

Lama Michel Rinpoche

# How to apply spirituality in our daily life

teaching transcript

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We all want to be happy and we all want to avoid suffering.  
By taking good care of this life, making this life meaningful and  
preparing for our own death, we can bring spirituality into our daily life  
and achieve real happiness, free from suffering.

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Amsterdam, The Netherlands

13 May 2015

Lama Gangchen



Peace Publications

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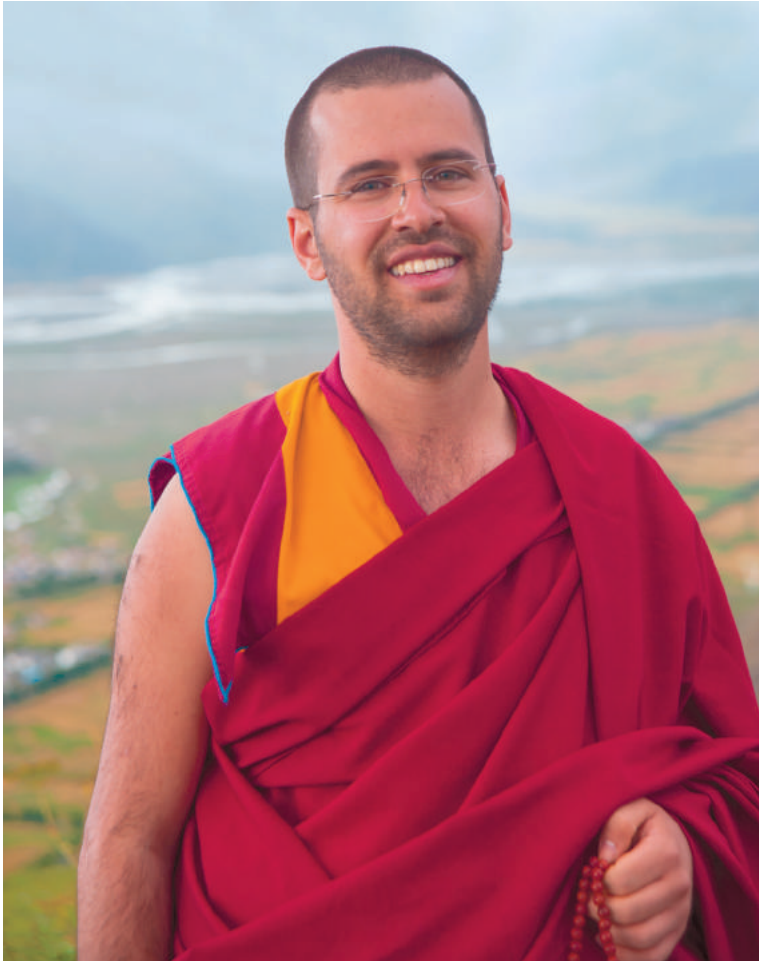
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Lama Michel Rinpoche



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	6
Words of gratitude and inspiration .....	6
We all want to be happy and avoid suffering .....	8
Do whatever you do, as long as it works .....	9
What is happiness? .....	10
Material utopia .....	11
Three points to achieve happiness from within .....	14
<b>One: take good care of this life</b> .....	15
<b>Two: make this life meaningful</b> .....	17
Living to survive or living to make life meaningful .....	19
How do I make life meaningful? .....	20
Physical and mental suffering .....	21
External conditions do not bring a state of satisfaction .....	24
Multiple causes, multiple solutions .....	26
Suffering, ignorance and selfishness .....	28
Understanding from our own experience .....	31
Becoming enlightened is a gradual process .....	33
<i>The three principal aspects of the path</i> .....	34
<b>Three: prepare ourselves for our own death</b> .....	37
Five points to prepare for death .....	38
Death is the ultimate opportunity for spiritual growth .....	42
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	43
<b>About Lama Michel Rinpoche</b> .....	46

## Introduction

### Words of gratitude and inspiration

Before anything else, I would just like to start with a very short prayer. Actually, I recite this prayer everywhere I go. It doesn't matter whether I'm speaking at a conference, in a temple or a school. It doesn't matter where I am, I always start with this short prayer. In this prayer I recall the names and the qualities of my teachers, my masters and the masters of my masters.

In Buddhism, it is very important for us to have gratitude towards those who have taught us. And if there is anything that I can share with you today, it is because someone previously taught me. So wherever I go, I start with this short prayer. The first part of the prayer is in Tibetan, the second part is in Sanskrit.

*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

Let me add that I am also very grateful to be here today, to have this opportunity to have the feeling of being among friends - friends of our friends are always good friends - to have this time together to share something. I, myself, have this opportunity in my life to dedicate my time for what I really love. I think this is something very precious; this is something very fortunate.

I would like to share something with you. I am not here today to teach anything to anyone. I am just here to share some thoughts with you, some aspects of my life that are very helpful to me, and I think they can be helpful to you too.

As many of you know, I come from Brazil. My family, on the side of my father, is a traditional Jewish family. My grandmother was born in Austria, while my grandfather was born in Germany. They both escaped when they were young during the Second World War. On the side of my mother, I come from a traditional Christian Presbyterian family. So since I was little, I had different types of education. Sometimes I would go to the synagogue, sometimes I would go to church. But when I was quite small, I met my teacher for the first time, my source of my inspiration, who is Lama Gangchen<sup>1</sup>. I could say that what really changed my life from the beginning – what gave me the direction for what I have done up to now – is the actual true-life example of a person in a state of balance, joy and satisfaction.

Once I was at a family gathering. It was a dinner before the wedding of a Jewish cousin in New York. Someone from the Jewish part of the family asked me why I hadn't become a rabbi. I said, "Most probably because the person that has been an example for me is a Tibetan Buddhist lama. If he had been a rabbi, most probably I would have gone that way." When I started to follow this path, I had really no idea about the philosophy itself, even though I liked it very much as soon as I started to study.

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<sup>1</sup> T.Y.S. Lama Gangchen Tulku Rinpoche is a Tibetan Lama Healer who went into exile to India in 1963 and moved to Europe in 1982. Lama Gangchen Rinpoche is Lama Michel Rinpoche's root guru, his primary spiritual guide.



## **We all want to be happy and avoid suffering**

In all these years, I have had the opportunity to travel to many different places. I went from Brazil to study in India for twelve years, in a Tibetan refugee camp, which may not seem like a very nice place – a big monastic university with four thousand monks. After that I moved and have been living in Europe now for more than ten years. I have travelled to many places in Asia, I've been to Africa, I've been to South America.

I think one of the qualities that I may have is being curious: looking at things, listening to people, understanding what is happening, always questioning things. But one thing has become very clear to me, regardless of where I go: human beings are very, very similar. When we read texts written two thousand five hundred years ago by Buddha, or one thousand five hundred years ago by a great master called Shantideva, it is as if they are talking about us nowadays. The people of that time were not that different from what we are now. Our main concerns, our difficulties, our resources were basically the same. And it doesn't matter where I go – if I am in a big city like São Paulo where I come from, or if I am in the middle of the monastery in Tibet where I often go – when you start listening to people's complaints, concerns and difficulties and the resources they have to deal with them, they are basically the same.

One thing has become very clear to me: it doesn't matter where we come from, it doesn't matter what our culture is, what our education is, it doesn't matter what our social status is, we are all the same in the sense that we all suffer, we all want to be happy and we want to avoid suffering as much as we can. And for me the most important of all is that every one of us does everything we do, thinking it is the best for our own happiness. It doesn't matter if I dedicate my life to politics, sports or art, if I want to

go to a little cave in the middle of the mountains to meditate my whole life or if I want to dedicate my life to doing nothing, I do what I do because I think that it is the best for my own happiness, guided however, by my own ignorance. That's what we do, each and every one of us. It doesn't matter where we come from, it doesn't matter what our age is, it doesn't matter what our culture or education is; there is a very strong force inside every one of us that makes us to do every action we do. This force is this wish to be happy, which is actually the same thing as the wish not to suffer. They are two sides of the same coin.

In Tibetan we call it *sepa*; it is difficult to translate. It is not a wish; it is like a spontaneous desire, something much deeper than a wish. It's a craving. It is a force that drives us to do everything we do. Why I do what I do is basically because I don't want to suffer and I want to be happy. This is what is behind everything that we do. It doesn't matter where we come from, it doesn't matter what our culture is - none of this matters.

### **Do whatever you do, as long as it works**

When I was around eighteen I had been living in the monastery already for six years and a question came to me. I could say that I was going through a brief moment of crisis because I was asking myself, "What am I doing here in the monastery?" I loved the life in the monastery; I really liked it. It is a little bit like military style: a lot of discipline, many hours of study every day and so on. It's true, I quit school when I was twelve, but I went on to study much more than I could have imagined.

But the question that I had was: "What am I doing? Why am I here? I am Brazilian, I come from a different culture." I tried very often to look at things from different perspectives, trying not to be completely closed up in one view. And finally I came

to one conclusion, which for me nowadays is something that drives me on my way, something that guides me. There is one basic rule for me, let's say a law, to follow: do whatever you do – it doesn't matter what it is – as long as it works. What does it works mean? It depends on whether it makes me truly happy or not.

### **What is happiness?**

Here we come to a very fundamental question: what is happiness? I was talking some time ago with a friend. She was writing her thesis for her university Master's degree in development economics, which is economics for low-income countries. As we were talking – I was helping her a little bit with her thesis – a question came up. I asked, "What's the final goal of economics, what's the reason behind it?" It came out that the reason why the whole economic system works and exists is for the well-being of human beings. What is the ultimate well-being of human beings? It is happiness. So what is happiness?

If happiness is the final goal of economics, what is happiness? I asked, "Have you ever found the definition of happiness anywhere, in any books on economics?" She said, "Never." It means we have a whole system dedicated to something that we don't know what it is. And even the definition of economics itself is already quite shocking. The definition of economics – the one that most people learn at the university – is: "The science that uses finite resources to satisfy the infinite wishes of human beings." It is already crazy in itself to imagine that there can be something finite, something that finishes, that can satisfy something that is infinite. The idea that you can satisfy something that is infinite is already a crazy idea.

## **Material utopia**

Why am I talking about this? Because it brings us to the question: what is happiness? We are living in times in our societies, not only in the West but also in the East – in the whole modern world – where more and more we have this idea that in order to be happy, I must have what I want, when I want it and how I want it. And that happiness is fully connected to material development. We believe in what I like to call a material utopia, which means we believe that it is possible to be truly happy only through material development. But the question is: is it possible? Remember, it doesn't matter what you do, the important thing is that it really works.

I started to look around me. I come from a family where money was never really a problem, so I have seen people close by with a lot of money and people with great wealth. But they were not very happy. Still today they are not that happy – very nice people, but always with some problem or another. When I look around I know people that have enough money for this lifetime and for the next ten lives if they could take the money with them. Are they really satisfied in their lives? No.

So, one thing became very clear to me when I was analyzing this. I said, okay, what works? Does money really work? Does money make people happy? Can money bring happiness to people? Yes or no? I believe yes – up to a certain point: if you don't have food, if you are constantly hungry ... It is very difficult to ask someone to meditate when the person is very hungry. If you cannot take care of your health, if you don't have a place to shelter yourself from the heat, cold or rain, if you don't have the minimum basic needs, it will be difficult for you to have the inner space necessary to reflect upon your own deeper aspects. So there is a minimum, which is necessary. Above this

necessary minimum, it doesn't matter how much more you have; it won't make any difference. It won't make you happier.

So, what shall we do then? As I said before, the important thing is to do what really works. From what I have seen and experienced, it seems that whenever you turn on the television, when you open the newspaper, what is being proposed to us in society as a way to be happy, or even as happiness itself, is not sustainable. It is something that we gain for a moment, but then right away what happens? It fades.

Some time ago I was called to talk at a school in Italy. I like talking with kids very much. Normally they are from thirteen to nineteen, but that time when I arrived there, there were about two hundred kids around five to six years old. So I asked myself, "What am I going to do now? How long do I need to talk?" They said that I had one hour and a half. I wondered how I was going to entertain all these kids for an hour and a half. I thought, okay, they called me to talk about Buddhism, let's go with the Four Noble Truths<sup>2</sup>.

I found a way to talk to them in a simpler way. It was an amazing experience. At one point, after maybe half an hour – I had already established some sort of friendship with the kids – I was explaining the causes of suffering to them.

I asked the kids, "Is there any toy you would like to have?"

And they enthusiastically said, "Yes!" "Okay, has it ever happened, maybe for Christmas or your birthday that you got the toy that you wanted?"

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<sup>2</sup> The Four Noble Truths were taught by Buddha Shakyamuni as the central theme of the so-called first turning of the wheel of the Dharma after his attainment of enlightenment. They are: the truth of suffering, which is to be understood; the truth of the origin of suffering, which is to be abandoned; the truth of cessation, which is to be actualized; and the truth of the path, which is to be relied upon.

They all said, “Yes!”

“Were you happy?”

“Yes!”

“How long did your happiness last. A long or short time?”

Not so happily, they all said, “Short.”

“Do you still have the toy?”

“Yes, we do.”

“Does it still make you as happy as before?”

“No.”

“Do you want another toy?”

“Yes!”

“How long is the next toy going to make you happy?”

I asked them again, “Once you get the next toy, how long is it going to make you happy?” What was the answer that they gave me? They were not so happy about the answer they were giving me. They said, “Short.”

They were not special kids. From the time we were young, we have known that material things are not going to make us happy. But we don’t know another way. It’s as if we change the toy, but we don’t change the game because we were never taught another way of playing.

When I say this, I always remember when I was once at the other extreme; I was together with a friend who happens to be a very rich man. We were going to a little town with his private jet. He looked at me in front of his private airplane, and he said, “The only difference between big and small boys is the size of their toys.” In the end, you are there, trying to be happy by changing the toy. And we do this our whole life. Does it really work? No.

After looking at all of this, my conclusion is that first of all, there is one fundamental question that we need to ask ourselves: what is happiness? What do I want in life? I think

that is a question that we must ask ourselves, independently of what other people are telling us – independently of what our philosophical view is.

It doesn't matter what Buddhism tells me happiness is. What do I think happiness is? I have the deepest respect for the teachings of Buddha, but what really matters at this moment is what I see as happiness, because that's the direction in which I am going to put my own energy. Otherwise, I can say, "I believe I must reach enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. And that's the main goal that I must have in my life because that's what my teachers taught me in Buddhism." But then maybe I am still projecting my own happiness onto having power and influence and being recognized by others and so on. Intellectually I may be telling myself that I want enlightenment, but truly I don't want it.

So the question is, independently of what my culture is, of what my education is, of what my religion is, of what labels that I put onto myself are: what do I really want? And very often we will come up with the answer: "I don't know." That's the answer we very often get, because we have never asked ourselves this question clearly.

### **Three points to reach happiness from within**

Some time ago I was talking to a friend – a new friend actually – and I would also like to make a dedication for him since he passed away a few months ago. I met him because of his sickness; he came to talk to me. His name was Ricardo Della Rosa. He was one of the best directors of photography in Brazil. He died very young; he was, I think, forty-five or something like that.

When we were talking, I somehow got inspired to see things that I had always seen but from a different perspective, to put

them together in a different way. It was something that was very important to me. We had a very nice talk. Sometimes it happens in life that you can create a deep friendship with a person in a very short time – even if you don't know each other very well – when there truly is love and you are really sincere with each other.

What came to my mind during our talk was the following: there are three things that are important in life, three points in which we need to put our energy. I believe my idea of happiness – before coming to explain these three points – is to be in harmony with myself and others; to not be in conflict. If the other is in conflict with me I cannot do much, but at least I shouldn't be in conflict with others.

So for me, happiness means being in harmony with myself and others, with the world around me, independently of where I am, with whom I am, in what situation I find myself. If my own happiness needs to depend on other people around me, if my own state of happiness and harmony needs to depend on the place where I am or the situation I am in, then I don't have any alternatives. Instead, for me it is a state that comes from within. In order to reach that state of happiness, there are three points that I found out that are very important for me that I would like to share with you here today.

## **One: take good care of this life**

For me, these three points illustrate what I consider important things to do in life. The first one is that we need to take good care of this life, which is what most of us are already trying to do. We have a body; we need to take good care of our body, so we need to eat well, we need to do exercise, we need to do everything necessary to stay healthy. We have responsibilities with other people: family, friends, work, society. We need to keep our responsibilities, keep



this positive interdependence that we have with other people around us. We need, at the same time, to respect the environment. In other words, we have to take care of this life.

How to take care of this life is a big topic and that's what most of us normally talk about; that's what we mostly hear about, too. It's okay to take care of our health, to take care of society, to do things so that these things function correctly and go in a more harmonious way in our daily life.

So yes, we have this body, we have this life and we must take good care of this life. For me, it means doing my best. It doesn't matter what I do, I need to do my best. My best doesn't mean that it needs to be perfect, it means I must sincerely put the best of my energy in everything I do. If I go to meet someone, I give my full energy to that person. I look into the eyes of that person. I talk to him or her. I listen to them. I do my best in that moment that I have. Am I going to make mistakes? Sure, no doubt. But I am still doing my best. I will learn with my mistakes and I will go on. For me, that's one important point.

Sometimes I see that we have the tendency to go from one extreme to another. We go out from one extreme in which we think only about taking care of this life, then suddenly we say, "No, it is the spiritual part and what transcends this life that is what's important." Then we completely forget the dealings of this life and we go to much less concrete things, high philosophical things, mystical things, referred to as *spiritual*, even though that is not the right word.

Some are going to talk about high philosophy and more mystical things thinking, "I have gone to another level and now I am not taking care of what I eat anymore, of society around me; I don't take care anymore about, let's say, *mundane* things."

But I have a body, made of flesh. I walk here, I breath this air, I drink the water. I must take care of this world. I am here. I relate to people around me. I am not independent of society or those around me, so I must be a positive part of it.

So we have the first point: we have a life, let's take good care of it. We have this body, we need to take good care of it to the best of our abilities. With this part I think each one is already doing something- most of us are normally already doing it - to the best of our abilities. Sure, there is always something we can do better, but we are already doing this.

## **Two: make this life meaningful**

Then there is the second point. I must take good care of this life, but that's not enough. I must make this life a meaningful life. This life must be meaningful. I cannot waste it. I can have perfect health, I can have a very nice, clean house, I can have good relationships with my friends and family. But if I live this life only to survive, I am not making this life meaningful.

This reminds me of a time one of my teachers called Gen Lhakpala told me something. It is a little bit extreme, but it can help us understand what I want to say. We were in the monastery, which is in the middle of the fields, far away from the city, way out in the countryside of India, full of cows and cornfields. One day we were outside, and there were some cows.

Then he looked at the cows and he said, "You know, if you don't make your life meaningful, there is no difference between you and a cow." I asked, "Why?" He said, "If you live this life only to survive, if you spend your life just trying to

avoid suffering and gaining pleasure, there is no difference between you and a cow. Look at the cow. You see that the sun is very strong there. When the sun is very strong, what does the cow do? Does the cow choose to stay in the sun or go into the shade? It goes in the shade. Why? Because the cow does its best to avoid suffering. When the cow is eating grass, there is one place where the grass is very green and nice and in the other place the grass is very dry. Which grass is the cow going to eat? The green one. So does the cow wish to get more pleasure? Yes, the cow is choosing to get more pleasure.”

What he was saying is that if you dedicate your life only to avoiding suffering and gaining pleasure, there is no difference between you and a cow. You are just more sophisticated. Maybe you choose a different wine, a better restaurant or try to avoid suffering by having air-conditioning, central heating or whatever. But if we spend our whole life only avoiding suffering and trying to gain pleasure, we are simply surviving; we are wasting this life.

Here comes the difference for me. We can live life in two ways. Or we can live our lives only to survive, getting busy with many things and thinking we are busy in our lives. We are running and running to do many things, but actually we are not going anywhere, we are just running. It's like these crazy treadmills that we have nowadays, where people just run and they don't go anywhere. For me it's really strange. When you go to the gym, you see all these people just running and not getting anywhere. Sometimes in the city behind a glass window you see all the people who are just running and getting nowhere. For me it is somehow a metaphor of what many of us are doing, of what many of us do: we run, run, run, run, run.

## **Living to survive or living to make life meaningful**

When I came from the monastery to live in Europe, I understood one thing. Sometime after I had arrived, I started to be very busy. People would come up to me to ask me something, but I would say that I didn't have time. I understood that having time was not cool. It's not well-seen if you have time. If you have time, it means you are no one. If you have time, it means you are not important, you don't matter much. So you cannot have free time. You must be busy in order to be someone. It was not true that I didn't have any time; I was simply choosing to dedicate my time to something else. Do I have time? Yes I do. But my priority is this instead of that. It's a different attitude that we have.

The point that I want to make is that very often we run, run, run, run, run, run, and where do we get? Nowhere. Why? Because we have nowhere to go, we don't know even where we want to go. That's why it's so important for us to ask ourselves and understand: what is happiness, what do I want?

Here are the two basic choices that we can make in life. Do I want to live this life only to survive? Or do I want to live this life to make this life meaningful? We have this choice. I think we could divide most of us into these two sorts of categories.

What does it mean to live this life only to survive? We spend our whole life avoiding suffering, gaining pleasure, solving problems, but everything that we do is like a goal in itself: it's not a means or method to gain something, to get somewhere.

I see many people with this sort of life, and - I am sorry to be very direct - it's a little bit sad. I see people that spend a lot of time at work - which is okay, it's good, we need to take care of this life, that was the first point: I need to work, I need to pay

the bills. But very often the work is not something that has some sort of deeper meaning, so I do the work only to pay my bills.

Sure all of us have conflicts. Unfortunately, what happens very often is that people get home with their own conflicts and instead of dealing with their conflicts and using the conflicts and the difficulties to grow and become better people, they run away from them. Maybe they smoke something, they drink something, they turn on the TV, and life passes by. Between one reality show and another, people forget to live their own lives.

Nowadays they have reality shows on television. Not long ago the reality show was the gossip on the streets: what the other person did, the life of this person, the life of that one. Very often when we are not busy enough making our own life meaningful, we end up living the lives of other people, looking at other people, what he did, what the other one did. What are the magazines that sell the most? Gossip magazines. Very often there is this way of living life; we just survive. One day is gone, another day is gone, another day is gone. It's a choice. Personally I don't like it. It's a choice if we want to live our life only to survive, but personally, it doesn't fit with my way of being.

### **How do I make life meaningful?**

So, let's make this life meaningful, but how do I do it? What does it mean to make this life meaningful? Here for me, making it simple, it is like this: in order for me to make this life meaningful, I must at least die a better person than I was born. That's the minimum I need to do. Because what is the meaning, what does it mean for me to make this life meaningful? It means that I can give something to others. I can grow and become a better person myself. It is the moment that I can share, I can give,

I can do something, where I can help others to be happier. And at the same time I myself, gradually as life goes on, am able to be happier and happier, more and more satisfied and to live in a more harmonious way with others; I am making my life meaningful.

From this, the question arises: How do I make this life meaningful? Personally, I found the answer inside Buddha's teachings. And I'd like just to try to share it with you in a very simple way. The first point we have already gone through, which is: what is my present situation? It is very important to understand. It's as if we have someone who is sick or if we are sick, before we go to the doctor, we need to be clear about the symptoms that we have. What is the sickness that I have? What are the symptoms? What is the situation I am in? Once what I have is clear to me, then I can go on to find out what the causes are. I can see if I can get cured, and after that I can see what the treatment that I need to follow is. But first I need to be sure: I am sick.

### **Physical and mental suffering**

So what is the first diagnosis that I have. I suffer. We have two main types of suffering: physical suffering and mental suffering. Which suffering do we have mostly here: physical or mental? Mental, right? One of the teachers of Lama Gangchen was Kyabje Zong Rinpoche. I listened to one of his teachings; he was very direct. He was saying, "There are two types of suffering: the suffering of body and the suffering of mind. Poor people suffer mostly from the suffering of body. Rich people suffer mostly from the suffering of mind. At the end of the day, they are suffering equally."

If we think about the suffering of body, where do we need to look for solutions, in the mind or in the body? I would say, if I am hungry, what do I need to do? I need to eat. Okay, if

I am a very highly realized meditator, surely I can help myself by meditating, but otherwise, for most of us, if I am hungry what do I need? I need food, don't I? If I am sick, what do I need? I need a doctor, I need medicine. If it's too hot, what should I do? I need to get to a place where it is cooler. If it's too cold, I need to cover myself; I need heating. So for physical suffering, what type of solution do we need? Physical. And for mental suffering, what type of solution do we need: physical or mental? Material or mental? It would be mental, wouldn't it?

Where do we look for the solutions to our mental suffering? In the mind or in the body and in external things? Now I am sad, what I do? I go to buy a new pair of shoes. I am sad, what do I do? Oh, I need to find a person who will smile at me. Oh, I'll go on a walk in a beautiful park. I am dissatisfied, what do I do? I need to get something more. I am angry? I need to get away from my object of anger and find someone I like and be in a secure place. If we look at how we react to our mental suffering, normally we don't look for the solution within our mind. Most of the time, we are looking for the solutions outside. Does it work really? No. That's why we are running without moving. It's like going to the same place again and again. Momentarily it works, yes, but not in the long-term.

This always reminds me of one short story, which I like very much. I was told this story twice: once by a rabbi, another time by an imam. So I don't know really if it's an Arab Muslim story or if it's a Jewish story. It's not a Buddhist story, but it fits. The story is like this: Let's say, one day we are walking on a road, a very narrow road - dark, at night without a moon. Then we get to the top of this road where there is a point of light. Under this light there is a man searching for something. He is searching desperately. He's looking and looking and looking.

We look at him, we see that he is very desperate and we ask him, “Sorry, can we help you?”

He says, “Oh yes, please. I lost the keys to my house. I cannot go back home and this is a big problem. I must get back home. Can you help me look for my keys?”

We say, “Sure.”

So we go there and we start looking around for the keys, but after some time we still cannot find anything. So we go up to the man and we ask, “Excuse me, where did you lose your keys?”

He says, “Oh, I lost them down the road.”

Surprised, we ask, “Then why are you looking for the keys here?”

“Oh, because there it is too dark. Here at least I have some light.” *[laughter]*

Looking for the right thing in the wrong place doesn't work. So if I am dissatisfied, if I am sad, if I have jealousy, if I have envy, if I have any other inner conflict which generates suffering of the mind, I can look as hard as I want to find a solution in a beautiful house, being part of a beautiful couple with nice children, with a wonderful job and everything pleasant around me, but it will not work. I have nothing against any of this – you can have the nicest house, a nice husband or wife with nice kids, a very good job, everything. All of this is wonderful; it is part of the what I previously said about taking good care of this life. But is it enough? Will it solve our inner conflicts? No. And this is very clear for us, because it doesn't matter how many problems we solve, are we still dissatisfied? Yes. It doesn't matter how beautiful our house is and how nicely dressed we are. None of this matters, in the end we are still dissatisfied.



### **External conditions do not bring a state of satisfaction**

The most satisfied and happiest people I have ever met, up to now, are people that were extremely simple. To be well, it didn't matter where they were. They were simply happy, even when there were big problems. One of them was this teacher that I was talking about before, Gen Lhakpala. Even when he was diagnosed with a tumor in the esophagus in his last two years of life, he was still always smiling. He said, "Okay, it's my time to die, let's wait." He was fine. It didn't matter where he was going, he was happy.

When I once asked what the best years of his life were, he said, "Some of the best years of my life were from the sixties to the seventies."

I said, "Wait, that time you were in the north of India, in a place which used to be a jail. You had no food. Eighty percent of the people living there had tuberculosis."

He said, "It's true, sleeping meant just lying down on the floor; there was no bed. It's true, but at that time there was much more harmony among us and we were so happy. Our life was mainly dedicated to meditation and philosophy; we had no other worries. And we were simply happy."

Actually, I believe he was happy everywhere he went basically. Did he have problems? Sure, we all have problems. But the point is that what really brings us to the state of balance and satisfaction are not the external conditions. And I think this is quite clear for us, isn't it?

Another point is that we all look for pleasures; we like pleasures. If I am thirsty and I drink water, will it make me happy? It is nice, isn't it? So it brings me pleasure when I drink water if I am very thirsty - this is true for all of us.

Maybe I keep drinking the same water ... I drink one glass after the other because I want to maintain the pleasure. I like pleasure so much that I don't want it to go away; I want more pleasure. So what do I do? I continue drinking water. What happens after the second liter of water? Does the more water I drink keep up the same sensation of pleasure or not? After some time, does it become a cause of suffering? It does, doesn't it?

This is the same for every pleasure we may have. It's the same for material things. It doesn't matter how much I have, it will never be able to maintain this sensation of satisfaction. Finally, what are we attached to? To the water or the sensation of pleasure that I have? What do we really want? The sensation. But the material things cannot keep the sensation for long. Only one moment...*[snaps his fingers]*. The same thing goes for if people praise or compliment us. One classic example that I see happen many times is when someone comes to me or to anyone and says, "Oh listen, that person said something nice about you." And the person that said it is someone that we really like. So what is the answer that we very often give when we hear people saying such things? "Oh sorry, I didn't hear you well. Can you repeat that?" *[laughter]* Sure we understood it perfectly, but it's a sort of a massage for our ego, isn't it? We really like it. But if we start to receive the same attention again and again - the same compliment - after some time it no longer has an effect. So we cannot base our satisfaction in life on gaining pleasures, material things or recognition.

The last point I want to make is that I have nowhere to escape. I can change family, I can change house, I can change job, I can even change my body, how I look, I can change countries, but I cannot escape from myself. I can take a vacation from many things but not from myself. Sometimes people have come to me

and said, “I want to take a vacation from myself.” Sorry, that’s not possible. For example, if I am a very envious person, at work I may look at someone and I say, “Oh he works less than I do and he gets a better pay, how is that possible?” Finally I might get away from everything; I go to a little hut in the middle of a forest to meditate and I am alone in the middle of nature. Then what happens? I am envious of the little birds. “Look at them. They all have company. I don’t have company. Here I am, alone...” *[laughter]*

We take our own habits – our own mental and emotional habits – everywhere we go. So if I do not change myself, I will continue to suffer and to be in conflict. It doesn’t matter where I go or with whom I am.

### **Multiple causes require multiple solutions**

This brings up an important point: Why do I suffer? Who is to blame? And here we see something that is rooted very strongly in our culture: most of the time we look for a specific cause of our suffering. If there is a problem, if there is a difficulty, who is the one to blame? Because we look for one cause of the problem, we also look for only one solution. Is there any problem that any one of us ever had that was created by only one cause? I have never seen it.

Just to give an example: I don’t know much about Dutch history; I am from Brazil. In Brazil people complain because there is a lot of violence on the streets of the cities. Where is this violence coming from? Normally we point the finger directly at the person there, the one who is being violent. But if we look more closely, why is this happening? We can go back farther and farther. Brazil, for example, was one of the last countries to abolish slavery. And when slavery was abolished in Brazil, it was only officially

abolished, because at the end of the 1800s a way was created for the slaves to continue to be *paid slaves*. The social differences, the stigma is still there even now. There is a sort of anger; there is a very deep conflict in parts of society that is coming from a lot of violence that we have accumulated over hundreds of years of history, and all of this leads to the results of today.

When things happen, they are not coming from the momentary cause alone. There are many, many accumulated causes that are related; they are interdependent. The result is, for example, that we are here today talking. Why? How many causes and conditions were necessary for this moment to exist as it exists? Lama Gangchen needed to have left Tibet in 1963. Somehow he needed to get to Europe at the beginning of the eighties. My mother needed to have a friend called Professor Charette who was invited to her thirtieth birthday. Then he had to ask her if she wanted to help invite a Tibetan lama to Brazil. She had to agree. She could have said no. If that day she had said no, most probably I would not be here today.

If you tried to tell the story, the history, of this moment for each and everyone of us about how we got here, it would take centuries. The most interesting thing for me is that there are many, many very small actions in the lives of each one of us: words that were said, ways of listening, thoughts that have passed through people's minds, choices that were made, and that if it was not for those words, those choices or those thoughts, this moment would not exist as it exists.

So one thing that is very clear is that nothing happens because of only one cause, and because of that, the solution cannot be found in only one solution. Very often solutions are not short-term; there are middle and long-term solutions as well, especially when we talk about things related to society.

## **Suffering, ignorance and selfishness**

With this in mind, why do I suffer? Normally when we suffer, do we have someone or something that is to blame? Yes. But if we really look deeper, our suffering is coming from our attraction and from our aversion: anger, hatred, jealousy, miserliness, dissatisfaction, desire and attachment. Does the same situation always make us suffer in the same way? No. If it did, then it would be much more simple. But it's not like that. I personally believe in what Buddha taught based on my own experience: suffering is not coming from external conditions but from internal conditions. Our suffering is coming from our own conflicts.

It basically works like this: we are ignorant. I am sorry to say it, but we are ignorant. What type of ignorance do we have? We are ignorant because we have no real consciousness of cause and effect. When we are experiencing a result, we have no idea what the causes were. When we are acting, we have no idea what the results will be. This is the first type of ignorance.

The second type of ignorance is that we experience the world as if it were very solid and objective. To simplify, the world in which we live, reality, is it a subjective reality or an objective reality? What do you think? Subjective, right? I look at this object [*shows his phone*] what is it? A telephone, it is my phone; for you it's your phone, which is already different. For one person, it's a phone, for another person it is something else; there can be many ways of seeing and relating to it.

But the point is that it's subjective. But how do we relate to subjective reality in our daily lives? Don't answer with a philosophical mind. Without analyzing, in our daily lives, do we deal with subjective reality as if it were subjective or as if it were

objective? Objective, right? So we relate to subjective reality as if it were objective. That's ignorance.

Out of ignorance, what we call selfishness is generated. Selfishness is the attitude from which we generate the constant thought of *the I and the my*. That is our main priority of everything that we do. If I need to judge if something is good or bad, what is my reference? *The I and the my* or the whole? *I and my*. If I need to make a choice, what is my reference: *the I and the my* or the whole? *The I and the my*. So this simply means that we are selfish.

What is this selfishness bringing as a result? Let's say I am in front of a situation that I see as a source of pleasure. For example, I drink water and I like the water. I get the water, I drink the water and I like it. What is my reaction: attraction, aversion or indifference. Attraction: I like it, so it becomes *my water*. I really like it.

But then, out of this attraction, what do I get? Attachment: I cannot let it go. Oh, but the water wants to take some time for itself and get away. "No! You are my water! You cannot go!" *[laughter]* Then, what happens when the jar comes nearby... and the jar likes the water? I say, "but this is *my water*," and I see the jar as some kind of threat to my water being with me. What do I feel? Attraction? Aversion? Or indifference? I feel jealousy and aversion. What comes out of aversion? Jealousy. And from jealousy comes violence and so on.

Sooner or later, do I need to separate myself from the water or not? Yes. The day I need to separate myself from the water, how will I feel the experience? By suffering and maybe also by being angry, because I am going to blame someone for having to separate myself from the water. Or one day I may still have

the water, but the water isn't making me as happy as before. Who's to blame? The water! *[laughter]*. All this is a result of what? Attachment.

What is the difference between attachment and desire? Desire is when I project my happiness onto something that cannot actually sustain it but is something that I do not have. I want the water. And as long as I don't get the water, I am not satisfied. The moment I get the water, it is transformed into attachment.

When I come into contact with something that I see as a cause of suffering, my reaction is aversion. From aversion we have anger, hatred and many forms of violence: mental, physical and verbal. Then we have all the other parts that come along. There is fear, there is miserliness, there is pride and there are so many other negativities that come out in our attempt to be happy.

For example, let's take anger. What is anger? Anger basically comes out when I am in front of a situation that I see as a cause of suffering. I don't want to suffer, so I want to create distance between myself and the object that I see as the cause of my suffering. So what do I do? I find a way to send it away, to get rid of it. But when I get angry, does it make my suffering less, does it eliminate my problem? When we get angry, do we suffer less or do we suffer more? More. So that's why, when we get angry, for me it's like taking a sign saying: "Look how ignorant I am! To suffer less, I suffer more!" and showing it to everyone. Because why do I get angry? I don't want to suffer. By getting angry, what happens? I suffer more.

These are just some examples. The point is that our suffering is coming from our inner conflicts, which are: attraction, aversion, jealousy, anger, miserliness, pride, arrogance and so on. These inner conflicts are coming from attraction and

aversion. Attraction and aversion are coming from selfishness. Selfishness is coming from ignorance.

### **Understanding from our own experience**

Now a very important point arises. We shouldn't relate to it conceptually or intellectually. We need to understand all of this from our own experience, because if I say, "The causes of my suffering are my anger, my jealousy, my pride and my miserliness, *but* you must stop doing this, and I must get that..." I can intellectually have an idea of what is right and wrong, but still I do not put it into practice in my real life. This is not working. Philosophy and spirituality work if put into practice; otherwise, they are just concepts in our mind.

So the process of understanding these things is something that we must go through and it's not something that takes one or two days. It takes many years. It takes a long time of looking, reflecting and slowly, slowly it becomes more deeply engrained in us.

At one point in my life, I was going through a difficult time. When I was eighteen, I was in the monastery and I was in a difficult situation. What really triggered my conflict, my crisis, was not that I was unhappy in the monastery, it was that I started to ask myself, "Why am I here? The objective of Buddhism is to become *enlightened*. What does that mean?" There is a whole philosophical definition, but what does it really mean? Making it simple from what I have understood: enlightened means to completely eliminate our defilements: anger, jealousy, pride, miserliness and finally ignorance. And it means to develop to the maximum of our potential love, compassion, wisdom, generosity, humility and so on – our qualities.



But is it possible? At that time I thought that it wasn't. So I was in real trouble because I was dedicating my life to something that I did not believe in. I was there in the monastery... Everything was nice. I loved studying philosophy. We had long philosophical debates which I loved. I would stay there until late at night during the debates. And I liked the ceremonies, I loved my teachers, I liked the life there. But all of this had one purpose, which was enlightenment. And I didn't believe in it.

I am lucky in a way, because I am very slow to take deep, important decisions. According to Tibetan medicine, I've been told that I am of the phlegm nature, so things work slowly inside. If I have processes going inside, most people that know me from outside cannot see what is really happening, and I don't talk about it. I never talk to anyone about what is going inside – ever since I was a little kid – as long as it's not really clear. Sometimes people get a little bit shocked because they say it looks like something happened suddenly but it is not like that; maybe it took two years, three years for me to reach a decision.

At that time I started to question myself, “What is enlightenment? Is it really possible? Is it possible really to be happy in this way?” I had the opportunity to talk with some teachers of mine, some of my masters. Basically I spoke with three of them. I talked to Lama Gangchen Rinpoche. I had a very nice talk with the Dalai Lama. And I spoke with my main philosophy teacher Geshe Thubten Rinchen. During all this time I was observing, reflecting and looking. And after maybe two years I came to a conclusion, which is: it is possible. Why and how?

## **Becoming enlightened is a gradual process**

Becoming enlightened is not like turning the light on. It takes time: one year, two years, ten years, twenty years, fifty years, one lifetime, two lives, ten lives, one hundred lives, I don't know. It takes time. We develop ourselves gradually. It's not immediate. It depends on how we interact with the world around us. But the main point, which for me was very clear, is: is it possible to have less anger if we make the right effort? Yes, I believe so. I have seen it in many people.

Luckily, I have many defects, but anger has never been a difficulty for me. It's really rare for someone to see me angry. I have other faults. For example, I am an extremely lazy person. That's another problem. But the point is that it's possible to have less anger and less laziness. It is possible. I have been working on my laziness, and I can tell you, even if I am not yet there, it is possible.

Is it possible to have less attachment? Yes, it is. It is not easy, but it's possible. It depends mostly on putting energy into the right direction. Is it possible to love one person more, in the true meaning of love, which means opening our heart towards the other person and wishing the person to be happy, independently of who he is, where he's from or what he's doing?

In Tibetan, the difference between the word love and desire is very clear. For example, if I say to you, "I love you," it means, "I wish you to be happy." If I say, "I need you in order for me to be happy," it means that I desire you. So if someone comes and says, "Oh I must have you. You are the source of my happiness. I love you," pause one minute and rephrase. You do not love me, you desire me. Okay, maybe you also love me, but the moment that you say, "I wish you to be happy, and I would do everything

that I can in order to help you to be happy,” then you do indeed love me. But the moment you tell me, “I must have you nearby in order to be happy,” this is not love, this is desire. Very often we have the two together, but they are simply two different feelings.

Is it possible to love more people, more sentient beings, to open our heart towards others? Is it possible or not? Yes. So, what’s the limit of loving others? The limit that we have is where we go beyond our own selfishness and where we are able to love others unconditionally. I love you because you exist. That’s the limit where we can get, which is basically limitless. What is the limit of eliminating anger? Having no more anger. What is the limit of eliminating dissatisfaction? Being fully satisfied. So in the end, it is possible to reach enlightenment. It simply is not something that you can buy at the pharmacy or that you can gain during a weekend course. It’s a gradual process for the whole life.

### ***The three principal aspects of the path***

In Buddhism it is said that to be able to reach enlightenment, we must dedicate our life to achieving three things to make our life meaningful - we are still on the second point. These are: we need to put our energy into loving ourselves, loving others and developing a correct view of reality. These are the three points. Traditionally they are called: the three principal aspects of the path, as outlined beautifully by *Lama Tsongkhapa*<sup>3</sup>.

The first aspect is loving ourselves. What does it mean to love myself? I do love myself; we all love ourselves. Why? Because we want to be happy. But can I love myself in a more coherent way? To really put into practice the love that I have

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<sup>3</sup> *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path* by fourteenth century master Tsongkhapa Lobzang Drakpa is a short text in 14 verses highlighting the three most important aspects of the path according to the Gelug tradition, i.e., renunciation, bodhichitta and the correct view of reality, or emptiness.

towards myself, what do I need to do? I need to accomplish and cultivate what I know is good for me and I need to abandon what I know is harmful. That is the meaning of loving oneself. How many things that we know are good for us, do we still not do? How many things that we know are harmful for us, do we still do? This means not loving ourselves enough.

So when we say to love ourselves – the first part of the path, which is traditionally called renunciation – it means to renounce suffering and the causes of suffering – that is loving ourselves. This means there are really no more excuses: if something is good for me and is not harming others, I do it. If something is bad for me, in the short, middle or long-term, I don't do it. One might say, "Oh, but the taste is delicious." So what?

Like once when I was talking to a friend many years ago while she was going through a difficult situation. This situation in itself was not that difficult, but actually it was a difficult situation for her so she asked me for some advice, asking how I could help, how she could deal with this situation.

Coming up with a nice solution for her, I said, "Okay, maybe you can do this."

She said, "Oh, that is too difficult."

I said, "Okay."

I thought about it a lot, I found another solution and I said, "Then you can do this."

"Oh, I really don't like that."

Again I said, "Okay."

I kept thinking until I found something else and I said, "Okay, maybe you can try this one."

She said, "Oh, this I don't like and it's difficult."

Then I said, "Look, then you'll have to keep your problem."

"Oh, but I don't want that either."

One thing: “I don’t like it” and “it’s difficult” are not excuses; otherwise, we go nowhere.

There’s one time in my life I will always remember. There are some moments in our life that mark us, don’t they? I was with Lama Gangchen in Tibet when he said that I needed to study something that I really didn’t like. I was in Tibet to study and he told me, that I needed to study how to practice *mo*. *Mo* is a Tibetan sort of divination. I have nothing against it, but it’s not for me.

I said, “But I don’t like this type of thing.”

He said, “Why, do you think in life you can do only what you like?”

I said, “Okay, I’ll go to learn,” and I learned how to do it.

After having studied it, then he said, “Oh, but you don’t need to do it...”

But I did learn how to do it.

Loving ourselves means basically doing what we truly know is good for us without excuses. We simply need to do it, no excuses. No: “I don’t have time,” “I don’t want to,” “It is not good,” or whatever other reason we may think of ... No excuses! We simply say yes or no. So to love ourselves – and it’s a gradual process – to really love ourselves well takes time. It’s not so simple.

The second step is to love others, open our heart to others. There is a very simple exercise I would like you to try. Once I did this exercise and for me it was particularly touching. I was in São Paulo, maybe one or two years ago, waiting for a friend outside of his house. Nearby, a house was being built, and there was this construction guy working there, with his yellow helmet. He started looking at me, which is normal, given how I was dressed – it’s how people usually look at me. So usually when someone is staring at you and you look at them, what do they do? They look the other way, don’t they? But instead, he continued looking at me. So I kept looking at him. And we were there looking into each other’s eyes.

Then I started to have this feeling and thought, “I love you. I wish you to be happy. I don’t know your name. I don’t know where you come from. I have no idea about any of this, but I deeply wish you to be happy.” In other words, I love you. I was not verbalizing it; otherwise, it would have been a little bit strange, *[laughter]* but I was just saying it to myself. We stayed for maybe almost two minutes looking into each other’s eyes, and slowly, slowly we started to smile – both of us. We were just looking at each other like this. And it filled me up with joy for the whole day. Whenever I remember it, I am happy about it.

So basically the exercise is: once a day, when we are at a restaurant, when we are in the subway, when we are on the road, when we are at work – anywhere, just choose one person and say non-verbally to this person, “I love you.” We need to choose people that we don’t know. It is important that these are people that we are not so used to seeing. This is an important exercise for opening up our heart daily.

The third point is to have a correct view of reality, which, in very few words means to try to relate to reality in a coherent way with what reality actually is.

With these three points, we make this life meaningful.

### **Three: we need to prepare ourselves for our own death**

The first point to reach happiness from within was that we should make this life a good life. The second point was to make it meaningful. The third point, which we will not go into details about, just very simply is that we need to prepare ourselves for our own death. We are all going to die; we need to prepare ourselves for that.

When? Now I am thirty-four; do I need to prepare for death when I get into my eighties? No, we need to prepare now. It’s not

because I am young that I am not going to die soon. If death looked at me and I said, “Oh, but I am young.” Death would be laughing and saying, “Why, because young people don’t die?” We are all going to die and we have no idea when so we need to prepare.

### **Five points to prepare for death**

There are five steps to prepare for death. I will just name them.

*The first point:* we need to relate in a healthy way to material things. We need to have material things as a means and not as a goal. The things that I have, have a function for me. So I am not attached to the material things I have.

*The second point:* we need to develop an identity that goes beyond this physical body, a deeper identity that can transcend this life.

*The third point:* we need to understand deeply and direct our lives so that we are not taken or driven by mental defilements such as anger and jealousy and so on.

*The fourth point:* we need to have a positive goal in our lives that transcends this life. For example, I never want to be separated from love, compassion and wisdom. I want to live in a stable and joyful state.

*The fifth point:* the fifth point is the power of familiarization. If I familiarize myself daily with love, with satisfaction, with wisdom and so on, gradually I will get there.

These are the five points that we need to follow to prepare for our own death. I believe is that it doesn’t matter what our religion is, whether we have a religion or not, what our culture is, where we come from; we want to be happy. So let’s do the right things in order to be happy. Let’s do something that works, that’s the main thing.

## 1. The power of virtue

The first one is called the power of virtue. The power of virtue means to relate to material things in a healthy way, which means that we use material things for the function they have and not simply to own them. This means going back home, looking at what I have, and asking myself, “What is the utility of this? What’s its function?” If it has no function, I sell it or I give it away. If it has a function then I keep it.

For example, there is an elderly lady in Brazil, a very good friend of mine. She has a beautiful collection of jewels. She’s a very generous person. One day when I was giving these teachings, she came to me and said, “Oh, I feel a little bit guilty about the jewellery that I have. It would be of much more benefit if I just sold all of it and I gave the money to help others. The truth is that I never wear any of it, but every once and a while I open the jewellery box, I look inside and each jewel has a memory connected to it.” She doesn’t have her husband anymore, she doesn’t have her children; everyone has passed away so there is a memory connected to each object. I said, “There is no problem. What is the function of these objects? It is the memory that they bring to you. So they do have a function.”

## 2. The power of intention

The second power is what we call the power of intention, which is the ability to have an identity that transcends this life. To make it clearer, there is a simple exercise that you can do. You need to write a letter of self-introduction. Imagine that whoever gets this letter must be able to recognize you in the middle of thousands of people. But there are some rules for writing this letter.

First of all you need to write it by hand; don’t use the computer. In the letter we cannot say our name or talk about our body:



I cannot say whether I am a man or a woman, whether I am tall or short. We cannot talk about our family: “I am the son of ... , the father of ...” or whatever. We cannot talk about our profession: “I am doctor, I am a lama, I am a lawyer, I am this, I am that.” We cannot talk about our social status, we cannot talk about things that we own: “I own of this, I did that.” Actions that I have done: “I have written a book.” We cannot talk about any of this.

Someone may ask me, “What am I going to say?” In the letter we are going to talk about our inner aspects. How we relate to the world internally: our emotions, our feelings that are independent of the actual external conditions. We are going to say things such as: “I am a person who, when I see someone in need, I will do anything to help that person.” Or instead - I am just inventing things - “I am a person who, if I see someone in need, I try to escape. I am a person who, if anybody talks about me or my family positively, I am very happy. But when they say something negative, I get so angry.”

So we write this letter - don't worry about being incoherent because we are incoherent. One very important rule about the letter is that no one can read it, only ourselves. Why? Because if someone else can read the letter, while we are writing it, we will already be worried: “Oh, if this person sees the letter, then maybe I'd better not say this.” No one but us can read the letter. When we finish the letter, we close it up. After six months we should write another letter. Then we open the one from before and we read it. And slowly, slowly we learn to know ourselves better and to have an identity that goes beyond our external parts.

### **3. The power of the antidote**

The third power is called the power of the antidote. The power of the antidote means to recognize that mental defilements are really harming us. And to have the total determination not to be taken by them: by anger, by jealousy, by pride, by miserliness and so on. Because according to Buddhism, one of the worst things that can happen to us when we die is to die with a negative emotion. There is a detailed reason why, but just know that is one of the worst things that can happen to us.

### **4. The power of prayer**

The fourth power is called the power of prayer, which is to direct ourselves to something positive. What do I want for myself that transcends this life? To have positive wishes for ourselves that transcend this life. Not something like: “I want to go to Heaven, where there is everything that I don’t have on Earth but that I would like to have.” Not these type of wishes but wishes that transcend this life that I can have also in this life. “I want to have joy, I want to have full compassion, may I always be full of wisdom, satisfaction and so on.”

### **5. The power of familiarization**

The fifth power is called the power of familiarization, which means to repeat positive attitudes again and again so that when we die we can have this state of mind. Because at the moment of my death I cannot say, “Wait a minute, I am not ready because I am having this bad emotion, let’s change the situation.” It’s not going to happen like that. Either I am familiarized with positive emotions, or they will not arise at that moment. So I have the power of familiarization. That’s a lifetime work.

## Death is the ultimate opportunity for spiritual growth

[Question from the audience: “Can I learn to see the beauty of my own death?”]

For me beauty is something that makes my mind happy, joyful. Not in a superficial way but in a deeper way. Lama Gangchen normally tells me the most beautiful of all beauties is a peaceful mind. If we take for example, a search on the Internet of images of the word *death*, most of the images that come up are quite ugly. But the image that comes to my mind when I say the word *death* is a beautiful golden light.

What happens during the process of death? Our body loses strength. As our body loses its strength, the gross mind, which is directly connected to the gross body also loses its strength. So all our conceptual parts stop functioning. What remains are our deeper emotional parts; feelings without the many names, dates and so on. Then the subtle body, the part of our energy, also loses strength and together with that our emotional part also loses its strength. What remains is what is called the very subtle body and the very subtle mind. So we go back to our essence.

Actually death is the best opportunity we have in our whole life, spiritually speaking, if we know how to use the process of death well. That’s why it is said that the yogis – the great practitioners – fear death their whole life –not fear in the sense that they are afraid of it, but they are preparing themselves for death their whole lives – but then they are very happy when it comes because death is the ultimate opportunity for spiritual growth.

Why? We have two aspects of our mind. One aspect which is spontaneous, in Tibetan it’s called *lhenke* ལྷན་སྦྱེད་, and one aspect which is constructed, which we call *kundak* གུན་བཏགས་. The constructed aspect of our mind is everything that comes

from our culture, from the education we receive and so on. What we need to transform is that which is spontaneous, not what is constructed. The spontaneous is the part that we bring from life to life. But when we try to change this spontaneous aspect of ourselves during our lifetime, it's very difficult because it is overwhelmed by the constructed aspects. During death none of this is there: we are face to face with ourselves, eye to eye. At that moment there are no more distractions. So if we are able to direct ourselves in the right direction during the process of death, that is the best opportunity we may ever have. And for me, this is extremely beautiful.

## **Conclusion**

What I am about to say may be very strange, but personally I really don't like talking, in the sense that I think verbal communication is one of the worst types of communication that exists. For people that know me in my daily life, I am really not a person that would say, "Okay let's have a chat." I really don't like talking. But the fact is that – and that's life – a great part of my life is spent talking. My point is that when we communicate, the words that we say are just a small part.

I believe very much in the intention that we put in the background. For example, like when I recited the prayers at the beginning to connect with my teachers and the teachers of my teachers. There is so much that we can bring to what we say: the intention we generate, the emotions we feel. What I said to you today here is what I believe and it is what I try to add to my own life. This is something that is very important.

To conclude, there are two sayings that help me very much in my daily life and I'd like to share them with you. The first saying

was taught to me by a Jewish rabbi when I was thirteen years old. His name is Newton Bonder, a very great person. My Jewish grandmother brought me to talk with the rabbi after I went to the monastery. “Something is wrong with my grandson, let’s see if someone can save him!” So I had to talk to the rabbi. It was an incredible meeting, because this rabbi followed the Kabbalah, and he was saying, “Oh yes, we also believe in reincarnation.” So it was quite interesting.

But the first thing the rabbi told me as we entered the room together ... He sat down to talk, he looked in my eyes and he told me, “If I am me because you are you, and if you are you because I am me, I am not me and you are not you. But if I am me because I am me, and if you are you because you are you, then we can talk.”

Let me repeat it again. If I am me because you are you, which means: if I act in a way because you are here, I am not myself. And if you are you because I am me, you are not you. But if I am me because I am me, and if you are you because you are you, then we are sincere. We are real, so we can talk.

One thing I truly believe is that we need to be ourselves in life, regardless. Let’s not try to live the life of other people or try to be something else because people are there watching or whatever. Sure, we need to adapt to others’ needs but while being sincere with ourselves. This is advice that, according to me, really helps a lot.

The second saying and last thing I’d like to share today is one Tibetan verse. As I said before, one of my main defects is laziness, so this verse always helps me. It is from one master called Künden Jampelyang, a Tibetan master from around four centuries ago, and he said, [*speaking Tibetan*]

རྗེད་དགོས་རྗེད་དགོས་བསམ་ནས་ཉི་ཤུ་སོང་། | jé gö jé gö sam né nyi shu song  
 མ་བྱུང་མ་བྱུང་བསམ་ནས་ཉི་ཤུ་སོང་། | ma jung ma jung sam né nyi shu song  
 ཨ་ཀ་ཨ་ཀ་བསམ་གནས་ཉི་ཤུ་སོང་། | a ka a ka sam né nyi shu song  
 དེ་ལྟར་ངང་ལས་ཨོ་ངོར་དྲུག་བཅུ་སྟོང་། | dé tar ngang lé o ngor druk chu long  
 མི་ཚེ་སྟོང་བར་བཟང་བའི་རྣམ་མཐར་ཡིན། | mi tsé tong par zé pé nam tar yin

In English it would be something like this:

*Thinking of doing it, thinking of doing it, twenty years passed by.*

*I couldn't do it, I couldn't do it, twenty years passed by.*

*Oh, why didn't I do it, oh, why didn't I do it, twenty years passed by.*

*In such way, sixty years passed by. That's the biography of an empty life.*

If we add to it:

*Not thinking of doing it, not thinking of doing it, twenty years passed by,*

we get to eighty, because during that time life expectancy was more or less sixty years.

My point is that if there is anything we want to do, we must start today, without excuses. Especially if we want to change any attitude within ourselves. If we want to prepare for death, we need to do it today, not tomorrow or any other time.

I want to thank everyone deeply and make one very small request to all of you. The request is: please, you don't need to remember my name, you don't need to remember anything else, the only thing I ask of you is that if there is anything that I said that you think may be of benefit, please do the best you can to put it into practice. That's the only thing I ask. Thank you very much.

## About Lama Michel Rinpoche

Lama Michel Rinpoche is a Buddhist master following the NgalSo Ganden Nyengyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, under the spiritual guidance of Lama Gangchen Tulku Rinpoche.

Born in São Paulo, Brazil in 1981, Lama Michel was recognized as a Tulku (the reincarnation of a Buddhist master) at the age of 8 and ordained as a monk at 12. He received a formal education of Buddhist practice and philosophy for 12 years at the Monastic University of Sera Me in the south of India. He continues his studies with annual visits to the Monastery of Tashi Lhumpo in Shigatse, Tibet-China.

Since 2004 he has been residing in Italy, dedicating his life to serving his Guru, Lama Gangchen Rinpoche, and generously sharing his experience and wisdom in many formal and informal situations, such as conferences, teachings, retreats and school visits.

Under the guidance of Lama Gangchen Rinpoche, he oversees several Buddhist centers such as the Kunpen Lama Gangchen in Milan, Italy, Albagnano Healing Meditation Centre in Albagnano on Lake Maggiore, Italy and the Centro de Dharma da Paz in São Paulo, Brazil.

For more information and NgalSo Livestream video teachings, visit:



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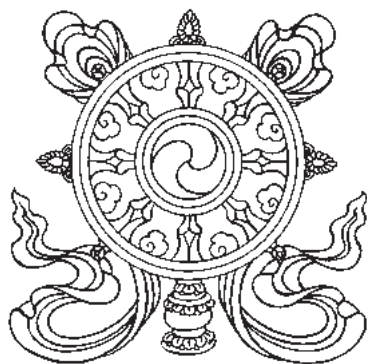
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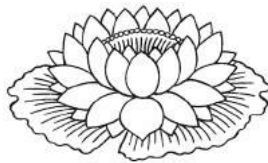
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