absorptions. This is what we should be doing, but the way it's written in most traditional sadhanas is very short and most people repeat it and don't do it but Rinpoche designs the sadhanas in a way that we are obliged to do the meditation, which is much better for us.

Then we have the three transformations. Transforming the ordinary experience of death into what we call the dharmakaya or mind of a buddha, transforming the normal bardo, the intermediate state, into the enjoyment body of a buddha and transforming normal rebirth into the emanation body of a buddha. All these practices produce results because we already have something similar inside ourselves that we can transform. If there was nothing similar between us and a buddha, if we had no basis to become a buddha, if we were totally and utterly different, we couldn't become one. Fortunately our present body and mind, our emotions and elements, our sleeping, dreaming and waking up, our gross subtle and very subtle minds, are the precise raw materials we need for the alchemy of enlightenment!

Bardo literally means 'in between' so there are many bardos. There is in-between death and life or we can also say between our everyday going to sleep and dreaming and in-between sleeping and waking up. We can also understand that when we meditate similar things happen, we go into meditation, meditate, and come out of meditation. We have some basis for buddha-hood already, because even though we might not meditate we do go to sleep every day. Without choice we go to sleep, dream and wake up. We have something that we can transform. We already have the basic energy, the raw materials, so we just need to know what to do and if we do it properly what will come out at the end are the three bodies of the buddha, the body, speech and mind of an awakened being. Buddha means awakened in Sanskrit. The absorption of the *pranas* or energy winds into the

heart, when we go to sleep, is very important. Sometimes we can actually feel the winds gathering inside our heart chakra as we go to sleep. We have to learn to recognise what's happening and learn to do it in a conscious way. We have this wonderful book: *T.Y.S. Lama Gangchen Rinpoche, Tibetan Lama Healer, NgalSo Tantric Liberation in the Palm of your own Hand*, about the process of death, bardo and rebirth according to tantra. First, we have the NgalSo preliminary practices, which are refuge, then the mind generation or developing the causes of bodhichitta, the seven limitless meditations, and then of course there is the guru yoga which is very important.

A very quick summary: what we're trying to do is train in recognising our elements absorbing. Why? Because we want to understand something of life's mystery and we want to be healthier, happier and more enlightened. That means we have to receive an initiation from a qualified tantric master like Gangchen Rinpoche. Of course, there are many qualified masters, so please choose one who has an unbroken lineage to the source of that tradition. For these meditations to work we have to have an initiation. Why? Because it's like installing an enlightenment software into our consciousness. It's not enough just to have the book or look at the internet and then try to do it at home, we must receive initiation for this process to work.

Let's put what we've been talking about in terms of going to sleep, it's easier for people to accept. First, when we go to sleep we feel heavy and our eyes shut, we feel we are sinking into our mattress. This is the absorption of the earth element. Normally we sleep with our eyes shut, I have seen one or two people who sleep with their eyes open, but what happens is the earth energy absorbs into the heart so even if somebody has their eyes open the energy absorbs and they no longer see when they go to sleep. There's what we call an outer sign of the element wind absorbing and there's also an inner sign. This feeling of heaviness, the eyes closing, falling asleep, we all know very well. The inner sign is called the mirage vision. What this means is that

the earth *prana* is getting weaker and this allows the water *prana* to manifest itself. What we see, when we're meditating, looks like the shimmering on top of a swimming pool when it's sunny. We see this shimmering blue light or sometimes they describe it like a mirage, like when it's very hot in summer. We've all seen this above a road, a shimmering light. We see something similar to this. People get very fascinated by these things and it is fascinating but it's actually just what happens naturally inside of us. We're just becoming clearer about our body and mind. We're awakening. There are lots of things to discover, inside ourselves, that in normal life we don't know. The exact colour and so on varies a bit between people as it depends on the strength and health of our elements, but there is a similar sequence that appears for everyone.

The earth element dissolves into the water. We see this every day, we have this experience of sinking, of going to sleep. For sure, we can also recognise the inner sign. We're probably more able to recognise it through meditation, in fact that's why we meditate because it's easier to recognise these subtle absorptions of the elements and that is also why we do *Self-Healing* and *Making Peace with the Environment* practices so that our energy system is clean, clear and open. Then something will really happen. Rinpoche, very kindly, has designed a system where even in such a difficult, polluted, complicated time, we still have a chance of progressing on the spiritual path. Because we're doing **EH YAM RAM LAM BAM SHUDDHE SHUDDHE SOHA** thousands of times, in many different ways, we are cleaning and working on all these energies, channels, chakras, winds and drops. We do a lot of this practice so then when finally our *pranas* gather - they're clean and pure. Most people can't gather their winds except by accident, imagine we've just been out smoking and then the polluted winds gather into our central channel, we would feel terrible! Rinpoche's practice is giving us a nice, clean, healthy body and energy so when the winds gather we have a good and positive experience. I think this is Rinpoche's intention: we need clean elements, open channels and

pure drops so that we have the best chance to transform ourselves and develop realisations or at the very least become more healthy and have more energy. We already have the basis of enlightenment, which is going to sleep every night. The path is learning to recognise this through meditation. The result is when we die we'll be able to recognise the elements absorbing and so they will absorb in a much more positive and powerful way. Whether we do this meditation or not at the time of our deaths, the winds will definitely absorb into our central channel. We're learning to recognise and use these experiences because we're trying to transform our ordinary death and make our death something positive, something useful. The earth element will absorb at our death time, but in a stronger way than when we meditate or sleep because we will wake up not in this life but in another. The earth element, for people who are dying, is the feeling of not being able to move, of totally sinking into the ground. The feet go cold and we cannot see anymore.

There's also a process of ageing related to the elements. As we get older our earth element starts to degenerate. For example, our hair starts falling out, our teeth start falling out, we cannot see very well, we get osteoporosis: this is the degeneration of the earth element. In our NgalSo Guyusamaja sadhana it explains this process very clearly and how if we meditate on the elements absorbing it slows down the ageing process and gives us more energy. Obviously when we get sick it's very unpleasant, however from the spiritual point of view one good thing is that our element absorptions become clearer and more powerful. Why? Because we are a little bit nearer to death. So in tantra whatever experience we have, good or bad, we have to try and find something useful in it.

Back to the winds. We have this very interesting mediation, thanks to Rinpoche, on the process of death, bardo and rebirth according to tantra and the elements absorbing. First we recognise the elements, then we clean them, and after we get these element *pranas* to absorb,

one by one. The earth element absorbs first. However, just to confuse ourselves, in the Kalachakra Tantra there's a different system. Different people have different experiences. For example, in Kalachakra the fire element absorbs first, fire absorbs into water. People die in different ways, we're not all the same. For a lot of other people, it's earth into water, water into fire, fire into wind, wind into space and that's what's called the stupa meditation. The reason we do the NgalSo Trulkor exercises is to wake up and stimulate these element energies, so that when we do this kind of meditation it becomes clearer. Trulkor Yoga is not to become beautiful or thin, or to become a yoga celebrity, it's to recognise the five elements more clearly and as a result improve our meditation practice.

In the Buddhist Vajrayana practice we always need balance, so when we're meditating it's important for our breath to be equal. If we can, we get up when the sun's rising, that's one good way, or we can meditate when the sun's going down. Let's suppose we can't meditate at that time because it's possible that our only free time to meditate is 3pm. Then what are we going to do? Probably the wind is coming out through one nostril or the other, it's not balanced, and we can check this with our high-technology wet finger. In India they have something called a yoga danda, a yoga stick - it looks like a walking stick for a hobbit. If we look at pictures of tantric implements we can see a yoga danda. I always thought it was to rest our arm on because when we say mantras in retreat our arm gets tired, but recently I discovered the actual purpose of this hobbit-sized walking stick is to put it under our armpit. Of course, we probably don't have a hobbit-sized walking stick or a yoga danda so no need to rush to the internet and try and buy one, we can simply put our fist under our armpit, it's like an on-off switch for our breathing. It's really amazing. We check with our wet finger which side our breath is escaping from. Then we sit and put our fist under our armpit or if we happen to have a hobbit-sized walking stick we can use that, then we meditate and see what happens. I'll tell you the answer: our breath should switch to

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the other side. It's amazing, it's like a switch. Once we know we can switch our breath by doing this we can make it go equally through both sides. So that means, it's not dawn, it's not dusk, we don't have to get up at 4am in the morning but we can still get our breath to flow equally so we can meditate better. The point is we're trying to create balance. We're just trying to breathe in a balanced way. Because if we breathe in a balanced way it's much easier to concentrate.

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What Lama Gangchen is teaching us is really so interesting and profound, and actually easy, but it's up to us whether we practice it or not!

Seven limitless prayer

Limitless love

May all beings have happiness and its causes

Limitless compassion

May all beings be free from suffering and its causes

Limitless joy

May all beings never be separated from the great happiness
that is beyond all misery

Limitless equanimity

May all beings dwell in equanimity, unaffected by attraction
to dear ones and aversion to others

Limitless health

May all beings recover from the sicknesses of mind and body
pollution so that they all enjoy relative and absolute health now and
forever

Limitless ecological regeneration

May all beings relax in a pure and healthy outer and inner
environment now and forever

Limitless peace

May all beings enjoy inner and world peace now and forever

Where are my inner elements?
Albagnano 2018

KUNPEN LAMA GANGCHEN

ALBAGNANO - LAKE MAGGIORE

Via Campo dell'Eva 5, 28813 Albagnano di Bèe (VB) Italy
reception@ngalso.net ahmc.ngalso.net

ALBAGNANO - LAKE MAGGIORE

Via Campo dell'Eva 5, 28813 Albagnano di Bèe (VB) Italy
reception@ngalso.net ahmc.ngalso.net