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NGALSO
Path to Enlightenment

Aspects of the Mind Lama Michel Rinpoche

This text is a clean and unedited transcription of a public speech given by Lama Michel Rinpoche in the Keizersgrachtkerk, Amsterdam, Netherlands on May 3, 2016. Link to video: <https://youtu.be/PYbNF99aoZ0>

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Prayers and introduction

Good afternoon. So I will start with a short prayer and this prayer I do wherever I go. It does not matter if I am talking in a gathering like today or if I am in a temple or in a church or in a school; it does not matter where. It is basically one prayer in which I remember my masters and the masters of my masters. Because one very important thing for us in Buddhism is gratitude. And if there is anything I can share with you today, it is because someone has taught me. So based on that I just remember my teachers and the teachers of my teachers. The first part of the prayer is in Tibetan; the second part of the prayer is in Sanskrit. There may be some people who also may know this prayer. They can also follow me if they may want.

*lo chok sangpoi pel gyur trashi pa
thub chen ten pe trinle yar ngo da
pel gye dro lor tsam pe dze pa chen
pal den lame shab la sol wa deb*

OM AH GURU VAJRADHARA SUMATI MUNI SHASANE KARMA UHTA
VARDANAYE SHRI BADHRA VAR SAMANYA SARWA SIDDHI HUNG
HUNG

*pa khyo kyi ku dang dag gyi lu
pa khyo kyi sung dang dag gyi ngag
pa khyo kyi tug dang dag gyi yi
don yer me chig tu jin gyi lob*



*ma khyo kyi ku dang dag gyi lu
ma khyo kyi sung dang dag gyi ngag
ma khyo kyi tug dang dag gyi yi
don yer me chig tu jin gyi lob*

OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNI SHAKYAMUNIYE SOHA

For me today it's a great pleasure to be here together with all of you. I think the main reason is because it's an honor to be able to share what we learn, what we know, what we think we understand, with people with an open mind and an open heart. This makes our own life more meaningful. So I am very grateful to all of you for being here today, for coming to listen to some words. Especially because - as I said - one of the things that makes my own life more meaningful is having the opportunity to share something that I believe is very precious for me; that was the opportunity of learning with great masters. As some of my great masters would say, "I have no qualities but I had great masters."

All of us, it does not matter where we come from, it does not matter what our culture is, what our religion is. I myself, I come from a sort of mixture because my father's family is Jewish, my mom's family is Christian Protestant Presbyterian, and we were born in Brazil where we already have a mixture of many cultures somehow together. Then I grew up from when I was twelve till when I was twenty-four in India in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery. Then I traveled around through Europe, the Americas, Asia and I had the opportunity in all these years to meet many people and to talk to people and to see people from different cultures, different social levels and different levels of education. And being in this position of a lama, sometimes I think the western people see the lama more like a sort of psychologist than an actual spiritual guide, which means that people come with their more personal questions and their personal difficulties and so on, which is okay, it is fine. I think that we can do it, doing it in the best way we can. But with this it makes the opportunity to know the people in a different way.

Very often when we see someone we first see what is like the front of a building. What is inside is not always shown. That is also why I normally say that everyone seems normal as long as you don't know him well enough. I meet many people that actually come and they open themselves. So you go beyond the front of the house; you go to the inside of the house and you see the many rooms there.

Everybody suffers and everybody wants to be happy

What I have seen is that it doesn't matter where I go, with whom I am, what culture, what social level, rich, poor people, great levels of education, people that maybe have a very low level of education; it does not matter. There are some things that are very, very similar, not to say the same; I would say the same.

First of all everybody suffers and no one wants to suffer, and everybody wants to be happy. That's the main thing. And the most amazing thing of all, somehow it's quite shocking: everybody - it does not matter who they are, who they may be - we do everything we do, thinking it is the best for our own happiness. Even the most amazing things in the world and the most terrible things are happening in the world. Why do people do what they do? Because they think it is the best for their own happiness, although guided by their own ignorance. This is something that we can



see everywhere and for me it is very clear: once you see this, it unites us. We see that it does not matter who is there on the other side; we are going in the same direction. The direction that we want to go is that we want to be happy, we want to live in a state of harmony, of joy, of satisfaction; that is actually what we truly want. And we do everything we do trying to find the right balance and trying to do the right thing in order for us to reach and to be able to maintain such state. Because there are many moments during our lives where we experience joy, where we experience satisfaction. But the great question is how to keep it. Sometimes when we look, life may look more like a sort of a rollercoaster: up and down and up and down and up and down. And all we actually want is satisfaction. So we may try to do it in many different ways and most of the times we try to find solutions in quite a superficial way. We try to find solutions. I mean we try to find means to maintain a level of satisfaction and joy in a bit of a superficial way, which means we do it, doing things that we already know that don't work. I will go directly to the point.

One time I was called to give a talk about Buddhism in a school. I arrived in the school. Normally whenever I go somewhere I have no idea where it is, what public it is; I just go wherever they ask me to go. So I arrived at the school. There were about two hundred kids from six to seven years old. Then I asked the teacher, "How long do I need to talk?" She told me, "About an hour-and-a-half, two hours." I said [to myself], "What do I do now?" Okay, I was invited to talk about Buddhism, to make an introduction to Buddhism. Then I said, "Okay, let's talk about the four noble truths." Then I started talking about the four noble truths, changing the way [of explanation]. Sure I would not talk in a normal way, how I would speak in a normal context with adults. I was making questions with the children, making friendship. Then there was a moment during the explanation in which I needed to explain to them how desire works.

I asked the children, "Is there a toy that anyone of you wants?"

And a lot of them said, "Yes!"

"Anything that you really like and you want?"

And all of them said, "Yes!" They answered me as a group; it was very nice actually.

Then I asked them, "Did it ever happen - maybe at your birthday or on Christmas - that you got a toy that you wanted?"

And all of them said, "Yes!"

"Were you happy?"

"Yes!"

"How long did your happiness last? Long or short?"

They said, "Short."

"Do you still have the toy?"

"Yes, we have"

"Does it still make you happy as before?"

"No."

"Do you want another toy?"

"Yes." [laughter]

Then I asked, "The next toy that you get, how long will it make you happy; long or short?"

They looked at me a little bit upset and they said to me, "Short."

Were these children special children, because they had a special awareness of the nature of dissatisfaction of desire? No.

The problem is that we change from toy to toy since we are very small, because we

don't know any other game. So basically what we do is: we know that is not what makes us truly happy. We know that that is not able to sustain our sensation of pleasure and satisfaction. But we don't know any other way around.

So first we have the toy here. Then as we grow up we start having more pleasures of the body. Then we want to have a position. And then we try to get more money and a position, and power and pleasures. And then we try to satisfy all our wishes. We try to maintain the sensation of happiness.

One time this was so clear to me. I was together with a friend. He is a person with good wealth and he was in front of his private jet. Then we were about to enter his private jet and he was not so comfortable to have all this wealth so he looked at me and said, "You know the only difference between big and small boys is the size of their toys." [Laughter] Like to say that it's just a toy and not more than that. It's just a game trying to be happy.

The point that I want to bring is that we try in many ways to be happy all the time. We try by gaining material wealth and material stability. We try to maintain the sensation of happiness by having pleasures from our senses. We try to maintain our sensation of pleasure by having good people around us and by trying to have good relations within family and friends and all of this. But the fact is that, even though we may be able to get most of it; finally there is still something missing. Most of the time. So here comes one question for me to try to look for the right solution. Let's try to better understand the problem. All of us want to be happy, which means we don't want to suffer.

Physical suffering and mental suffering

If we look at suffering, there are mainly two types of suffering: physical suffering and mental suffering. The suffering of the body; it is like heat and cold and pain and thirst and hunger. Then we have the suffering of the mind: sadness, anxiety, worries, dissatisfaction and so on.

What do we have more: suffering of body or suffering of mind? What do you think? [Audience responds, "Mind"] Suffering of mind, right? We suffer much more for things because we get worried or because we are dissatisfied or because we have anxiety and so and so on, than the actual fact of suffering or of having pain. Even when we have pain we are more worried that we will have more pain after than the actual pain that we are having right at that moment. Basically there is a very simple fact that is, for the suffering of body, where do we need to look for a solution: in the body or in the mind? If I am hungry for example, what do I do if I am hungry? Is meditation going to help? Yes, up to a certain point. [laughter] It is going to help me to deal better with the hunger but it's not going to eliminate the hunger. So to finally eliminate the hunger what do I need to do? I need to eat. So body - solution body. If I have pain in my body... I met many great masters with great states of mind, but when they were sick they went to a doctor, okay? So for the suffering of the body we look for a solution, in the body. And for the suffering of mind, what do we do? We need to look for the solution truly in the mind. Even though that is not what happens most of the time. What happens most of the time when we feel sad or when we feel anxiety or when we have worries and jealousy and envy and dissatisfaction and so on? We go to buy something new. Maybe we go for shopping or we go to watch a nice movie or we want to go out with friends; we try to forget suffering instead of solving the problem. And what happens after that? It simply comes back.

So I believe very much that in this task that we all follow, which is this process of

trying to be happy, of meeting a state of peace, joy, satisfaction, the most powerful tool that we have is our mind. This is the most important one.

The secrets of the mind

There is a saying from a great master, his name was Yongdzin Yeshe Gyaltsen, some centuries ago in Tibet and he said something like that. I tried to remember before the verse. I'm not really sure it's correct, but in Tibetan we would say something like:

*khorde kyon yon ma lu pa / sem le jungwa yin no she
thubpe sungrab le sung pe / kyibu namcho chen nam gyi
sem gyi sang di she par cha*

Which means something like:

*All the benefits and the harm;
All the positive and negative aspects of existence;
Everything that exists, good and bad, in the world... in existence
Know it was thought to arise from the mind
So was said in the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni
Those intelligent enough should put an effort to learn the secrets of the mind.*

So if we really look carefully, we are totally unable to perceive anything, to experience anything, independently of ourselves, right? Anywhere we go, anything we do, anyone we meet; the way how this reality exists for us, it always comes through the filter of our mind, so we are deeply influenced by our own perception. And it is actually something very powerful. If we change our inner way of relating to the world, the world changes. Based on this, one of the most important things for us to do, I believe, is to learn how to take good care of our mind. The mind is not something fixed; the mind is not something like a piece of concrete. It is something that is malleable, and we can shape it, as we move along our life. We already do it all the time, but it is important to know about it. It is important to understand how our mind is functioning, so that we can understand that actually we are... we are not a result of the circumstances around us, but the circumstances around us, the world around us, is the result of the way how we act. Most of the times when we feel happy or when we feel sad, when things go well or bad, what do we do? We point the finger toward something or someone and we live our life as if we were the simple result of what is happening around us. We act as a victim. "Why am I sad? Because that person did that, because that thing happened in that way, because this was not supposed to happen, but it happened because of this, because of that."

We have many reasons around us that we see as the causes of our own suffering. And we live as if it were the simple result of the world around us, but I truly believe it's not like that, because we have a great power of influence, on the world, the way how we experience, on reality around us, all the time. To understand this better, I believe it would be very, very important for all of us, to do a process of education to learn more about our own mind. Mainly because it's the most powerful tool and source that we have in our whole life



We learn how to take care of the body - let's say we learn, we try at least. If we look around us in society, how much importance is given to take good care of the body? More and more. So there we are taking care to eat healthy food and to do exercise and so and so on, right? So, it's good, it's important; I also believe we need to take good care of the body -also because the body is directly connected with the mind; we'll talk about that a little bit later - but the fact is that we are aware of that. We are aware of taking good care of the material things, so we study our whole life - not the whole life but we study since we are small and we go to university. For what? What do we learn? Knowledge, in order to do what? To make money, because we need the material stability. Correct, wonderful, but is it enough? It is also important for us to take good care of our body. Do we need knowledge for that? Do we need to know how our body functions; what is good to eat, what is bad to eat, what is good exercise, what is bad exercise? We need it. But to have good health, is it enough to have the right knowledge of how to take care of the body? No. We need to eat the right way, we need to do the right exercise, we need to have a healthy lifestyle. But we have a very important tool in our life, let's say the most important of all, which is our mind. And we simply do not acknowledge its existence. I'm generalizing society, okay? I am sure for many people it is different, but generally speaking. Why don't we talk about: let's make exercise for our mind? Okay, be careful what type of food you take for your mind, what type of information you intake, what type of influence you gather and the way you influence the mind. We never talk about this, we never take care of that much. While actually it is extremely important.

Gross, subtle and very subtle mind

So what I wanted to do today is, most of all, to share with you some concepts of a better understanding about the mind, so we can understand our own mind a little bit better, so that we can direct it more consciously. So first of all, the mind always functions within an object of perception.

The mind - giving a definition of the mind in Tibetan- it's called *salshin rigpa*, which means clear and cognitive. The mind is clear, clear like the light, because it's always awake, there is no moment of the mind when it is not perceiving something. Even when we are in deep sleep, the mind is still functioning and according to Buddhism even after death the mind still functions - not in the body sure, but there is a deeper level of consciousnesses, a more subtle type of mind that continues. Anyhow, the mind is always on. That is why it's clear and it's cognitive because it is always perceiving something. The mind always has an object of perception.

Then we have the gross mind. The gross mind is the mind that normally we call mind, in the sense that there is the mind that perceives our five senses: what we see, what we listen, what we touch, what we taste, what we smell, plus the sense of the mind itself, which is the cognitive part. So we have the mind that perceives ideas, the mind that is fully manifested; that's what we call the gross mind, okay?

Then we have the part of the mind that is called the subtle mind, which is actually very important. For example, I'm not angry, okay? Looking around I see no one that seems angry. The fact that we are not angry right now, does that mean that we do not have anger? Bring me an object of anger and we will see what happens. *[laughter]* Okay? So if we start here playing games and try to bring an object of anger for our neighbors, we will see what will happen. Okay?

So what will happen is that, the anger that I have but that in this moment is not

manifested, where is it? In the subtle mind. So the subtle mind is the aspects of our mind, which are there but are not manifested. When the anger manifests, then it manifests in the gross mind. Okay?

So everything that is working beneath, that is there but we are not fully aware of it, this is what we call the subtle mind. Positive aspects, negative aspects... Negative aspects means aspects that bring suffering, positive aspects means aspects that bring satisfaction and joy. It's not something moral: what is good or what is bad? In Tibetan we call the negative aspects of the mind *nyon mong*. *Nyon mong sem rabtu ma shiwa chepa*. It is any aspect of the mind that brings the mind to a state of unpeacefulness; that's a mental defilement, a negative aspect of the mind; it brings the mind to a state of unpeacefulness. This is what we call a negative aspect of the mind.

Anyhow, we have negative and positive aspects of the mind on a gross and a subtle level. The subtle mind is all the parts of the mind, which are not fully manifested but are there.

Then we have what we call the very subtle mind. The very subtle mind is actually the imprints of our emotions, of our thoughts, of our experiences and is something that we call the mind that goes from life to life. It's like it is something that is not even manifested in a subtle level but is there, that we take wherever we may go, wherever we may be. This is what we call the three types of mind. First gross mind, subtle mind and very subtle mind.

There are two aspects of the mind, which... there are many, many ways in which we can classify the mind and we can explain it. I wanted to go today, starting from gross, subtle to very subtle, but then most of all entering to two aspects of the mind, which for me are very important, which in Tibetan we call *kundak* and *lhenkye*. *Kundak*, I like to translate it as: constructed - a constructed mind, a constructed aspect of the mind and *lhenkye* we call spontaneous and inborn - a spontaneous aspect of the mind. So we have both: we have a constructed part of our mind and then we have a spontaneous part of our mind. So let's try to understand what is what and to recognize it within ourselves.

The constructed mind

The constructed part of the mind is everything that depends on the culture, on the education, on the experiences we have. So because of that, my constructed mind is very much different from yours. The problem is that very often we have many aspects of our mind that are constructed but we think are spontaneous. We are not aware that they are constructed.

So I want to make one example, which for me is very clear and the first time I read this example it was not in this context, it was in a completely different context. It was about marketing, but when I read this it really touched my mind. And it is about the color pink, the pink and blue color. So if we ask people nowadays, if we ask ourselves, "What's the color for boys and what's the color for girls?" Between pink and blue, if we have a small boy, which color would we dress him, pink or blue?

[Laughter. Audience responds, "Blue"] Some people like to do things in the opposite way, so they take pink. But most of us, which color would we give for a small boy?

Blue. And for a small girl? [Audience, "Pink"] Pink. Right? Why?

Without philosophy, without the mind of analyzing or the philosophizing mind, we would just directly answer: Why? "Because that's how it is, that blue is the color of boys and pink is for girls, come on! Why to make such questions? It's quite obvious, it is like that." But if you really ask why and if we go to look at the history of pink and

blue, it starts in 1918.

Nineteen eighteen was the beginning of the industrial revolution and before that time, the color for clothes, the color for boys and girls was white, grey, cream. All children were dressed in cream. Like when we look at old movies, what was the color of clothes for most poor people, basically? It was this cream white color. To dye cloth was very expensive, so children were never dressed - unless they were princes or very rich people - they were never dressed with colors. They were only dressed with this sort of cream color. So in 1918 with the industrial revolution it was possible to make cloth with color to be available for people, for most of the people to buy, so people started inventing colors for people to use.

The first marketing campaign for color, for clothes for children with color was pink for boys, blue for girls in 1918. Why? Because they thought in that time, that pink was for boys a stronger color and blue was softer, so the light blue was for girls and the pink was the stronger color for boys. And so from 1918 to 1920, it was so: all the clothes for children were sold, everybody was buying blue for the girls and pink for the boys.

Then what happened? It was in 1920: the market of clothes for children started to get a little bit stuck, because people were not used to buying clothes every six months. So what happened was that we created this industry and, because of that, we needed to create needs in order for the industry to move on. That's what happened. And how do you make the needs and how do you make people believe their wants become needs? With marketing. So in 1920 they changed the direction and they made a whole marketing campaign in which the color for boys was blue and the color for girls was pink; they inverted it and since 1920, we follow. So up till today when parents go to buy clothes for their children, pink is for girls and blue is for boys. This is the constructed mind, which is constructed by influence, it is constructed by information that we receive and by emulating what other people do. How many aspects of our mind are constructed? So many. So many.

One of the clear ways of trying to understand, what are the constructed parts of our mind, is to go live in a place where people come from a very different culture. Then we start to see how different things are and we really get to see what are the constructed aspects of our mind.

So one important process that I would really like to do - until now I was not able to do, but I advise anyone that could do to make it - is to make a study to check what are the influences of our constructed mind. I never made a real study about it; I was just reflecting a little bit upon it and I ended up with three main influences that we have on our constructed mind, because the constructed mind is a little bit our paradigm - the view of the world in which we live. And the most crazy thing is that it's fully constructed by influences and by ideas and so on, but we believe that that's how things are. And we can even discuss... we can become even violent when seeing... or we can become with strong judgment, when we see one boy dressed in pink. People may even say quite strong things and act in a strong way. But what happens is that our constructed mind is simply influenced by information.

Three main influences

So I have seen three main influences of our constructed mind, in our western society. Every culture is slightly different but in our western society mostly we are influenced by the monotheistic religion. And the religion brings strong points of view, of what is reality, what is right what is wrong, how things are done and so and so on.



So we have a strong influence from the monotheistic religion.

We have a strong influence from the so-called scientific view. I say 'so-called', because very often what we follow is not necessarily scientific; most of all the influence that we have, is from the mechanic system view of Newton; a materialistic view of the world. That is why for most of us, if we start learning something about quantum physics, it's so difficult to understand, because it's in a complete different paradigm. We have to change our structure of reality.

I was reading some time ago last year somewhere about quantum-computers. I like these things; I was reading about how quantum-computers work and a quantum-computer is not working with the normal binary system. A normal computer has a binary system, which means it makes all the calculations based on existence - nonexistence, one and zero, okay? Quantum-computers use what they call q-byte. A q-byte has four possibilities - not two. It has: exist, don't-exist, exist & don't-exist at the same time and a fourth one that I did not understand. *[Laughter]*

So, first of all how can something exist and not exist at the same time? That's the first question. Why is it so difficult to understand very often? Because it is in a complete different paradigm.

We were brought up in a paradigm of reality influenced by a very materialistic linear reality, where consciousness is a result of material. In the paradigm of quantum physics it is the opposite: Material is a result of consciousness, so it's a complete different paradigm. I am not entering into that subject now. The only thing I want to say is that we are influenced by this view. So we have an influence of a so-called solid materialistic view of reality.

And then the third main influence that I see that many of us have very strongly is that we have an influence from capitalist economics in which we live. So the idea that the more something costs the better it is, and many other values and ideas that we have accumulated in our mind.

But it is so nice... It's so nice when we start to see that our view that we have is a constructed view. And when we see a constructed view as a constructed view, for me at least it relaxes the mind. Because before when we see a constructed view as not just as something solid and that's what it is, we don't open ourselves to other possibilities. And suddenly we see that we are so influenced by so many things: by what we listen, by what we see, by the education we receive... And our constructed views are not created only today, yesterday, but they are slowly, slowly built up from generation to generation. So my constructed views - my constructed mind is fully influenced by the constructed views and mind of my parents and grandparents and all the ones that came before me. When those views are passed to me, my worldview, the paradigm in which I live, when they are passed to me they are passed with the whole luggage, the heritage that I take. That's why somehow culture is something so strong inside of us, because culture is the way how we see the world.

I will give another example of influence of a constructed view. I think many of us grew up with a great influence of Walt Disney culture. "And they lived happily forever." So you see many people that grew up... Luckily I'm now out of that group - at least I feel so. But we see many people that grew up with the idea that happiness is where? Where do you find happiness? In a state, once you are going to meet your enchanted prince or princess... and then everything will be fine.

In Brazil you even see people saying to the children, especially the girls, like when they get hurt or they have pain or when they are sad... Like when they have pain and they come to their parents and say, "Oh Mum I have pain," and they are crying. And the answer is, "Don't worry: when you get married, it will pass." [laughter]

So if we look in our culture: how important is the aspect of marriage and finding the right person and all of this? Not talking about on a practical level; I'm talking about in a conceptual way. This is quite new for human reality. Some time ago things were not like that. It is a constructed aspect of the mind. Okay?

Just one other example: There have been societies in which the whole family structure was completely different. For them that was the most natural thing, because this is also part of the constructed mind.

So one step that I feel is very important, is for us to start understanding what is my constructed mind and what is the spontaneous mind.

The spontaneous mind

The spontaneous mind are the aspects of the mind that are totally independent of culture, education, experiences that we live through... Of knowledge. For example, we can go anywhere in the world: people get angry, jealous, envious, selfish. People feel love, compassion, wisdom... Wisdom is not a feeling; wisdom is to be coherent with reality.

These are things that are spontaneous. We can build them up... the important thing to understand is both the spontaneous and the constructive mind can be tuned, can be shaped and they also influence each other.

But the spontaneous part of our mind is that aspect which independently of what we believe or what we don't believe, independently of where we are born, in which culture we live and so and so on, they are there.

It is very interesting for example, there are studies about the expressions of the face. And by seeing this, people have seen that in different parts of the world and by totally different cultures, people manifest the same emotions to the same expressions. That's why actually a person that is trained in this can understand if a person is lying or not lying. Or if a person is expressing love, or contentment, or dissatisfaction, or anger and so and so on. We are actually quite transparent.

So what happens is that these are aspects that are spontaneous. The main objective in Buddhism is to transform the spontaneous mind, not the constructed one. Because the constructed mind when we die is gone. Inside the idea of reincarnation, what continues from life to life is the spontaneous mind, not the constructed one. A baby comes with a spontaneous mind but not with a constructed mind.

When we look at small babies and then we follow them up as they grow... If we think about our brothers, sisters or about one's own child, or grandchildren and so on. Are these children born already with some sort of character? That sure is shaped afterwards. But when you see like one brother and one sister; are they different since the moment of birth or not? Yes.

You see some children that since they are very small - like a very small baby - have a very strong character. Are there babies that are very soft and gentle? Some of them since they were very small, they were already trying to understand everything and other ones maybe they don't really understand anything. [laughter] And if we follow up after this, actually the adult is not that different from that small baby that was born very often, which is showing the spontaneous part of the mind.

The good news is that we can shape our mind. It is possible to shape and train the

mind, even the spontaneous mind. It takes longer than the constructed mind, but it's possible. So is it clear, the difference between these two aspects of the mind, the constructed mind and the spontaneous mind? Okay.

Once again, it's very important and it's quite liberating to see the constructed aspects of our mind as being constructed. And it's also quite liberating to see the spontaneous aspects of our mind as being spontaneous. Why? Because most of the times the spontaneous aspects of the mind we see as a result of the conditions in which we live. Why do I feel angry? Because this is happening, because that is happening. Why do I have this emotion or that emotion? We feel very often as if we were simply a result of the world around us. But then if we really look, they are always there.

I always remember one friend of mine. She was unhappy one day and she came to talk to me. She started complaining about her working partner, with whom she had a business together and then there was the problem: "Because this person he never recognizes anything I do." She had a strong sensation of not being recognized and not being respected and not being understood. Then I knew her quite well and I knew her friend also.

So I asked her, "Have you ever felt this any other moment in your life before? Forget about this right at this moment and forget about the context in which you are. The same inner sensation of not being respected, of not being understood, not being recognized, which is somehow the same thing; have you ever felt the same thing before? Can you go back in your memory and remember other moments when the same feeling arose?"

And she answered me: "My whole life, so it was with my husband, so it was with my friends, so it was with my parents; nobody never understood me. I was never recognized."

Then I just asked her, "What's the only thing in common that you see in all this? It's you." [laughter]

So the point is that, like, when we know someone after some long time and we are going to see the person again after one month or two weeks or three months, it does not matter. Do we have some sort of an expectation of what the other person is going to talk about? And what the complaints are that the person will do?

We are quite simple and we are quite repetitive. Because the point is that, as long as we do not deal with our own inner conflicts, we will just create again and again external situations through which these conflicts are going to manifest. So this is all part of the spontaneous mind. The spontaneous mind manifests to us, in a more clear and aware way, through the different conditions that we live. And we are lucky when it manifests, so that we see it more clearly and we can do something about it.

The mind can be shaped

That's why in some Buddhist teachings it is said our enemies are actually our best friends. Why? Because when we have an objective in life to train the mind, to shape our mind, it is so important to see our own shadow, it's so important to see our spontaneous mind. Normally when someone is treating us in a way that we may not

like very much and when conditions are not the best, then our defilements, our anger, our jealousy, let's say our inner poisons come out. So good! Why? Because then we can see it, then we can do something about it. It's not because I'm not feeling angry that I don't have anger, right?

So what's the only way how I can really deal with my anger? First I need to see it, to know I do have anger, otherwise I just live in this idealized idea that I'm perfect. And then when something happens, then it's not my fault, it's someone else's fault because if you did not say this, or if you did not do that, I would not be angry. So the anger is not my fault; the anger is not really coming from me. And what happens basically is, the more the time passes, the more we make our own negative aspects - or we can call it habits also - of our spontaneous mind stronger and stronger and stronger, because we are constantly shaping our mind. Both the spontaneous and the constructed, every moment, right in this very instant.

The simple fact that we are talking about having a constructed and a spontaneous aspect of the mind, this is already changing our constructed mind... The way how we see things. So in every moment of our reality, of our experience, we are shaping our minds.

The fact is that very often we shape the mind in a way - not being aware in which direction, in which way I am shaping my mind. The more I get angry, the more used I get to being angry. So the more I get angry the more I will get angry. This is one example. So not only is it possible to shape the mind; that would not be a very correct statement. The statement is: we are always shaping the mind; the mind is always being shaped in a way or in another. By every place I go, for every person I meet, by every thought I have, by every emotion it manifests, I'm shaping my mind, all the time.

It's the same with the body; every time I sit I'm creating a habit. If I always sit like this, [*changes posture to sagging shoulders and stooping back*] one day I will start having a problem in my back. And where is the problem coming from? From a long process; not coming from that very right moment [*returns to original straight position*].

So, similar to the body, we are always shaping, the same thing; body and the mind are very similar actually in many aspects. Every time I eat, am I shaping my body? Every time I breathe, the movements I do, the way how I sleep, all of this is influencing the body. Nothing comes out of nothing like in an instant. It's a very gradual process. So that is why keeping healthy is not so easy, because it means having a fully healthy lifestyle, because the body's being shaped all the time, by everything we do.

The same is with the mind. So what's the way to have a healthy mind? It is to live with a healthy lifestyle, mentally and physically, because I cannot say, "Okay, for you to have a happy mind, a healthy mind, you do two times meditation a day." It will help for sure, but it is not enough. Because every word we say, every thought we have, every place we go, everything we do, we're shaping our mind. As we shape our body, as we shape our life.

Actually we could say, every word we say, every action we do, every choice we make, every thought we have, determines our future and our present. It's extremely important. So there's not such a thing as, okay, I will do this to shape my mind. No, we are already doing it every day.

There was one study done in England - it is quite useless but it's good they did it, because the result is quite obvious. The study was, people that stay many hours in violent videogames; does this influence the mind to be more violent? The result was

yes.

If I am always reacting with violence in the game, I pass five hours a day... Someone's coming and then I am reacting. I'm doing that virtually. What happens is that people after that, they have stronger reactions. What is the influence? When something happens, they have a tendency to react more violently.

I'm not saying someone will become a very violent person because he plays a lot of violent videogames. I am not saying that. But the fact is that the mind is influenced. One very small example: if I come to you today and start talking badly about Devadatta - Devadatta was a cousin of Buddha. For whatever reason - many reasons - in the Buddha's teachings, when we need to say the name of someone, we say Devadatta. So, let's say I come today here and I start talking bad about Devadatta. I say, "Look, Devadatta is a terrible person with such a bad character; never trust him." I say many bad things about Devadatta. You never met Devadatta. You don't know who he is, okay?

Then after twenty years you meet Devadatta for the first time; is there any preconception or not? For the twenty seconds of criticism that you listened to twenty years back? Yes, we're fully influenced by it. So we are influenced by what we see, by what we listen, by the places where we go, by everything that we experience.

What I want to say is that we are always shaping our mind, every moment of our life. So one of the important things for me is for us to shape our mind in a conscious way. In order to do that well it's important to know how our mind is functioning also.

I would like to briefly talk a little bit about some basic functions of the mind also. So we have seen the constructed aspect of the mind and the spontaneous aspect of the mind.

And I leave for each one of you, to go on this quest of finding the constructed mind and understanding how it was built and so on. And all the time whenever we may go and say something, "This is like this," just ask yourself: "This perception I have, where does it come from: spontaneous mind or constructed mind?" Instead of saying, "This is like this," we should say: "This is how I see it." Because this is just the way how I see it, through my own constructed mind.

Mental factors

One other thing is that in Buddhist teachings there is the whole part of learning how the mind functions and so on. We call it *lo rig*; the type of teachings. And within it there is one part, which calls the primary mind and the mental factors. That's the name how it's translated normally. In Tibetan it's called *tsosem dang semchung*.

Basically it's the fact that we have thoughts. Every thought, every part of our mind... We have, more normally called the sense-consciousness, which is the different part of the mind perceiving the different senses. So we have the eye-sense-consciousness, the ear-sense-consciousness, the taste-sense-consciousness, the touch-sense-consciousness and then we have the mind-sense-consciousness also, which perceives the memory, the ideas and so on.

Every one of this primary consciousness is built up from many different let's call it micro-minds: small little aspects of the mind that build up one thought. And understanding this better is like taking one thought and open it into parts. When we start dividing the thought, it helps us to understand where can we change them. So like normally there are described fifty-one mental factors. Not every thought has all

the fifty-one; that's not possible.

Mainly they are divided into six categories, which are the five omnipresent mental factors, the five determining mental factors, the eleven positive mental factors, the six root unwholesome or the six root mental factors that generate suffering, like negative mental factors, the twenty secondary negative mental factors and the four mental factors that change position: they are not good or bad, they can change depending on who they go with.

We're not going to go through now the fifty mental factors. But I would like to introduce you to the first five, very briefly - and it's something that we normally studied quite long - I just like to make a short introduction to it. So they are called omnipresent, because they are present on every thought. Every moment in our mind, we have these five mental factors, which are: sensation - or feeling is a better word in English - feeling, discrimination, or discernment, a better translation... feeling, discernment, then we have intention, attention and contact. Now let's see what we mean by these words. Let's try to understand it.

Feeling

The first one is feeling. Feeling is the aspect of the mind through which we experience reality. There are three types of feeling: positive, negative and neutral. A positive feeling is all the feelings that we have, that we want them to continue and whenever it ends, we want it to come back again. That is a positive feeling. Negative feeling are all the feelings we have we want it to end as soon as possible and whenever it ends, we don't want it to come back again. That's a negative feeling. We are not talking about the object through which we experience the feeling, but the inner sensation.

And then we have a neutral feeling, which is basically the feeling that we have and we don't care if it continues or not. Which is more difficult to understand, because they're neutral, so we are not so much aware of it. So this is the so-called feeling. Feeling is very important because it is the base for judgment. When we have an experience, when we meet a person, when we go to a place, when we experience anything, what is the basis for us to say if it was good or bad? Our feeling. If we had a good feeling, a good sensation, it was good. It may have been ugly, it may have not been nice, the image or this or that, but if we felt good, it was good. But it may have been the most beautiful thing, but if I felt bad, it was bad.

So feeling, is one of the most important aspects of our mind, because it's the aspect of the mind that determines if it is good or bad, if we want or if we don't want. It's through feeling that we judge everything.

And feeling is also very important because... The second mental factor we will also go into afterwards is discernment. Both of them are very important, because these are the two main reasons why people go into conflict.

The first main reason why people enter into conflict is because of feeling, because when we have a positive feeling, what happens? We connect it with something, with an object.

I drink water, *[drinks out of glass]* "Ah, I have a nice feeling, I like it, I want more!"

So what type of reaction I have towards the water? Attraction.

[Laughter; person out of the audience refills Lama's glass with water.]

And what happens with attraction? Attraction brings... attachment. I don't want to lose my water.

Can I do anything negative, can I become violent in order to get my object of desire?

If we look around us in society, most of the violence that happens, they are based on desire. Desire for feelings: for the feeling of pleasure, for the feeling of happiness, that's all people mostly want. Why people go out for pleasures of the body, why people want power, why people want money, why all of us and why some people do crazy things for this? Because truly what we want, is what? The sensation, the feeling of pleasure.

It is actually something so simple. But it determines so many things. So the first aspect of our mind... There is no thought, no moment of experience, in which there is no feeling - or it's good or it's bad or it's neutral. Someone may say, a neutral feeling is no feeling, but it's also a type of feeling.

Discernment

Second point, we have what is called discernment. The second mental factor that is always present is discernment. *Duche* in Tibetan. I prefer to describe it as discernment but some people also translate it as discrimination. Discernment is the aspect of the mind that puts the parts together of the object and says this is this, that is that. It is the one that looks and says, "Oh that's a glass of water." That is discernment. *[Holds glass up]* Colors appear to my eye... Shapes and colors appear to my eyesight. Because when I look at the object, what is appearing to my eyes? A glass full of water or shapes and colors? What appears to the eyesight? *[Audience, "A glass of water."]*

When we look at a painting; what appears to our eyes? Shapes and colors? Or is there a specific... Do I know what the painter really meant? It is actually shapes and colors. Like one time there was a little girl in the center in Milan... I was giving a talk.

Normally schools come sometimes to the center, and then a little girl, she was about six I think... And behind me there was a big image, a painted image of Buddha standing up. Then she looked at the image of Buddha and she asked me, "Sorry, who is that lady with a blue helmet?" *[laughter]*

Being very sincere I have no idea why Buddha is depicted with this hair that looks like a blue helmet. And the way how Buddha is dressed; in our culture is it a dress for a man or a woman? More for a woman, right? So was she wrong? No. That's based on what? Her own constructed mind. That's her view. Because what appears before our eyes is nothing more or nothing less than colors and shapes.

[Picks up a glass of water.]

So when I look at this object, what is appearing to my mind, to my eyes? Colors and shapes. What will I do to it? I will discern it. I will say, "Oh look it's a glass of water." I will give a name to it and also I will be able to make a difference between one object and another.

[Puts glass down.]

I can look and I can say, "Oh there is a full glass and there is an empty glass." I can discern one thing from the other. So at every moment we are always discerning things, we are always naming things, labeling things. This is this, that is that; that's the aspect of the mind called discernment. A very important one also.

Most of the conflicts arise because of attachment to sensation, feeling and to discernment. When people are well enough with their senses, which means that everybody has enough to eat, when everybody has a nice house to live, when everybody is physically materially well, so basically most of the feelings are fine in this way, then what do we start discussing and fighting about? Ideas! "I am right, you are wrong!" This is discernment. "I think."

Can we have very strong discussions because of ideas? We have them, right? People can even kill themselves because of it; this is attachment to discernment. “My discernment is right, your discernment is wrong.”

So most of the conflicts, they are born from attachment to feeling and attachment to discernment. And the fact is that we have feeling and discernment every moment of our life.

Intention

The third mental factor is called intention. In Tibetan: *sempa*. Intention is the aspect of the mind that directs us towards an object. An object means a person, a situation, an object, whatever it may be.

Whenever we do something... Whenever we say a word or we act physically or we do anything, we make any choice, there is something that's the base of our motivation: our intention. Why am I doing that? There is something that moves us towards the object. This is called intention. Then once we choose the direction, we sort of grasp at the object; that's how we want to get there, that's called attention.

Then we will go back to the five again. So we have sensation, feeling, discernment, intention... Intention is the basis of every action.

Many of you have heard the word karma, no? When we go to describe what karma is: karma is intention basically. The basis of every action finds itself in the intention that we have, when we act. That's why we cannot hide ourselves from karma, because it is like we cannot hide ourselves from our intention. Maybe we can hide from other people our intention, but truly not from ourselves. So intention is the basis for every action.

Attention

Then the so-called attention is when we focus on the object. We say, “That is what I want, that is where I want to go, that is what I want to do.” We grasp at something.

Contact

And the last mental factor, but somehow the first of the five, is called contact. Contact is the aspect of the mind that puts together the experience of external reality. Contact is the union of the object of perception or the sensory object, sense-power and sense-consciousness. For example, there is the form of the glass. *[Picks up the glass]* What appears to my eyesight? It is not the glass but the form of the glass. So the form of the glass appears to my eyesight. Then there is the actual eyesight. And then there is the eye-consciousness.

There is the vibration in the air, the sound.

Then there is my ear-sense-consciousness, which is the actual physical sense of the ear and then there is the ear-consciousness. (There is the ear sense and then there is the ear-consciousness.) It is like this for our five senses.

Contact is... if we put the five aspects of the mind, or the five mental factors in a sort of an order, to make it more easy to understand, we start with contact.

The first thing that happens is that we enter in contact with something, with someone, by seeing, by listening, by touching, by smelling, by thinking. With the sixth

object we have sound, form, smell, taste, touch and then we have mental images: ideas, memories... So we enter in contact with one of the objects of our six senses. And by that what happens is that we... it depends on our senses. Once the two get together, we need also the sense-consciousness.

Like when we are sleeping: If we are in deep sleep, even though our senses are there, are we aware of our senses? Not really. Why? Because the sense-consciousness at that time is not awake, is not aware. So what happens basically is that we need the three together.

There is something very interesting about this contact. By looking how we perceive reality through contact, we are not able to perceive reality in a different way. How do we perceive reality? Objects of the senses, our own senses and the sense-consciousness.

We have the six senses: five senses plus the mind. By only looking at this mental factor, we can understand how much reality is actually subjective and not objective. For instance, this object. [Picks up the glass] We take today the glass as object. So we take for instance this object, we call it a glass of water. Can we all see it? Yes. Are we seeing the same glass? Without entering into philosophy, I ask you: is it the same glass, or not? What is the answer? Yes, we are seeing the same glass.

Now let's try to analyze it. And we will see the contact. What is the contact that we have here? There is the form of the glass that appears to our eyesight. The form that appears to me; is it the same form that appears to all of you? No, I am nearer; it looks bigger. You are farther; it looks smaller. In other words, the light that reflects into my eyes and the light that reflects to the eye of each one of you; is it the same or is it different? It's different. Is it similar? Yes, by definition: whatever is similar is different.

There is a saying in Tibet: *drana ngo ma yin*: if it's similar, by definition it's different. So the form that appears to my eyesight and the form that appears to the eyesight of each one of you; is it the same or is it different? Different: different positions and so on. Now, the eyesight: is it the same or is it different? My eye and your eye, is it the same? I take off my glasses. [Takes off glasses] And I can tell you it already starts to change. [Laughter. Puts glasses back on.] So what happens basically is that our eyesights are different, right? They are similar because we are all human beings. But because they are similar... they are different. Okay?

Our eyesight-consciousness; is it the same or is it different? It is different. So the question is very simple: are we seeing the same thing? Are we experiencing the same object? No! We are not even talking about discernment. Before reaching discernment, before reaching the aspect: how do we see the glass? If we like it, if we don't like it, if we call it a glass, if we call it a vase or whatever name we give to it; before reaching that part, on our sense power, on our senses, reality is already different. So this is the so-called contact.

One of the beautiful things of it is that when we understand the simple fact, the mental factor called contact, and we understand that everything that I perceive through my senses is different from what you perceive through your senses, I start respecting more the difference between each one of us. And I start to be less attached to my way of seeing. And I stop saying, "This is this." I start to say, "This is what I see. This is how I perceive," instead of saying, "This is how things are."

Contact, feeling, discernment, intention and attention

So first thing, we have contact. Once we have contact, what is the direct result



of contact? Feeling! In the moment I enter in contact with any object, of anyone, of my senses, right away I have feeling. And what are the feelings? Positive, negative or neutral. Together with that, what do I have? Discernment. I would say for example, "I see the flowers" [*Points at a bouquet.*] Why do we put flowers here? To bring a nice feeling. Because we think in our constructed idea flowers are nice. [*Laughter*] It's not my case, okay? I'm very happy with the flowers. But imagine just if I had a world view in which I am very sad with any act of violence towards nature, and I see cutting a flower as an act of violence towards nature, I just look at the flowers and I already start judging people around here: "They cut flowers! What is this!" What can happen is that the first eye contact brings a neutral feeling. Then because of the discernment I can have a negative feeling or a positive feeling.

I just remembered right now about the flowers of a friend of ours in Brazil. She was a schoolteacher and she teaches in a school in the outskirts of São Paulo, a very poor area, very violent also. So one day they had a day that all the parents came to school and so on, and she wanted to make one room as an honor to the mothers. So she spent quite a lot of money - she does not have much money, but she spent a lot of money - to buy many flowers. And she made a room full of flowers because in the outskirts of the city people don't see many flowers. So she made a room full of flowers in order to dedicate it to the mothers, in order for the mothers to go in and have the nice sensation of being in the middle of so many flowers.

Nobody went into the room. People would just pass by and would not enter the room. And then she was a little bit upset and said, "What did I do wrong? What's the problem with that?" So she went and she asked people, "Why are people not entering into the room that I made full of flowers with so much love and so much care?" "No, no, no, we here - talking about the outskirts of the city - we only see flowers in funerals. So a room full of flowers reminds us of death."

I have a friend that had strong trauma's regarding funerals and she cannot bear to have the smell of flowers, because she remembers the moment and the suffering. She always goes back to the suffering when these people died, whenever she feels the smell of flowers, because she connects both. So what happens is that the first thing we have is the contact, but after the contact we have one first sensation, but together then we have the discernment. The discernment may be positive, negative; whenever we give a name and we say this is a flower, it comes back with a whole background of experiences, of emotions and so and so on. Maybe at some point in my life somebody gave me a yellow rose and it was such a wonderful moment, so when I see a yellow rose, somehow I remember that it gives me so much joy. Maybe not, maybe a different thing, maybe it reminds me of a difficult moment and this is not conscious. When I say yellow rose and I give that discernment, together with it comes a whole bunch of experiences, that I bring together with me and I judge reality through that. So contact brings sensation. Together with that comes discernment: this is this - that is that. Out of sensation and discernment what happens? We have one thing, which in Tibetan is called *sempa*. In this case *sempa* is translated as desire, but in Italian it's called *brama*. *Brama* is like a more spontaneous type of desire. It's something that is not intellectual. Basically it's a strong instinct to avoid suffering and to gain happiness. It's a strong instinct that we have. It's a very, very strong force that we have inside, all of us, that's basically what makes us to do everything we do. It's a deep strong force that is: "I want to be happy; I don't want to suffer." The first thing that we started talking today. It's a force that we have in front of us.

Like whenever we are in a situation that we see as a cause of suffering, what is our reaction: attraction, aversion or indifference? Aversion: we want to make distance from that. Because of that it's making me suffer. If there is something that I feel happy, that I feel good about it? Attraction. So after contact: feeling, discernment... So we can make it more simple. We can say contact, discernment, feeling... If the feeling is of pleasure: attraction. If the feeling is of suffering: aversion. If the feeling is neutral: neutral. So this is where it comes the intention: the intention to gain, the intention to take away. This is where it comes the first reaction that we have. And then from that, it comes the next mental factor, which is attention, which is basically what do I do in order to get, or what do I do in order to put away and then we choose one direction and then we grasp at it. Then we say something, we make a choice, we do something about it, so what is on the basis of our choices, of our actions, sensation, feeling and discernment

The extent of influence we have

One important thing: can we change our contact, can we choose the contact that we have? Yes and no. Can I choose where to go? Yes, up to a certain point, yes. Can I choose who, which people to meet? Up to a certain point, yes. Can I choose if I watch a movie or if I don't watch a movie? Or which movie to watch, or which paper to read, or which music to listen and so and so on? Yes. So I can choose what contact I want or not. Remember one thing: everything that comes to our mind, influences our mind. Everything we see influences the mind, everything that we touch, that we hear and so on.

For me it was very clear, the example of the subliminal message. Subliminal message is basically... In the beginning of cinema and television they discovered that – if you take one second in cinema there are twenty four frames - and if you write a message, or if you put an image in one frame and then you don't put it for like for seven frames, and then you put it in again, and then you don't put it for seven frames, and then you put the message again – when you do it like this, the eye cannot see, but we perceive the message. Stanley Kubrick used to do this in his movies for example, and Coca cola used to do this in the beginning of publicity. Now it is prohibited generally speaking to use this, but it's quite a mean technique because we are able to give information without saying you are giving this information... More than giving: to induce information. The point is that when people would see something without knowing that they were seeing it, in the end of the movie, they would have that idea and they didn't know where it was coming from. Or that emotion and they didn't know where it was coming from.

Like in one of the movies of Kubrick there is an image of a man sitting on an electric chair. The image itself is not so violent, but people have a very strong sensation of fear and anxiety by looking at that image, which is actually stronger than what your eyes are seeing. So it gives a very strong impact on people because you experience something stronger than what we are seeing. Basically what he did is that where there is the image of the man he put the image in of a skeleton. The image of a skeleton, of a dead person and then the image is there but you don't know it's there. So he was playing with this.

But what I want to say is that if something that I cannot even see, influences my mind, what about what I am fully seeing? Surely it influences the mind. So contact is important, we need to choose what to see, what not to see, what to listen, what not to

listen. Everything that we listen, everything that we say, everything that we see, everything that we touch, everywhere that we go, everything that we experience, influences ourselves. It is shaping our mind. It is shaping ourselves. So we can make some choices in this level.

But can we make a choice in the level of feeling? Not so much. When we enter in contact with something, the feeling is coming, as a result. In discernment: can we have some choices and freedom, when it comes to discernment? Yes, we can actually re-discern. We see something and then we ask, okay is it really like this and I want to relate to this object? Is there any other possibility? It is similar to the fact of knowing that the constructed mind is constructed. It is knowing that a view is a view. It is knowing that when I look at this object I call it flowers, because that's the name that I'm giving, that's the functions and characteristics that I'm attributing to it, but it does not necessarily need to be like that. So once we know this, we can choose which type of discernment I want to apply.

One time I was talking to a friend of mine, and he was in a difficult situation in his life. I was trying to explain him a different way of seeing the same reality. I was looking and said, "Please look, things don't need to be how you see them." And I was explaining my own point of view. His main point was, "But the way how I see, is it wrong?" "No! Both ways, the way how you see it and the way I see it, both of them are right." "Then why need I to change my view then?" "Because it's better for you. Because it helps you to generate more positive emotions, good feelings and not generating negative emotions." What is the only difference between an object of anger and an object of compassion? The way how we see it. The same person doing the same action; I can say, "Oh, you are terrible!" And I can add many bad words. I can say, "Look at you!", and I then generate aversion towards you. Or I can see you doing the same thing and I can say, "I am so sorry that you act out of so much ignorance. How can I help you to get out of that ignorance, so you stop harming yourself and others?" It's compassion!

In front of the same object, what makes the difference? What is better for me: to feel anger or to feel compassion? What makes the difference? The attitude I have. Or the only difference between an object of miserliness and an object of generosity... Someone comes and asks me something. I can say, "I don't give" or I can say, "Here it is, I share what I have." The object is the same. What changes is the way how I put myself.

So we can make a choice, and the important thing is not what's right and wrong - there are many right ways of seeing reality - but the point is which way of relating to reality is better for me, puts me into a positive interdependence, let's put it this way. Then we have discernment where we make choices. But then there is intention. Intention is where we can make the main difference. The question is, there is something that harms me, what can I do about it? When I am in front of an object to which I am suffering; if I am aware of that object is just a mirror that is reflecting my own defilements, I don't need to go against him or her or against a situation. I can maybe make some distance, but without generating any aversion towards the person and towards the situation and so on, because I know that it is coming from myself. The very important thing is for us not to react violently towards the difficult situations of life. This is very important and here we have a key of choice.

Listen, comprehend and meditate

Most of all in the moments that we choose how to react, we are choosing how to train, how to shape our own mind and our own habits, because we are made out of habits, our mind is made out of habits. The process of shaping the mind in Buddhism is made out of three parts, which is called listening, comprehending and meditating. First thing: understand, that's listening. Second thing: comprehend. Make that knowledge to be your own knowledge, not any more the repetition of someone else. Why is it like this? Because I believe it, because I experience it, because I understood it; not because someone said it. Third point: get familiarized with it, so it's not anymore something conceptual, but it's something spontaneous, deep within ourselves. This is how we can shape our mind.

For example, is it enough to know that we should not get angry, in order for anger to go away? If we go and we understand very clear that it's not good to get angry. Does anybody here see anger as something good? Maybe if you see, you don't want to say because you may feel not so comfortable as nobody else thinks like that. [Laughter] But the fact is that even children, when you ask the children... I always make this question - not always but most of the time - to children when I talk to school kids, very small or teenagers, it does not matter:

"Do you get angry?"

All of them say, "Yes!"

"Is it good or bad? How do you feel when you get angry?"

All of them say, "Bad!"

"Do you feel good?"

"No!"

"Why do we still get angry?"

Many of them say, "I don't know!"

It looks so stupid actually. Like if we just look at anger, what is anger? Anger is an attitude in which we have a contact and the object to which we get into contact, we see it, we have a feeling of suffering and we don't like suffering. So what is the reaction? I want to get away from this feeling of suffering. But we connect our feeling with the contact, so with the object. We forget that we have our own sense-power and that we have our own consciousness, and our own discernment that has a big influence in reality, which we connect with the object. So I have contact with an object: something that I see, something that I listen, something that I touch, a situation that I experience. Then what happens? I have a feeling of suffering. I don't want to suffer so I have an intention to get away from this suffering. My reaction is aversion, distance and then I can get aggressive, I can generate violence. Anger is: I want to destroy what makes me suffer. I want to put aside what is making me suffer. But by anger, are we able to eliminate the object of suffering? By getting angry do we solve any problem? Not really. Do we suffer more when we get angry? So for me, when someone gets really angry it is like putting a nice sign, holding a big sign and saying to the world, "Look how I ignorant I am: in order not to suffer I suffer even more." Because that's what we do, right? We don't want to suffer, that's why we get angry and what's the result? We suffer even more. So, once we understand how stupid it is to get angry and we get to the final conclusion there is no reason whatsoever in the world for me to get angry. There is no reason. Give me one reason to get angry. I couldn't find it. There is no reason. All this is not right and okay, I can understand that you may see it is not right. I also may see that it is not right but that is no reason to be angry. Why? Because through anger, you're not going to make it

right. Through anger we are not going to change people's attitude or to change the world. We just get more frustrated ourselves and we suffer more. We accumulate tension and we end up sick.

So basically there is no reason, but once we understand that there is no reason to get angry, it's not enough; it is the first step. Then we need to start to induce ourselves into experiences of being in front of an object of anger and not reacting with anger. Because our mind works out of experiences and not out of understanding. We give a lot of importance to understanding but that's just a very, very, very small part of our life. And not so important really. Knowledge, I love knowledge, I love learning and studying and I like it very much! But the more time passes, the more I see how small it is, how useless sometimes. Whenever we are in front of a situation in we react, we do not react based on knowledge; we react based on experience.

So the process within Buddhism is: I need to induce myself in an artificial way to positive experiences, so that after I can repeat that in a natural way. So I will induce myself to be in front of an object that normally I will react to with anger. And I will not react with aggression or with anger, because I am aware, I am careful at that moment. So I induce myself to an experience of patience, which is to be in front of an object of anger and not to react with violence or aggression. Is it easy? No. But this is to meditate on patience. I need to induce myself into that state. Do we all have a mind that we are full of love and compassion towards all sentient beings? No. So what we need to do if we want to generate that mind? We need to induce ourselves to open our hearts, to be more generous, to relate to reality in a more coherent way. Because only by inducing ourselves to an experience - not to an understanding, because we already had that understanding before - by inducing ourselves to that experience, slowly, when we get to the actual situation, after we remember that past experience and then we can repeat it more easily. The more we have an experience, the easier it is to have that again and again and again.

This is the process that in Buddhism is called meditation. Meditation is not necessarily to sit down in silence. Meditation is very much connected into familiarizing and training ourselves. And the way of shaping our mind in a conscious way is, we need to choose: where do I want my mind to be? How do I want to be? That is why it is so important actually to have a mental image, to have an idea of what is a healthy mind. That is what I want.

For me a healthy mind has different aspects. For example: a healthy mind is a mind that does not react in front of situations. A healthy mind is a mind that is not afraid of others and is not victimizing itself. It is a mind of a person that's fully aware of one's own responsibilities and relates to reality. The main aspect of a healthy mind: a healthy mind relates to reality in a coherent way with what reality is. That's the main aspect of a healthy mind. A healthy mind is open; it's not closed. It's aware of its own limits. So once I know what I want, then I need to put an effort in that way. That's why, one thing I think that is a good thing to do, like a sort of advice: make your own wish list. I don't know, if here in Holland you have the habit of writing down a wish list, like what do I want to get. Or when people are going to get married and they have a list of presents they want to get, or whatever. Now there is a sort of wish list - Americans like very much wish lists anyhow. Let's say you make a wish list, a mind wish list: what do I want for my mind. Oh I want to be more patient. Patience. Oh what do I want? I want an open mind, that I am able to respect others more. What do I want? I want more stability, I don't want anymore for my mind to be

just like a sort of a leaf or a paper in the middle of the wind going up and down according to the situation that happens. I prefer to be like a strong tree that moves a little bit; it feels the air but it is not going always from its own place. I like to feel what is happening around me, I need to understand what happens, but I am not changing my position so easily. We put: what do we want to be, where do we want to go, frankly? Where? And based on that, then we need to work hard for it.

How do we work hard? By understanding, comprehending and meditating.

Meditating is inducing ourselves to it. Because our mind is flexible. One master from Tibet, his name was Geshe Chekawa, from the eleventh century. He wrote, "The mind is full of defects, but it has one great quality: whatever you teach, it follows." So let's teach the right things, let's shape it in the right way. And how do we do that? By every word we say, by every thought we have, by every choice we make, every day. But some people tell me, "Oh, the most important thing is to be natural." [laughter] I think it is much better to be an artificial altruistic, than to be a natural selfish person. It's much better to be artificially patient than naturally angry. Is it better to be naturally patient? Sure much better! But to be natural is not an excuse for our anger or for anything else. So if I act in a way - even though it may be artificial, which means it needs an extra effort of awareness - that's how gradually I will also train myself so that that may become natural and spontaneous, which is my true objective.

So within the aspects of the mind one of the most important aspects is, our mind is malleable, it's shapeable, we can shape it. And we are always shaping it, but we need to do it within our own awareness. In a way like we choose the direction how we want to shape the mind. And once we shape the mind correctly, then everything is fine. Just to make one example: one of my teachers, Gen Lhagpa-la, I asked him one time, "When was the best period of your life after you left Tibet in fifty-nine?" He said, "Oh, it were the first ten years." I said, "What ?!" The first ten years all the monks that came out of Tibet, they were living in the north of India in a place called Buksa which was the ex-jail where Mahatma Gandhi was put by the English. It was a British jail, in the middle of the forest in the north of India. They had almost nothing to eat; they only had old rice full of excrements of animals and all bad insects inside and so on. Eighty percent of the monks had tuberculosis. They had no place to sleep, no cushion, no beds, no blankets; they just laid down, wherever and take out their belts like... And then I asked him, "How come, they were the best years?" "Oh, basically because we only had two things to think about: Dharma: we had our teachers with us, our guru's, so we were passing our time meditating, praying, debating on philosophy, and talking about Tibetan politics. These were the only things we ever talked about."

What happens is that, if we fill our mind with objects that are interesting, and if our mind is satisfied, the rest doesn't matter that much. When the mind is not satisfied, whatever we have is not enough. It does not matter, everything, it is never enough. That is one of the reasons: always learn something new. Keep your mind busy with good things, otherwise you will fill it up with useless stuff. That's what happens. If we do not fill our mind with good things, it will fill itself with useless things. The life of other people, what they do, what they don't do, what happened here, what happened there and this and that and bla, bla, bla. All the gossiping we know, and all the words that we do not need to have. That's why it is important also to learn new things. One of the important things to keep the mind healthy, is never stop learning! Always have new things, new positive things. Because the more things we learn, the more space

we have. And the more we are filled up with positive things. Otherwise what happens is, that we start - when we stop learning, we have no new things - and then we just start with filling ourselves with little problems and judgments and here and there. And we get a little bit stuck in our own views and we suffer more basically.

The relation between body and mind

So just one point to conclude - which I said I would say but finally we talked about many other things and this never came out - is the relation between body and mind... Very, very briefly: One Buddhist text says, 'Body and mind always go together'. For example: when you feel sad, tears come out of your eyes. If there was no relation between body and mind, why would tears come out of the eyes when we feel sadness? No reason. The fact is that, depending on what we eat, depending on how we sleep, depending on the actual hormone-cycles of our body, does it influence the mind or not? Sure! So what is important? Also to understand the influences of the mind.

This just reminds me of a friend, she's a lawyer - very strong character - in Brazil, and she used to tell me that, when she was in her premenstrual period she would get more nervous than she would get normally, and she would get a little bit aggressive also. So her boss was an old Japanese guy and whenever he saw that she was a little bit over the edges, he would just wink and put one chocolate on her table. *[laughter]* And then she would understand, "Oh, oh I am going a little bit beyond the edge." Just by having that little chocolate on the table. And what happened is, that as she used to understand her own inner cycle and the influence of her body, she was more careful not to have certain reactions.

So we need to understand the influences that the body has to the mind. And by that we can be more careful. Because the problem is that when there is an influence, that maybe we don't feel so well, or we feel a little bit sad, or something inside, that is an influence also coming from the body and from the environment and so on. And then what happens: we do not understand this interdependence that is there and we try to blame someone and something for it. So just one advice: whenever we feel sad, whenever we feel some emotion that is not really the best one inside of us: no hurry to blame anyone or anything for it. Wait a little bit. Look at yourself, breath in and out a few times, look at the situation. Cause otherwise what can happen is that you blame someone and you start fighting with that person or that situation, and after the feeling is gone but then we have the problem that the fighting has started. So wait before reacting. We have to try to act and not to react.

So the influence between the body and mind is very strong. We need to be beware of that also, and so that we need to respect, and learn how to use it into our own purpose. And we cannot go against it. It's like, the hormones are something that's happening, and are an influence to the mind. If you like it or if you don't like it. According to Tibetan Buddhism, the body is like a horse and the mind is like a horse-rider. The horse-rider is having a problem with his legs; he cannot walk, he is disabled, and the horse is blind. So the horse can only go where the horse-rider chooses with awareness, cause the horse is blind and the horse-rider can only go where the horse is able to go. So who is giving the directions to the body? The mind! But the mind cannot go where the body cannot go. So the two things need to go together. This happens on a gross and a subtle and a very subtle level. So that is why it is also important to take care of our health. But also the mind has a big influence in

the body. And I just want to make one very, very short example that we conclude with today.

We have two effects - the placebo effect. When I take something and I believe that this medicine is really good for me, it helps to cure. We have many doctors here, you know better than me. Do these two effects work or they don't work? [Doctor in audience replies, "They work"] And what about the nocebo effect? [Doctor replies, "It works also"] The nocebo effect is the opposite one. I believe it harms me and then what happens? It harms me! So just one small bracket; this is my own personal point of view, which means it can be... most probably it's wrong. But the following: nowadays we have a lot of care for the health. Can eat this, cannot eat that, this is good, that is bad and so and so on. I fully agree; I grew up in a very natural style family. We never ate white sugar when I was a kid and like this we can go on. And I do think it is better. But when we start having too many worries - this is harmful, that is harmful, that is harmful, that is harmful - there is also a nocebo effect there. So remember that the mind and the body are influenced by our choices and our beliefs also. When I really truly believe in something it influences the body, and vice versa, and the body also influences the mind. So basically we just need to be careful in our way of living, and try to create the best balance that we can get. Remember that there is no such a thing as instant enlightenment. There is just like step by step, day by day, thought by thought, word by word, choice by choice, one day after the other; that's how things change.

So we make just one prayer for dedication that I'd like to do in order to... I'd like to thank very much everyone. And I like to make one request: Anything that we said here today, that you may think that is of benefit, please put an effort to put it into practice. Do not keep it all in the intellectual world of ideas and we need to really bring it to action. Okay? So we just make a short prayer of dedication in Tibetan.

*jetsun lame ku tse rabten chin
namkar trinle chog chur kye pa dan
lobsang tenpe dro me sa sum gyi
dro we mun sel tac tu ne gyur chik*

*nyimo delek tsen delek
nyime gung yang delek shin
nyitsen taktu delek pe
kon chok sum gyi jin gyi lob
kon chok sum gyi ngoe drup tsol
kon chok sum gyi tra shi shok*

Thank you very much. It was a great pleasure and I really hope it may be of some use to everyone.