

Oral Instructions and Commentary

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‘Drop of Ambrosia’ A Short Practice of Medicine Buddha

Chapter 1

Please generate the altruistic attitude necessary to attain perfect Buddhahood. Realize that only through attaining that state of the highest wisdom and compassion will one be able to establish each and every living being who has been one’s own kind mother in countless lifetimes in the past. To establish each and every one of them in the true and unchanging happiness that comes only with the attainment of Supreme Liberation. Resolve to listen attentively, to the teachings, to commit them to mind, and then to put them into actual practice. Today we are going to look at the practice of the Medicine Buddha, as contained in this short volume: ‘The Drop of Ambrosia.’

The first two lines of the text refer to the refuge, the taking of refuge. The objects of the refuge, that is those in which we take refuge are the Buddha, His teachings, which are the Dharma, and His enlightened followers who are the Sangha. The translation of the first line here, part of it has been left out. What was left out is the term ‘tag-tu’, which means continually, perpetually. This means that when one takes refuge it is not just for the moment, but it is from this moment on, until one has attained complete, perfect Buddhahood. Up until that moment one will continue to take refuge.

How will one take refuge? One will take refuge by way of the three doors. One takes refuge physically, verbally, and mentally. Those are the three doors. What is one taking refuge from? One is taking refuge from all of the aspects of what is called samsara, all of the miseries of samsara, all of the dangers of samsara, and so forth. It is from that; one takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. One way in which one can think about this, or some people think about this, is that they are taking refuge for themselves and from the terrors of the three lower realms. This means that through taking refuge, they seek to avoid rebirth in the lower realms and attain rebirth in the one of the three upper or more ‘pleasant’ realms. Another way that some people can think about refuge, when they go for refuge, is to take refuge with the idea of being thereby protected from, not only the miseries of the three lower realms, but from the miseries of samsara in general. Such people take refuge with the idea of attaining the peaceful liberation for themselves. This consists in the attainment of nirvana as an Arhat. This is the case of someone is thinking to attain liberation, only for him or herself. This is the way many people approach the taking of refuge. However, on this occasion, we can see in the following lines, the refuge is being taken, not just to free oneself from the miseries and unfortunate qualities of Samsara. Rather, the motivation for the refuge here is to attain the highest state of unsurpassed enlightenment to free all other sentient beings from the miseries of samsara. This is what distinguishes the Mahayana refuge from other motivations. Whichever of these three types of motivation one has for taking refuge, they are all Buddhist practices because one is taking refuge in

the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Therefore it is said that taking refuge is the very foundation of all Buddhism. It is the first step in all Buddhist practice.

As it is beginning of all Buddhist practice, the Refuge Vow is the foundation of all other vows. As it is the entrance way into Buddhist practice, it is the foundation of all attainments, all of the progress upon the path that is subsequently made. Therefore if one takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, one qualifies himself/herself to be considered a Buddhist.

In this particular line of refuge in the text, it says here “I take refuge respectfully through my three doors”, the term respectful is not quite strong enough for what is being said here. The term in Tibetan is ‘gu’i-pay’ means devotion. So, it is not enough to be respectful because respectfulness does not necessarily entail faith and without faith there is no entering into the State of Refuge. The text, indicates in Tibetan the taking of refuge with devotion, with a sense of deep faith in the three objects of refuge and in their ability to provide refuge from all of the miseries and fears of samsara. Refuge is the foundation of all Buddhist practice; it is the doorway, or entranceway into Buddhist practice. Faith and devotion are the foundations of Refuge, the entranceways to taking Refuge. The mind of faith and devotion is so fundamental to attaining the State of Refuge, it is important to look at what is meant here by ‘faith and devotion’. There are different types of faith, one is called the ‘Faith of Clarity’ The completely clear, pure, unobstructed faith arising when one’s mind is overcome with devotion to an object. When one just thinking, or seeing, about that object completely captivating the mind. Then the mind becomes completely clear and free of anything else other than that one-pointed devotion, that complete admiration for the object. That is what is meant here. One needs that type of faith, it is the looking upon the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) and being overcome with this complete sense of devotion.

The second type of faith implied in this statement is called the ‘Faith of Desire’. The faith of desire is that aspect of devotion, which arises in respect to an object, which one deeply admires and wishes to attain the qualities of that object. Looking upon the Buddha and being overcome with the magnificence of his attainment, or looking upon the Medicine Buddha and understanding his magnificent qualities of healing and so forth, there arises a desire to attain those qualities. At least there is the aspiration to attain the benefits of those qualities, such as the blessings of the Buddha, the blessings of the Medicine Buddha to overcome all obstacles. There is the desire for what the object of devotion has to give. That is the other type of devotion, which is implied here in this statement of taking of refuge with devotion.

The third type of devotion or faith evoked here, is the ‘Faith of Confidence’. It is when one’s attitude towards the object of faith is free of all doubt, free from all hesitation. One is completely confident of the qualities of the object, believes in them totally without reservation. Of these, three types of faith, the most significant here is the third: the ‘Faith of Confidence’. If one possesses this third type of faith, the absolute, unreserved confidence without any doubt or hesitation in the object of refuge, then all of the empowering blessings of the Buddha will be very easily received. One will be able to receive them all. Therefore, it is said, that if you divide the level of your faith into different degrees: lesser faith, middle level of faith, and greater faith, then, relating to that particular type, one will attain three different degrees of blessings: a little blessing, a middling amount of blessing, or a full measure of blessing. This also means if one has no faith whatsoever, one will receive no blessings. This is a very clear exchange of value: if one has faith, one receives blessing; if one has no faith, one receives no blessings. The more faith you have, the more blessings you will receive. The connection between faith and blessing is something of which we should be very aware. What this means in

practice is if one has faith in the Dharma, one will get the blessings of the Dharma. Why is that? It is because if one has faith in the Dharma, one will practice it. If one has no faith, if one's mind fills with hesitation, doubt, and lack of clarity, then one's attitude towards practice will be very, very weak. If one has this very clear 'Faith of Confidence', without any doubt or hesitation, then one will, of course, undertake one's practice with enthusiasm. Therefore, the blessings of the practice will quickly accrue. Otherwise one will be obstructed by one's doubts, one's interest in undertaking practice will be much diminished, and the blessings of the practice will not arise. This attitude of confidence is something we can as powerful in all situations. It does not have to be just in respect to the Dharma. For any effective or meaningful interaction to take place between people normally there has to be some level of confidence. The effective interaction one has with others is based upon confidence. If it is a friend, a business associate, a relative, or anyone like that, in order to work functionally with them in such a way that is beneficial to both people, you have to have some level of confidence. If you have confidence in someone, the more confidence you have, the more efficiently you can work with them, the more benefit will arise from that. Understanding that if one is to be effective, even in worldly terms, one will have to inspire confidence in others. One will have to be somewhat trusted by others or else one will not be able to interact effectively with them. Understanding that, one naturally and seriously takes on the task of inspiring others with confidence. Acting in such a way that will lead others to have confidence. Part of the reason this sense of confidence is so important is that it leads to a sense of happiness, or comfort, between people. If you feel confident or trusting towards another, and they feel that towards you, then there naturally rises comfort, happiness, and enjoyment with each other. Interpersonal relationships are based much on trust and confidence in one another. Likewise, when this confidence is lost, when begins to feel hesitation or doubt about someone, one starts to question what that person will do, then tension, uncomfortable feelings, and strife arise. So much of the problem of interpersonal relationships begins in the lack of confidence, that people have not succeeded in inspiring and maintaining confidence in one another. On this occasion, we are looking at the Three Jewels as the objects of our confidence. If we are to take up the practice of the Dharma and interact effectively with Buddha, Dharma and, Sangha we must have this confidence in them. It is out of this confidence that we find the faith, that we engage in the practice, and receive the blessings. It is very important to take this seriously, to develop 'Faith of Confidence'. If one lacks it, if one has doubts, then this will undercut or subvert the processes of the Dharma. Therefore, the very first line of the text invokes the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha as the refuge; and follows it with the exhortation to go for refuge in the Triple Gem. One can only proceed through the practice effectively if one truly develops deep, clear and confident faith.

The next line speaks of other living beings and refers to them as living beings who have been one's own mother, and now tormented and oppressed by misery. The word translated in the text here as 'sentient beings', (in Tibetan 'dro-wa', this is the substantive form of the verb 'to go'), literally means 'goers': those who go, those who move about, animate beings. Called this for various reasons, but principally because sentient beings go from one birth to another. They are called goers because they wander about. They migrate. So, the question is why do they migrate? Why do they wander around? Why go from one realm to another? The answer is they go in that way, because the force of Karma is driving them there. Helplessly driven, they go without plan. They are not deciding: "I will be born in this realm and next time in another realm." They are helplessly driven to take rebirth by their own Karma. There is no laying this out, there is no planning, as if we set ourselves an agenda or a calendar and make plans for what we are going to do in a few weeks or months. There is no ability to do that. Once one is caught in the process of samsara, the cycle of birth and death, one is born repeatedly by the force of Karma. Determination of rebirth, whether it is good or bad, is by one's Karma. The karma which, the effect of the activities that drive us, cause us to wander about in a somewhat unconscious,

helpless fashion. One's wandering through the various realms of samsara can be compared to an insect, such as an ant, trapped inside a jar. The ant will just wander about crawling up the side, staying a while in one part, then on to another part, sometimes on the bottom of the jar, sometimes wandering up to the top without any sensible plan or strategy. There is no place to go, the lid is sealed tight, and the ant cannot emerge from the jar. Trapped, it can only wander up and down here and there. This is very much the situation for the 'goers', the living beings. This term 'goer' or sentient being refers to all living beings without exception who are trapped in the cycles of birth and death. The text here, "Dug-Ngel Narway", means tormented by miseries. Why are all living beings trapped in samsara? Why are they tormented by sufferings? Why are they tormented by miseries? The reason is that this is the very nature of existence within samsara. It is characterized by misery, so no matter where you go in samsara the basic nature of the experience will be unsatisfactory. There is more and less misery, but misery pervades every single place. It is just like the ant: wherever it goes, it is still trapped in that jar. There is no place in samsara, which is free of suffering. Therefore, it is said that living beings are oppressed by miseries. Understanding this, we have the following line: "La-Me Go-Phang Gö-Chyir Sem-Kye-Do", which offers the solution for all those living beings. The solution is to free them of the trap in which they found themselves. Just like letting the ant out of the jar. It is put in the form of a pledge or a resolve, if you will, showing a determination that we cultivate as practitioners to establish these living beings in the state of ultimate perfect and continual happiness: supreme enlightenment. The verb in the sentence is 'Kye', which means to generate, to give rise to. This is a pledge to generate within one's mind the firm resolution to complete the task of establishing all sentient beings in the Supreme State of Liberation. The object of one's concern, those who one wishes to establish in this state of highest liberation, are these 'wanderers', these 'goers' who are trapped in samsara like the ant in the jar. The text here says: "...sentient beings who have been my mothers.", what does that mean 'mothers'? What this means is that we are trapped in samsara, in the cycle of birth and death. Though it is very large and contains all the different worlds, it is like that jar in which the ant is trapped. It is sealed. We wander around within it. So, in one lifetime, just as in this present lifetime, we have a mother and a father. Therefore, we did in the last lifetime and in the one before that. There is no beginning to the process of birth and death. There is no limit to it. The process is cyclical. It has been going on and on from beginningless time. Each time we are reborn, we have a mother and a father. Therefore, within this closed system of samsara, there is not a single living being who has not, at one point or another, been our own kind mother. When we look upon sentient beings, it is not as though we look upon strangers. Other than not recollecting when they were our mothers, it is certain that at some point in the past they were. This entails an obligation to look out for their welfare. It is all the more reason why we should be concerned with freeing them from their miseries and establish them in the state of highest liberation. This foundation for practice, established through refuge and the generation of altruistic aspiration to attain the highest liberation for all living beings, we now proceed to the actual practice of the Medicine Buddha.

Chapter 2

We begin our hearing and contemplation of this teaching by resolving to listen to and practice the Dharma and thereby enable ourselves to establish all sentient beings in the state of Liberation and Highest Enlightenment.

We began this morning by looking at the text 'The Drop of Ambrosia', and went through the first part of it which is the taking of refuge and the generation of the Bodhisattva attitude. Now we will continue with some commentary on the meaning of the text and the strategies for practice. The text starts out with the visualization of the Medicine Buddha who we see in front of us. He is seated upon

a throne supported by lions. Upon the throne are a lotus, a solar disk, and a lunar disk. Upon that lunar disk sits the Buddha who is the color of Lapis Lazuli. He is the Buddha of Medicine. He is holding a stem of the king of medicinal herbs, the Mairobalan plant, in his right hand. In His left hand, He holds an alms bowl, which again is made of Lapis Lazuli. He radiates the light of the 32 major and the 80 minor marks of the fully enlightened being. He appears in the in the Nirmanakaya form, meaning he appears as did the Lord Buddha in this world, dressed in the three types of monastic robes. We visualize Him surrounded by all the lineage Lamas, Yidams, the seven Medicine Buddhas and Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as numerous as dust particles in the sunlight. The text says 'dust particles in the sunlight' because when the sun shines through a window you can see little particles of dust. So, if you can imagine all of light rays in all directions, there would be innumerable visible dust particles. This to show how extensive the numbers of fully enlightened beings, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, which surround the Medicine Buddha.

From the three places, that is the 'Om' in His crown chakra, the 'Ah' in His throat chakra, the 'Hum' in His Heart chakra, go forth rays of light. These rays of light go forth in all directions, taking the form of invitations to the wisdom beings who correspond with each of those being visualized. Those actual wisdom beings are actual Lamas, Yidams, Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas now coming from wherever they are and dissolve into the visualized forms that correspond with them. They are what is called 'the pledge-beings'. That is to say, those who arise through one's own visualization, becoming identical with the 'wisdom-beings', the actual beings that correspond to the visualized beings. So, the Medicine Buddha we visualize in front of us becomes identical with the actual Medicine Buddha; likewise for all of the Lamas, Yidams, Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas. We now have in front of us all of these innumerable Buddhas and Bodhisattvas surrounding the Medicine Buddha himself. All of them take on the nature of ultimate wisdom, universal compassion, and the powers and abilities of the fully enlightened being and put them into action to overcome the miseries which cause trouble for all living beings. They take on their true nature to relieve these miseries and in particular those sufferings arising from illness. As we visualize the deities in front of us, we then make offerings.

The way offerings are made is to generate from our meditation the seven types of offering goddesses, each specializing in a different type of offering. Each type of the goddesses go forth making offerings to each of the innumerable assembled enlightened beings, principal among them the Medicine Buddha himself.

Here in the text it says:

'Sarwa Tathagata' that means 'All Enlightened Beings';

'Sapariwara' means 'together with their retinue';

'Argham' means 'the offering water used for drinking';

'Prastitsa' means 'please enjoy';

'Swaha' seals the offering.

Then you substitute each of the other offerings instead of 'Argham'.

'Padyam' means the water for washing.

'Pushpam' means flowers.

'Dhupam' means incense.

'Alokam' means the lamps.

'Ghande' means the perfumed oils.

'Newite' means the food offering.

'Shapta' means the music offering.

Each of these are offered by the class of offering goddesses associated with the particular offering to each and every one of the assembled deities.

Having made the offerings, the next section concerns the offering of praise. It is where the special characteristics that make the Medicine Buddha worthy of our praise and worship are enumerated in brief. The first of these is that His compassion extends to all living beings with complete impartiality. This first defining characteristic of the Buddha called 'Chom Den Dey' in Tibetan, in Sanskrit it is Bhagavan. It has three syllables 'Chom' 'Den' 'Dey'. The first means to overcome, or vanquish the maras. Den means to possess, to possess all the merit, all the good qualities arising from the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. Dey means transcend. What is transcended? The Buddha transcends both samsara as well as nirvana. He does not abide in either of them. He attained the ultimate state of transcendence. He is therefore the Chom Den Dey, the Bhagavan who is equal in His loving-kindness and compassion to every sentient being. The next line says that merely by hearing His name, all of the miseries that living beings encounter in the lower realms are dispelled. This to show His supreme power in clearing away suffering. The next line says "Divine Medicine Buddha, you clear away the illnesses arising from the three poisons (greed, anger and ignorance)." The three basic types of disease are the processes of wind, bile, and phlegm. They are associated respectively with the three poisons of desire, hatred, and delusion. Clearing away the three poisons one puts in balance all of the bodily constituents and becomes free of disease. Therefore, the Medicine Buddha clears away all of the diseases associated with these three poisons. The last line says "I praise and prostrate to you Light of the Lapis Lazuli." This part of the practice involves the accumulation of merit through the seven limbs of practice. The first of these is obeisance. This is where we bow down and pray. For prostrations to produce merit it has to be done in a certain way, whether it is done with body, speech, and mind, it has to be done with the mind of devotion and reverence. Obeisance must be performed with deep faith and veneration. It has to be done in a meditative state allowing one to prostrate while offering obeisance and praise to each of the visualized, invoked, and named Buddhas and wisdom beings. To make this offering of praise and obeisance, one has to develop meditative power. To understand what this means, look at the words of this prayer. It defines the way one prostrates says that all of these Buddhas are visualized in front of you. They are as numerous as the little particles of dust that appear in the sunlight. In other words, there are innumerable Buddhas. Meditate on this: upon each particle of dust, there abides as many Buddhas as there particles of dust. Their vast retinues of enlightened disciples surround each of the Buddhas who exist on each particle of dust. In this way, the entirety of space, in all directions, is completely filled with these dust particles. It is to them that we offer praise and obeisance. To be effective, we must do this through the power of our meditation, and emanate sufficient numbers of our bodies to bow down to every one the Buddhas and their retinues. Each of those bodies goes forth with a mind of reverence and deep faith and prostrates to the Buddhas and their retinues. This is something we have to practice; increasing our ability to do so effectively.

The second is offerings, and is what we have covered so far. Third is confession. The third way engages in the limb of bowing to the enlightened beings with one's mind stabilized by 'correct understanding.' 'Correct Understanding' is the understanding that does not objectify the Three Spheres (the Three Spheres being the object to which we bow down, the one who bows down, and the bowing itself). If we objectify any of the Three Spheres, we lose correct understanding. Free the mind that clings to inherent existence of the Three Spheres, we bow down effectively with Right (Correct) Understanding.

The next limb of practice, is the Confession. It says in the text: "I confess the evil deeds I committed since beginningless time." This means not only from this lifetime, but also from innumerable lifetimes where there is a tremendous accumulation of various types of non-virtuous karma. This can be purified only through the process of confession, which relies on the Four Powers. Otherwise, one cannot get rid of the effects of the bad karma, and will have to experience the result as great misery or suffering. Principal here are the powers that arise from shame and fear. Shame refers to what one feels when one becomes aware of the presence of the enlightened being. In this case, the Medicine Buddha, the omniscient fully enlightened being from whose wisdom eye nothing is hidden. One realizes then, that the Medicine Buddha knows and understands clearly, all of one's misdeeds from beginningless time to this lifetime. So, one feels a sense of shame. Here, one relies on the first of the Four Powers: the Power of Support. The support upon which one depends for the confession and purification of non-virtue is the Medicine Buddha Himself. Feeling shame when one realizes that He understands all of one's misdeeds. Then, one relies upon Him, confessing to Him, openly expressing one's misdeeds from beginningless time, seeking to hide nothing. One seeks to set things right with respect to Him. He is the support.

Next is the fear that arises when one understands the inexorable nature of Karma. Engaging in an activity, whether good or bad, one will inevitably experience the result, unless one somehow purifies it. The metaphor here is that although one has eaten poison, and has great fear of the sickness and pain will ensue, one will immediately do something about it. This is called the Power of Regret, the second of the Four powers. Here one strongly regrets the non-virtue the one engaged in, because one understands it is poisonous, pernicious nature that can lead to tremendous suffering.

The third power is the Power of Resolve. It is where one understands the consequences of misdeeds, and resolves never to engage in such activities again.

The fourth of the Four Powers is the Power of the Antidote. That is the doing of something that will counteract the effects of the unwholesome activities, such as the practice of Vajrasattva Purification. This is where one meditates upon Vajrasattva and invokes the Purifying Blessings of Vajrasattva. It is seen as nectar flowing out of Him into oneself, clearing out all bad Karma and obscurations; purifying one's body, speech, and mind in that way replacing those unwholesome things with the pure nectar of awareness. Practicing the Vajrasattva mantra, and meditating on the process of purification, this acts as an antidote to the non-virtues. In this way the Four Powers are put into practice to purify all of one's bad karma.

The next of the seven limbs of practice is the remembrance of engagement in this to build up merit. To have tremendous merit built up through the bowing down, praising and offering to these innumerable beings; the offering to even one of them produces tremendous merit. When one is multiplying one's body to do this produces enormous merit. Then getting rid of all the demerit is another aspect of building up merit, because the demerit counteracts the merit, so we have to get rid of that through confession.

Next is the Limb of Rejoicing in the virtues of others. It is the opposite of envy and jealousy. It is where, instead of feeling uncomfortable or unhappy, in seeing the pleasures of others, one rejoices in these things. It is the opposite of envy or jealousy. Understanding that the attainments, the possessions, the pleasures, the good qualities of others, and so forth, arise from their accomplishment of virtue: their generosity and so forth. One rejoices when one sees someone who is happy, someone who good possessions and so forth. Even more, one rejoices in the good, the meritorious

accomplishments of others, because this is the highest good that one can do for oneself. To produce merit in ordinary terms, the best action in the world is to do that; and then when one sees someone else do it, one should, without any envy or jealousy rejoice in that. Therefore the Buddha says that if you, upon seeing the enjoyment and meritorious virtuous deed of someone else, rejoice from the bottom of your heart, then the merit you produce in that rejoicing is equal to merit produced by the person who actually engaged in that virtuous deed.

The branch of requesting the Buddha to turn the Wheel of the Dharma is very important, and again, produces great merit because the Buddha cannot turn the Wheel of the Dharma unless requested. This is why when the Lord Buddha manifested perfect, complete enlightenment in Bodhgaya; there was a period of forty-nine days when he didn't say anything. He didn't teach. His teaching awaited the request for the teaching. The god Brahma accompanied by the god Indra requested it. They came to him, exhorted and supplicated Him to turn the Wheel of Dharma. Only when requested by living beings in a certain world is it beneficial for the Wheel of Dharma to be turned. Aware of this, we should exhort the Buddha who appears before us to please turn the Wheel of Dharma of the three vehicles (Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana).

The next branch, which is the sixth of seven, is the entreaty to the Buddhas to stay in the world for the benefit of sentient beings. Fully Enlightened Ones have the ability to withdraw their manifestation in the world and enter into a nirvanic state, but do not do so out of concern for the living beings of the world. However this can only happen when they are requested to teach. If there is no request, there is no one listening. Likewise there is no use staying in a place where no one expresses the desire for an Enlightened One to remain. It is very important, then, to request that the teacher remain in the world. This is exemplified in the life of Sakyamuni Buddha, who, many times as the years passed on, remained in the world when requested, instead of leaving. For instance there was a time when he was ready to go and a disciple named Tsunda begged Him to stay in the world and continue to teach. It was upon that the Buddha remained in the world for some further years. Therefore the sixth limb is the request to the teacher not to leave the world, but stay as long as sentient beings wander in Samsara. This section of the text ends with the sixth limb of the practice, namely the request for the Buddha to remain in the world for the benefit of sentient beings, as long as they wander in Samsara.

The seventh limb, which is not in the text at this point, but at the end of it, is the dedication of merit of these six limbs. The limbs of prostrations, offerings, confessions, rejoicing in the good qualities of others, the exhortation to teach, and the prayer to remain in the world, are dedicated for the purpose of attaining complete enlightenment encompassing the welfare of all sentient beings. The purpose of the dedication is to protect the merit of the six branches. One has generated all this merit but if one does nothing to protect it, then it will be wasted and squandered in worldly activities. So, instead of letting that happen, one dedicates it to the highest goal. In that way, it is not only protected, it is saved from being squandered on worldly aims. This way the merit will accumulate like a savings account until one attains perfect enlightenment. That concludes the seven limbs of practice.

Chapter 3

Please listen to the teachings with a clear and sincere motivation to gradually learn what is being taught. Learn it thoroughly. Put it into practice, progressing from one stage to the next, gradually increasing your clarity and strength of practice to attain the highest state of enlightenment. With the motivation of relieving all living beings of their miseries, liberate them from their cycle of existence and place them in the highest, purest state of happiness and peace which is enlightenment.

We continue now, as we did yesterday, with the explanation of the practice of the Medicine Buddha called 'The Drop of Ambrosia.' What we've covered so far are the first several pages of the text. First was the process of taking refuge. Next the generating of altruistic motivation of attaining Buddhahood for the sake of others. Then we covered the methods of generating merit consisting of the seven branches of practice. Those three things have now been completed.

If you look on page 6 of the text, having completed the refuge, the bodhicitta generation, and the seven branches of practice, which generate merit. Now, what do with this state of refuge, this bodhisattva attitude we've generated and with all of the merit from the seven branches of practice? What we do is go into the central practice of the Medicine Buddha. Here it refers first to the Medicine Buddha himself. It calls him the 'Bhagavan', 'Chom Den Dey' in Tibetan. As was explained yesterday, the three words (in Tibetan), the first 'Chom' means the He has vanquished all of the Maras and demons. Inner, outer and so forth... 'Den', that He possesses all the good qualities, and 'Dey', that He transcends all limitations of Samsara and Nirvana. That is His nature, He is the fully enlightened Buddha. In particular, as Medicine Buddha, He is known as the 'King of Medicine'. We are addressing Him as the teacher, the Lama, the Bhagavan, the king of all healers and physicians. The second line 'that He possesses in his very nature the great glory of the spontaneous attainment of the two benefits', so spontaneous means that this is His very nature: the attainment of the two benefits. This not something that He has to struggle for or work hard for, but it arises out of His nature. Therefore He is said to have the tremendous, marvelous glory of this spontaneous achievement of the two benefits. The two benefits are the benefit for oneself and the benefit for others. The benefit for oneself is the attainment of the of the 'truth body', the Dharmakaya. The benefit for others is the attainment of the 'form body', the Rupakaya. The highest benefit that any individual can achieve is the Dharmakaya for him. Then, for the benefit of others they manifest the 'form bodies', such as the Nirmanakaya and the Samboghakaya. These two things are achieved by the very nature of the Medicine Buddha. The next line refers to sentient beings being the object of compassion. They are defined here as all living beings within the realms of birth and death.

What defines them and how we understand their nature is that they are oppressed by the illnesses of the three poisons. They are tormented by sicknesses of the three poisons. The three poisons are greed, anger, and ignorance. These poisons are the basis of all suffering in the world. So, they are said to be the three root diseases, which oppress sentient beings. The next line, in regard to these sentient beings, states that we now resolve to aspire, to engage in activities which bring about the great happiness and bliss that consists of complete freedom from all these basic illnesses that arise from the three poisons. What we are clearing away with the practice, are the diseases of sentient beings. So it is important to understand these in order to treat them and bring about the freedom from disease and illness.

The basic root of all illness as defined here are the three poisons, which disturb, in one way or another, the constituent elements of the body and mind. The poisons, again, are greed (or lust), anger (or hatred), and ignorance (or delusion). These disturb the psychophysical organism. In particular they disturb the three basic processes, which govern the organism, and those are known as 'lung-tri-began' in Tibetan, which can be loosely translated as 'wind, bile and phlegm'. The balance of the three basic processes is upset through the influence of desire, hatred, and ignorance. Ultimately, to bring the body into balance and to get rid of disease, we have to deal with these underlying factors. Understanding then, that the three poisons are basis for the disturbance of constituent elements of the organism resulting in diseases, it is also important to understand what is the basis for these three poisons: why do these arise? It is because they have a root cause, what can be called a fundamental

ignorance with regard to the nature of all phenomena. Although all phenomena, without exception, lack any self, they lack any 'true' or inherent existence as such. Even though they lack inherent existence, it is through this contamination of erroneous mental process, that one begins to grasp 'self'. This means that one sees things, as being inherently existent, where, in reality, they aren't. For example, with regard to yourself, you see a 'self' that truly exists. This is an example of the contamination of the intellectual conception of inherent existence, and that is what is meant by the term 'fundamental ignorance'. It is from this fundamental ignorance that the three poisons arise, resulting in the various types of unwholesome mental factors. On the physical level, they result in the imbalance of the corporal system, which leads to various disease processes. This type of ignorance, this seeing of things as inherently existing, is called 'innate ignorance' because it is something that comes with us from beginningless time, throughout all of the lifetimes into which we are born again and again. It is not something we came up with at some point. It has always been there. It is the ignorance that falsely construes phenomena to inherently exist. Because of this innate ignorance, the resultant types of imbalances are always with us.

They don't always manifest, even though we are never separated from them. When we are in a state of equanimity, when we are completely free of ignorance, we think we have gained some freedom from the three poisons in the disease process. This is like the bird whose shadow is there but cannot be seen because it is cloudy outside. It just awaits the coming together of conditions, the conditions that allow it to become manifest, such as sunlight. The causal factors are always present for the imbalances of the diseases. They only await the conditions to make them manifest, when those conditions manifest, then suddenly one has one or another type of imbalance or illness.

This simile of the birds helps us to illustrate this, but it only goes so far, because the bird, so long as he is flying under the sun, there will always have a shadow. However there is a way that we can become separated from basic causes of illness, when we become free of their ultimate underlying cause; innate ignorance. Once we've done that, we lack the cause of illness or any type of imbalance. No matter what conditions arise, we will not be subjected to illness. As long as the bird is there, you have a shadow. If you remove the bird, you'll have no shadow. With the removal of 'innate ignorance', there can be no cause allowing illnesses to arise. What we have here, is a progression from the ultimate root cause (innate ignorance) to the generation of the unwholesome mental factors of greed, hatred, and delusion and from that to the imbalances of the winds, bile, and phlegm. In this way we can understand how the processes proceed according to the combinations of the underlying mental factors. We've talked, here, about the specific way in which diseases arise. That is to say the ultimate source of illness is 'innate ignorance' and the unwholesome mental factors that arise from that disturb the constituent elements of the body, leading to disease processes.

In particular how do we understand this? What is the precise basis of the arising of each type of illness? Here we have the analysis of the origins, or the etiology, of different types of diseases, and though there innumerable diseases, they can be summed up into three categories. Those diseases, whose origins are associated with disturbance of the 'winds', come from some a certain unfortunate event and are associated with the Wind God. The Wind God at one time was travelling around and he saw the princess Norbu Zinpba (which means in Tibetan 'Holder of the Jewels'). She was also a goddess associated with the wind. The Wind God hadn't met her before and when looked upon her, she was incredibly beautiful, ornamented by different jewels, and there arose within him a desire towards Norbu Zinpba. They entered into a relationship; specifically they embraced in a sexual way. Just as they were having sex, he lost his grip on the 'Bladder of the Wind' which held in the forces of

the wind, and of course, it opened up and they spilled out. This is the source all wind illnesses. This is why the source of wind illnesses is excessive desire.

The origin of the diseases associated with the bile is also associated with a certain king. He was a historical king. His name was Sherab Tengpo Sheten. Sheten means 'firm wisdom'. He decided to make a great offering ceremony to the gods and the great rishis (yogis). He invited them and they all arrived one by one. They came in front of the king to receive their offerings. It so happened that the god Shiva ended up at the end of the line. He was very unhappy with this and thought: "now I am the preeminent god of the world, and I shouldn't be at the end of the line." There arose within Shiva a great anger. Now, this was a very auspicious event that the king Sheten put together. There were beautiful, extensive offerings. The guests were also very auspicious; there were all of these wonderful gods, goddesses, and rishis. But Shiva at the line was getting very angry, his eyes blazing forth with anger and, from the center of his forehead, he shot out a stream of fire. The fire burned up all the offerings and dispersed the crowd, incinerating them, or chasing them off, in any case the whole beautiful event was ruined by his anger. This is the origin of the rise in the bile element. We can understand from this, just as all those good things lost from Shiva's anger, the nature of anger and the rise of bile. When the bile gets too great, anger arises. The bile is associated with the presence of strong anger.

The third category of illness is that of phlegm. This also has an origin. The introduction phlegm illnesses into the world are associated with a king of the ancient times. His name was Gyalway Ming. He had a beautiful queen whose name was Remaya. He also had a minister whose name was Tongo Chien. The queen and the minister struck up a friendship, which eventually came to the notice of King Gyalway Ming. The king became angry as he thought they were too friendly, so to speak. His anger resulted in having the queen and minister taken out into the middle of the ocean and tossed overboard. As this was occurring, Remaya and Tongo Chien said a prayer (munlam, which is a type of a prayer). They prayed that the king, who they referred to as 'nasty and insufferable', be beset with an incurable illness of the nagas. The illnesses that are said to arise from the influence of the nagas or from any sort of local deities are then associated with the phlegm category. The force of their prayer, which was very strong and focused, produced the desired effect. The naga disease indeed struck the king. This was the first phlegm illness to enter the world. From that time on phlegm illnesses have spread throughout the world. In the former accounts of the wind and the bile illnesses it is clear how strong desire gave rise to the wind illnesses and strong anger gave rise to the bile illnesses. Here the present story illustrates how delusion (or ignorance) gives rise to the phlegm illnesses. It is not as clear here, and that is the nature of delusion. All parties, that is to say the king, queen, and minister, were not clear as to an appropriate resolution of events. They could have been clearer in their thinking. This event is indicative of disturbances of the mind. So, this event is associated with the generation of all phlegm illnesses.

Now, back on page six, the last line says: "May all sentient beings come to enjoy that great happiness and bliss which is complete freedom from illness. This is the goal: understanding the causes of illnesses, both general and specific, and because they have ultimate causes, the causes can be removed. Illnesses are not inherent. They are not inevitable. By removing the causes of illnesses, we can produce, ultimately, a state of happiness and bliss that is free from all illness.

We continue on page seven. It refers here to the meditation one does in conjunction with the recitation of the mantra. The first thing one does is the invocation of the Medicine Buddha together with his retinue, including all eight of the Medicine Buddhas and their retinues. They are invoked

through the recitation of the mantras. The recitation of the mantra also serves as an exhortation, asking for their blessings. From doing this, innumerable rays of light come forth from the three places of their bodies (the crown of the head, the throat, and the heart). These rays of light purify sentient beings by the specific focus of one's concern in this practice, which is the welfare of living beings in the six realms of samsara without exception. Sentient beings function as one's chief object of concern. All sentient beings, from beginningless time, have accumulated various types of defilements and obscurations by virtue of karma and kleshas. In addition to defilements and obscurations, there arise three different types of manifest problems. The three manifest problems are the illnesses, demons, and the degeneration of one's sacred commitments. The innumerable rays of light clear all of these away, which stream forth from the three places in the bodies of the Medicine Buddha and his retinue upon our request, which comes through our recitation of the mantra. Having thus purified all sentient beings in this way of the underlying and manifest unwholesome qualities, then the blessings of the Buddha and his retinue enter into them and establish the realization of samadhi. Samadhi is the meditative concentration and the full realization of all the qualities associated with the Medicine Buddha and his retinue. All of this is realized, or established within the mindstreams of oneself and other living beings through this recitation of the mantra.

Now, on pages eight and nine is the long form of the mantra recitation. Following that on page ten is the short mantra. Whichever of these one can do, then one does it as many times as possible at his point in the practice. Whether it is a few minutes or a few hours, you do as many as you can. As you do it, of course, you do the meditation as described understanding that the recitation of the mantra is the invoking of the blessings of the Medicine Buddhas and their retinues, exhorting them to send forth these rays of purifying light, removing the obscurations, diseases, demons, and so forth. This gives rise to the true realization of the meditation on the qualities of the Medicine Buddha. So, thinking in those terms one does the recitation, then on page ten there's the conclusion of that meditation practice. At the conclusion, one visualizes each of the retinues of the Medicine Buddhas in turn dissolving into the Medicine Buddhas and they dissolve into the next one, and finally into the (main) Medicine Buddha himself. Then from the three places of the Medicine Buddha again come forth rays of light in the three colors (white at the crown, red at the throat, and blue at the heart). The nectar of pure awareness or the light of perfect wisdom then enters respectively into the three places of one's own body. Dissolving into one's three places, it gets rid of the three types of obstacles. It gets rid of the three obstacles. What are the three obstacles? They are the karmic obscurations arising from actions, from the unwholesome states of greed, anger, and delusion, which are the obscurations to omniscience. They are removed through the blessings of the rays of light. Once the obscurations are removed, the Medicine Buddha dissolves into light and the light enters into the crown of one's head. With this, one's self becomes inseparable and undifferentiated from the Medicine Buddha himself. That is to say that one becomes inseparable from the Buddha who is the embodiment of the omniscience and universal compassion of all enlightened beings, of all the Buddhas. Following that you rest your mind in 'Mahamudra' which is the 'emptiness in form'. This is the defining quality of the realization of Mahamudra. That emptiness arises as form. In other words, one realizes that emptiness is not other than form. Through that understanding, one realizes the relative identity of form and emptiness. This is similar to what is written in the Heart Sutra where it says "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form..." only here it is just saying emptiness is form. If the form that we see is emptiness, then it follows very easily that form is emptiness. So, in that state of realization one rests the mind at this point of focusing on the Great Seal, the Mahamudra, which is characterized by this realization. With everything dissolving into emptiness you rest the mind in that nature of perfect awareness, the union of form and emptiness.

Upon the completion of that meditation, all that is left to do is the dedication. The dedication, first of all, is a dedication of the merit of this practice to one's own swift attainment of the state of the Medicine Buddha. Then, having attained that state, one resolves to establish all sentient beings, without exception, in that highest state of the Medicine Buddha.

Questions and Answers;

Question: "Can you explain the difference between the long and short mantra?"

Answer: "It is always good to begin by saying the long one at least three times, or, if you have the opportunity, seven times or more. Then when you go for the actual accumulation of repetition of the mantra, you just do the short one."

Question: There seems to be an obvious qualitative difference between the long and short mantras, can you explain that difference?"

Answer: "There is not really a qualitative difference as it is a quantitative one. The meaning of both of them is the same, but the meaning is drawn out more explicitly in the long one."

Question: "What is the number of repetitions required to complete the practice of Medicine Buddha?"

Answer: (Rinpoche giggles here) "More than one!" (Now laughing out loud). "If one is not enough, then, do more!"

At this point, Ontul Rinpoche requested all attendees to begin the practice. "And now we try (laughing again)."