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NGALSO
Path to Enlightenment

How to be happy and not to suffer Lama Michel Rinpoche

This text is a clean and unedited transcription of a speech given by Lama Michel Rinpoche to a Dutch singing bowl group in Albagnano Healing Meditation Centre, Italy on March 30, 2018.

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Prayers and introduction

lo chok sangpoi pel gyur trashi pa
thub chen ten pe trinle yar ngo da
phel 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 kye ku dang dag gyi lu
pa khyo kye sung dang dag gyi ngag
pa khyo kye tug dang dag gyi yi
don yer me chig tu jin gyi lob

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

OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNI SHAKYAMUNIYE SOHA (2x)

Good afternoon [audience answers: “Good afternoon”]. I am very happy to be here. They requested me the day before yesterday. Finally I have found some time in between, today, to be able to share a piece of Dharma with you. First of all I am very happy that you are all here, that you have come; it’s already a few times that you have come [audience: “for some”], for some of you, no? Not all. For some of you the first time and others have been before.

So, we have some time together, so I would like to use it in the best way. So, two things: first, if there is any subject specifically that you are more interested, or you have some special questions. Otherwise, then, second, then I go in one direction directly. What do you like? You have any specific subject or have any questions? [Someone in the audience: “You go in one direction”] Okay, I do [laughs].

Nobody wants to suffer, everybody wants happiness

So, I would like to share with you basically... there are two aspects very important in our life, which in Tibetan we call *tawa* and *chöpa*, which means vision and conduct. Independently of spirituality or not, all of us, in our lives, we have a part for vision. Vision; this means what we understand, how we see reality, our paradigm. What we think is right, what we think is wrong, how is the view. Our point of view of reality, our own paradigm to be precise. This is the view.

And the conduct is how we act physically, verbally and mentally; what I do actually.

Many times, they are not really perfectly fitting. Sometimes we have a view, which goes in a direction, and a behavior, a conduct, that goes in another direction. It doesn’t need to go necessarily always together. So very often the view has... The view itself has two levels: a more conceptual level, and a more integrated level with our own being. There are some things that I know conceptually, but I am not able really to follow. Other things, they have already been integrated with my own self, so it is natural to act in that way. So we have these two aspects, okay?

So, everything that we do in our life is guided by these two aspects, which means: which is my conduct, which is my choice, the way how I act and so on, and what is my view? So I would like to share with you today a little bit, first of the view that I have related to Buddhism, and then what is the conduct that we can follow.

The first thing is that we are all very, very similar, not to say we are all the same. It does not matter where we come from, it does not matter our culture, it does not matter the religion, independently of the social status, independently of the level of education, independently of all the aspects that we can find out: we all suffer, we all want to be happy, nobody wants to suffer and everybody wants happiness. It’s the same everywhere we go. And the most amazing thing which is quite obvious - but for me at least, when I really look at it, it’s quite amazing somehow - is that everyone, it does not matter what we do in life, from the person that dedicates his life to power and money or the other that dedicates his life to politics, to the one that just wants to do sports, to the person that wants to pass their whole life meditating, to the one that is mainly dedicated to the family, it doesn’t matter who; everyone of us, we do everything we do, thinking it is the best for our own happiness.

If we take two people doing exactly opposite things, why are they doing what they are doing? Because they think that what they are doing is the best for their own happiness. So we do, all the time, everything we do, thinking it’s the best for our own happiness, guided very often by our own ignorance. Which means it’s not

(necessarily) because 'I think it's the best' that... it is the best.

So, there is one fundamental question that comes from the beginning, which is: if what we all want is to be happy, first of all, what is happiness, and what do I need to do in order to be happy? And here, in order to answer this better, there are another two questions that we need to put ourselves also. Which are like four pillars, which is somehow the basis for our conduct and our view, of basics for our life in many aspects. And this again is independent of religion, it's independent of culture, we all have this.

Anywhere we go, anyone we meet, we all have these four views, which are:

What is suffering? We recognize our own suffering, and we project suffering into things, okay? What is my suffering?

The second is:

Why do I suffer? Normally whenever we suffer we point our finger to something that is the cause, someone or something that is the cause of our suffering. So, what is my suffering, why do I suffer?

The third point is:

What is happiness?

and (the fourth):

How to be happy and to avoid suffering?

That's the four points. I am going to be very brief, because there are other things that we could go through also. But we could go in many details at this point, but we don't need to do that right now. But the point is that... we cannot talk - not that we cannot, but it is not so beneficial to talk about the way how Buddha saw these four things, without first looking (at) how we see them. Because what happens is that each one of us, we have our own view, and we always need to start from where we are. Otherwise we think, "Okay, this is the view of Buddha, so beautiful, so special." But we need to connect that view to our own view, okay?

What is suffering and why do I suffer?

So, first of all, what is suffering for us? Normally we divide suffering into four types. We can do two or four, okay? Let's make four today.

Physical suffering

We have first of all *physical suffering*. What physical suffering is there? Pain, hunger, thirst, cold, heat; that's basically what we call physical suffering. Normally what do we do to deal with physical suffering? We need to eat correctly, we need to go to the doctor, do a treatment, we do something to the body, right?

Material suffering

Then we have the next type of suffering, which is *material suffering*. When we divide into four, we have the *mental suffering* divided into three, okay?

So the first one is material suffering, which is the suffering of the mind that comes from a relation with the material things. Because if we divide it in another way we make physical and mental suffering. But if we take the mental, we divide the mental into three.

Material suffering is when we suffer, either physically or mentally actually, because of the lack of material resources. [Comment from audience: Like you have no roof

over your head?]

You have no roof over your head is: you have a physical suffering, which is caused by material suffering. But for example, do we ever suffer because of the way we relate to material things? Can we suffer because we don't get what we want? Can we suffer because something that we have is broken? Or we just have a new car, and we are so happy with our new car. Then when we park ... somewhere, we get back to the car, someone came and made a big scratch on the car outside; can we suffer because of that? Finally, is there any suffering related to material things or not? Something breaks, something lost, we lose money, someone makes an investment and the investment goes down, or whatever other reason. If there is an object that I like so much and suddenly my object is not there anymore, you know, can we suffer because of material things? We do - it's not really very wise to do, but we do. Normally people suffer because of material things.

What is the solution to deal with material suffering? I am going to be very brief. It is to make a correct distinction between what I *need* and what I *want*. If we make a correct distinction between what I need and what I want, then a great part of the problems are gone. Especially for us, because if we were living in a part of the world in a condition where we don't have enough to eat, that's another story. But in the moment that we are, in a rich part of society, we don't have these problems. If we are able simply to make a distinction: do I need it or do I want it? If I want and I can have; enjoy. If I want and I cannot have; relax. Because here for example, many times we think we suffer because we cannot have what we want. Did we ever suffer because we could not have what we wanted? Very often. "I want this and I cannot have it!" Then we suffer. Material or non-material things. This actually is not true; we actually never suffer because we cannot have what we want. We suffer because we want what we cannot have. Is it clear, the difference? It's not because I cannot have what I want. Because when I think that I am suffering because I cannot have what I want, I am a victim of the world. I should have it but I cannot have it, so, someone else is to blame. When I understand that I am suffering because I want something, for which the causes and conditions are not there to have right now... Not that I cannot have it because someone else has ordered that I cannot have it; simply the conditions are not there to have it. So I need to relax and continue to create the causes in order to get it, if I really want it. But I am suffering because I want something, which is not possible to have right now.

So, to deal with the material suffering, one of the things to make the distinction is: material resources are energy, it is a means, a tool. We have things for a function that they have for us. So, for example one very practical exercise that we can do is: we go home, we open one wardrobe, we go to a room, wherever, and then we look at the things that we have and we ask, "Am I serving you or are you serving me?" When we see that we own things, and these things have no function whatsoever for us, but they occupy a space in our lives, when they take part of our time, we need to clean them, we need to take care of them, we need to protect them, we need to worry about them, we are serving them, they are not serving us. So when we see that there is anything that we possess that finally has no function for us, that some functions are even more subtle, like one friend, which I like to dedicate for her also, Donna Norma, she is in the hospital these days, an old lady in Brazil, and she came to me one day after I gave some teachings connected to this subject. And she said: "I am sorry, because I feel not comfortable, because I think I am doing wrong, because I have many jewels that I never use, but I am not able to give them away. It would be better

to sell the jewels and use the money to do something good. But each jewel was given me by my son or by my husband, and both of them already died, so every week I go there and I open the jewels and I remember the moments in which I wore the jewels and who gave to them, like they bring memories.” and I said, “They have function. They have a very important function. To make you to connect to the good memories and to bring you joy. So they have a function.” A function does not need to be necessarily a material function, okay. I can have an object that is there to remind me about something, ... it has a function. What is not fine, is when we have things and they simply have no function whatsoever, their only function will be to be possessed by us. And when we see that we have things, that we are possessing them and they have no any benefit for us, no any function for us, they still occupy energy in our life, they occupy space in our lives.

So when we see that there is something that has no function, three possibilities: or I give, or I sell, or I throw, but I don't keep. Okay. Without attachment, and then, if you start doing it in the beginning it's painful to give things away because after some time, if you really see and you start relating to the function that things have for you, it changes the energy, it becomes so pleasurable actually. Like even, some time ago, I changed the room where I live in Lama Gangchen house. Like last year, whatever, one year and a half. But when I changed, I just brought the things, which I was really needing. And many of the things one year passed and I am not using it, I do not even know what is there. So, my logic is also, if you have one luggage, one wardrobe, something, and you don't open for two, three years, don't even need to open, just take everything and give it away. Because if you don't use it for two, three years, most probably you will not need to use it for the rest of the time. But, okay, you can open still and give a look before giving it away, but just ask yourself (okay): “Am I serving you or are you serving me?” ...

Also, because when we reach the end of this life, which will happen to all of us, we don't know when, one of the things that blocks us from having a good death is the attachment to material things. One of the things. So when we see that things have a function to us, if they have no more function there is no more benefit of them. One time even I had one person give me a present, a very special present, gave me one dorje, which is this object here [shows a dorje], it's a sacred object, little bigger like this, of pure gold. But like not gold plated, it was completely pure gold. And I look at it and say, “Wow”. Then I put it on the altar and then I start looking at it and I say, “What function it has for me?” No? What difference it is if it's gold plated, if it's real gold or if it's plastic finally, if it's just there. If I have a function for the energy that something has, if the material which form of metal or mineral has a different energy, is when we relate to it you know. But it's not because simply something has a big value, materially, and a big price that, if the function is because it's a very expensive object, then sell it, no? Otherwise they just keep you, than finally one day came an important master, Trijang Rinpoche, and I wanted to give something special and I gave him that object which was the most valuable what I had, so I found a good function to it, you know. So I gave it to him and now it's his problem to find a function [audience laughs].

But what I want to say is that ... this is ... material suffering; make the distinction, need and want and function with objects. Because remember everything we have takes energy from our lives, okay. If we use a modern phrase we would say: “Less is more” [audience: “Yes, that's a nice one”]. Very often it really works, okay. So then,

and don't need to be guilty if you have many things, as long as you give good functions to it. And even if you don't give functions, you don't need to be guilty still. Just do something about it, okay.

Social suffering

Third type of suffering, *social suffering*. Social suffering is the suffering that comes between the problems that we have, and the difficulties and conflicts that are between husband and wife, and brothers and sisters, and father and children, and children and parents, and friends and so on, and the work and so. So if we look at the three, which suffering do we have more: physical, material or social? [audience: "I think social"] Mostly social, okay. So, again, I am not going to go into many details, but being brief.

How to make social suffering less.

Most of the time we do not suffer because (of) what the other person is. We suffer because the other person is not what we think he or she should be, okay. So we give a very practical example. I meet you today, we meet ourselves today here, okay? Fine, that is okay, I will see you in one week. After one week we are going to meet again, who do we think we are going to meet? The same person or someone different? [audience: "The same person"] If we start analyzing and thinking it is someone changed, but how do we act in our daily lives? The same person. And when we go to meet that person, we have our own mental image of who I am going to meet, right. So, what happens when the person I meet does not correspond to the expectation I had, to the image I had? I just get upset; "You are not supposed to be like that." "Why not? I am just who I am." "Because I thought you would be different." So what happens that, sometimes we get upset because my father doesn't act as a father. Because my child is not supposed to do what he is doing. "After all I taught him, after all I gave to him, now look what he is doing. He is not supposed, I did not educate my son or daughter to be like this. I didn't do this in order to be like that" you know, and like this we can go on and on, and my friend? "Oh, after all happened, look how he is acting, a friend shouldn't do this or that shouldn't do that" and like this we can go on and on.

So basically what happens is the following; we relate to other people through, inevitably, a filter, which is the image we have of the other person. We are not able to relate to anyone independently of the image we have of the other person, okay. But the problem is that the image we have of the person is one thing, the person is another thing. [audience hums consent] okay. If we can take anyone of us that is here, okay, if we put any one of us in the center, and then each person that knows this person, and we can bring in the father, the mother, the brother, the sister, the friends, the husband, the wife, whoever, okay. We bring all the people we know, or even from the group, we put that each person will describe that person. And then the person describes himself also. Is there any description which will match? No. And who is right and who is wrong? Okay.

Sometimes people say, "Nobody understands me". Don't worry; no one will ever understand you. [audience giggles] In the sense no one will ever see us as we see ourselves. Isn't that right? And then we will never see the person as the person sees himself or herself. So what happens here is that we relate to people inevitably through an image. The problem is that this image is created by us. And very often it does not really match with the characteristics of the person. And when the mismatch comes out strong, when the person does not sustain ... the image we have (more),

then we think the person is wrong. And we go against the person, and we get upset, and we fight and we ... even worse, sometimes I project on you one mental image. Suddenly, when passes some time, something happens, whatever, you cannot sustain anymore the image, I feel that you have betrayed me. I feel betrayed. "Look, I gave you my trust, I believed in you and finally you are not what you exactly I thought you were." And then of course I just look at you, "I am sorry, I am just who I am."

So, how to make this better? First of all remember; whenever we relate to someone, we relate through the mental image and we have no choice, we cannot do without. But what to do? First thing: mental image upgrade. From time to time we need to update the mental image we have of the person. How do we do that normally? We talk, we ask: "How are you?", "What have you done?", we discuss about things, we exchange points of view, it's the natural way of updating the mental image we have of the person. What happened, the most dangerous people (are) the ones who are very near, and we think we already know the person completely, so we never do this updating anymore. And sometimes it's even worse, we do the updating and then we see that the person has changed and we do not believe in the change because we are more attached to the image than to what we see through our eyes and through our ears. Okay?

So remember, we relate to people through mental images. So, we do not say anymore: "You should be like this" or "You should do like that", but say: "This is what I think, how I think, but this is not what you are, this is how I feel". Okay? So, very briefly, if we are able to do that, a great part of our social suffering goes away. Because much less conflicts also, in relation to that. And this brings also a big respect for the other person. I respect you for what you are, which means I do not expect you to be what I want you to be, what I think you should be. Because one of the ways of lack of respect towards the other people, is when we want the person to be something just because we think that's what the person should be. It means we do not respect the person's abilities, this person's conditions, the person's own ideas. Each one of us, we have a different process of growth and development. We need to have respect for each one's.

So, we relate to people, understanding that it will be through a mental image of them and we need to update the mental image from time to time, okay. But remember that I don't see you. I see you, yes, but through the image that I have of you. So actually, whenever we look to someone else, we are looking at the reflection of ourselves. Because I can not see you independently of myself. [Audience: "But can you also then ... if you are aware that you can also help other people to see you better, by ..."] You can try. [audience: "hmm, yeah, if they are open to it"] If what happened is the following, sure you can always try to help people to understand you better, okay. It's our duty somehow, to try to help others to see us in a more coherent way, with the way how we see ourselves. But also by the way how other people see us, sometimes help ourselves to see our self better [audience: "Yes sure, yeah"]. Okay?

Because remember, we also relate to ourselves through an image of ourselves. Which is not necessarily coherent, eh? [audience laughs] Okay? Because, okay here we open something a little bit longer, but this is an important subject - no problem. The things get a little bit more complicated. Because both relating to our self and relating to others, we have three images, okay. What I am, what I was and what I want to be, what I am supposed to be. Then what happens? I project what I should be. Then the future becomes present and I am not what I should have been, okay. Then what

happens, I am so attached to the image of what I should have been, that I am not able to open myself to the good things of what I am. So I am not able to see what I am, because I am too attached to what I should have been, to that image there. Like I wanted to be a doctor in that hospital, that's the thing what I do, okay. So I work for them and finally I agreed with that I am not a doctor in that hospital, I am a schoolteacher, okay. And then finally, I am not ever being able to enjoy being a schoolteacher, I don't see it as something good, I am not able to look at it. Why? Because I am not the doctor that I should have been, okay.

So, many times we get attached to one image. So, we project our self in the future. When the future does not correspond with the present, we think there is something wrong with the world, we don't think we projected wrong. So it is important, also towards ourselves, to remember we relate to ourselves through a mental image. Another example: One point, one moment in our life (this is a little bit more complex, but it is okay), one moment in our life we are very lonely, okay, let us say in our childhood, or later, any moment in our life, for whatever reasons, we have no one to talk to, we are going through a difficult moment, and we have no one that we can truly communicate and we can nobody listening to us, and we feel or we find our self very lonely. Some years pass by and the situation changes. We meet good friends, we have people that will take care of us with love and kindness, people will listen to us, but we are still attached to the image 'I am a lonely person' and it does not matter how much people give to us, because we see ourselves as a lonely person, we still have that sensation of being lonely and what we do, instead of understanding that this comes from the image that we have of ourselves, we try to blame the world why 'I'm feeling lonely'. So you are not giving enough attention to me, you are not doing that enough, so we try to blame the world for ourselves being lonely what actually is because we are attached to an image of something that actually is already gone. Is it clear, this concept? [audience hums consent] Okay.

So, it's very important also, not only the way how we see things, to go beyond the image that we actually built, and remember that that's just the value that I'm attributing to it, it can be different. Even to the objects, if I take this object, okay, [lifts up a singing bowl and shows it to the audience] we call it a singing bowl, right? Okay. It's a sacred object that has the ability to make these beautiful sounds [sounds the singing bowl], sounds that many of you know better than me, and according to Buddhist tradition it is also a sacred object because it represents the correct view of reality, and wisdom, because the sound, it is something that, if we look, sound exists. If we try to grab, where is the sound, we cannot grab at it. Similar to reality, without analyzing, everything appears solid. If we start to analyze, why it exists in relation between object of perception and observer and so on, we cannot grab at it anymore, okay. So, has many meanings. So, I buy my singing bowl, a very sacred object, I take it very importantly home, I put in a good place, then I go to work. And then when I come back home, I am very happy, I want to do the meditation with that singing bowl and then I don't find it. Where is it, where is it? I go around the whole house, I cannot find it. Then finally I go out to the garden and then I see that the food for the dog [audience starts giggling] has been given inside it. Okay. What happened is that someone in the house, maybe the son or the daughter, or whoever, took it and gave it. And then we go and we say: "What are you doing? ", you know, "it's a sacred object, it's this and that ... blahblahblah" and then the person said: "I needed something, it works, no?". [audience laughs] "What is wrong?" Does it work to feed the dog, depends on the size of the dog, [audience laughs and somebody comments: "Some

dogs would drown in it”]. For some dogs this bowl would be too big, you have to take a smaller one. But it works, right?

So the point is the following; any object, and even our own selves and other people, anything that we perceive, we are only able to relate to it through the image that we attribute to it. Through the value that we attribute, I attribute the value, that it is a sacred object, and it has the parts, the characteristic that can sustain this value that I attribute. Then it's okay. If I attribute a value that it cannot sustain then it's a wrong perception. Okay, if I take this object and I call it a chocolate cake, and I can believe it, but it's not going to work as a chocolate cake, okay.

What I want to say is that we relate to people through mental images. Sometimes we attribute a value that the person is not able to sustain. But that's not a mistake of the person, we are attributing a value that it cannot sustain. Okay? I think it's clear up to here, right? [audience hums consent] Okay.

Another point which makes it a little bit more tricky. The objects are constantly in transformation, right? Everything that we see, everything that we listen, that we touch, all the world around these people, everything is constantly transforming, constant in movement, it's impermanent, okay. Nothing get old suddenly, it's a gradual process of transformation of everything, right. But there is one detail. The mental images through which we relate to things are permanent, they are not constantly transforming. So what happens is that I relate to you, that is impermanent, through a mental image, that is permanent. So what happens is that when I come to see you after one year, and I still have the same mental image, that has not changed, I think that you still should represent that, you still should be the same. But you are not, okay. So we need to remember, mental images are permanent. We can generate new mental images, but they are permanent. But objects and everything that I relate to are impermanent. So we need to update mental images. And then if we remember that both about ourselves and about others, this will help us a lot to deal with the social suffering, okay. Because really if we see ... most of the times when I see people having problems in family and friends and so on, most of the times it's because they feel that they were (hurt), because the person did not correspond to the image they had of the person. This is what happens the most. Okay?

Mental suffering

Fourth type of suffering: *mental suffering as a whole*. Sadness, anger, anxiety, fear, depression, we can go on and on, long list, okay. So this is what we have generally that we call suffering. Normally, our normal way of being, is that when we ask why we suffer, I am generalizing, but in our society normally, why do we suffer? Because of external causes. Why am I suffering today? Because that person said that, that other person did that, because this is not how it was supposed to be, because that has happened, because my boss did this, because that that and so and so on. And consequently, when we think about what is happiness, we project happiness into something external, no? So imagine how would you be, or better, would you be happy if you could have everything you want? If you could have everything you want, if you could be without needing to separate from what you like, from what you have in your life - in other words, if you could have all the objects of desire, if you could never be separated from the objects of attachment and attraction, and if you could be totally away, if you never needed to enter in contact with an object of aversion - in other words, if I could be away from what I don't like, if I could keep what I like and I could

get everything that I want, would I be happy? [audience: Don't think so] I think so, personally. [audience: yes?] Yes, the problem is that it is not possible. [audience: okay] If it would be possible ... imagine, any desire I can satisfy it, everything that I like I don't need to separate myself from it and everything that I don't like I don't need to enter in contact with it. Wonderful, no? [audience: Do you want to repeat ..?] Everything that I want I can get. Everything that I like I don't need to separate myself from it. And everything that I don't like I don't need to relate to it, I don't need to enter in contact with it. It would be wonderful, but it's not possible. But still we act as if there was a possibility. So we try to get everything we want, we try not to be separated from what we like and we try to avoid everything we don't like, but these three things is not possible.

What is happiness?

So, one of the points ... is that happiness is not the result of an external condition, but of an internal state. The same things that are causes of suffering are not coming from external conditions but from internal conditions, okay. So, once you see where I project my suffering, where I project my happiness, consequently, it will come to what I do to be happy and what I do to avoid suffering, in my own life. And I repeat once again, it's very important for each one of us, really to think clearly for our self and make a very sincere question: Which are the sufferings in my life? Why I suffer? Which are the causes of suffering? What is happiness for me? And what do I do to be happy and to avoid suffering? Not conceptually, analyzing what we are really doing, what is happening already in our daily life, not the idealized idea of what we should do. What am I already doing? Where am I putting my energy already since I wake up until I go to sleep, okay?

Now, what is the view that Buddha brings to us? That what we all want is to be happy. But most of the times we project our happiness into wrong things. No one of us wants to suffer but most of the time we just try to deal with the symptom and we don't take care of the causes. It's like, if we have headache, what's the normal attitude towards headache? Take a pill or go to check the liver, the kidneys or what is the main cause of it? To go to the dentist, maybe it's the way how I sleep, with the mouth. Maybe it's a problem with the hormones, you know. Pain is nothing more, nothing less than one alarm that is ringing, saying, "Something is wrong in your body." That's pain. And what we do normally when the alarm rings? We turn off the alarm and we don't care why it's ringing. That's what we do. Actually all suffering, physical and mental, is an alarm that is ringing, saying something is out of balance. So when we have mental suffering, it is an alarm that is ringing, saying something is out of balance. You are not acting in a way that is coherent. You are not doing things in the right way. But our tendency is: eliminate the symptom and that's enough. Also physically, eh? In our whole society, we go to the hospitals, very often the tendency is to study how to take away the symptom and this and that, and why is this happening... doesn't matter so much. Normally if we say for physical suffering, where is the solution, in the body or in the mind? The mind helps, but if I have a physical problem, I go to the doctor, I change my diet, I do something in order to eliminate the physical suffering. And for mental suffering, if I am very sad, or if I feel a lot of anxiety or anger and so on, what I do? I go to the shopping mall. I buy something, you know. [audience giggles] I look for some pleasure. What we do very often, we try to forget about the suffering. We try to overcome the symptom, instead of curing the disease. So what is our experience? Once we are able to overcome the symptom, does it come

back again? [audience: yes] So, it's very interesting once we go through it. If we look in the lives of each one of us, okay, looking for our own selves, do we have patterns in our lives [audience giggles] of similar things that repeat again and again? Like, one day I was talking to a friend, here in Albagnano, and it was something that was very clear, that's why I always give this example. I was talking to her and she was very uncomfortable because she had a problem in her job. Basically there was a partner in the job, business partner, and this business partner, she said that he would not recognize her job and her actions, and it doesn't matter what she did, it was never enough and it was never good enough, and he was not recognizing her. And she was very upset about it. Really upset about it. Then I listened, I talked, but then I asked her, "Did you ever feel like this in other contexts in your life?" And she thought and she said, "Actually, you know, almost always. My parents never recognized me, my husband never recognized me, my friends never recognized me, my children never recognized me and my partner doesn't recognize me." And I asked, "What do you see in common between all of these things?" And she said, "That no one recognizes me." There is something more, no? It's like, there is a joke, which I used to do when I was very small, I was like five, I think, or even less. And the joke was the following, like children's jokes...; everywhere I touch it is painful. When I touch my leg it's painful, when I touch my shoulder it's painful, when I touch my head it's painful, when I touch my nose it's painful, when I touch my chest it's painful. What's the name of my sickness? Finger pain. [audience laughs] Okay? So, that's what we do, you know? We go on and on complaining that this person does not recognize me and that person don't recognize me, that other person don't recognize me, and we forget that there is another part behind, which is me, okay. And until I don't deal with what is with me it will just continue the same. And the most crazy thing, crazy, I don't know if it's the right word, but quite amazing, is that, when we have a certain pattern, that we project on the world, we somehow create situations to justify that pattern. We attract situations and create situations where the other person will not recognize me. So I don't need to deal with the problem if the problem is somewhere else.

So if we look to each one of us, we all have patterns okay. I have my own, each one of us has, we have the things that repeat, the other things. Then, and it's very interesting, when we are able to see that, then we relax and ... you know, we stop projecting so much in the world and it's okay. Every time I am in a difficult situation with something, that's an opportunity for me to learn better how to deal with it. In other words, when a symptom manifests it is showing us that there is a sickness. Can we know there is a sickness without having a symptom, unless we do a very precise exam or something? Normally how do we know there is a sickness? [audience: Because of the symptom] Because of the symptom. So, what is the job of the doctor? To learn how to read the symptoms.

When we have in our life sadness, anxiety, fear, anger, such mental suffering of any kind, these are all symptoms. There is something behind that is not well. When I fight with a person it means there is a symptom, there is something not going well with the relation we have. There is something not okay with me and with you and in the way how we relate to ourselves. I am in my job and suddenly I am very unsatisfied with my job? It's a symptom. Which it is showing something else: Lack of motivation, unhealthy environment, whatever is the reason. So I need to go back and understand the cause. So whenever there is a symptom, good that there is a symptom. Okay, I also will take care of the symptom, but I need to look for the cause, I need to deal with the problem.

And according to Buddha's teachings the main problems that we have are three; the sickness in our life, if I would go to Buddha, and I would say: "Oh Buddha, I feel sick!" I would say: "Like going to a doctor." And Buddha is: "Oh son, what do you have?" And I would say: "You know, I am very unsatisfied. It does not matter what happens, finally it is never enough. And I have many things in life which are very good, but finally there is always problems with the things and finally I have conflict here and I have this, that, and I am not really happy, you know." I look to him: "Aha, you are sick." "What is my sickness?" "Your sickness is called selfishness. It is caused by the virus of ignorance." It manifests to anger, attachment and ignorance. That's the manifestation. Okay.

So we have two main attitudes in life; attraction and aversion. So basically, whenever we enter into contact with something that according to us makes us suffer, we generate aversion. Whenever we enter into contact with something that we feel that makes us feel good, we generate attraction. But the problem is that we think that the feeling good or feeling bad, it is created only by external objects and we take completely away the part of the observer, how I relate to it. So what happens? This candle is beautiful, it makes me happy, what do I generate towards the candle? Attachment, attraction that becomes attachment. You make me happy, I don't let you go. I look at the candle, I feel uncomfortable, I think the uncomfortable feeling is because of the candle, what do I generate towards the candle? Aversion. When the candle does not go away? Anger, aggression, okay. And most probably I was not feeling well not because of the candle, but I've projected on it, okay. So, our suffering happens ... from all of this, the root is our ignorance.

Ignorance is the fact that we relate to reality in an inconsistent way, incoherently. Which means ... two examples; we live in a reality that is impermanent, right? It's clear this? That everything that we see, everything that we hear, we touch, it's constantly transforming. But then, even though it is impermanent, how does it appear to us, as being permanent or impermanent? If we look on the candle now, without philosophizing and analyzing it, is it the same candle as when I started speaking or is it different? If we start to think we say it's different, if we just ask directly how it appears to me; the same. If we stop to analyze is it the same? No, okay. So it appears to us as if it was permanent, but actually it is impermanent. This is called ignorance. We see reality in an opposite way from what it is. What is wisdom? To see impermanent phenomena as being impermanent.

Another point; the reality in which we live, is it objective or is it subjective? [audience mumbles: objective] I make the question differently; everything that we can perceive does it exist in the same way for everyone or is it different for each one? [audience: subjective] Like if we take even the sound, [plays the singing bowl] okay, are we listening to the same sound? Without analyzing, what will we say? [Audience: Yes]. The experience of listening is made of three parts, actually four, three plus one, okay. There is the vibration in the air of the sound, the sound that arrives in my ear and the sound that arrive in the ears of each one of you is the same vibration or is it different? [audience: the same] If we are in the same position, if I play the bell and I am here and you are there, we listen in the same way? [audience: No] So because of being in different positions, the vibrations in the air go to different ways, so it's not the same. Sure I am not holding twenty singing bowls in my hand right, it's one, but the vibration in the air that arrives to each one of our ears is ... different. It is very similar, but there is a saying in Tibetan it says [speaks Tibetan]... whatever is similar,

by definition is different. If it's similar, it is different, okay. If it's the same, it's the same. So, the sound that arrives to our ears is similar, but is different. Our own ears, physical ear, does it perceive the vibrations exactly in the same way, or each one of us is little different? [Audience: different] Different. Some people have a more sensitive ear, some people have a less sensitive ear, and like this we can go on. Like my mother for example, if she is in a place with more noise, for her she cannot, because she has very sensitive ears. She can listen to very, very subtle sounds, so depending where she is, it can be very difficult for her. And like this we could go on. Each one of us have a different ... similar because we are all human beings, okay. A cat would listen most probably in a different way, but very similar. The third part is called the sense consciousness. There is a part of our consciousness, of our mind, connected to our brain that perceives the information that comes from our ears, which we call the ear sense consciousness, okay. Is it the same or is it different? Different. So, the object is this; that the sense power is different ... the sense consciousness is different. And the fourth thing, the value that we attribute to the sound, is it the same or different? [Audience: Different] So how can we say we are perceiving the same thing? Right? What we see, what appears to our eyes, forms and colors, but again it's not the same. Our eyes are different, take off my glasses - it's already something else, okay. What we see is different, the consciousness is different, the side sight is different, the value that we attribute is different. So we live in a reality that is completely subjective. Each one of us perceives it in a completely different way. Very similar very often, but in a different way. And this is, if we go to quantum physics nowadays and to neuroscience, it is saying exactly this, maybe in different terms, but it is saying the same thing, okay.

But now, without philosophizing, when we look at things, how does reality appear to us? As if it is objective or subjective? [Audience: Objective] Objective. In other words, when I see something that's what it is. I am not aware that what I have seen actually is a reflection based on the value that I attribute it, and the forms and colors, the light that came to my eyesight, and based on my own eyesight and the consciousness that I have and the value that I attribute this is what I see. That is different from what you see. Do we have this awareness? No, not at all, right. So, what happens when someone else says that what we are seeing is not what it is, what we see. You are wrong. When someone else has a different point of view of ours, see reality in a different way, our tendency is to say the other person is wrong. Because we are not aware that what we see is the reality that we perceive, we think that that's what is reality. Okay? So, the reality in which we live it is subjective, but still it appears to us as if it was objective. So what is the ignorance? That the subjective reality appears as if it was objective and we believe it. And we relate to it in this way. And this is the root of all suffering, okay.

Then, what is wisdom? To relate to the subjective reality as being subjective, okay. [Audience: Can you say it one more time] To relate to the subjective reality as being subjective. We don't need to make it objective... it is subjective and I will always relate through the filter of myself, there is no other way of doing it. And each one of us will do the same. And to make it more clear, there is no such a thing as one reality that each one of us perceives differently. Like when I play the sound [plays the singing bowl] there is not such a thing as one sound that each one of us perceives differently. There are many individual realities that put together, makes one reality. There are many sounds, because the sound is made of what? Vibration, ear sense

power, ear consciousness and value attributed to it, that's what together makes that sound. So we have different sounds, okay. This doesn't mean that external reality does not exist. External reality, here [knocks on table], it does exist but it does not exist independently of internal reality, okay.

Now, with all of this we ask: *"What is happiness then?"* Happiness for me, the definition is that instant in which we do not want anything to be different from what it is, when everything is fine. When we stop craving, when we stop protecting ourselves, when we first just relax and we say: "Okay, it's fine. I don't want anything to be different from what it is." In order to reach that state there are some things which are a great help, such as harmony, inner peace, which is pacifying our own conflicts, generosity, humility, love, very important, compassion, most satisfaction. Satisfaction is not the result of having many things, satisfaction is a way of relating to reality of the material things that we have, is of rejoicing of what I have, instead of wanting always more. And wisdom most of all, that's the most important of all, okay.

How to be happy and not to suffer?

So, with this we get to the fourth point, which is: *What do I do in life in order to be happy and in order not to suffer?*

Do I need to eat? Yes. Do I need to have a place where I live? Yes, hmm, better to have one, otherwise when comes the winter, then it's difficult. Could I live without? Okay, maybe there would be a way, but generally speaking it's useful, no? So the question is: "Do I need to work?" For most of us, yes. Most of us we have a family, we have a responsibility towards our family, to take care of our children, relate in a kind way and take care of the people we live with, husband, wife, parents and so on. We have a social responsibility and all of this is fine, nothing against all that we do in our lives. Is it good to have fun? Yes. Is it good to relax, take care of our health, we have a body, we need to take care of it, all of this is wonderful, and we already do the best that we can in relation to that, okay. But this is just part of surviving, right.

There's another part that comes together, which is, I need to use every experience that I have in life as an opportunity to become more patient, to develop more love, to be kind, to have more wisdom, less impatience, to be more humble, to be more peaceful, and every experience of life is a good opportunity for that. Because every experience is a place where we are going to touch to see if any symptom is going to appear. And when a symptom appears, it means there is a sickness behind, so we know it and then we can do something about it. But the place where we really practice our spirituality is not in the temple. The temple is a very important place, it's where we learn, where we are getting blessings, it's where we generate our energy. But where we need apply it? In our job, with our family, with our friends, with the people we have difficulty with. In the difficult moments, that's where we need to apply. That's the real place for our spiritual development, yeah.

Otherwise we can happen like, there was a monk one time and he was making a retreat. Alone, making a beautiful retreat with meditation alone, you know. No one coming to disturb him, anything, and then came one master, one Lama, asking: "Oh, dear monk, what are you making retreat about?" And he said: "I am meditating on patience." "Oh, that's so good." So the master came and slapped him on his face, spit on his face and slapped him and then the monk wanted to react back. And then his master came and stepped back and he said: "Remember, without an object of anger you cannot practice patience." [audience giggles] "Otherwise it's just theoretical all this." When do we practice love? When we have someone in front of us that we can

love. Of course it's another thing that we need to be careful. Sometimes we generate when we start to get more near to our spiritual path, okay, like in Buddhism or others also, we generate this idea that we need to love everyone. Which is very correct, it's very beautiful. So we've even made this prayer: "May all beings have happiness and its causes, may all beings be free from suffering and its causes," very special. But there is the danger sometimes of generating an idealized type of love. That I love everyone, but finally I love no one. Like, I love everyone, I really care for everyone, as long as you don't harm me, as long as you are nice to me, as long as you are far away from me. [audience giggles] So, if I say I love everyone with exception of five people, or three, or two, or one, this means I don't love everyone. So, when we talk about developing love, that's something very important, but where do we need to practice it? With our friends, with our family, with the people we work, with the people we have difficulty with. That's where we need to train, in our daily life. Looking towards people, seeing them, wishing them the best, doing something with kindness towards them, having patience. And that's where we develop ourselves.

Conclusion

(Three main aspects of the path)

So, the conclusion I like to bring, that the path, the spiritual path, we can conclude it into three things that we need to do in life; independently of our work, of our family, of everything that we do, that's wonderful, but independent of all of that we need to do three things: love ourselves, love others and live in a coherent way, have a correct view of reality. [Audience: Correct view?] Correct view about reality, how we see things - if it's impermanent I see that it is impermanent, if it is subjective I see that it is subjective, being coherent, consistent towards reality, okay.

Love ourselves means recognize what is good and cultivate it. Recognize what is harmful and abandon it. What does it mean to love myself? I recognize what is beneficial to myself and I cultivate it, even though it may be difficult. I recognize what is harmful towards myself and I avoid it, I abandon it, okay. It's not that obvious, eh. But that's a direction where we need to cultivate.

Second step: love others, care about others. Which does not mean give up on yourself. The same way that my happiness is important, your happiness is also important. The same way my suffering is important, your suffering is also important. Open our hearts towards others, independent of who they are or they are not, you know. Like in Tibetan there's two different words; like between a couple there is one word which is 'I love you' and another word which is 'I desire you'. I love you means: Your happiness is important for me. I desire you means: I need you in order for me to be happy. That's desire, that's not love, okay. [Audience: Mix the two] We can have the two together, but one is one, the other is another. They need to be clear, okay. The problem is that when we think that the two are the same, suddenly there is no desire then we think there is no love, but I like the person, I want the person to be happy, but we have conflicts, okay. So it's important to make the two things clear, desire is desire, love is love and the two can be together and the two can be separate, okay. But generally speaking what we need to develop most of all is love. We need to develop the wish for others to be happy, that's the most important.

And the third part, which is also very important, is: relate to reality in a coherent way. Which is: remember that what I say is not what you hear. What you say is not what I hear. What I hear is a sound that comes to me that I will attribute a value to it. So I have no idea what you say, I can have some idea of what I heard. It's clear this, no? However, everything is interdependent and we have no control over reality in

which we live. All of this which we were talking before, okay.

And in order to do that, to make this process of loving ourselves, loving others, having a correct view of reality, we do this by a process again of two things: which is listening, like we are doing now, by reading, by listening, by gaining information about how we see reality and how we behave. Comprehending, means reflecting about what we have heard until we have no more doubts about it, we are sure about that. And the third we need to familiarize ourselves with it, so we need to put it into practice, which we call to meditate, which means we put into practice. So, how can I familiarize myself with love? By developing love, by feeling love. How do I familiarize myself with patience? By applying patience, even if it does not come spontaneously.

So, in other words, we should act and we should behave in accordance to what we want to be and not in accordance to what we are. I think this is clear. In the moment that I act, that I behave, following what I want to become, gradually I become it. If I act and I behave just based on what I am, so I am like this, I will just continue to be more of what I am already. Okay. This is what we are calling tantra in Buddhism, we call bringing a result into the path. I am not yet a Buddha, but I act as if I was. I think I am. I will behave as if I was a Buddha. Slowly I become one. Because we are made out of habits. The more we repeat one attitude the more stronger the attitude will become. The less we repeat it the weaker it will become, okay. So basically whatever we look what I want to become and then we act in accordance to what I want to become and not to where I am now. Oh, I want to be very patient, so let me act patiently, it does not come spontaneously, no, I bite my tongue, but I don't react aggressively. Slowly I become. I am not a very concentrated person, okay, but I want to be concentrated, yes. So I need to act in accordance, I'll put special effort to concentrate myself, to be more perseverant, you know. Then slowly things change this way. And remember the process is gradual, it's not in one day, not in a week, it's not in a year, it's not in a decade and it is not in a lifetime. It's many lives and slowly, slowly, from life to life we make deep changes in ourselves, but in one day we can make a lot still.

Taking refuge

Okay, so this is maybe everything I wanted to share today and if there is any specific question? [Audience:] "Lama, eight of these people take refuge today in Lama Gangchen, can you just tell us a little about the refuge?" Okay, you are going to take refuge now, right? Refuge is something that we all do in life, all the time, every day we take refuge, since we were born actually, okay. For example, when I am thirsty, where do I take refuge? In water. So why do I ask, why do I look for water, why do I take refuge in water? [audience: because you feel you need it?] Because I don't like being thirsty. [audience laughs] Okay? If I liked being thirsty would I look for water? No. If I think there is nothing to do about being thirsty, would I look for water? No. So, when I feel thirsty and I don't like being thirsty and I believe that it's possible to eliminate my thirst, then I look for something that can help me with that. That's why I go for water, okay.

So refuge is based on two things, the words are not so nice in our culture, but that's the words traditionally used. To take refuge we need two things, which is called fear and faith, which I will explain better. I have fear from being thirsty, which means I don't like being thirsty. If I didn't fear thirst I would never look for water, right? And I

have faith in water. Faith means I believe that water exists, I believe that water can eliminate my thirst. Otherwise I would never go for water, okay. So when we take refuge, for example today with Lama Gangchen, we take refuge in the Guru, take refuge what you call in the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha. First thing, what do we take refuge from? Why do I take refuge? Because I don't want to suffer. Because I see that my suffering is not coming only from external conditions. Because normally I take refuge in a house when it is cold, I take refuge in money when I feel that I don't have enough, I take refuge in whatever, okay. So, in this case I take refuge in the Guru, in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Why? Because I recognize that my suffering is not coming only from external things and what I get normally it's not enough. I need something different. And this path of developing my own inner qualities, of developing my own love, patience, stability, peace, wisdom, of developing loving myself, loving others and having a correct view of reality, of developing my own spiritual path, I recognize that this is what I want, but alone I cannot do it. Like, I am thirsty, but I need to find water, I cannot eliminate my thirst just by myself.

The important thing when I take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is understanding that the main refuge is the refuge in the Dharma, which is the spiritual path. The Buddha is the one that shows us the path. The Dharma is the path for us to follow. The Sangha is the spiritual company during our path. And the Guru is the embodiment of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The Guru shows us the path, he represents the path and he accompanies us during the path, okay. But the only reason why I take refuge in the Guru is because I want to follow the path. But taking refuge is not going to the Guru and saying: "Oh Guru, please help me, you know I have faith in you, I do anything you want, take me out of suffering." No, that's not right. The right way is: "I take refuge in you, please help me, please show me the path so I will walk it." So when you take refuge in the Guru at the same time we must take refuge also in our own potential to become a Buddha. Like, if I want to go walking from here to Kailash, anyway, just saying at whatever place, I can take refuge in someone, please you show me the path how to reach there. Please you teach me how to walk, so I don't get tired, correctly. Please you teach me how to speak the languages so I can communicate during the whole path or whatever. But I'm going to learn the languages that you need to teach me, I'm going to walk with my own legs to get there. But I need your help.

So when you take refuge in the Guru, the function of the Guru by giving us refuge is not to take us out of suffering. He cannot take away our defilements. He cannot put his quality inside of us. He can show us what to do, what to cultivate and what to abandon and he can bless our mind in order to help us to do it. But we take refuge at both together; at our own potential and at the Guru that is showing us how to develop it. Taking refuge also Lama Gangchen calls it the spiritual company, because it creates a very deep connection. It's like actually the connection that's created even stronger than what we have normally, connection by blood with family. Some say it's very deep, but this is something you need to experience by your own, difficult to put it into words, okay. There is one important aspect on refuge also, it's based on trust, it's based on respect, it's based on love. And the relationship normally, normally we are worried to be judged. When we take refuge with a master that has the qualities such as Lama Gangchen with whom I have taken refuge. One thing I am sure that I have seen with anyone, you know, I can go to him tomorrow and say: "I killed five persons". He would not change the love and the kindness and the way how he takes care of you. So we don't need to worry about how he sees us, it's a relationship in

which we can be a hundred percent who we are, without trying to prove something else in order to be accepted or in order to be loved. It's also something that is important.

Okay, so, please enjoy this opportunity, and we make some dedications, now. Can we conclude, okay. And once again thank you very much everyone for coming, you are always all very welcome, any moment. Come together with the whole group or to come individually also, everyone is always very welcome, okay. [Audience replies with thank you].

Dedication prayers

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