

Essays on Purification

by Various Authors

Jason Espada, Editor

Essays on Purification, by various teachers

Contents	page
Preface - Ethics and the Purification of Karma in Buddhism	5
1. The Importance of Vajrasattva Practice, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche	7
2. There's Nothing Better Than Purification, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche	8
3. Taking Joy in Correcting Mistakes, from The Pathgate Institute	13
4. Two Selections from The Practice of Vajrasattva, by Ringu Tulku	14
5. From The Mahamudra Lineage Prayer, by Thrangu Rinpoche	17
6. The Whole Purpose of Practice, by Ringu Tulku	19
7. On the importance of self worth on the spiritual path, by Ajahn Munindo	21
8. Six quotes	25
9. Seeing the truth, by Ringu Tulku	31
10. From Purification, the Four Opponent Powers, and the Practice of Vajrasattva, by Nick Ribush	32
11. On purification practice - by Lama Zopa Rinpoche	35
12. Samskaras and Burning the Seeds of Habit, by Sandy Lamerson	39
13. From Essential Teachings, by Ajahn Suchart Abhijato	46

14. On the Gratification, the Danger, and the Escape, from In the Buddha's Words, Chapter Six, by Bhikkhu Bodhi	48
15. The Perfection of Purity, by Ajahn Amaro	52
16. From Purifying with the Four Powers, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche	57
17. Taking Refuge, by Ringu Tulku	page 64
18. Purifying the Mind of Negative Karma, from Training the Mind in the Great Way, Gyalwa Gendun Druppa	69
19. On not continuing samsaric suffering, notes from the teachings of Lama Zopa Rinpoche	73
20. From Remorse and Confession in the Spiritual Community, by Subhuti	83
21. On Virtue, and Rejecting, by the Venerable Hsuan Hua	87
22. Purification of Mind, by Bhikkhu Bodhi	89
23. From The Tamonata Sutta - Four Types of People	92
24. From The Simile of the Cloth	94
25. The Two Obscurations - From A Letter on Wisdom and Compassion	98
26. The self-arisen wisdom, by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche	101
27. From Small Boat, Great Mountain, by Ajaan Amaro	102
28. The Meaning of Confession, by Max Lucado	103
29. Selections from Opening the Hand of Thought, by Uchiyama Roshi	105

30. On Karma and Purification, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama	109
31. From On Purification, by Gelek Rinpoche	113
32. The Four Powerful Remedies, by Lama Yeshe	117
33. On The Four Opponent Powers, by Geshe Sopa	121
34. The Four Opponent Powers, from Becoming Vajrasattva, by Lama Yeshe	143
35. Ways to Repent and Purify Vows, by Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoche	148

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{About these selections:

The Traditional teachings in this collection are my own versions;

and the the texts and prayers offered here have been edited, and in some places revised, according to my understanding. In these cases, I have done my best to be true to the meaning.}

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Preface

Ethics and the Purification of Karma in Buddhism

No presentation of Buddhist teachings would be complete without the mention of ethics as integral to this Path. And the practice of ethics in Buddhism necessarily includes both karma, or causality, and the purification of the effects of past mistakes.

To make the study and practice of ethics immediate and accessible, in Buddhism it's first taught that positive actions lead to well being and peace, and negative thoughts, words, and actions lead to suffering, both in the short and long term.

Then, actions have some results that are obvious, others that are more subtle, and some that are harder to recognize. Among the subtle results of an action or way of thinking, speaking, and action is the conditioning of our mind. Generally, negative states such as anger, or greed, or fear, or arrogance veil the mind, and make it harder to see our true nature.

Another karmic result is that *an action produces a seed*, or a tendency in the mind to repeat the same action, or a similar one. This is described in various ways in Buddhist teachings, since it is what we need to understand, change and transcend to become a liberated person.

These seeds are variously called karmic tendencies, propensities, *vasanas*, habit energies, or latent tendencies. Whatever words we use to describe this refer to the dynamic nature of the results of our actions on the deeper level of our consciousness.

In Buddhism we attend to this because it is the very ground we transform in practice, letting go of unskillful habits that harm ourselves and others,

and cultivating more skillful ways of living and responding to conditions, all the way to freedom of mind and heart.

Of course, we have to live a while and see the path for ourselves, but there it is. Ideally, we are guided by the wisdom of our caring elders and holy, enlightened beings. They recognize, surely, that we all have made mistakes, fallen into delusion, negative, destructive habits, and suffering, and so, out of their great love, our teachers encourage us to have compassion for ourselves, to be patient, and diligent, and to cultivate the unified path of ethics, meditation, and wisdom.

With a range of skillful means, they encourage us to change the negative to positive, to counter our delusions and suffering at every turn. Depending on our own unique conditioning, we'll find different remedies more effective, but they are all available.

We say something is purified first by ethics, which can have the feeling of restraint in the beginning, especially;

Included in teachings on purifying ethical conduct then is

the reading of sacred texts, particularly on wisdom, liturgies and prayers of confession, as well as the recitation of mantras all with that intention;

and then extensive deep and clear meditation, which calms and quiets the energy of the difficult emotions even more,

and finally discerning wisdom which transforms the tendencies altogether.

This is just a brief introduction on how we free ourselves from suffering, and attain the peace and health we all seek.

The Importance of Vajrasattva Practice, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Vajrasattva practice is so important generally, and especially nowadays in the world, when there is not only global warming, but many other problems. There are so many other dangers- of war and sicknesses, cancer, and so many people whom you know are dying. There are so many sicknesses and other conditions for dying.

This Vajrasattva practice and other purification practices are the ultimate answer, so everything in the world- what you see, every situation- tells you to practice Vajrasattva.

To purify and do Vajrasattva practice is the ultimate answer, to stop the cause of rebirth in the lower realms. The immediate [result] is to have a higher rebirth, to make preparation for death and then to meet the Dharma, to meet the virtuous friend who reveals the path to enlightenment. Then to achieve ultimate happiness, to be free from samsara and to achieve enlightenment for the numberless sentient beings and to free them from the oceans of samsaric sufferings and bring them to full enlightenment...

There's Nothing Better Than Purification, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

You see, what we're doing here, even if the Third World War that people talk about were happening, other than Vajrasattva practice, what else could you do? Even if the Third World War had broken out, there'd be no other way to spend your life than practicing Vajrasattva to purify yourself and benefit others. When you practice Vajrasattva you also purify others. Even in the face of nuclear danger, there's nothing better to do than practicing purification. The immediate thing to do is to practice purification... purifying not good karma but the other kind!

Even if you discover you have cancer - you go to a hospital for a check up and the doctor diagnoses cancer - there's nothing else to do but practice purification, to purify your mind of the causes of suffering rebirths, the negative karma that causes your consciousness to migrate into the lower realms. Even if you find out that you are terminally ill with cancer, AIDS or any other life-threatening disease, the immediate solution is to purify as much negative karma as you can, to ensure that your next rebirth will be a good one, so that in your next life you can continue to practice Dharma, to actualize the path to enlightenment.

When some people find out that they have cancer or AIDS, they go on vacation to some pure land like Goa, Tahiti or Rio de Janeiro - which I used to call Rio Degenerated, but I haven't been there for a while! - anyway, to some place that Westerners consider to be pure lands! But that doesn't help. That doesn't solve your problem; that doesn't heal your sickness or purify your negative karma. It just distracts your mind from the problem. Similarly, drinking alcohol or taking other substances to suppress your fear, to not feel afraid, works for only a short time and is simply cheating yourself. Not only does getting intoxicated not solve your problem but it also leads to additional life problems.

Therefore, even if you are going to die tomorrow, tonight, this hour, there's nothing else to do but purify your mind.

Besides benefiting yourself, to be successful in benefiting others, to have no obstacles for that, you also need to purify your mind.

**To free numberless sentient beings, the source of all your past, present and future happiness, including not only temporary happiness but also ultimate happiness - liberation from samsara and the great liberation of full enlightenment - to bring these numberless sentient beings to full enlightenment by yourself alone, you need to actualize the steps of the path to enlightenment.*

What interferes with your doing that is your negative karma, your defilements. Therefore, purification is very important; a key point in your practice.

Even to liberate yourself forever from the oceans of samsaric suffering, the continuity of which has no beginning, you need to actualize the path that ceases the defilements, the cause of all suffering - karma and delusion, including the seed of delusion. Even for your own liberation from samsara, purification is the essential practice.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo advised that, out of meditation on that path and collecting merit and practicing purification, it is more important to spend time collecting merit and practicing purification than meditating. Here, meditating means meditating on the path. Of course, practicing purification and collecting merit all involves meditation, but the specific meditation Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo was referring to was meditation on the path.

As we know from our own experience, we've tried a lot to meditate on the lam-rim, starting from guru devotion, the perfect human rebirth and so forth, spending time on that, but not much has happened in our minds.

Even though we've spent much time meditating on the lam-rim, there's been no real change in our hearts. The words on which we've been meditating remain just words and haven't connected with our hearts. There's a gap between our hearts and the words we've been repeating or reciting during meditation. Sometimes, instead of getting transformed, our minds have even gotten worse.

You might have heard this example used by Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo. A rock might have been immersed under water for a long time, but it still remains very hard and solid. Similarly, our minds have been around Dharma for a long time, we've been reading and listening to teachings for ages, but nothing has happened; there's been no change in our minds. We have no realizations and our egos are just as big as they were before we met the Dharma, if not bigger! Perhaps our egos have become even more professional, more sophisticated, better qualified than they ever were!

Anyway, I'm joking. However, if you've been meditating on the lam-rim for a long time and feel no benefit, your mistake is that you have not practiced enough purification or collected enough merit.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo also said in his lam-rim teachings that even if you have been doing many preliminary practices [of purification and collecting merit] along with your lam-rim meditation, if there's been no change in your mind, you need to examine your guru devotion. There might be something wrong in your practice of that. You have to analyze what might have gone wrong in your guru devotion and fix any mistakes that you find by confessing past errors and correcting your future practice.

If you fail to do this, you'll continue to collect the heaviest of negative karmas, the greatest obstacles to realization and the development of your mind in the spiritual path, the path to enlightenment. If you are unaware of this and continue to do mainly preliminary practices and lam-rim meditation, not much will happen in your mind. What you are doing is good, but it won't transform your mind, won't bring you realizations.

Even in this case, therefore, purification is required. You have to recognize your mistakes and confess them, refrain from making them in future, and do whatever else should be done. In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo said that of all the things you do in your life, the practice of purifying negativities and collecting merit is more important than meditation. This is what we are doing here, what's happening now.

Also, for old students who knew Lama Yeshe, who was kinder than the buddhas of the three times, doing Vajrasattva practice is the best offering we can make to Lama. He wrote these teachings on the Vajrasattva practice and tsog offering, put together the sadhanas and so forth, so our doing one of Lama's favorite practices would please him a lot and is repaying his kindness. Whether you're a direct or indirect disciple, it's the same.

Motivation for Vajrasattva Practice

Think of all your non-virtuous actions - all actions you've done motivated by attachment clinging to this life, ignorance and anger; all actions that result in only suffering. Think of all the actions that became negative karma. Think especially of the actions done out of the attachment that clings to the pleasures of this life, to a good reputation and so forth. Think of all the ten non-virtues - killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slander, gossip, harsh speech (which means saying words that hurt another person), covetousness, ill will and heresy - you have committed in this life and numberless times in your past lives.

Think of the times that you have broken the pratimoksha, bodhisattva and tantric vows in this life, and even if you haven't broken them in this life, you have broken them numberless times in your past lives. Then think of the heaviest negative karmas, those created in relation to the guru through harming the guru's holy body, not following his advice, disturbing his holy mind, generating non-devotional thoughts, criticizing or giving up the guru. Even if you haven't done some of these things in this life, you have done them numberless times in your past lives.

“These negativities are obstacles that not only block my achievement of the realizations of the path to liberation and to enlightenment but also prevent my bringing every happiness to all sentient beings. On top of this, they cause me to be reborn again and again in samsara, especially the lower realms, where I have to suffer for an inconceivable number of eons. So, this is the only chance that I have to free myself from all these defilements and from the sufferings of samsara, especially the sufferings of the lower realms. This is my only opportunity to escape; this is my only opportunity to purify.

“Since death could come within this minute, I must purify all these negativities without even a second’s delay. I must free all sentient beings, the source of all my past, present and future happiness, from all their sufferings and bring them to enlightenment. Therefore, I myself must achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible. It is for this reason that I am going to practice the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation.”

Teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche given at Land of Medicine Buddha, California, 1999.

Taking Joy in Correcting Mistakes

Ordinary beings have the habit of concealing their flaws, by indulging in acts of self-denial or engaging in activities that will distract their mind from what they do not wish to acknowledge. Dharma practitioners, on the other hand, rejoice in seeking out their own mistakes, knowing that it is only by having their mistakes corrected that they can bring about beneficial changes in their lives.

This is emphasising the need to recognise our own flaws and apply the appropriate antidotes, rather than focusing on the mistakes of others as a means to distract our mind from facing up to our own short-comings;

Ven. Lama Dondrup Dorje emphasises the need to move away from our habitual indulgence in self-denial which only fosters the build-up of guilt, insecurity, and endless misery, and embrace instead the joy in uncovering our own mistakes, the joy in removing the impurities we identify, the joy in removing negative emotion therein, and the joy in cleansing our mind.

Ven. Lama Dondrup Dorje advised his students that it is by finding joy in uncovering mistakes and welcoming the opportunity to rectify them that we are assured of a joyful life.

- From the Pathgate Institute of Buddhist Studies

Two Selections from The Practice of Vajrasattva, by Ringu Tulku

We need to truly understand the idea of purification.

The first thing is to understand: *We are not what we do*. If I do something wrong, that is not the only thing about who I am now...

Purification is based on that: I am not 'the bad one.' I do bad things and have done bad things, but I am not the 'bad one'. Everybody does good things and bad things, everybody makes mistakes but they can also do good things. This understanding is very important. Maybe I have done bad things, and gone through bad things. Maybe I have had negative emotions and done negative actions but that goes for everybody.

Negative things can become positive things, also. I do some negative things and some positive things. I can become more positive. This is where purification lies. If I say that 'I am the bad one', then there is no purification possible. If I say 'negative things have happened', that doesn't mean that is who I am. Then purification can happen.

Therefore, you can allow the negative thing to go. You can develop your positive qualities. You can enhance your positive habitual tendencies so that you become better and better.

What we are trying to do here, in the practice, is to allow those negative things that I cling to, to allow them to go. We have lots of remembered and not remembered things we cling to; things we understand and things we don't understand, conceptual and nonconceptual, many things. We can, and we should, let them go. That is the practice.

But it is not enough just to say, 'Oh, I should let it go.' Just by saying that, it doesn't go. I have to really *let it go*, and repeatedly. It is not easy because I have so much that I hold onto. I hold on to all these negative things and negative ways of doing things. It is like a habit, an addiction.

Something that has become habitual is not easy to change. So, the practice is to cultivate another habit because that is how to change the habit you already have.

So, therefore, that is the practice: learning how to feel pure; how to feel when you are *not* holding on to negative things; how to feel more pure and positive and compassionate...

*Purification actually comes about through wisdom and compassion. What purifies us is our understanding of wisdom and compassion. The strongest purification is wisdom, because it gets rid of ignorance directly. If you really reach a place of true wisdom, that is it!– All negativity will be gone.

* * *

Acknowledging a negative deed to be negative is the beginning of your purification. Confessing is saying that and that you want to let go of it. But the Tibetan word used here, *Shagpa* (pronounced shakpa), does not only mean to do this. It includes this meaning but it also means 'to get rid of, to let go, to purify' these negative things. *Shag* literally means to cut or cleave, like splitting a log with an axe. One part is cut away from the other part. So, *Shagpa* means to completely separate, to dissociate, to cut away.

So, I let go of all my downfalls and misdeeds. 'Misdeeds' mean doing whatever is not good to do. 'Downfalls' are when I promised to do something good but I did the opposite. And I promise not to do it again because if I do something negative, and I do it knowingly, again and again, it's not good for me. I vow not to do anything negative and I don't hold on to anything negative. So then, I ask that I may not experience the result of anything I have already done.

'Saying this, confess and resolve not to repeat your misdeeds.'

We say this with a strong kind of a resolution that we let go of all these negative things. When we are talking about negative things here, it means not only negative things that *I have done*, but also negative things that *I have experienced*, anything that is negative that I have experienced. This is anything that has been done to me, that I kind of hold on to, whether in my body, in my speech or in my mind. Any habitual tendencies towards that, I allow them to go. Whatever has happened, we can still have the attitude, 'It happened, it is done, and now I don't want to hold on to any habitual tendencies in body, speech and mind because of it, so I let it go.'

(In the practice of Vajrasattva) At this point then, feel that Vajrasattva says, *Your misdeeds are purified, done, finished*, and feel that you have been able to let them go. This is important – this is the practice. The practice is that you actually *feel* that they are gone.

From The Mahamudra Lineage Prayer, by Thrangu Rinpoche

In general, there are two things that impede our practice of Dharma. The first is all of the various obscurations and wrong doings that we have accumulated throughout beginningless samsara- most of which we do not remember. Also, the negative actions that we have accumulated in this lifetime are of particular concern- these we are likely to remember.

We apply the practice of purification specifically to whatever negative deeds impede us the most. If we have engaged in a great deal of wrong doing in this life, we apply the practice to that. If we do not have a great deal of active wrongdoing but have very strong disturbing emotion or emotions, then we apply the practice to that obscuration.

The second major obstacle that impedes our practice is the various obscurations that cover up our buddha nature. We need to weaken these disturbing emotions generally by applying mindfulness and alertness to all our actions and by recollecting the harmful effects of the disturbing emotions when they arise. However, in the Vajrayana, we also use the purification practice, which is particularly effective in weakening the disturbing emotions...

* * *

If you are affected primarily by excessive conceptuality, you purify that. If you are afflicted by anger, jealousy, or pride, you purify them.

In short, focus on purifying whatever impedes your practice of Dharma most, and rest in the confidence that it is actually being purified.

These obscurations can be purified through this practice because of the blessing of the truth of the unchanging nature... Therefore, through this practice, your disturbing emotions and conceptuality will be reduced.

When you begin the practice, you may have a sense that you are merely pretending, but as you go through the practice, doing it again and again, you discover that it really works. You discover that the disturbing emotions and so forth can be changed.

The Whole Purpose of Practice

From *Confusion Arises As Wisdom*, by Ringu Tulku

In a way, we could say that the whole purpose of practice is to transform our karma. Karma, habitual tendencies, and personality are all the same thing. Karma can be changed, and karma has to be changed. Otherwise, if we carry the same karma and go on in the same way, we just repeat the same patterns again and again, and get nowhere. If we react in a certain way throughout this lifetime, we will die in the same way and continue to react in the same way in the next lifetime. We need to change our karma.

Of course, the better our karma, the easier it is to change. People who have more negative states of mind will need to work harder. If we use skillful means, it can be much easier to change our karma. This is why we have so many different practices; they make it easier to change our karma. The transformation that happens through practice is a transformation of karma. To change our habitual patterns is very difficult, because we have been acting in certain ways for a very long time. And a lot of our tendencies are unconscious. To transform at this deep level is not easy, but it is certainly possible. It will have to be done at some point.

Another important point about karma is connected with regret. When you do something wrong, regret is the most important aspect for purification. (a heart-response awakened, recognizing a harmful action) But sometimes students confuse regret with being hard on themselves. It is important to recognize that what you did was wrong, and clearly see that you shouldn't do it again. But punishing yourself does not purify anything. Rather than being focused on negativity, purification happens from doing positive things, from creating positive karma. This is a much better approach.

The instruction is this: recognize what you have done wrong, make a resolution not to do it again, and then do something positive to purify the wrongdoing. You need to let go of the negativity. Just as in *Vajrasattva*

practice, letting go of negative deeds and negative feelings becomes a strong purification.

There is a story about this from the time of Atisha Dipankara. When Atisha came to Tibet, he was asked by one of the monks, "If I do something wrong and break one of my vows, what should I do?"

Atisha asked him, "Where are you living now?"

The monk said he was living in retreat in a cave.

Atisha said, "Okay, if you break a vow, go to Sangphu Monastery and publicly say, 'I have broken this vow.' Then go to Samye Monastery and again say to everyone, 'I have broken this vow.' Then go to Lhasa and say, 'I have broken this vow. After that, go back to your retreat place and act as if you had never broken the vow.'"

In other words, when you have done something wrong, you shouldn't agonize over it for the rest of your life. Dwelling on it doesn't help. This can make you uptight and worried about doing every little thing wrong. This makes it difficult to practice. Practice should not be a burden; *practice should be a joy*. If you get distressed about making a mistake, your practice will never be a joy. So you need to make a confession, then let it go and act as if it never happened.

We need to be realistic and keep our feet on the ground. It's important to form the resolve not to do a negative deed again, but it's also important to recognize that everyone makes mistakes. This doesn't mean that what you do is inconsequential. It's important to recognize that negative deeds are not good for yourself and not good for others. So, do take care. But when a negative thought comes into your mind, you don't need to panic. It can't be the first negative thought you ever had! Okay, it appeared. So what? Let it come and let it go. Let it go as quickly as possible. Then, it's okay.

On the importance of self worth on the spiritual path

from the teachings of Ajahn Munindo

Question: Harsh and cruel words can come out so quickly when one is in a heated discussion or argument, to one's immediate regret. How can one try to avoid this?

Answer: Well the experience of regret is actually the message; it's the lesson, the dukkha that happens when we make a mistake. (the wisdom of the heart) It's really important that we understand that, because otherwise it's like fighting ourselves. It's as though healing is taking place, but we are resisting it.

When there's some heat in a discussion, something is going on that we are not so happy about, we can end up saying something hurtful to somebody. Then afterwards, when we remember what happened, we feel regret. Now that regret is right, it is appropriate - not just the mental dimension of regret, the thought: 'I wish I hadn't said that' - but the actual feeling of embarrassment, the heat as we go red in the face and the feeling in the stomach or the throat. That's the consequence of having generated hurtful action. It's also the doorway beyond.

Now we need to have the appropriate attitude to regret, otherwise we'll never learn. The Buddha said regularly that it's only through seeing the consequence of our harmful actions that we can be released from them. That is why the whole teaching, the basic Buddhist teaching, is established on mindfulness of dukkha. It is only through mindfulness of dukkha that we can see the end of dukkha. By feeling the consequence of our inappropriate speech - in other words, by suffering consciously - the whole body mind gets the message. We realise: 'I don't want to do this, I don't want to be this way.'

This is a very simple but very important message, because often we intellectualise around the consequences of our heedlessness. We say something unkind, and we feel the pain of regret and embarrassment. Then maybe we start to feel guilty, sticking darts into ourselves for having been so foolish, really getting off on feeling guilty...

But when we go on like that we're not in touch with the reaction any more; we're not being mindful in that moment. This is the displacement activity of the age. Instead of being sensitive to the actual feeling, we think about the cause of our problems. We miss the opportunity to put ourselves into the optimum position for reading feeling accurately - and to move through, and beyond it...

Now while that might alleviate some of the regret for a while, actually it's just displacement, it's not really dealing with it; it won't really help us in taking responsibility for our heedlessness.

So if we have (caused suffering) we should be interested in how to alter it.

From the Buddhist perspective, the way we show interest in it is by feeling the regret... This may sound as though we are being caught up with guilt again, but we really need to see and understand the neurotic tendency that we have of making ourselves and one another feel guilty - otherwise we'll never get past a certain point in practice.

But then we can also consider the consequences of exercising restraint - how we feel about ourselves then...

So if we do that, and then stop and think about it - in a cool moment, not when the passion is still going - how do we feel about ourselves?...

We feel good. There is a natural sense of self respect

*Guilt is one of the things that can get in the way of working like this; another is a lack of a sense of well-being. Even though we've got the theory down - to be mindful of dukkha and all that - if we don't have a good strong sense of well-being within ourselves then it's not going to work.

While we may not feel guilt we can just get crushed and depressed, thinking about how many times we've failed: 'I just keep doing this thing over and over again. Every time she says that, I say this. When is it ever going to change?'... and we can get really depressed. If that is the case then we have to use discernment and actually observe what's going on, for without a really wholesome well established sense of well-being within ourselves, we can end up dwelling too much on our mistakes.

So it can sometimes be skilful to distract ourselves, if we've made a mistake or said something really terrible and we find ourselves caught up with regret, but without a sense of wellbeing.

Basically, remorse is the message, and when we get that message then we'll stop indulging in heedlessness. However in order to get that message, we've got to be strong with a sense of wellbeing...

Really, we also have to be mindful of a sense of well-being, and what maintains that sense of well-being. We need to develop positive, wholesome kamma; We can generate kind, compassionate thoughts when we do the chanting:

*May I abide in well being, in freedom from affliction,
in freedom from hostility.*

May I maintain well being in myself.

And then:

May all beings be well.

May they be free from suffering,

may they not be parted from the good fortune that they have attained.

If you know somebody else who sincerely says nice things, who really feels these things and expresses them, you like to have them around. It's exactly the same thing with ourselves. We actually feel good about ourselves when we have the perception of ourselves as somebody who says those sorts of things.

While meditation on these divine abidings (kindliness, compassion, joy and equanimity) is helpful, sometimes we are so out of practice with exercising our hearts in this way that just to think of them is not enough; sometimes we also need to say it. We can actually go through this recitation on our own, or write it down, or better still tell others.

We can also make gestures of good will in daily life; we can engage in a conversation with somebody who we would not normally bother engaging with, we can offer well-being, we can make gifts for people. This is the principle of dana, generosity.

When we have this operating within us, it conditions, strengthens and nourishes a sense of well-being. We know that we are a source of well-being, of good will because we're giving it out. When we are strong in this sense of well-being, it means that we'll be able to learn the lessons we need to learn.

A Clear Conscience

Ananda asked what were the purposes and blessings of virtue. The answer was: to be free of self-reproach, free of guilt feelings, with a clear conscience. But Ananda asked further, what were the purposes and blessings of a clear conscience. The Buddha replied, that it would bring joy in wholesome thoughts and actions, happiness with progress made and incentive for further striving. And what would result from that? One would experience exaltation in one's heart, being drawn towards the good and perfect bliss; and from that would further result deep calm and insight (AN 10.1)

- From Ananda - Guardian of the Dhamma

The immediate result of living in conformity with these guidelines to right action is the arising of a sense of freedom from remorse. Remorse, a feeling of regret over moral transgression and neglect, tends to provoke guilt, agitation, and self-recrimination. When, through close adherence to the precepts, the mind is freed from remorse, an ease of conscience and "bliss of blamelessness" set in born of the knowledge that one's actions are beyond reproach. Thence the Buddha declares wholesome rules of conduct to have freedom from remorse as their benefit and reward. The joy that comes through realizing one's purity confirms the confidence originally placed in the teaching. Thereby it arouses still stronger faith and a desire for further application to the practice.

- From Transcendental Dependent Arising - A Translation and Exposition of the Upanisa Sutta, by Bhikkhu Bodhi

O good man! The Bodhisattva has no repentance in his mind when he sees that the shila [morality] he upholds is steadfast. As there is no regret, there is joy in his mind. As he has joy, his mind is happy. As he is happy, his mind is at peace. As his mind is at peace, there comes about an immovable samadhi [concentration]. As the samadhi is immovable, there is true knowing and seeing. Due to true knowing and seeing, there is parting from birth and death. Parting from birth and death, he achieves emancipation. As a result of emancipation, he clearly sees the Buddha-Nature.

- The Nirvana Sutra

*The whole ocean of hindrances from past actions
arises from illusion.*

*If you want to repent, you should sit upright
and reflect on the true nature of things.*

*All evils are like frost and dew.
The sun of wisdom can dissipate them.*

- From The Sutra of Contemplation of the Dharma Practice of Universal
Sage Bodhisattva, also known as The Sutra on the Meditation of
Samantabhadra

*When a metal garment which has become stained with contaminations
and is to be cleansed by fire, is put in fire,
its stains are burned but it is not;*

*So, with regard to the mind of clear light
which has the stains of desire and so forth,
its stains are burned by the fire of wisdom,
but its nature, clear light, is not.*

From In Praise of the Dharmadhatu, by Nagarjuna

*The basis of purification is this very mind itself-
when recognized as the inseparable unity of clarity and emptiness;
That which purifies is the Great Vajra Yoga of Mahamudra;
That which is to be purified are the transient stains of delusion;
May the result of purification, the stainless Dharmakaya, be manifest.*

- From The Aspiration Prayer for the Attainment of Mahamudra,
by The Third Karmapa

Seeing the truth

Buddhahood, or the enlightened state, or the dharmakaya is not somewhere else. It is not something that we need to generate, or develop, but it is here, in this very consciousness, in this very moment.

But of course, that does not mean that we experience it. When we see the truth we have a completely different experience, but, it's nowhere else. It's not something that you have to get from somewhere else, and that is totally different that is brought in.

The present, what we are exactly, there is the dharmakaya, the only thing is whether we can have this understanding, or way of looking at it.

If we see our true nature now, at this moment, then all the fabrications, all the samsaric problems, or samsaric way of seeing things - as we said earlier, samsara is a state of mind, is a way of seeing things - then, *seeing the truth as we* are dissolves that way of seeing things, and then our way of seeing things completely changes, and that is the experience of the enlightened state.

- Ringu Tulku, from his talks on the Three Yanas

From Purification, the Four Opponent Powers, and the Practice of
Vajrasattva, by Nick Ribush

(From the editor's introduction to Tantric Purification)

In Buddhism, purification is a science based on understanding the psycho-mechanics of karma, or action—the law of cause and effect—and entails the application of what are called the four opponent powers. Sometimes referred to as “confession,” Buddhist purification is very different from the Christian conception of the term, although parallels certainly exist.

Every action, whether physical, verbal, or mental, leaves an imprint on the consciousness, like a seed planted in a field. When the conditions are right, this imprint ripens into an experience. Positive imprints, or “good” karma, result in happiness; negative imprints, or “bad” karma, bring suffering.

Every action has four aspects that determine whether the action is complete or incomplete: motivation, object, performance, and completion. To be complete, the action of killing, for instance, would require the motivation, or intention, to kill; a sentient being as the object to be killed; performance of the action, either directly or indirectly, that is, doing it oneself or ordering someone else to do it; and completion of the action, with the other sentient being dying before the killer.

If an action is complete in all four aspects, it becomes what is called *a throwing karma*, an action that can determine your state of rebirth by throwing you into one of the six samsaric realms.

If one or more of the four branches is missing, the action becomes *a completing karma*, determining the quality of the experiences you will have in this and future lives:

A completing karma brings three types of result:

the result similar to the cause in experience,

the result similar to the cause in habit (reinforcing that particular habitual tendency),

and

the environmental result.

Thus, a complete negative karma has four suffering results. For killing, these four could be rebirth in a hell, a short life plagued with illness, a tendency to kill other beings, and rebirth in a very dangerous place.

Although all this applies equally to positive as well as negative actions, in the context of purification we focus on the latter.

The four opponent powers work - and are all necessary - because each one counters one of the four negative karmic results.

The first power - taking refuge and generating bodhichitta - is called the power of the object, or the power of dependence, and purifies the environmental result. It is called the power of dependence because our recovery depends upon the object (in relation to the harm that was done). For example, to get up after you have fallen over and hurt yourself, you depend upon the same ground that hurt you. Similarly, almost all the negative karma we create has as its object either holy objects or sentient beings. In order to purify it we take refuge in holy objects and generate bodhichitta for the sake of all sentient beings.

The second power is the power of release, which counteracts the result similar to the cause in experience. (where, as we have done happens to us)

The third power is the power of the remedy, which is the antidote to the throwing karma that causes us to be reborn in the three lower realms.

Finally, the fourth power is that of indestructible determination, by which we overcome our lifetime-to-lifetime tendency to habitually create negativities again and again.

Thus, in neutralizing the four different results of negative karma, the four opponent powers purify them completely, preventing us from ever having to experience their suffering results. This kind of explicit logic lies behind all Buddhist practice and explains, in part, why Buddhism is so appealing to the intelligent, well-educated spiritual seeker of today.

The third power embraces many different kinds of remedy, from making prostrations to building stupas to reciting the hundred-syllable Vajrasattva mantra to meditating on emptiness. Ideally, several of these are practiced simultaneously.

On purification practice - by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

There are four remedy powers. The one that reduces and purifies negative karma is regret. The stronger the regret, the more the negative karma is purified. All phenomena affect each other; that is what dependent arising means- fire can burn, water can make things wet. It works similarly in our mind: our positive thoughts have one effect; negative thoughts have a different effect. So, there is happiness and there is suffering - this is a dependent arising.

Reciting the mantra of Vajrasattva, who attained qualities such as compassion and power in order to benefit sentient beings, purifies negative karma through dependent arising.

* * *

Just one complete negative karma that is committed through the ten non-virtuous actions- killing, sexual misconduct, telling lies, etc.- produces *four suffering results*. As well as *the ripened aspect result* of rebirth in the lower realms, there are three other sufferings: *experiencing the result similar to the cause*; *creating the result similar to the cause (producing and reinforcing that particular habitual tendency)*; and *the possessed result*, which is related to the environment and the suffering that is experienced when, for example, you are born after some time as a human being due to your good karma.

Creating the result similar to the cause means committing the same negative action again as a result of the past. Then, that complete negative karma produces another four suffering results, including creating the result similar to the cause; then that complete negative karma produces another four suffering results.

As long as we don't purify that one negative karma and abstain from it we will experience the result again and again. Like this, it goes on and on, forever—the effect becomes endless.

* * *

Think:

If I put effort into not creating that one negative karma, I don't have to experience all the endless suffering that comes from it. It makes a huge difference whether that one negative karma is committed or not.

To make your practice really effective and powerful, contemplate the endless effect of even just one complete negative karma- having to experience so much suffering in samsara for that one negative karma- so that you can't stand to live even one more second without purifying it immediately. There are so many negative karmas committed each day, month, and year, from beginningless past lives- it is unimaginable. If you think of all these karmas from beginningless past lives, it becomes more and more unbearable. There is no way to relax for even a second without practicing purification.

* * *

Think:

Death can come any time, even today; it can come this hour or minute. That means I can be in the most terrifying suffering of the lower realms today, any minute, any second. The minute my breath stops, it is there, actualized. Therefore, I must purify right away, not delaying for even a second.

As is normally explained in the teachings, it is as if you have eaten poison and are going to experience great pain and die, so you want to get rid of the negativity in the quickest possible way.

This also applies when you practice Vajrasattva meditation in daily life or in retreat. You can meditate like this at the beginning of any purification practice, to make it really powerful.

How much we can purify negative karma depends on the mind. Our mind creates negative karma but, with strong regret, the mind can purify so much. Regret is like medicine for us.

In Western psychology, regret may be interpreted as negative, but there is negative, harmful regret and useful, positive regret. One becomes negative;; the other becomes medicine for our mind.

* * *

After completing any purification practice it becomes more powerful if you seal it with emptiness by meditating on the three circles: the performer of the action, the action, and the object, what is accomplished- looking at them all as empty.

Think:

In emptiness there is no creator, me; there is no action of creating; and there is no creation, negative karma...

Remain in that state of mindfulness, allowing the awareness that all things are empty to continue, that they do not exist from their own side, and then dedicate the merits.

Samskaras and Burning the Seeds of Habit, by Sandy Lamerson

The first time I heard the word *samskara*, I was on a 10-day Vipassana retreat at an SN Goenka Center. In some of Goenka ji's talks he mentioned that the practice of meditation, or more precisely, the experience of insight, can actually burn up or purify the samskaras. Even though I only barely touched what Goenka-ji was getting at, what he said stuck with me.

Recently, this topic has come to the foreground of my yoga and meditation practice, as it is a central theme in the Yoga Sutras. I am exploring what gives rise to habit, thought, and the formation of a sense of self. With reference to my own experience, this essay explores the nature of samkaras and how the Sutras and contemporary masters describe the process of "burning the seeds" of habit, leading to real freedom.

What is a *samskara*? *Samskara* is a Sankrit term used in both Buddhism and classical yoga philosophy. *Samskaras* refer to imprints or impressions left on the mind by experiences, also called "subliminal impressions." Subliminal, in this context, means in the impressions are lodged in the unconscious and subconscious mind. BKS Iyengar writes that memory and samskaras are not only stored in the brain, but also in the body and in each cell (since the spinal column and the nerves which enervate each cell are an offshoot of the brain). In short, Samskaras are impressions piled and stored in the unconscious and subconscious mind and body which propel us towards certain behaviors and their consequences.

The cause of samkaras or subliminal impressions can come from perception, inference, choices, practice, interaction with others, thoughts, intent, willful actions, education, background, culture, upbringing and even dreams and past lives. Samskaras manifest as habits, behavior (*acara*), character (*silam*), tendencies, and psychological predispositions.

Actions based on samskaras can be skillful or unskillful, yet habituation based on samskaras is ultimately the cause of our limitations and a small

sense of self (e.i. identifying with what we like and dislike, identifying with our habits or personality: “This is just how I am”).

Within Hindu and Buddhist cosmology, samskaras are also the seeds which cause rebirth and endless transmigration in samsara, the ocean of life and death or wheel of time, whose essential characteristic is suffering, disease, or unsatisfactoriness.

The theory of karma is essentially the principle of cause and effect– that actions of body, speech and mind bear fruit. From our actions of body, speech and mind, whether negative positive or somewhere in between, we reap corresponding results.

Furthermore, the subtle imprints or “grooves” in the consciousness created by our actions become deeper and more enforced by repetition. Repetition is a key factor in the formation of habits, whether positive or negative. In a sense, it is easy to change our habits- we merely need to repeat certain actions of body, speech and mind over a period of time and the habit will change, or new habits will be reinforced.

In *Light on Life*, BKS Iyengar gives a down-to-earth example of how samskaras work, and how to break free of habitual patterns. Iyengar uses the example of coming home to ice cream in the freezer after a hard day’s work. After returning home from work and seeing something pleasing to eat, the hand impulsively reaches for the tub- knowing the the immediate feeling of eating ice-cream is pleasurable, based on past experience. This impulse can easily overpower the mind, especially if the “groove” is deep enough.

Here is where the mind and intelligence can intervene in the usual habit pattern. Analysis and reasoning (*vitarka*) and reflection and consideration (*vichara*) are the first mental steps in overcoming habit energy. The mind needs to observe and reflect on whether an action is skillful or unskillful

and anticipate the long term effects of the action, not only the immediate gratification.

This process leads to discernment (*viveka*). After discernment has been reached, the mind is in a position to use its will (*iccha*) to act. This action, though likely more positive and skillful, is still in the realm of karma, and one reaps the corresponding effect, such as not feeling terrible after indulging in a tub of ice cream.

After repeating this process, the mind can create new, positive samkaras (or neural pathways). One is still not free from habit energy altogether, though the samkaras are being changed from negative to positive habits. However, the process of transformation has begun.

In relation to this, I found this writing from Swami Chidananda, from the Sivananda lineage:

First comes Vichara (reflection), then comes Viveka (discrimination). Through Vichara and Viveka flowers Vairagya (non attachment, dispassion). Observation stimulates inquiry. Inquiry creates the ability to discriminate. Through discrimination, one begins to see the difference between the mere passing appearances and the permanent changeless Reality. So comes Vairagya.

Over time, the effort to observe, reflect, discriminate and act bears fruit- one is no longer in the sway of the senses, habits and impressions. One is in a genuine position of choice and freedom as *vairagya* (non attachment) blooms.

Vairagya can be understood as a subtractive principal- letting go of that which is unhelpful in the path. Whereas *Abhyasa* can be seen as the additive principle- repeated practice of cultivating the positive qualities which are helpful in realizing our deepest aspiration.

I have experimented with this practice of observation and reflection followed by discrimination and willful action to overcome habit energy.

Getting up very early in the morning has often been challenging for me. One morning, I pressed the snooze button and turned over a few times and then the passage from *Light on Life* came to mind, where BKS Iyengar writes that one has to use tremendous will to overcome the especially deep rooted habits (the *Hatha* of Hatha Yoga, also means *will*, or *force*). For me, one of these habits has been turning over in bed and sleeping another hour, when I could be ready to get up and practice. So I experiment, use will and get up and begin the day with meditation. Sometimes, this practice does not go as well, and I turn over to sleep. Sometimes I need the sleep, and sometimes habit prefers this comfort. This experiment of working with habit truly takes time and fortitude.

The following Yoga Sutras may be applied to overcoming unskillful habits:

II. 33 vitarka bhadhane pratipaksa bhavanam

*When you are disturbed
by unwholesome, negative thoughts or emotions,
cultivate their opposites,
promote self-control,
and firmness in the precepts.*

(trans. M. Stiles)

Principals which run contrary to *yama* and *niyama* are to be countered with the principals of knowledge and discrimination.

(trans. B.K.S Iyengar)

and,

Through the cultivation of friendliness, compassion, joy, and indifference to pleasure and pain, virtue and vice respectively, the consciousness becomes favourably disposed, serene and benevolent.

Sutra I.33

(trans. B.K.S. Iyengar)

Both of these Sutras indicate that our troubles and afflictions are rooted in unwholesome activity of body, speech and mind, which are themselves rooted in ignorance of the true nature of reality. These positive cultivations are a powerful practices and are helpful in overcoming habitual, unskillful states.

Additionally, according to the Sutras, burning the seeds of habit, requires transformational insight (*prajna*), and breaking through all duality of good and bad habits into the realm of the unconditioned.

BKS Iyengar elucidates this in Sutras I.48 – I.51

*with the dawning of prajna –
a seasoned intelligence, or mature wisdom
accompanied by intense insight,
a new life begins with this truth bearing light.
Previous impressions are left behind,
and new ones are prevented.*

(trans. B.K.S Iyengar)

I bring in this Sutra in to inspire and give a vision that such things are possible, even for all of us beginners, if we persist.

That such a penetrating insight can prevent the arising of future suffering, is an inspiring reason to practice. The Sutras go on to say that even this powerful insight must be relinquished, for it too is a seed, though a very positive seed.

Even this distinctive knowledge of insight (I.50) has to be restrained, subdued and contained. Then, as a flame is extinguished when the wood is burnt out, or as rivers lose their existence on joining the sea, all volitions and impressions of the unconscious, subconscious, conscious and superconscious mind cease to exist. All these rivers of consciousness merge with the ocean of the seer.

However lofty this may sound, this ultimate freedom is within the reach of each person if the aim and means are present. The yogic practices outline the path towards freedom, through seeing, knowing, discerning, practicing and letting go- the path to becoming free of habit and limitation.

Our habits and our difficulties can be our teachers, if we use them to study the self and as a starting point for transformation. This does not happen overnight, but the yogis have shown us the way... now it is our turn to walk the path.

Here is a distillation for ways of working with habit:

- 1 Identify the habit.
2. Identify what is deeply and spiritually important in your life.
3. Analyze and reflect if the habit is helpful or hurtful in both the short and long term- prioritize the long term in relation to your spiritual path and deepest yearnings.
4. Set your mind to be aware of the habit and the impulses of mind.

5. Practice not reacting to impulses.
6. Cultivate positive habits over a long time, until they become natural.
7. Practice friendliness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity to yourself and others.
8. Persevere and do not lose sight of your aim.
9. Practice observing the mind in meditation, go deep.
10. Continue, repeat, let go, surrender to higher self.

Om shanti, shanti, shanti

From Essential Teachings, by Ajahn Suchart Abhijato

As long as there still remain craving and desire in one's heart, all the happiness and pleasures from sight, sound, odour, taste, and touch — no matter how much — will be fleeting. They are temporary — only last while experiencing them. After that, there will be even more craving to experience such pleasures, just as we've experienced them from the day that we were born up until now. We have yet to feel enough and satisfied. We still constantly crave to see forms, hear sounds, taste flavours, smell odours, and feel touches.

This is a delusion — to think that experiencing these sensual pleasures would bring happiness. Little did you know that you've already become a slave of your sensual craving. That is, if you somehow don't manage to consume or experience such sensual pleasures when you're longing for them, i.e., sexual/sensual craving (raga-tanhā or kama-rāgā) , you'll suffer and feel discontent. You'll have to find a way to experience pleasing sights, sounds, odours, tastes, and touch. After being content for a while, another craving will reoccur; that's how such an endless cycle is formed and carries on.

Even after you die, your mind still holds onto these cravings, and so it will search for these sensual contacts in the next realm and existence. You will have to be reborn in a sensual realm where sentient beings can experience such sensual pleasures. This can range from the heavenly realm of devas, that of humans, that of animals, that of ghosts, that of demons, to that of evil/hell beings; they are the places for sentient beings that are still attached to and have desires for sensual pleasures. As long as your craving for sensual contact has not been curbed and eliminated, you'll still be bound to be reborn in this endless cycle.

The type of realm in which you will be reborn depends on how you sought out your sensual pleasures. You would be reborn in the realm of happiness after you die if you sought pleasures out in a skilful way — with good and pure intentions: not through killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and substance abuse. You may be reborn in the heavenly realm of devas or in the human realm.

But if you sought out the sensual pleasures in an unskilful way — with wrong intentions: through killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and substance abuse, you will then be reborn in those four lower realms of animals, ghosts, demons, and evil/hell beings. Your mistaking of sensual experiences and pleasures through sights, sounds, odours, tastes, and touch for happiness will subject you to the endless cycle of rebirth and death in these sensual realms.

On the Gratification, the Danger, and the Escape, from In the Buddha's Words, Chapter Six, by Bhikkhu Bodhi

The education that the Buddha imparts to us brings about *a deepening of our perspective on the world*. To help us transform our understanding and deepen our perspective on the world, he offers us three standpoints from which we can appraise the values by which we order our lives. These three standpoints also represent three “moments” or steps in an unfolding process of insight that starts from our common-sense attitudes and moves strategically toward higher knowledge, enlightenment, and release. The three moments are: gratification (*asāda*), danger (*ādīnava*), and escape (*nissarāa*).

The Buddha underscores the importance of this scheme with the bold pronouncement that until he was able to fully evaluate the world in this way, he did not claim that he had attained the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment.

In advancing systematically through this scheme, one begins by recognizing the indubitable fact that such worldly phenomena as sense objects, forms, and feelings give us some degree of gratification. This gratification consists in the pleasure and joy (*sukha-somanassa*) we experience when we succeed in fulfilling our desires. Once we acknowledge this fact, we can then probe deeper by asking whether such pleasure and joy are entirely satisfactory.

If we address this question with utter honesty, in a dispassionate frame of mind, we will realize that such pleasure and joy are far from satisfactory. To the contrary, they are saddled with drawbacks and defects ranging from the trifling to the catastrophic, defects that we perpetually hide from ourselves so that we can continue unhindered in our quest for gratification.

This is their danger, the second moment or step of observation. The most pervasive danger lurking behind the innocent façade of our worldly

pleasures is their inherent nature of being impermanent (*anicca*), bound up with suffering and discontent (*dukkha*), and subject to inevitable change and decay (*vipariṇāmadhamma*).

The third moment, the moment of escape, follows from the second. “Escape” here is not escapism, a word that implies an anxious attempt to avoid facing one’s problems by pretending they don’t exist and losing oneself in distractions. True escape is quite the opposite: the sanest, most rational, most judicious course of action we can take when we accurately recognize a genuine danger. It is our search for an exit from a burning building, our visit to the doctor when we’re beset by a persistent fever, our decision to give up smoking when we understand how it jeopardizes our health.

Once we see that the objects of our attachment are flawed, beset with hidden dangers, we then realize that the way of escape lies in dropping our attachment to them. This is “the removal of desire and lust, the abandoning of desire and lust” (*chandaṅga-vinaya, chandarāga-pahāna*) referred to in the texts.

The Pāli commentators, not surprisingly, connect these three moments with the Four Noble Truths. “Gratification” implies the second noble truth, for pleasure and joy arouse craving, the origin of suffering. “Danger” is the truth of suffering itself. And “escape” is the truth of the cessation of suffering, which also implies the Noble Eightfold Path, the fourth truth, the way to the cessation of suffering.

Selections from the Suttas on The Gratification, the Danger, and the Escape

(1) Before My Enlightenment

“Before my enlightenment, O monks, while I was still a bodhisatta, it occurred to me: ‘What is the gratification in the world, what is the danger in the world, what is the escape from the world?’ Then it occurred to me: ‘Whatever pleasure and joy there is in the world, this is the gratification in the world; that the world is impermanent, bound up with suffering, and subject to change, this is the danger in the world; the removal and abandoning of desire and lust for the world, this is the escape from the world.’

“So long, monks, as I did not directly know, as they really are, the gratification in the world as gratification, its danger as danger, and the escape from the world as escape, for so long I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahmā, in this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans.

“But when I directly knew all this, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with ... its devas and humans. The knowledge and vision arose in me: ‘Unshakable is the liberation of my mind; this is my last birth; there is now no renewed existence.’”

(AN 3:101 §§1–2; I 258–59)

(2) I Set Out Seeking

“O monks, I set out seeking the gratification in the world. Whatever gratification there is in the world, that I have found. I have clearly seen with wisdom just how far the gratification in the world extends. “I set out seeking the danger in the world. Whatever danger there is in the world,

that I have found. I have clearly seen with wisdom just how far the danger in the world extends. "I set out seeking an escape from the world. Whatever escape there is from the world, that I have found. I have clearly seen with wisdom just how far the escape from the world extends."

(AN 3:101 §3; I 259)

(3) If There Were No Gratification

"If, monks, there were no gratification in the world, beings would not become enamored with the world. But because there is gratification in the world, beings become enamored with it. "If there were no danger in the world, beings would not become disenchanted with the world. But because there is danger in the world, beings become disenchanted with it. "If there were no escape from the world, beings could not escape from it. But as there is an escape from the world, beings can escape from it."

(AN 3:102; I 260)

The Perfection of Purity

by Ajahn Amaro

The habits of identification, attraction, aversion, and anxiety create suffering and lead to rebirth in samsara. They keep us far from our main goal, that of recognizing ultimate reality and complete enlightenment.

Ultimate reality is the principle that all mental and physical phenomena - people, mountains, galaxies, the New York subway - are regarded as being without substantial essence or separate self-identity. In order to see the true nature of existing phenomena, we need to purify the mental cloudiness that keeps us from seeing it.

The Buddha taught that

*it is owing to the development of virtue, concentration, and wisdom,
that enlightenment has been fully realized*

In order to learn how to properly apply these three agents of purification - virtue, concentration, and wisdom we need to learn from our mistakes - and purification is synonymous with this act of learning.

The methods to do this revolve first around a conscious recognition by the individual of destructive or delusory tendencies in his actions, his speech, and his mind; second, around the resolution to do better in the future. This is working on the principle that if we simply deny our shortcomings or try to play the "Absolute Reality" trump card, the obstructive karma will be regenerated continually and unconsciously. Once things are opened up and acknowledged honestly, however, the purifying can function freely.

In the Theravada tradition, we say:

*Rain soddens what is kept wrapped up,
But never soddens what is open;
Uncover, then, what is concealed,
Lest it be sodden by the rain.*

Another text states it in this way:

For it is growth in the Buddha's way of training, when one sees one's error as such, to make amends for it in accordance with the dharma, and undertake to be more careful in the future.

These acts of recognition can vary in size from a brief mental noting, to the recitation of the monastic rule, to a monthlong "Ten Thousand Buddhas Repentance Ceremony," or the 100,000 prostrations, mantra recitations, and visualizations employed in the Tibetan ngodro practice.

Regardless of the dimensions or grandeur of the act, however, the essence of the transformation is identical- it's a radical letting go of the past and a reformation of attitude. On the psychological level, this act is the catalyst of all beneficial development.

The Buddha extended this principle of purification through different approaches toward meditation, particularly the development of what are known as "The Four Foundations of Mindfulness" or Satipatthana. These four are, in brief, mindfulness of the body, of feeling, of mental states (or moods), and of mind objects (or the categories of phenomena according to the Buddha's teaching, such as The Four Noble Truths).

They are described as,

A path that goes in one direction only: to the purification of beings, to the surmounting of sorrow, to the disappearance of pain and grief, to the attainment of the true goal, to the realization of Nirvana.

The schema of concentration and contemplation of mind is designed to fulfill the work of purification. For example, in the section on the “contemplation of mental states,” the Buddha says,

Here a monk knows a lustful mind as lustful and a mind free from lust as free from lust; a hating mind as hating ... a deluded mind as deluded ... a distracted mind as distracted ... a concentrated mind as concentrated ... a liberated mind as liberated and an unliberated mind as unliberated

Mindfulness that ‘here is a mental state’ is present just to the extent necessary for knowledge and awareness. And he abides detached, not grasping at anything in the world.

{The Sutra on the Establishments of Mindfulness outlines this process:

Here, monks, for example, if sensual desire (or the other hindrances) are present in himself, a monk knows that they are present. If absent, a monk knows that they are absent.

He knows how the unarisen hindrance comes to arise,

and he knows how the abandonment of arisen hindrance comes about,

and he knows how the non-arising of the abandoned hindrance in the future will come about...

In this way, he abides, ardent, clearly aware and mindful, having put aside desire and dissatisfaction in regard to the world...}

This passage outlines a crucial element of what purification means on the level of mind: it’s not what you think or feel, it’s your awareness of and attitude toward thoughts and feelings that counts. Anger arises, but it’s only anger - in the light of awareness and a heart of loving-kindness we can feel it, know it, let it go, and not follow it. Nothing has been destructively

repressed, no hurtful action has been taken, and the light of the mind is “on.”

As the consistency of awareness is strengthened by meditation, this process is illuminated more and more clearly. It is seen that the anger came out of emptiness, dissolved back into emptiness, and that any ascription of a feeling of ownership toward it was an unnecessary and false addition. The anger is no more mine than is the breeze on my skin or the sound of a dog barking across the street. It arises and ceases, it is known by awareness - and we are neither enriched nor corrupted by its passing. As it says in the verses of the Third Zen Patriarch:

*The Way is open like vast space,
where nothing is lacking
and nothing is in excess.*

This insight naturally develops into a deep recognition of the laws of causality and interdependence, and the heart rests in the knowing of these relationships. Being this knowing is the Way, the path to peace.

At first this kind of insight arises only momentarily, so effort needs to be made to sustain or further it. Once the Path has been seen, however, and we have managed to get onto it, we need to be able to keep ourselves on it. As everyone knows, it's very easy to wander off down all kinds of interesting sidetracks. As we learn to recognize what is and what is not the Path, we are more able to pursue our desired route straightforwardly.

Sustaining and furthering insight into selflessness is the act of purification, and yet the purpose of it all is not the process of purification but the nature of life when the goal has been reached.

When the realization of this nature is complete, the heart has arrived at perfect nirvana, free from any clinging whatsoever. It is the realization that

there is no one here to be pure or impure - only a quality of brightness and ease, a rich and fearless peace. This is the perfection of purity.

From *Purifying with the Four Powers*, by Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche

In *The Hymns of Experience of the Graduated Path to Enlightenment*, Lama Tsongkhapa says

*Also, consider the working of black and white actions,
Practicing correctly is your own responsibility,
The venerable lama practiced like this,
You who are seeking liberation should do likewise.*

*Should you not find a suitable rebirth,
It will not be possible to progress along the path;*

*Cultivate the causes of a perfect rebirth,
*Especially appreciate the importance of purifying
The three doors from stains of evil;
Cherish always the practice of the complete four powers.*

*The venerable lama practiced like this,
You who are seeking liberation should do likewise.*

...

The mind is obscured by the stains of negative karmas done with the body, speech and mind. It is especially important for us to purify these karmic obscurations.

In the first verse, Lama Tsongkhapa is describing the first sentient being, yourself. The second verse contains what should be done if you want to make your life highly meaningful by making progress in the graduated path to enlightenment, year by year, month by month, week by week, even day by day. It explains what you should do to become nearer to enlightenment for the sake of sentient beings.

For such a person, what practice is important? It is extremely important to purify; it is especially important to purify karmic obscurations. This is very sensible advice from Lama Tsongkhapa, from his own experience of what he himself did to become enlightened.

What is the block? Why is your mind not developing? Why are you not getting better and better? Over many years you have been listening, reflecting and meditating on the path. You have heard and read many times the most profound secret tantric teachings, especially of Maha-anuttara Yoga Tantra. You have even done some retreat. But your mind is still the same as before. A rock that has been under the ocean for many eons is still hard, with only wetness on the outside, no wetness inside. There is no change - nothing goes inside. Your mind is like this: not having any change, any development, any realizations of the path. Nothing of what is mentioned by Buddha in the texts of sutra and tantra is being actualized in your mind.

This is all because of not having done powerful, continual purification. Your mind is blocked by all these heavy collections of the various negative karmas and root downfalls accumulated with your body, speech and mind in this life, and in beginningless past rebirths.

The first thing is not having done perfect, powerful, continual purification. The second thing is not having changed your actions. Particularly those who have taken the three levels of vows, even if you do some purification, you continue to create the negative karmas by receiving the vices or root downfalls of those vows. You continue to obscure your mind. Even if you have done some purification, by not changing your actions, you continually obscure your mind...

Lama Tsongkhapa says in the next verse that you should *always cherish the practice of the complete four powers*. Not only did you not purify, but you did not try to abstain from negative karma, so continuously your mind gets obscured. Firstly, it is especially important to purify the obscurations.

Secondly, you should always cherish practicing the complete four powers. The perfect way to purify karmic obscurations is to do confession perfected in the four powers all the time. You can understand how important this practice is by Lama Tsongkhapa's use of the word "cherish".

With the first power, **the power of putting the blame** means *you recognize* the aspect of that suffering as the shortcoming of that negative karma.

Practicing this power (regret, repudiation, with decisive insight, turning away from an action) particularly stops the completion of these basic negative karmas of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.

Each complete negative karma has four suffering results. One result is experiencing the suffering of lower rebirth as an animal, preta or narak being. This first power particularly stops the experience of this result... If this power of repentance is practiced strongly, you do not need to experience those suffering rebirths in the lower realms. You do not need to experience those heavy sufferings.

Saying prayers and reciting mantras, or the holy names of the Thirty-five Buddhas, is **the power of the remedy**. This is explained as "the power of always enjoying" or "the power of always conducting".

Perhaps it is like this patient who is in danger of death: he is so happy to take the medicine. Maybe this has a meaning like that: the power of always enjoying the remedy. It could have that meaning. By seeing the benefits, you enjoy doing prostrations, reciting the holy names of the Thirty-five Buddhas and saying mantras. Or it could mean conducting or doing that.

Generally, any virtue that you accumulate is this power of the remedy, this power of always enjoying.

This power of the remedy particularly stops this experiencing of the result similar to the cause.

This person who has taken poison by accident, as he has a very strong power of repentance, and realizes all the problems and shortcomings of taking poison, makes a strong determination to never take that poison again. He makes a very **strong determination** (resolution). *This is the most important point.* If this person did not make the decision to not take the poison again, even if he took all the medicine in a pharmacy, the problem would continue. If he was not careful in his actions, if he did not stop taking the poison, the problem would go on and on. If he makes this decision from the beginning, immediately after his experience, and stops the action of taking the poison, he does not need to experience all those problems - and does not need to go to the trouble of taking a whole pharmacy full of medicine. So it is extremely important that he stops the action of taking the poison.

The power of the determination to not commit the negative karma again stops the experience of the suffering result of doing the same negative action again, *which is creating the cause* for another four suffering results.

{the ripening result - rebirth in one of the six realms;

the possessed result - the environment, and conditions of one's life;

experiencing the result similar to the cause - as one has done to others;

and,

creating the result similar to the cause, which is producing and reinforcing habitual tendencies, or the karmic imprints that then manifest}

The fourth power is **the power of the object**.

You practice relying upon the power of the object by taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. You can regard the realizations of the buddhas *as* Dharma;

and you generate loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta on the object of the sentient beings. In this way, you purify the negative karma in regards to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and sentient beings. That is the power of the object.

Lama Tsongkhapa says to always cherish practicing the complete four powers. This word "cherish" could contain these explanations of how important these four powers are.

The word "always" means that it is not enough to do this practice for one week, one month, one year. This is not enough. You should do it all the time - every day. If possible you should be like Lama Atisha: whenever you see that you have received a root fall, broken a vow or created negative karma, immediately, without any delay, you should purify it. Without allowing the negative karma to increase, immediately purify it.

Use the example of three people who have taken poison. One person, by taking the poison, has already died. Another person, by having taken the poison, is experiencing much pain and is near to death. You yourself have taken the poison, but are not yet dead. Relate like this:

"Some sentient beings who have created the same negative karmas as I have, have already died and are now experiencing the heaviest sufferings in the lower realms. Some sentient beings who have created this same negative karma are dying right now. I have also created this same negative karma; I am also in this group."

Think of the person who has already died, and of the one who is dying now. When you look around and see the others like this, and you see that you yourself have taken the same poison, it is so unbearable. The same thing that is happening to them is going to happen to you. Relate this to your negative karmas.

"If I die, how will it be to have the body of a suffering migratory being?" Remember the unbearable sufferings of the lower realms: the narak, preta and animal beings.

"These are the result of negative karmas created by the unsubdued mind - my unsubdued mind! My taking birth and my suffering in the narak, preta and animal realms come from my actions, which come from my unsubdued mind, my disturbing thoughts of ignorance, anger and attachment."

After thinking about the evolution of this suffering, of how it comes from your own mind, then think:

"What are my own attitudes like in everyday life?"

Having a virtuous mind unstained by ignorance, anger and attachment is very rare. Mostly your mind is stained by disturbing thoughts and nonvirtue. One after another, your mind is overwhelmed by different delusions. One after another. It is so difficult and so rare for a virtuous thought unstained by the disturbing thoughts to arise.

Also remember this verse from *Bodhicaryavatara*:

"With behavior such as this, I won't even achieve a human body. There will be no virtue, only nonvirtue. If I don't accumulate virtue when I have the freedom and opportunity to do so, but accumulate negative karma, for hundreds of eons I won't even hear the sound of happy migratory beings."

This is saying that for many eons you will not even hear a human voice, like creatures born on the bottom of the ocean, or under the earth. For so many hundreds of eons, so many millions of eons, the suffering beings born in those places cannot even hear a human voice.

"With behavior such as this, I won't even achieve a human rebirth" means that you should remember your behavior. Mostly, your mind is overwhelmed by attachment, by worldly concern clinging to this life.

Even though you may feel upset and repentant thinking about how you have lived your life creating so much negative karma, you should feel great happiness when you think that there is such an extraordinary method of purification.

"I have the opportunity to purify so that I don't have to experience this negative karma at all. I am very fortunate. I should not waste my time; I should not waste my life. I *must* take this opportunity....".

Taking Refuge, from Being Pure, by Ringu Tulku

Buddha, Dharma and Sangha

Refuge is about laying a foundation for your practice. It is about finding a direction you want to go in. I usually describe it as finding a purpose and a path for yourself. In Buddhism, we go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Going for refuge to the Buddha is not about asking Buddha to come and help you, and save you. That is not going for refuge. That is prayer, and you can do that also, that is okay from the Buddhist point of view. But refuge is something a little bit different.

Refuge is based on an understanding that there is a possibility of transformation. The Buddha is the ideal, or example, of transformation. When we describe Buddha, we say that anybody who has limitless wisdom and compassion, is a Buddha. But it is important to understand that 'Buddha' or 'enlightenment' is not a result of attaining something that you do not have, now. It is more the result of getting rid of something. Like, for instance, if you are locked in a room and then you get out of that room. It is a result, but you have not got anything you did not have before. You got out of something that you were caught in.

In a similar way, Buddhahood is seen as freeing yourself from ignorance. You could also say, it is freeing yourself from something a bit like an addiction. If you have been addicted to something, or under the influence of a very negative habitual tendency, and then you break out of it, reaching Buddhahood would be like that. It is about breaking out of our usual, limited way of being.

So, when we say 'going for refuge to Buddha, we are saying: 'I, and every being, has that capacity to be free from suffering, from ignorance, from negative ways of reacting; and from these very strong negative emotions and reactions which create a lot of pain and problems for myself and others. There is a possibility to change this, and I would like to work on

this, to free myself from my habitual tendencies, my ignorance and my negative emotions.

So going for refuge to the Buddha is deciding that I want to transform and I also want to help others to transform. Transform means 'become better, not just a little bit, but completely. The Buddha is the utmost kind of transformation. So when I say I go for refuge to the Buddha, what I mean is that I would like to transform completely: I want to develop my compassion, my wisdom and my ability to help others, to the utmost. This means understanding that there is the seed, or the potential, of compassion in me, and the seed, or potential, of wisdom in me. This is what we sometimes call Buddhanature.

When we talk about Buddhanature, it doesn't mean to say we are all really good; we are all good, there is no real problem, we are already Buddha. That is not what it means. What it means to say is that we are not all good; we have lots of negativity; we have lots of delusions, lots of negative emotions and lots of negative habitual tendencies. We are not much better than animals. Our animal instinct' is still very much there. But we have progressed a little bit; we have evolved a little bit. And we can evolve much more. That is the idea, that there is a possibility to do that. That is why we say we have Buddhanature. We have some wisdom, some compassion, some little bit of loving-kindness and all these can be developed and increased.

So, going for refuge to the Buddha means that I want to free myself from the causes and conditions that make me chained to the problems and suffering of ignorance. And I would like to find ways and means to work on that, not only for myself, but for others also. So, once I have gone for refuge to the Buddha, then I have to find a way of how to do that.

This is going for refuge to the Dharma. The Dharma is the methods: the teachings of the Buddha and the experience of those teachings. When I say I take refuge in Dharma, again, it is not like saying, Please Dharma, come

and save me!' Because there is nothing called 'Dharma' that can do that. Dharma consists of all the methods to work on myself; all the different ways, means, understandings and practices, whatever needs to be done. These methods are the Dharma and I need to learn these.

So, going for refuge to the Dharma is saying I would like to try and learn them and then I would like to use them, apply them and practise them; so that I use them on myself and my experience. So, Dharma is described as both aspects: the teaching and the experience. The teaching is the learning and the experience is that understanding becoming part of ourselves. When it has become our experience, we actually act in that way. It becomes part of who we are.

Then there is going for refuge to the Sangha. The Sangha is the people who have experience of the Dharma. So Sangha can be very high, like Buddha Shakyamuni. Buddha Shakyamuni is also Sangha. When Buddha Shakyamuni became enlightened, it is said that there was one Sangha in the world. So it is not necessary for it to be a group of people, although the word 'sangha' means an assembly or a group of people or an association. But it doesn't mean that in a Buddhist sense. And then when Buddha taught the first of his teachings to five of his first disciples and they became enlightened, they became Arhats; then it is said that there were six Sangha members.

So the actual, true Sangha is anybody who has true experience of Dharma. This is not just the learning of Dharma but also the actualisation of the experience of Dharma; those who have actually transformed at some level. That is the real Sangha, the true Sangha. Those who are not truly experienced but have some understanding and are trying to work on that, a group of people who are working on that can also be called a Sangha. They are trying to understand the Dharma and practise it. That can also be called a Sangha, an ordinary Sangha. Sometimes they call it a Beginner's Sangha.

When I say I go for refuge to the Sangha, it means 'How do I learn the Dharma?' I want to learn; I am ready to learn from people who have some understanding or experience. That means I want to open myself to study and learn and receive instructions and examples and methods. Also, I open myself to be positively influenced. Learning is not only in theory. Learning is through inspiration and influence also.

Sometimes we talk about transmission. Especially in Vajrayana Buddhism, we talk about transmission. What is transmission? It is nothing like the teacher comes and makes a symbolic action or something and something comes out of the teacher and goes into you. Transmission is that you come into contact with a genuine Master, a genuine Dharma person, or not even necessarily Dharma, but a great person. And then, through his or her being, through their teaching and way of being - in body, speech and mind - you are influenced; you kind of change, either knowingly or unknowingly. So, you change for the better. That is transmission.

This is our natural way of learning and is how we learn from everything. It is how we learn from our society; how we learn from our parents and how we learn from our peers and our teachers. It is not just what they say. We learn by looking at what they do and how they are. That is the same thing; that is transmission.

So, therefore, going for refuge to the Sangha is saying that I would like to make myself open, with humility, in order to learn. That is one way of going for refuge to the Sangha. I allow myself to be influenced positively. And I do not allow myself to be influenced negatively. This humility is very important. It is said that if you have pride you cannot learn anything. You are closed, as if you think: 'I know everything, I don't need anything. I look at everybody like they are useless. Then you cannot learn anything from anybody. The more I see the positive qualities in others, the more I myself can learn. If I can see even little positive qualities in others, some good side of them, some small good quality, the more I see this, the more I learn, the more I acquire good qualities and the more I improve.

If you don't see any positive qualities in anybody, it doesn't mean that you are the best. It means that you are closed. You cannot learn anything while you are like that and you will remain like that always if you keep that attitude. That is what we are saying when we talk about humility and humbleness: not to be coated with pride, but to allow ourselves to soak up positive qualities and positive things from outside, from everybody and everything.

It is not that I have to only see good things and I cannot see bad things. That is not the idea. Of course, we have to understand the bad sides also. We don't need to close our eyes to them. We have to be very aware and alert and understand and be clear, but not be clear only about bad things. We have to be clear and understand and be aware of the positive things as much as the other side. So the more we can be aware of the positive things, the more we can also feel good about that. We can learn and we can respect others. Respect is a very important thing because it is the beginning of learning. It is the beginning of our improvement also. And it is the beginning of the Sangha, of togetherness - respect for each other and showing appreciation for each other. That is what leads to togetherness and Sangha.

Purifying the Mind of Negative Karma, from Training the Mind in the Great Way, by the First Dalai Lama

Undoubtedly we carry within ourselves a great store of negative karmic seeds from the past. And even now from time to time we fall under the spell of thoughtlessness and consequently commit negative actions. We should purify ourselves of these karmic seeds by means of applying the four opponent forces. As it is said in *The Sutra Revealing the Four Dharmas*,

The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas mastered the four opponent forces. These four outshone the power of the negative karmic seeds that had been accumulated (prior to their enlightenment).

And what are these four? (A) They are the force of regret, (B) application of antidotal practices, (C) the resolve to turn away from negative ways, and (D) the force of reliance.

A) The Force of Regret

Purifying the mind by means of engaging the force of regret means that (with great love and compassion for oneself and others) one contemplates the undesirable karmic effects of negative actions, reflecting upon the ripening karmic effects, the results that coincide with the nature of the cause, and the overall workings of the process.

B) The Application of the Antidote

There are six antidotal practices to be applied in order to purify the mind of the seeds of negative karma. These are as follows:

(i) The first is mentioned in *The Ornament of Mahayana Sutras*: 'Holding or reading the profound sutras, such as *The Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom*'

(ii) Next is meditation on emptiness, etc. Meditation such as those on emptiness are the direct antidotes to the influence that the seeds of negative karma have upon us. Being mindful of and meditating upon emptiness leads to the transcendence of the patterns of ego-grasping, which is the root of all negative activity.

(iii) The third purification practice is the recitation of mantras and so forth. This refers to the special tantric mantras and dharanis associated with spiritual purification, such as the one hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva, etc. These should be applied in accordance with the stages of meditation and ritual generally taught in the Tradition. *The Sutra Requested by Subahu* states,

*Fire which attacks a forest in late Summer
quickly and easily destroys vast tracts.
Similarly, when the fires of mantra and dharani
are stirred by the winds of self-discipline,
the heat of the blaze eagerly consumes
the vast forest of negative karmic seeds*

One should continue the mantra or dharani recitation until signs of purification manifest in one's dreams.

(iv) The fourth antidotal practice is to create images of enlightenment. This means that, with appreciation for the enlightened beings, one builds or commissions the building of images of the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, or of enlightenment monuments (stupas).

(v) The fifth practice is to make offerings to the Buddhas or to images of them in order to purify the mind of the instincts of negativity.

(vi) The sixth is to rely on names. This means to recite or recollect the names of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, etc.

C) The Resolve

The third opponent force is to generate the thought of determination to turn away from negative ways in the future. Without this resolve, the purification practices are mere vocal exercises.

D) The Force of Reliance

The fourth opponent force is that of reliance. Here one relies upon taking refuge in the Three Jewels and meditating upon the bodhimind, the altruistic aspiration to highest enlightenment.

How effective are these four opponent forces in their function of purifying the mind of negative karmic seeds? This is determined by a number of factors:

whether the practice is done with great or small strength,

whether all the four forces are present or not,

the strength or weakness of the thought behind the practice,

the duration of their application, and so forth.

The effects of the practice of the four opponent forces manifest in a number of ways. Sometimes a karmic seed with the potency to bring about great suffering is reduced to the potency of producing only a small suffering. Or one may still take rebirth in a lower realm, but will not experience the unpleasantness generally concomitant with such an incarnation. Also, karmic seeds that could have brought about a lower rebirth now ripen in this lifetime as a mere headache. Or the lower birth that would have had to be endured for a long period of time now becomes of short duration.

The need for purification through the four opponent forces is given in a sutra:

*The karmic seeds within living beings
does not perish, even in a hundred aeons*

It may seem contradictory to quote this scriptural passage, in which we are told that karmic seeds are never lost, while at the same time speaking of rendering karmic seeds impotent. However, there is no contradiction. In general the potencies of karmic seeds remain until they are worked out; but this refers only to those, as in the above quotation, that were not purified by means of the four opponent forces.

Also we sometimes see it said in the scriptures that 'there is no option but eventually to face the ripening effect of our karma...' It is important to note that this refers to those karmic seeds that have already ripened upon us as undesirable effects in this life, such as being blind.

**The four opponent forces negate the effects of dormant karmic seeds, not of those that have already been activated.*

How long should we meditate upon the karmic laws of cause and effect? At the moment we regard worldly activities as our priority; spiritual endeavor is given a secondary place. We should meditate on karma until this becomes reversed: until our priority becomes spiritual development and worldly activities become of secondary importance.

On not continuing samsaric suffering, from the teachings of Lama Zopa Rinpoche

From The Four Suffering Results

The lam-rim texts discuss negative actions and their results through analysis of the ten nonvirtues... Each of these nonvirtues is further shown to have four types of suffering results. They are:

1. the ripening result (rebirth in one of the six realms)
2. the possessed result (the environment, and conditions of one's life)
3. experiencing the result similar to the cause (as one has done to others...)

and,

4. creating the similar cause (creating, or reinforcing karmic propensities, which are called bijas, seeds, or habitual tendencies; these imprints that then manifest again and again when other conditions are present)

Creating the similar cause, (or perpetuating it) as opposed to experiencing it, means the habit we had in a previous life continues. *It is the habitual pattern we have in our mind through having done the same action in the past.*

...

This type of karmic result is the crucial factor in why we suffer. We suffer because we create negative actions, and we create negative actions because we are habituated to doing them because we have done them in the past again and again. Here is the whole chain of cause and effect we set up that is called cyclic existence or samsara.

Because of the delusion we have created from a previous time, we suffer which causes us to create a negative action, which imprints a delusion on our mindstream, which causes us in the future to suffer and so create another negative action, and so on, again and again and again, forever.

As long as we follow delusion there is no end.

...

**In some way, this is the life's work for each of us, to destroy the nonvirtuous habitual tendencies and to develop the virtuous habitual tendencies.*

This habituating aspect of karma has been happening for beginningless lifetimes and it will continue for endless lifetimes unless we can break the habit.

The wonderful news is that we can break it.

By understanding karma we have the choice to follow old habits or to create positive karma instead. We can break from "the tight bonds of karma and delusion" and be free. (!)

Creating the Result Similar to the Cause Ties Us Forever to Suffering

Continuing to create the similar cause is the most dangerous suffering, because this is the aspect of our karma that makes us circle continuously in samsara and experience suffering again and again and again. It is the reason that we create and experience obstacles all the time. Through creating and experiencing obstacles, we are continuing to create the cause to receive obstacles now and in the future.

We are driven by needs and impulses. This is what this fourth result of karma is all about. When an impulse, such as to smoke or to commit

adultery, arises in our mindstream we need to understand its deceptive nature and its terrible consequences, otherwise we will never be able to overcome it.

We must consider the habitual desire to commit any of the ten nonvirtuous actions as more harmful than having a poisonous snake coiled in our lap. If the snake bites us the worst that could happen is that we die in pain, but it does not have the power to propel our consciousness into the suffering lower realms. Compared to the suffering of the hell realm we are heading towards by following our negative mind, the most excruciating death is nothing.

It's much more worse than drinking poison. Once the poison is in our system we experience so much pain, and if it is very strong we die and go on to the next existence. That is all that poison can do to us. It can't cause us to be born in the lower realms. It can't cause us to repeat our nonvirtuous actions over and over again.

...

Even more terrible than the experience waiting for us in the lower realms however is when we repeat this nonvirtue over and over again.

In the lower realms, a being experiences the result for a certain period of time. It could be eons, which seems like forever, but there will come a time when the suffering caused by that karma is used up. It is not permanent, but by creating and following that habit- creating the result similar to the cause - we create the cause for suffering not once but over and over again.

We are addicted to nonvirtue and so we are unable to ever break free of the cycle of suffering we have created. Suffering creates negativity creates suffering creates negativity. (And if we are not careful, completely clear about this, and powerfully determined to free ourselves) it never ends.

...

We can break this cycle, and that is so important to know, and when we do and start living in morality, then the four results of karma work in our favor.

!

By abandoning nonvirtuous actions, we are reborn in an upper realm, with a beautiful environment (the possessed result) where we experience great happiness (experiencing the result similar to the cause); but most importantly of all, we continue to create the similar causes for future happiness, and because karma is expandable, it just gets better and better, all the way to liberation and enlightenment.

Unless we have completely purified our previous negative karma, we have these negative karmic imprints within us, so that is why taking vows from a spiritual master is so important. By vowing to refrain from the worst actions such as killing, we can cut that habitual mind state.

* * *

From Teachings from the Vajrasattva Retreat, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

The ripening aspect result of one single complete negative karma is rebirth in the lower realms, such as I've just been describing. However, there are three other types of suffering result, which we experience later, when we're finally, once again, born human.

One is *the possessed result*, the unhealthy or fearful environment into which you're born. Even though you're born human, you find yourself in a place that endangers your life, that is filthy, dirty, full of excrement and garbage, where people cheat each other, where resources are scarce, there's no food or other means of living, where there's constant drought, nothing

grows, there's much fighting, many wars- dreadful places like that.

Then there's (*experiencing*) *the result similar to the cause - where what you did to others in the past, the harm you gave them, comes back to as similar harm to you in return.* Even though you are born human, you receive harm similar to that which you inflicted upon others in the past.

And finally, there's *continuing to create the similar cause (the karmic propensities, seeds, or imprints, as tendencies) that leads to engaging in the same negative actions again.* (Then) You create the same negative karma - gossiping, killing, sexual misconduct, ill will, slander and so forth - over and over and over again. No matter how much trouble you get into by doing these things, getting punished, imprisoned, fined or penalized, you can't stop yourself from creating these negative actions. Even though you think they're bad and that you should stop, you find it difficult to do so; your mind is very uncontrolled.

So again, you create the same harmful negative karma in that life, and that again brings the four suffering results, one of which is creating that same negative karma yet again. That complete action, too, has the four suffering results, including that of (the impulse of) doing it again, and so it goes, on and on, like that.

If you don't purify a negative karma created today- such as gossiping, ill will, sexual misconduct and so forth- it will go on and on, and you will keep creating the cause, bringing the four suffering results.

One of these is again *creating the same cause*, which itself brings the four suffering results, and in this way your samsara becomes endless. There's no end to your suffering, no end at all. Your suffering becomes endless.

...

Therefore, by doing Vajrasattva practice or even the Thirty-five Buddhas just once- not taking into account all the other different practices, *but simply considering doing Vajrasattva meditation*, or reciting the powerful names of the Thirty-five Buddhas just once - you can purify not only having to experience rebirth in the lower realms, but also the worst of the four results- that really bad one, the terrifying one, the one that is the worst of all, worse even than rebirth in hell- *the result of engaging in the same negative actions again and again.*

These practices have the power to purify that.

Of the three suffering results that you experience in the human realm, that of creating the same negative karma over and over again is the worst because it makes your suffering endless. It is more terrifying than rebirth in hell because once you have experienced one rebirth in hell, it's over; that karma has finished...

Hell suffering is not endless. You don't experience it continuously. When that hell karma finishes, the suffering of hell stops; the vision, the karmic appearance of hell, ceases.

Much more terrifying than that is continuing to create the cause leading you to engage in the same negative karma over and over and over again. That is the most terrifying of the four karmic results because it ensures that, without it being remedied, without end you will be reborn again and again in the lower realms, as well as later having to experience all the other sufferings of the human realm.

Therefore, following or being controlled by the bad habit is worse than the suffering of hell. Putting it another way, it's like that. (edited, revised, and added to)

The Four Remedial Powers

What I'm saying here is that by doing the practice of confession with the four remedial powers, you can stop each of the four suffering results.

By practicing the power of dependence (taking Refuge and generating bodhicitta), you purify the possessed result, finding yourself in a suffering environment. Here, by taking refuge, depending on Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, you purify the negative karma you have created with those holy objects. By generating bodhicitta, depending on sentient beings, you purify the negative karma you have created in relation to them.

Then, the power of feeling regret for the negative actions purifies the result similar to the cause in experience.

The power that I translate as "the remedy of always enjoying," - I think the meaning might be that by purifying negative karma, you get to enjoy happiness all the time, but I'm not completely sure- this is the remedy to the ripening aspect result, rebirth in the lower realms.

Finally, the power of steadfastly determining not to commit those negative actions again is the remedy for continuing to produce the cause (the karmic propensities) that are causes to continuously create those negative karmas again and again, which, as I explained, is much more terrifying, much worse than the suffering of hell itself.

The reason I'm going into all this in detail is so that you can understand, feel the kindness of sentient beings and therefore cherish them more than you do.

Through just one practice- reciting the Thirty-five Buddhas' names or doing the Vajrasattva meditation with the four remedial powers- you can avoid having to experience incredible unbearable suffering; you can

purify *so much* negative karma. For example, one of today's negative karmas, such as gossiping- through these practices you can either stop its four suffering results from arising altogether, or if you can't stop them completely, at least you can lighten or shorten their effect...

...

Even if by practicing the remedy of vowing not to commit negative actions again- the antidote to the result similar to the cause of creating the same negative karmas again and again- with Vajrasattva or the Thirty-five Buddhas, you could avoid having to experience the four suffering results *of just one* negative karma, that would still be incredible peace. You would stop the constant suffering that arises from continuously creating the cause, which brings suffering without end. You wouldn't have to go through it again.

The absence of that karma and suffering is peace- peace forever. By purifying these negative karmas (removing them altogether from one's mindstream) you stop having to experience the suffering result that happens again and again. So the everlasting peace and happiness that you experience in all your future lives from purifying these negative karmas comes from Vajrasattva or the Thirty-five Buddhas...

So far I've been talking about just one negative karma, but by practicing Vajrasattva or the Thirty-five Buddhas, by reciting their names and doing prostrations, we can purify *all* the countless negative karmas created today, this week, this month, this year, this life;

*with Vajrasattva or the Thirty-five Buddhas we can purify all our past lives' negative karmas.

To get an appreciation for this, first we should understand how terrifying all the results of just one negative karma are- how much suffering

it brings from life to life, and how unbelievable it is to be able to purify all that with Vajrasattva or the Thirty-five Buddhas; how much unbelievable peace and happiness it brings.

We should also understand what an emergency it is that we purify all this; that we should purify it without even a second's delay. Whether the negative karma be gossiping, or ill will, or sexual misconduct, or telling lies, or whatever, it is urgent to purify it without delaying even a moment.

That's just one, but through these practices we can purify all the negative karma we have created not only in this life but in all previous lives as well.

* * *

From The Purification of Negative Karma

So the point is this: generally speaking, regret is necessary, but you see, to have regret alone is not enough; the purpose of regret is *to do* something.

It's like the purpose of going to the hospital is to recognize whether you have a disease or not. If one doesn't a disease, then a one can enjoy life, being healthy, and if one does have a disease, then one can take treatment before it goes beyond the reach of methods to help, and you see death approaching. Before coming to that point, you can take treatment and get better.

Finding out that one has disease, you know, there's an uncomfortable mind, generally speaking, for most people, but knowing about it, you take the treatment, to heal and recover from the disease.

Here in the teaching of Buddha there's always a method. Recognizing the shortcomings of creating negative karma, you feel regret, but there's always a method, to transform, to free our mind from suffering.

In the Western culture, because there is no method, sometimes we tell people 'You're okay, there is nothing wrong with you.' Maybe that's okay for today, for some hours. The person won't become crazy, they will feel happy, but how long that can last? If you really think about it, you can see: Those negative karmas that the person did, does that really purify them? Does that really make those things not exist in the person's mental continuum?

Now, with this negative karma that is collected on the mental continuum, we have got *to do* something. We have got to clean that, we have got to purify that. If nothing is done, it gets piled up and piled up, like mountains, and you see then, because of that the problem will come out. The person will experience problems in life again and again, again and again, because the negative karma is there. So like that.

Then you see, as I mentioned yesterday, as I went over the four results, you see four suffering results. The person will do the action, and make the mistake again and again, so you see, in that way there is no end. In this way, for the person seeking for treatment, there's no end. Also, regarding the material expenses for the treatment, you know, all these things, also there is no end. As long as there's no end of the negative karma, there's no end. No matter how much one spends, it's never enough. The problem comes back and is experienced again and again. So like that. [pause]

Generally speaking it is like this.

From Remorse and Confession in the Spiritual Community,
by Subhuti

From Sila to Samadhi

In the early Buddhist scriptures, we often find the Buddha receiving a monk's confession with words like these from the discourse to Bhaddali:

Surely, Bhaddali, a transgression overcame you... But since you see your transgression as such and make amends in accordance with the Dhamma, we forgive you. For it is growth in the Noble One's Discipline when one sees one's transgression as such and makes amends in accordance with the Dhamma by undertaking restraint for the future.

-(M 65, Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation)

The words used here constitute a formula, and this fact suggests that they were felt to crystallise certain important ideas. From them we can draw out four aspects of confession. The four are: (i) *seeing a fault as such*, (ii) *actually confessing it*, (iii) *making amends*, and (iv) *making a resolution not to repeat the fault* (or "undertaking restraint for the future")...

Remorse and the Education of the 'Natural' Conscience

On the first aspect of confession: *seeing the fault as such*. This is the inward dimension of confession and is of fundamental importance. We must not be misled by the word *seeing*. In order really to see the fault, we must not only 'see' it (which might imply no more than a detached, abstract awareness that an action was technically 'against the rules') but also *feel* it to be a fault. In other words there must be *remorse*.

{This is the wisdom of our feeling nature.}

I think that sometimes, when we make a confession, this feeling element is missing or weak. This does not mean we are insincere. We know that what we have done is wrong, because the precepts say so, and we have a sort of general faith in the Dharma and hence in the precepts. But we may not actually feel that much remorse. Somehow, we just can't take it that seriously.

But our spiritual practice should be causing us to develop an increasingly delicate ethical sensitivity. It is especially likely to do so if we make confession a regular part of that practice. This makes us more capable of remorse. One consequence of growing ethical sensitivity is that we will act more skilfully, but at the same time, our 'standards' will go up. In other words, as we leave behind our grosser unskilful tendencies, we simultaneously start to feel remorse in relation to subtler ones, which previously we would scarcely have recognised as such, or dismissed as insignificant, or recognised only in the abstract, unfeelingly. In this way, we escape from our vicious circles and enter a virtuous spiral, propelled upwards by skilful use of remorse.

What then is remorse? The Sanskrit word is *kaukrtya*. This is the same word that is normally translated as 'anxiety' in the list of the five hindrances to meditation. 'Restlessness and anxiety' or 'flurry and worry' are common renderings of *auddhatya kaukrtya*, but actually, neither 'anxiety' nor 'worry' is strictly accurate as a translation of *kaukrtya*.

The Sanskrit word has two parts: *kau* means 'wrong', while *krtya* is like the past participle of a verb meaning to 'to do', so the literal translation of *kaukrtya* is 'wrong done'. *It thus refers quite directly to our sense of having done something wrong, (or having neglected to do something right). The experience of *kaukrtya* certainly involves a cognitive or thinking aspect, but the word basically indicates *a feeling*, specifically a painful feeling of regret and shame for something done or left undone.

Kaukrtya is a spontaneous or 'natural' mental event. Of course, it can be strengthened or weakened by other conditions, but the capacity for kaukrtya is part of being human. This has profound implications, for it means that *our consciousness has an intrinsic moral dimension*.

We have a sense of doing(right or) wrong that is not wholly dependent on our upbringing or education or even upon a process of reasoning. It functions as an intuition, springing directly from our awareness of ourselves (with our desires, our experience of pain, and so on) and of others, whom we recognise as essentially like ourselves. Doing wrong thus goes directly against something in the nature of the mind.

The same idea is present in the Pali word for 'mindfulness': sati. *The Pali Text Society Dictionary* gives 'conscience' as one of the meanings of sati. So conscience is part of consciousness, as is suggested in English by the etymological connection of the two words.

Buddhist morality bases itself on this faculty and this is one of the ways in which it must be classified as a 'natural' system of ethics. It is not founded on learning externally derived rules. There *are* precepts, of course, but precepts do not *generate* our moral sense. They only *educate* it (in the word's root sense of 'lead out'). Such education is necessary because, although innate, our ethical impulses are not usually the strongest we possess. They compete with others and they can also get obscured or distorted by the various forms of conditioning – cultural, social and psychological – that we all undergo. Worse, our ethical instincts can be blunted or even suppressed when we allow unskilful tendencies to develop.

Our moral intuition is thus a potentiality. Its actual manifestation waxes and wanes according to the choices we make and the conditions we (cultivate or) find ourselves in.

Most of us know this from our own experience. When we are on a retreat, meditating, absorbing the Dharma, perhaps spending a lot of time in

silence, we become much more sensitive and our actions start to reflect the great ethical principles of metta, generosity, contentment and so on. We usually carry something of this state away from the retreat, but back in the hurly-burly of everyday life, surrounded by distractions, we soon start to lose the spiritual 'edge' we acquire on retreat. After only a few days, our actions of body, speech and mind start to coarsen. Before long, we are quickly forgetting or even not noticing the little unskilful acts that we are committing and so have no chance of confessing them.

But however valuable such retreats and peaceful conditions may be, the most direct and effective way of strengthening and educating this basic ethical sense is through the practice of confession, which enables it to function sensitively, whether or not we are on retreat. As we have seen, the Buddha himself vouched very explicitly for the importance of confession, telling Bhaddali and many others that confession '*... is growth in the Noble One's discipline*'. The Noble Ones are of course those who are Enlightened, and the Pali word for 'growth' is, like ours, the same one that denotes what living things – such as crops – do. In other words it means the process of increase or expansion, of upward movement towards the light, and organic unfolding towards completeness or maturity. Confession of faults is a practice that leads to Enlightenment. Growth of *conscience* is literally growth of *consciousness*.

Virtue is the experience of our true nature.

When we are in our right mind, we naturally move away from non-virtue.

Rejecting means to look deeply into every evil, illuminating and contemplating what is not right, and rejecting it, while, of course, keeping and protecting what is right.

- The Venerable Hsuan Hua, from his Commentary on the Heart Sutra

Purification of Mind, by Bhikkhu Bodhi

1998

An ancient maxim found in the Dhammapada sums up the practice of the Buddha's teaching in three simple guidelines to training: to abstain from all evil, to cultivate good, and to purify one's mind. These three principles form a graded sequence of steps progressing from the outward and preparatory to the inward and essential. Each step leads naturally into the one that follows it, and the culmination of the three in purification of mind makes it plain that the heart of Buddhist practice is to be found here.

Purification of mind as understood in the Buddha's teaching is the sustained endeavor to cleanse the mind of defilements, those dark unwholesome mental forces which run beneath the surface stream of consciousness vitiating our thinking, values, attitudes, and actions. The chief among the defilements are the three that the Buddha has termed the "roots of evil" - greed, hatred, and delusion - from which emerge their numerous offshoots and variants: anger and cruelty, avarice and envy, conceit and arrogance, hypocrisy and vanity, the multitude of erroneous views.

Contemporary attitudes do not look favorably upon such notions as defilement and purity, and on first encounter they may strike us as throwbacks to an outdated moralism, valid perhaps in an era when prudery and taboo were dominant, but having no claims upon us emancipated torchbearers of modernity.

Admittedly, we do not all wallow in the mire of gross materialism and many among us seek our enlightenments and spiritual highs, but we want them on our own terms, and as heirs of the new freedom we believe they are to be won through an unbridled quest for experience without any special need for introspection, personal change, or self-control.

However, in the Buddha's teaching the criterion of genuine enlightenment lies precisely in purity of mind. The purpose of all insight and enlightened understanding is to liberate the mind from the defilements, and Nibbana itself, the goal of the teaching, is defined quite clearly as freedom from greed, hatred, and delusion. From the perspective of the Dhamma defilement and purity are not mere postulates of a rigid authoritarian moralism but real and solid facts essential to a correct understanding of the human situation in the world.

As facts of lived experience, defilement and purity pose a vital distinction having a crucial significance for those who seek deliverance from suffering. They represent the two points between which the path to liberation unfolds - the former its problematic and starting point, the latter its resolution and end. The defilements, the Buddha declares, lie at the bottom of all human suffering. Burning within as lust and craving, as rage and resentment, they lay to waste hearts, lives, hopes, and civilizations, and drive us blind and thirsty through the round of birth and death. The Buddha describes the defilements as bonds, fetters, hindrances, and knots; thence the path to unbonding, release, and liberation, to untying the knots, is at the same time a discipline aimed at inward cleansing.

The work of purification must be undertaken in the same place where the defilements arise, in the mind itself, and the main method the Dhamma offers for purifying the mind is meditation. Meditation, in the Buddhist training, is neither a quest for self-effusive ecstasies nor a technique of home-applied psychotherapy, but a carefully devised method of mental development - theoretically precise and practically efficient - for attaining inner purity and spiritual freedom. The principal tools of Buddhist meditation are the core wholesome mental factors of energy, mindfulness, concentration, and understanding. But in the systematic practice of meditation, these are strengthened and yoked together in a program of self-purification which aims at extirpating the defilements root and branch so that not even the subtlest unwholesome stirrings remain.

Since all defiled states of consciousness are born from ignorance, the most deeply embedded defilement, the final and ultimate purification of mind is to be accomplished through the instrumentality of wisdom, the knowledge and vision of things as they really are. Wisdom, however, does not arise through chance or random good intentions, but only in a purified mind. Thus in order for wisdom to come forth and accomplish the ultimate purification through the eradication of defilements, we first have to create a space for it by developing a provisional purification of mind - a purification which, though temporary and vulnerable, is still indispensable as a foundation for the emergence of all liberative insight.

The achievement of this preparatory purification of mind begins with the challenge of self-understanding. To eliminate defilements we must first learn to know them, to detect them at work infiltrating and dominating our everyday thoughts and lives. For countless eons we have acted on the spur of greed, hatred, and delusion, and thus the work of self-purification cannot be executed hastily, in obedience to our demand for quick results. The task requires patience, care, and persistence - and the Buddha's crystal clear instructions. For every defilement the Buddha in his compassion has given us the antidote, the method to emerge from it and vanquish it. By learning these principles and applying them properly, we can gradually wear away the most stubborn inner stains and reach the end of suffering, the "taintless liberation of the mind."

From The Tamonata Sutta

Four Types of People

AN 4.85

"There are these four types of people to be found existing in the world. Which four? One in darkness who is headed for darkness, one in darkness who is headed for light, one in light who is headed for darkness, and one in light who is headed for light.

"And how is one the type of person in darkness who is headed for darkness? There is the case where a person is born into a lowly family- the family of a scavenger, a hunter, a basket-weaver, a wheelwright, or a sweeper- a family that is poor, with little food or drink, living in hardship, where food & clothing are hard to come by;

he is ugly, misshapen, stunted, & sickly: half-blind or deformed or lame or crippled. He doesn't receive any [gifts of] food, drink, clothing, or vehicles; garlands, perfumes, or ointments; bedding, shelter, or lamps.

He engages in bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct. Having engaged in bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct, he- on the break-up of the body, after death- reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. This is the type of person in darkness who is headed for darkness.

"And how is one the type of person in darkness who is headed for light? There is the case where a person is born into a lower class family...

He engages in good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct. Having engaged in good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct, he- on the break-up of the body, after death-

reappears in the good destination, the heavenly world. This is the type of person in darkness who is headed for light.

"And how is one the type of person in light who is headed for darkness? There is the case where a person is born into an upper class family- a noble warrior family, a priestly family, a prosperous householder family- a family that is rich, with much wealth, with many possessions, with a great deal of money, a great many accoutrements of wealth, a great many commodities.

he is well-built, handsome, extremely inspiring, endowed with a lotus-like complexion. He receives [gifts of] food, drink, clothing, & vehicles; garlands, perfumes, & ointments; bedding, shelter, & lamps.

He engages in bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct. Having engaged in bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct, he- on the break-up of the body, after death- reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. This is the type of person in light who is headed for darkness.

"And how is one the type of person in light who is headed for light? There is the case where a person is born into an upper class family... and

He engages in good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct. Having engaged in good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct, he- on the break-up of the body, after death- reappears in the good destination, the heavenly world. This is the type of person in light who is headed for light.

"These are the four types of people to be found existing in the world."

From The Simile of the Cloth, Majjhima Nikaya 7

Translated from the Pali by Nyanaponika Thera, revised

Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was staying at Savatthi, in Jeta's Grove, at Anathapindika's monastery. There he addressed the monks thus:

Monks."-

Venerable sir, they replied.

The Blessed One said this:

Monks, suppose a cloth were stained and dirty, and a dyer dipped it in some dye or other, whether blue or yellow or red or pink, it would take the dye badly and be impure in color. And why is that? Because the cloth was not clean.

So too, monks, when the mind is defiled, an unhappy destination [in a future existence] may be expected.

Monks, suppose a cloth were clean and bright, and a dyer dipped it in some dye or other, whether blue or yellow or red or pink, it would take the dye well and be pure in color. And why is that? Because the cloth was clean.

So too, monks, when the mind is undefiled, a happy destination [in a future existence] may be expected.

And what, monks, are the defilements of the mind?

Covetousness and greed,

ill will and anger,

hostility, denigration, being domineering,

envy, jealousy, hypocrisy,

fraud, obstinacy, presumption,

conceit, arrogance, vanity,

and negligence are the defilements of the mind.

Knowing, these to be defilements of the mind, the monk abandons them.

Having abandoned them he thereupon gains unwavering confidence in the Buddha thinking:

Thus indeed is the Blessed One: he is accomplished, fully enlightened, endowed with [clear] vision and [virtuous] conduct, sublime, knower of the worlds, the incomparable guide of those who are able to learn, the teacher of gods and men, enlightened and blessed.

He gains unwavering confidence in the Dhamma thinking:

Well proclaimed by the Blessed One is the Dhamma, realizable here and now, possessed of immediate result, bidding you come and see, accessible and knowable individually by the wise.

And he gains unwavering confidence in the Sangha thinking:

The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples have entered on the good way, have entered on the straight way, have entered on the true way, have entered on the proper way; that is to say, the four pairs, the eight types of persons;

this Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples are worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, the incomparable field of merit for the world.

When he has given up, renounced, let go, abandoned and relinquished [the defilements] in part, he knows:

I am endowed with unwavering confidence in the Buddha, in the Dhamma, and in the Sangha;

and he gains enthusiasm for the goal, gains enthusiasm for the Dhamma, gains gladness connected with the Dhamma.

When he is gladdened, joy is born in him; being joyous in mind, his body becomes tranquil; his body being tranquil, he feels happiness; and the mind of him who is happy becomes concentrated.

Just as cloth that is stained and dirty becomes clean and bright with the help of pure water, or just as gold becomes clean and bright with the help of a furnace, so too, it may be said of a monk of such virtue, such concentration and such wisdom- his mind becomes clean and bright.

Then he abides, having suffused with a mind of loving-kindness towards one direction of the world, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth, and so above, below, around and everywhere, and to all as to himself; he abides suffusing the entire universe with loving-kindness, with a mind grown great, lofty, boundless and free from enmity and ill will.

He abides, having suffused with a mind of compassion... of sympathetic joy... of equanimity (the immutable strength of love, its unchanging nature) towards one direction of the world, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth, and so above, below, around and everywhere, and to all as to himself; he abides suffusing the entire universe with equanimity, with a mind grown great, lofty, boundless and free from enmity and ill will.

He understands what exists, what is low, what is excellent, and what escape there is from this [whole] of samsara.

When he knows and sees in this way, his mind becomes liberated from the canker of sense desire, liberated from the canker of becoming, liberated from the canker of ignorance.

When liberated, there is knowledge:

It is liberated,

and he knows:

Birth is exhausted, the life of purity has been lived, the task is done, there is no more of this to come.

Such a monk is called '*one bathed with the inner bathing.*'

{thoroughly purified, and resplendent}.

The Two Obscurations - From a Letter on Wisdom and Compassion

I just wanted to mention one thing you repeated in your short note- about what Goenka said about compassion developing naturally as a result of vipassana or insight- I think that, in all fairness, sometimes it happens like this, and sometimes not, otherwise all Arhats would be Bodhisattvas, and that's not yet the case.

Actually, this 'wisdom leading to compassion' is the approach in the Zen tradition, as well as in the Theravada, and also, to some extent, it is the approach taken by the lineages in Tibetan Buddhism that emphasize wisdom practice more first, on the way to a full, complete realization.

Just a note here: The Tibetan word '*San-gye*', 'Buddha', translates to '*completely purified- and fully developed*', meaning that all faults have been removed, which is the cessation without remainder, and all positive qualities are brought forth, *actualized*.

So, to get back to my point- if it is so that sometimes liberation, the freedom of mind, leads to the full development of love and compassion, and sometimes not, then why not? Why does it sometimes happen and sometimes not? This is so important for us to consider as individuals, and so important for our world, really.

And here's the best answer I can come up with so far. First, there are different temperaments, so that in any one system or approach one person will flourish fully, accomplishing all the different aspects of development, while another person may need other instruction, and to engage in other practices to achieve the same thing.

Then, I've found the following teaching very useful to explain what is happening in any case. In the Tibetan tradition, they speak of 'the two obscurations' that keep us from seeing the truth of what is here.

The first type is what they call the 'conceptual obscurations', or the

'obscurations of conceptual thought', or wrong views. These are corrected, or cleared away by samatha and vipassana- the quieting of the mind and cultivation of the strength of discernment- discriminating between the true and the false. The Theravada, Zen, and Tibetan traditions that practice non-conceptual meditation clear away this type of obscuration, the obscuration of conceptual thought, very effectively.

But what happens, quite often as it turns out, - it's the characteristic possible sidetrack to this approach- is that the other type of obscuration, called 'the obscuration of afflictive emotions', *kilesa nivrana*, is not always fully removed. Sometimes I've been calling these 'the qualitative obscurations'. And the all too common result is that people end up with a partial experience of the view of emptiness, or egolessness, one with the wrong concepts cleared away- but it is a cold, dark, meaningless, nihilistic experience, one that is lacking in the sense of worth, of the beauty and richness of what is here.

The emotional obscurations are cleared away by the development of all the qualities that we associate with the good heart: the development of love and compassion, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, humility, honesty, gratitude, joy, and generosity. These change the quality of the mind so that when the conceptual obscurations are removed as well, the experience is warm; the mind is bright, appreciative, and loving; and the feeling is one of richness, of the great value of life.

The no-self teachings of the Buddha are further expressed in the Prajnaparamita Sutras, and the Middle Way is a further explanation of those teachings. The term 'Middle Way' refers to 'being free of the two extremes', the extreme of eternalism, or ego-grasping, and the extreme of nihilism. According to Middle Way philosophy, all the mistakes that people can have regarding the View fall into one of these two categories.

Right View is accomplished by removing the two obscurations, conceptual and emotional, together with their seeds. So the development of love and

the positive qualities of the heart are definitely an essential aspect of vipassana, or wisdom practice, seeing things fully as they actually are. Whether we arrive at this indirectly, or through our engaging in methods that directly cultivate both discernment and kindness, the need is there for everyone to have these elements present. That said, we should each practice what suits us best, and accomplishes a full result.

The self-arisen wisdom, which is also called bodhichitta, is not something that has been fabricated, a new product created by the conjunction of causes and conditions. It never has changed, never changes, and never will change. The absolute nature remains what it is, perfectly pure, at all times.

Even if it appears obscured for impure beings at the start of the path, it has never actually been obscured. If it seems to be a mixture of pure and impure during the course of the path, it in fact always remains pure. And at the time of the result, perfect enlightenment, it is simply the same ground nature made evident and not something new that was not there before.

So even though we experience all these hallucinations that make up samsaric existence, they cannot affect one's confidence: the kinglike bodhichitta that is the doer-of-everything will never be stained or dampened.

– Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, from the book Zurchungpa's Testament

From *Small Boat, Great Mountain*, by Ajaan Amaro

When we say, “I will now practice loving-kindness” or “I will develop compassion” or “I will keep the five precepts,” we overtly take that particular quality as a practice. In fact, what we are really doing is aligning the conditions of our dualistic mind with the reality of our own nature.

We are helping the conditioned be resonant, harmonious with the unconditioned, and through that resonance, that synchrony, there is a spaciousness between conditions that opens up through which the unconditioned is realized.

By practicing the seven factors of enlightenment or the brahma-viharas, we set the conditions so the gap is right there. What’s “outside” in terms of the conditioned is completely attuned to what is “inside.” It’s a practice and process that works both ways. As we practice loving-kindness, our heart automatically comes into accord with reality and we feel good. And when our heart is awakened to reality, it automatically functions with loving-kindness or with one of the other brahma-viharas.

It’s like two-way traffic on a highway between the conditioned and the unconditioned. There are the intrinsic qualities that come forth and the practices that lead in. We get the strings in tune so that we line up our behaviors and attitudes “outside” with what is already the case “inside.” Goodness feels good because the attitude resonates with reality.

Lying and harming feel bad because they are dissonant with that reality of what we are. It’s as simple as that. The Buddha said the brahma-viharas are not transcendent qualities; they are a peaceful and a beautiful abiding. By doing these kinds of practices, we create an alignment so that things match up.

The conditions are set so that the gap is visible and very close. Then as soon as the gap opens, boom! It’s right there, in alignment, and in that moment, the heart is free.

The Meaning of Confession, by Max Lucado

What is the purpose of confession? Doesn't God already know what I've done? Why does he need me to tell him?

*The Greek word for *confession* is the compound term *homologeō*, *homo* meaning "the same" and *legeō* meaning "to speak." To confess is to speak the same, to agree with. In this case, to agree with God.

This definition not only tells us what confession is; it tells us what confession is not. Confession is not complaining. If I merely recite my problems and tell you how tough my life is, I'm not confessing.

Confession is not blaming. Pointing fingers at others without pointing any at myself may feel good for a while, but it does nothing to remove the conflict within me.

Confession is coming clean with God.

King David did. As if the affair with Bathsheba wasn't enough. As if the murder of her husband wasn't enough. Somehow David danced around the truth. He denied his wrongdoing for at least nine months until the child was born. It took a prophet to bring the truth to the surface, but when he did, David didn't like what he saw (2 Sam. 11:1-12:13).

He waved the white flag. No more combat with God. No more arguing with heaven. He confessed. He came clean with God. What was the result of such honesty?

*I confessed all my sins to you
and stopped trying to hide my guilt.
I said to myself,
"I will confess my rebellion to the LORD."*

*And you forgave me!
All my guilt is gone.*

(Ps. 32:5 NLT)

Want to get rid of your guilt? Come clean with God.

Selections from *Opening the Hand of Thought*, by Uchiyama Roshi

It's a big mistake to assume that the conditioned self is the true Self. The true Self appears when we strip away karmic or conditioned self. And that means 'opening the hand of thought. This is original Self.

...

Our real life is connected to everything. Our minds conceive of 'I' as only 'myself', as something independent. But if we open the hand of thought, such a conception vanishes and we can realize 'I' as being one with everything.

...

No matter what we think about it, we cannot be separated from the original Self. At the same time, it's also true that we cannot be separated from our conditioned self, either, which has the karma to produce all kinds of delusion. So we can conclude that the human condition involves existing in the midst of this relationship between conditioned self and original Self.

From the perspective of conditioned self, original Self represents the direction toward which we should aim. This is the meaning of 'vow'- going in that direction.

...

In the *Commentary on the Awakening of Mahayana Faith*, we read, 'the true Mind of every sentient being itself teaches and leads each sentient being. This is the Vow of Buddha.'

On the other hand, when we consider conditioned self from the ground of original Self, we realize that we are not what we should be. We can't actualize original Self because we are constrained by the handcuffs and

fetters of karma. In this frame of mind, we can't help but repent.

In the very nature of the relationship between original Self and conditioned self, vow and repentance naturally emerge.

...

I try to expose my own faults as a form of repentance. And when I repent, the flame of my vow burns brighter.

Vow and Repentance

Doing zazen is throwing out all human thought, and this letting go constitutes the throwing out of man's arrogance.

...

To throw out thought and not to tie one phenomena to another constitutes being prior to thought. Hence, it is to be before the separation of things into this and that. When we are practicing zazen we exist before separating this moment from eternity or subject from object.

We take that which precedes division as reality.

...

Since life is being vigorously manifested, all things are reflected.

Dogen Zenji writes, 'The activity of buddha is carried out together with the whole earth and all living beings; if it is not activity that is one with all things, it is not buddha activity.'

...

To act in accordance with the entire earth and with all beings is zazen practitioners' whole life course and simultaneously is their direction here

and now. In Buddhism, this life direction is referred to as vow.

...

The Lotus Sutra says, 'The three worlds are my possessions, and all sentient beings therein are my children.' This is the fundamental spirit of buddhism, and the source of this spirit is nothing other than settling in the zazen that precedes all distinctions.

...

For the person who sits zazen, vow is nothing other than the practitioner's own life; so we see all encounters- with things, situations, people, society- as nothing but our own life and we function solely with a spirit of looking after our own life. Therefore, like a mother's caring for her child, we aim to function unconditionally and tirelessly and, moreover, to do so without expecting any reward.

I take care of the world as my own life- moment by moment, and in each situation I enable the flower of my life to bloom, working solely that the light of buddha may shine.

In this sense, the activity of buddha carried on together with the whole earth and all living beings is the aim of zazen practitioners' daily life as well as the aim or vow of our overall life.

(However), even though in our zazen the direction of our activity is carried on together with the whole earth and all beings, there is no way we can carry out perfect activity.

In our zazen, precisely because we have taken such a vow, we cannot help but repent of being unable to fulfill it.

To truly repent does not mean offering an apology; rather, repenting requires standing before the Absolute and letting the Absolute light

illuminate us.

In the Samantabhadra Bodhisattva Dhyana Sutra we find,

'If you wish to repent, sit zazen and contemplate the true nature of things.'
In other words, it is in doing zazen that true repentance is actualized.

...

Living by vow and repentance, watched over, protected, and given strength by zazen, constitutes the religious life of the Buddhist practitioner. Where there is no vow, we lose sight of progress; where there is no repentance, we lose the way. Vow gives us courage; repentance totally crushes our arrogance- it is precisely this kind of posture that constitutes an alive religious life.

On Karma and Purification - from *Illuminating the Path to Enlightenment*,
by His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Whenever a karmic act occurs, be it physical, verbal or mental, the act itself lasts only until its completion, but its consequences can arise much later on. Certain karmas ripen during the life in which they were created, others in the very next life and the rest in subsequent lifetimes.

An important question in Buddhist philosophical discourse asks what is the factor that links the initial karmic act to its fruition? To explain this, there is the notion of karmic “propensities,” or “imprints,” which means that even though an act is over once it has been completed, its imprint, or potentiality, remains.

There is much discussion in the Buddhist literature on the question of where this imprint is stored. Many Buddhist thinkers maintain that karmic propensities are stored and carried in the consciousness. When we look at the teachings on the twelve links of dependent origination, we find that fundamental ignorance gives rise to volitional acts; karma leaves an imprint on the consciousness; and consciousness gives rise to the subsequent links. Therefore, in this context, it is consciousness that is the repository of karmic imprints.

However, there are times in one’s existence when one is totally devoid of conscious activity, such as when a meditator is completely absorbed in single-pointed meditative equipoise on the direct realization of emptiness. In that state, not a single part of the person’s mind is polluted, because the meditator is in a state of uncontaminated wisdom. At such times, where could the karmic traces reside?

One of the most profound answers to this question is that the imprints are maintained simply on the basis of the mere sense of I that we all naturally have. This mere I is the basis of the imprints left by the karma that created

them and is the link between the initial execution of the act and its fruition at a later stage. This issue is discussed extensively in Nagarjuna's *Fundamentals of the Middle Way*.

Lines of Experience: Verse 12

The fullest strides (of progress) in actualizing the supreme paths will not come about unless you have attained the working basis (of an ideal human body) that is complete with (all eight ripened favorable) qualities. Therefore, you must train in the causal (virtuous actions) that will preclude (your attainment of such a form) from being incomplete.

(Furthermore) as it is extremely essential to cleanse away the stains of black karmic debts and downfalls (from broken vows) tarnishing the three gateways (of your body, speech and mind), and especially (to remove) your karmic obstacles (which would prevent such a rebirth), you should cherish continually devoting yourself to (applying) the complete set of four opponent powers (which can purge you of them).

I, the yogi, have practiced just that. You who also seek liberation, please cultivate yourself in the same way.

As I mentioned before, when we reflect upon the potential of our human life and the opportunity it affords us of attaining the highest spiritual aspiration of full enlightenment, we will realize the preciousness of our human existence, particularly that which is endowed with all favorable conditions. Therefore, we read in Verse 12, "*The fullest strides (of progress) in actualizing the supreme paths will not come about unless you have attained the working basis (of an ideal human body) that is complete with (all eight ripened favorable) qualities.*" ...

Purification of Negative Karma: The Four Opponent Powers

We then read, *“(Furthermore) as it is extremely essential to cleanse away the stains of black karmic debts and downfalls (from broken vows) tarnishing the three gateways (of your body, speech and mind), and especially (to remove) your karmic obstacles (which would prevent such a rebirth), you should cherish continually devoting yourself to (applying) the complete set of four opponent powers (which can purge you of them).”*

With respect to refraining from negative actions in the future, you can determine to maintain an ethical discipline that will protect you from committing negative acts in future, but what about the negative actions you have already committed? The only way to deal with these is to purify them.

There is a Tibetan saying, “If there’s one good thing about negativities, it’s that they can be purified.” However, there are different degrees of purification. One possibility is to completely eliminate the potency of a karmic act such that it can never ripen at all. Another is to diminish the gravity of a serious negative karma such that its fruition will be less damaging. A third possibility is to delay the fruition of a negative karma that cannot be entirely purified.

The text refers to the four opponent powers that should be used when practicing purification:

1. The power of regret, or repentance (recognition with both heart and mind)
2. The power of reliance;
3. The power of virtuous activity; and,
4. The power of resolve.

Of these four, the most important is the power of repentance. From the depths of your heart, you must feel a deep sense of regret for the negativities you have created, as if you had ingested poison. (the qualitative aspect)

The second power is that of reliance. If you look at the many negative actions you have created, most of them are related to either higher beings, such as the Buddha, or fellow sentient beings. Therefore, you practice the power of reliance by taking refuge in the Three Jewels and generating bodhicitta, feeling strong compassion for all sentient beings.

Third is the power of engaging in virtuous acts specifically aimed at purification. Whenever you engage in a virtuous act, you can direct it towards the purpose of purifying your negative karma. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the general custom is to engage in practices specifically associated with purification, of which six are often cited: reciting the names of buddhas, especially in the bodhisattva's confession sutra with prostrations to the Thirty-Five Buddhas; reciting certain mantras, especially the one hundred syllable Vajrasattva mantra and the mantra of Vajra Akshobhya (Mitukpa) ; reciting sutras; meditating on emptiness; making offerings; and commissioning the creation of images.

The fourth power is a deep sense of resolve that you will not indulge in such negative actions in the future, even at the cost of your life.

During this practice, you may be aware that you might not be successful in completely abstaining from all of these negative actions or from a particular negative act, but while you are actually practicing purification, you should generate the strong determination that you will not indulge in such acts in future.

From On Purification, by Gelek Rinpoche

How to purify? The four R's

The way and how we can purify: The first and foremost problem we face is the denial. This is funny in the West; you either deny completely or you feel guilty. People are scared of feeling guilty, so they refuse to accept. They like to take a sort of shelter, to hide. The denial is a big deal here; I don't know particularly about the Netherlands, but in the West in general.

A lot of people look very angry, however they tell you: I'm not angry, *but* it is my duty to tell...' and a big blah blah blah will come. A big statement comes ahead and says, 'I'm not angry *but*'. Or they say, 'I don't particularly care, *but* this is the situation.' That actually means you are denying, denying your anger, denying your attachment, denying your hatred. People say, 'It is none of my business *but* you shouldn't do this and this', which means you are denying attachment. Things like that people do all the time. It serves a very good purpose for the negativities. The number one shelter for the negativities is the denial, because if you keep on denying you are not going to work with it! At the same time it is bothering you all the time; it is on the back of your mind somewhere. You may keep on denying but it is absolutely there. Maybe it is better than to feel guilty, I don't know.

Purification begins with **recognition**: to recognize I'm angry, recognize I have a problem; recognize I'm attached; recognize I'm jealous. Don't say, 'I'm not jealous, *but*.... Recognition is number one!

{with humility and self honesty; with kindness and compassion for oneself and others; with a sense of self worth, and faith in these methods and the possibility of transformation, and freedom. Here, }

Nothing can ever work without recognition. Buddha says that the direct antidote of anger is patience, but patience never works against your own anger unless you recognize you are angry. To help reduce attachment Buddha recommends meditation on impermanence, but I don't think that the impermanence meditation can immediately or easily affect the attachment without giving it recognition plus appreciation. For purifying anything you first have to see what you are going to purify, to recognize it. This is the first R; the R of recognition.

When you recognize 'I have done something wrong', when you are convinced, you do something: if you did something against an enlightened one you take refuge; if against a non-enlightened one you meditate on love and compassion. That is how you recognize. Not only you have to recognize that you did something wrong, by recognizing you should do something for the other one too...

The second R is **regret**. If you don't regret, there is no reason to purify. It won't work. Both recognition and regret reduce a lot of the power of anger. Please, do this exercise with yourself and find out within yourself how it works with these 2 R's. Just shut your door, sit by yourself and think about it. If you don't have a room where you can shut the door, go to the bathroom and think about it. Then you will know. These are things we can experience by ourselves. That will give you a better grasp than reading about it or being told. My job as a spiritual friend here is to point out and inform you. Your job as a practitioner is to feel and to experience. That is how we work. You may be wondering how we work. Well, this is one of them: when you are angry take these 2 R's and go to the bathroom and find out!

There is a third R too: **non-repetition**. If you have a strong regret – I still go on the same example we had – you're not going to drive while drunk or you're not going to drink again.

And then the fourth R is the antidote, **re-direction**. You give your emotions a new direction. Redirection is turning round the energy that went the negative way. You regret and you do a positive action. When you redirect your actions, you do something. Thinking it will never be good enough, is also not right. Sometimes it can be far better. If you are going to think that only what you can see directly with your eyes is good enough, it is limited to the period between birth and death only, but if you take a little bit of a bigger view, a little bit of an open mind, you'll know you can do a lot...

So, redirecting is the antidote action. Do something positive. Meditation on emptiness, or rather, seeing emptiness, is considered the best. Seeing emptiness is called 'the one medicine that cures hundred different illnesses'. Meditating on and developing the bodhimind is the second best action. Shantideva says:

*Hence virtue is perpetually feeble,
The great strength of evil being extremely intense,
And except for a Fully Awakened Mind
By what other virtue will it be overcome?*

- The bodhisattva's way of life, I, 6

It says, bodhimind has an tremendous capacity for purifying any negativity. What action could destroy such powerful negativity besides the great bodhimind,?

Then there are a class below that, actions such as saying mantras, doing prostrations, doing circumambulations and so forth. Equal to those are saving a life and acts of generosity. This is redirecting your emotion.

When you haven taken these 4 R's it may become a Rolls Royce, a good, perfect, luxurious vehicle. Then things will roll like a Rolls Royce. In short, what you purify are your negativities. How you purify is through recognition, regret, redirection and non-repetition. With the application of

these four powers, when you do it strongly, consistently, with enthusiasm things will change for the better.

Apply the six paramitas on it, because you need to be consistent, you need patience, you need discipline, you have to be generous, you have to concentrate, and you have to apply wisdom. The four powers joined with the six perfections will work.

This is not the traditional way of talking about this. Traditionally we talk about the application of the four powers over here and about the six paramitas somewhere else, but if you look really carefully, this is how you work. This is a part of your daily life. So even for purification you apply the six paramitas. People may say the six paramitas are the bodhisattva's activity and the four powers of purification are even available in Hinayana, but you don't have to worry about that. This is how you can apply it in your daily life. One good thing in Tibetan Buddhism is it is applicable to everybody's life.

The Four Powerful Remedies, by Lama Yeshe

I am sure Lama Zopa already told you that there are four powers you can use to purify negative actions. The first power is *the power of the object*. It means taking Refuge and actualizing the Bodhicitta-mind.

The second power is the power of regret. This is not just emotional sorrow, but regret with wisdom. You recognize a negative action, and you regret it, because you know a negative reaction will follow. It is just like a person who feels upset because he realizes he has eaten something poisonous, and knows that he will soon be in great pain. You regret your negative actions because you understand karma, cause and effect, action and reaction. If your regret does not come from wisdom-understanding, you keep on creating more negative actions.

The third power is *the power of the solution*. It means cultivating samadhi and vipassana. You try to make your mind concentrate one pointedly on Heruka Vajrasattva, the divine, blissful reflection of transcendental wisdom; you powerfully recite the mantra at the same time.

The fourth power is *the power of indestructible determination*. It is a strong resolution arising from knowledge-wisdom. The energy created by this determination is so strong that it causes you never to create that negative action again. This power completely counteracts your old habitual negative actions; it protects you from falling down again. This great energy is caused by inner realization; it can never arise from a mere intellectual motivation. It instinctively protects you. This is completely different from just having intellectual control.

Suppose you are taking the Mahayana Ordination, the Eight Mahayana Precepts for one day. If you take the ceremony with weak determination, you will definitely break your vows. If you have only a weak intellectual motivation, because of your limited wisdom, maybe at first you can practice and be aware, but after some time you completely fall back into samsara.

You have no idea what you are doing. You are not aware; you are not conscious. If you have indestructible determination, you will keep those eight vows, from the minute you take them. It is a memory action, minute by minute.

Before an action becomes manifest, it is already completely set up in the mind. Breaking vows is not an intuitive action, but it takes time. Just as if you want to pump up water, before the water gets to the end of the hose, there is already much air movement. If you just have weak motivation, the energy to guard the mind from negative actions becomes less and less. *There is a subtle energy within you which protects you from following your old habitual character.*

The purpose of Taking Refuge and actualizing the Bodhicitta-mind

The reason why you have to take Refuge and actualize the Bodhicitta-mind when you make purification is that whenever you create negative actions, it involves either the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha or sentient beings as the object. Of course, you are the subject. Check up.

Take for example the way you are living together since the meditation course here at Kopan. Everybody is in contact with other sentient beings; we are all relating with each other. We are all linked together. Most of the common problems arise from that relationship. They do not arise from this wood or from this cement.

Most of the time problems occur with those who are more close, with whom we are more closely connected. Once you touch honey, it sticks, and then it is difficult to get rid of, but, if you stay away from it, it cannot affect you. The same with black tar - if you touch it, it is very difficult to get your clothes clean. On the other hand, if you go near it but do not touch it, it cannot affect you. (edited) The same thing applies to our contact with

sentient beings. The closer we are connected, the more frequently and strongly problems arise.

Maybe I can give you some examples to clarify this. When you create the negative action of killing, you need an object, another sentient being. The subject is your mind. The same thing applies to telling lies. When I tell a lie, I need another being as the object. The subject is my schizophrenic, wrong conception mind. When I steal, the subject is, of course, my selfish, dissatisfied, attached, wrong conception mind, but the object has to be another being. I need Jim to be able to steal from him. If the thing I am stealing does not belong to Jim or any other sentient being, then you cannot call that stealing. So, therefore, negative actions are almost always involved with other sentient beings, either directly or indirectly.

At other times, the object involved is the Triple Gem - the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Finding fault in Holy Beings, such as Bodhisattvas and criticizing them, or degenerating Lord Buddha's Teachings, are examples of negative actions with the Triple Gem as object. Therefore, to be able to purify the false energy of the negative mind, we need to take Refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and actualize the Bodhicitta-mind.

When you are actualizing the Bodhicitta-mind, you have Great Compassion, great desire and enthusiastic feeling to lead all mother sentient beings into perfect enlightenment, and you take responsibility to do so on yourself. Just that releases you from karmic causation.

You give so much suffering to your parents. To be able to finish this karmic link, you cannot say, 'I'm completely fed up with them, I don't want to see them. I'm going to the mountain.' You cannot escape your karmic connection with your parents that easily. It is not enough. You need Great Compassion for them. If you start dealing with them with the great Bodhicitta-mind, you can finish that negative and powerful karmic causation.

When you feel much love and compassion for your parents, you can see them as being gentle, peaceful and kind, rather than having the paranoid idea that they are only criticizing your way of living life, and that they are always reacting against the selfish ideas of your deluded mind. Then you can understand why they do not want you to take drugs, and why they want you to have a good education. You can appreciate their concern, instead of being afflicted. By Taking Refuge and actualizing the Bodhicitta-mind, we can destroy the wrong conception mind's false energy.

From Steps on the Path to Enlightenment, Volume Two, by Geshe Sopa

On The Four Opponent Powers

The point of all these quotations and of this entire section of the Lamrim Chenmo is to stress the importance of studying and understanding karma. Based upon that understanding you will develop trust in the cause and effect of karma. With that foundation you will begin to recognize how much negative karma you have created in the past, and how much you continue to create- even in this excellent rebirth in which you have the intelligence and capacity to distinguish between good and bad. You will realize how this negative karma will continue to harm you for a long time. Once you understand this you will try to free yourself from those miserable results. You will try to purify past actions, and turning in a new direction, you will strongly resist creating additional negative actions in the future. The strong wish to eliminate past negative karma so that you will not have to meet its results leads us to the next section: the way to purify previous negative actions.

b" IN PARTICULAR, HOW TO PURIFY BY MEANS OF THE FOUR OPPONENT POWERS

When you have strong faith in karma, you naturally try to eliminate nonvirtue. But even when you make an effort to avoid being tarnished by unwholesome behavior, you may still create some negative karma out of carelessness, or as the result of intense afflictions such as hatred or attachment. Most beings are continuously creating negative actions because of the power of karma and the afflictions. Even when you are sincerely practicing the spiritual path, your mind is not completely purified until the end of the journey. When such faults arise you should not disregard them as if they did not matter, or leave them to ripen without any attempt to purify that negative potential. As soon as such downfalls occur, you should try to cleanse or destroy these negative karmas by applying the appropriate

remedies. For that purpose the kind Buddha taught many different methods to purify negative actions.

Just as there are different levels of virtuous and nonvirtuous actions, there are different levels of antidotes to nonvirtue.

First of all, we have three levels of vows, which are themselves powerful countermeasures to nonvirtue: pratimokṣa vows, bodhisattva vows, and tantric vows. Just in terms of the prātimokṣa vows, there are eight levels of vows, including lay vows, one-day vows, novice vows, and vows of a fully ordained monk or nun.' All of these are methods to counter faults, to restrain yourself from committing harmful deeds in the future.

Taking a vow means that you recognize that certain attitudes and actions are harmful, and you commit yourself to cleaning up and preventing those actions in the future.

In the Mahayana teaching we also have the bodhisattva path and the tantric path. Here too we have sets of vows that steer us away from actions that obstruct our progress on those paths and guide us in a positive direction. All of these vows and precepts at the different levels of practice are methods of counteracting and preventing negative karma.

When a person who has taken a vow violates the promise he or she has made, we call this a downfall. We use this image of falling down because by violating your precepts you cause yourself to fall into a bad situation in the future.

Each level of vows includes methods to remedy such downfalls; just as one falls to the ground, so there is also a method to get back up. It is because of our own actions that we fall into disastrous situations, and it is by our own actions that we can pull ourselves out of those circumstances.

In other words, the negative karmic seeds we have planted are not permanent. They are not something that cannot be removed. All of them can be purified if you use the proper method and make the proper effort.

For those who have taken a vow and then violated their commitments, the method of purifying that downfall is explained within the context of the vow itself. Each of the three systems of vows has its own methods for rectifying downfalls. Usually these remedies are centered around special rituals. When you take one of the three levels of vows you should learn these methods and then apply them whenever it is necessary.

There are also nonvirtuous actions performed by those who have not taken vows. How do you purify these? The method for purifying general nonvirtuous actions is to apply the four powers. These four are explained in the Sutra Giving the Four Teachings (Catur-dharma-nirdesa-sūtra).

Here the Buddha is speaking directly to Maitreya, and he tells him that if you make use of these four powers, all the negative karma that you have accumulated can be subdued, mitigated, and completely destroyed:

Maitreya, when a bodhisattva, a great being, possesses these four teachings, nonvirtuous actions that are performed and accumulated will be overcome. What are these four? They are the power of remorse, the power of the antidote, the power of turning away from faults, and the power of the basis.

The first of these four is the power of remorse. This is regret directed toward negative karmas you have created in the past. The second is the power of the antidote. If you realize that you have inadvertently eaten poison, first you feel great regret that you have put yourself in serious danger. Then you immediately apply an antidote to counteract the effects of the poison. The antidotes to nonvirtuous actions are meritorious practices, such as meditation, prostrations, and the recitation of mantras and prayers.

Third is the power of restraint, the power of turning away from committing those same misdeeds in the future. If you survive eating poisoned food, you will naturally make a firm resolve, "I will never eat that again."

Fourth is the power of the foundation, or basis; this is also known as the power of reliance. Since you have created a negative cause that may have very severe consequences, you look for a basis of protection, someone you can rely on to protect you from the results of your negative actions. The most reliable source of refuge and protection is the Three Jewels.

If you practice these four powers to counteract negative karma, there is no nonvirtuous action that cannot be purified. Even if you have committed great negative actions, if you have enough time and energy to apply these opponent powers seriously and intensively, even those grave negative potentials can be destroyed completely. And even if you are not able to destroy a karmic potential from the root, you can at least suppress it so that it is not able to bring its result in the near future, or you can mitigate it so that its result is very mild. As you can see, there are many different levels at which this practice can be effective, but the point is to interrupt the ripening of harmful results.

Remember that karma that is both done and accumulated is called definite karma. Its results are certain to be experienced because it was motivated by a strong intention and fully carried out with a concentrated effort. We say that such actions are definite karma because in general there is no way of avoiding their consequences. They will definitely bring their results. However, if you properly and sincerely apply these four powers, you will be able to subdue or destroy even definite karma: those actions which were both done and accumulated. Since this is true of definite karma, obviously it is also true of indefinite karma, which is much weaker.

1" THE FIRST POWER: REMORSE

The first power is generating profound regret for the negative actions you have performed. When you analyze your current situation based on an understanding of samsaric causality and its beginningless nature, you can infer that you must have already created a mountain of nonvirtuous karma. First, focus on your present life and analyze what kinds of actions with what motivations you perform every day. Ask yourself, "From the time I woke up until the time I went to bed, what kind of actions have I done today?" When you look into the situation carefully, you will see that your time is filled up with negative actions. If you don't check up, you will not recognize this problem.

Then recognize that so far you have considered only one day of your present life. Even now, while you are trying to practice the Dharma and are making every effort to act intelligently and beneficially, all kinds of afflictions still act in harmful ways. This is because your mind is so habituated out of attachment, malice, and a basic misunderstanding of your true nature.

Your present life is one in which you are practicing Dharma; you know the difference between right and wrong and you are at least trying to live a virtuous life. Nevertheless, every day you are accumulating more and more nonvirtue. Now imagine the wealth of misdeeds you must have collected during those innumerable lives when you totally lacked this level of intelligence or understanding. Consider how all the negative karma produced since beginningless time must be virtually limitless.

In order to produce a heartfelt sense of remorse, you should think about and meditate on the painful consequences that this mountain of negative potential will produce. Contemplate how this vast accumulation of negative potential will bring forth the three types of suffering results: fruition results, results corresponding to their cause, and environmental results. These contemplations will lead you to a profound regret for all of

these actions. That sincere remorse is the first of the four powers of purification.

Tsongkhapa tells us that when you are actually putting these four powers into practice, you can cultivate remorse through two different confession rituals. The Sutra of the Golden Light (Suvarṇa-prabhāsa-sūtra) is a tantric text that lays out various methods and procedures for confession. Then there is the short ritual we call the Confession to the Thirty-five Buddhas from the Sutra of the Three Aggregates (Arya-tri-skandha-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra) which was the ritual of confession that Tsongkhapa himself used.

In the Confession to the Thirty-five Buddhas you invoke the thirty-five tathāgatas and in front of them you confess and purify your negative actions. You clearly imagine them in front of you and then recite their names. In their presence you confess each of the negative actions you have done in the past, are doing in the present, and will do in the future. With your body you bow down to these buddhas, demonstrating your reverence, and remembering the unsurpassed qualities of the body, speech, and mind of the buddhas. Then, you mentally generate a strong sense of remorse for all of the harmful deeds you have done. You generate a countervailing force of positive potential by admiring the vast amount of beneficial actions that have been created by the buddhas, bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and all other ordinary individuals who are performing virtuous activity. You rejoice in their merits and aspire to follow in their footsteps. Finally you dedicate the merits of your confession to the benefit of all sentient beings.

Remember that, unlike in many other religions, the Buddha is not a god who decides on the nature of sin and sits in judgment of your actions. The Buddha cannot take away your negative karma in the same way that someone can pull a thorn out of your foot. But during his career as a bodhisattva, the future Buddha made a special dedication of his vast merit with the prayer, "In the future, when I become a buddha, may all beings

who call my name be purified of their negative karma, and by this blessing may all good things come to them." By the power of this dedication you can receive those blessings by reciting, with faith, the names of these thirty-five buddhas in order to purify your negative actions.

If you cannot do such an elaborate visualization, with all the thirty-five buddhas arrayed in front of you, you can do this purification practice in a simplified form. Imagine Sakyamuni Buddha alone, as a representative of all these buddhas, with all their power united in him, and then continue with the confession practice.

The key point in this purification practice is to generate the four powers sincerely in your own mind; that is the most important thing. Whether or not you imagine all these thirty-five buddhas in the space before you is not so important. The buddhas have perfect omniscience so wherever they may be, when someone invites them and seeks their help, they will be there.

On the sutra path, this kind of powerful practice can purify many negative actions. We also have certain tantric practices, such as the recitation of the mantra of Vajrasattva, that are very powerful methods of purification. But for any of these methods to be effective, these four powers must be produced in the mind.

You must begin by seeing the fault of a harmful action, and based on that you must produce genuine remorse. Out of that sincere sense of regret you must resolve that you will not repeat that action in the future, and then you have to apply a strong antidote. These powers must be based on a foundation of trust and confidence in the Three Jewels of refuge.

Without these four powers, which actually transform your mind, merely inviting the buddhas and asking them to do something to help you will not work. The buddhas did not create your negative karma and they cannot purify it for you. It is up to you to do the work of turning your mind in the right direction.

To summarize, the power of remorse is a strong attitude of aversion, renunciation, and opposition to the negative action you have committed. It is the same feeling of regret you would have if you realized you had just eaten poison. Once you see the dangerous consequences of what you have done, you feel profound regret and you resolve never to do that again. But until you see the faults and disadvantages of an action, you will not regret it. Therefore, producing sincere remorse depends on the study of karma and its results. The better you understand the cause and effect of karma, the more effective will be your application of the four powers of purification. If you lack this first power of remorse, the remaining three powers will be weak and ineffective.

2" THE SECOND POWER: APPLYING ANTIDOTES

Those people who have just discovered that they have eaten poison and feel the toxins beginning to work in their stomach naturally think, "How can I remove this great danger?" They are ready to do whatever it takes to save themselves from the consequences of their foolish action. They will look for a good doctor with an effective antidote and when they find such an antidote they will be ready to take it.

When this same kind of powerful remorse arises with regard to your own past negative deeds, you are ready to seek out the antidote and to apply it when you find it. The power of applying the antidote offers various methods that can counteract the poison of our past nonvirtuous deeds. In this section six types of antidotes are introduced, but this is not an exhaustive list; there can be many other methods. These are six examples presented according to the sutras and according to Santideva's *Compendium of Trainings* (Śikṣa-samuccaya).

1. Relying on the profound sutras. The first type of antidote relies on scriptures such as the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras. By reading, memorizing, listening to teachings, or explaining to others these sutras, you can purify negative karma. The main subject of these sutras is emptiness,

the ultimate nature of reality. Therefore, praising, reading, or hearing these texts has the power to purify negative karma.

In Tibet, even among lay people, this kind of practice was common. Many families would keep the twelve volumes of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras in their house and they would try to recite the text out loud once a year. If they could not read it themselves, they would invite monks from the local monastery to visit their house and recite the texts while the family sat respectfully and listened. This would take several days, during which the family would feed the monks and make offerings. This kind of practice is recommended in the sutras themselves: reading such holy texts- the words of the Buddha- or listening while someone else recites them, plants positive karmic seeds on your mental continuum, and it has a special power to purify negative seeds.

2. Having an interest in emptiness. The subject of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras is the wisdom that realizes emptiness, the ultimate nature of phenomena. Of course the realization of emptiness is the supreme weapon cutting out all negativities, like the axe which cuts the poisonous tree from the root.

Ultimately, all negative mental states and actions arise from ignorance, which is not knowing the truth. Realization of the truth severs the root of ignorance, which thereby severs all the negative karma that stems from that ignorance. This is why we say that the best antidote, the direct antidote, the ultimate weapon against negative karmic seeds, is the realization of emptiness.

"Having an interest in emptiness" means having confidence and conviction that emptiness is indeed the ultimate mode of being of the self and of phenomena. You gain this conviction by studying the Perfection of Wisdom and other sutras, the commentaries of the great masters such as Nagarjuna and Candrakirti, and by applying your own analytical wisdom to comprehend the meaning of emptiness. Then you meditate on that

meaning until you gain a direct realization of it. Even if you do not yet understand the meaning of emptiness, you should try to have faith that this teaching of the Buddha is not mistaken. You should aspire to understand it in the future, and expect that you will eventually gain the full realization. "Having an interest in emptiness" means approaching this profound teaching with that kind of positive attitude, rather than thinking, "This does not make sense."

*Of course emptiness, sunyata in Sanskrit, is essentially pure, primordially pure. Therefore, the afflictions, the obscurations within the mind, have a dependent nature- they are temporary, adventitious, created by causes and conditions. They are not intrinsic or inseparable aspects of mind, but are like clouds that pass over and temporarily obscure the mind. In its ultimate nature, one's own mental continuum is naturally, primordially pure from the beginning. Contemplating and meditating on that empty and luminous nature of ultimate reality and relying on the primordially pure nature of mind is also one of the methods of purification.

Aryadeva says:

*Those of little merit would not even
Entertain doubts that things are ultimately empty.
Even suspicion that objects are empty
Wrecks the seeds of cyclic existence.*

*The mere suspicion that ultimately things are empty of inherent existence has the power to shake the foundations of cyclic existence. It is the first glimpse of the truth, and it opens the way to the direct realization of emptiness, which destroys the karmic seeds that cause our suffering.

Only the fortunate ones, those with a great accumulation of merit, will be able to produce this doubt about the ultimate mode of being, this suspicion that things lack inherent existence. Those with little merit will never even think about this.

But those fortunate ones who study, think about, analyze, and meditate on emptiness will begin to suspect, "Maybe things are not as solid as they seem. Perhaps, ultimately things are empty of inherent existence." Even this much suspicion that the teaching on emptiness may be true can lead to the complete purification of all negative karmic seeds and the obstacles to liberation.

3. Relying on recitation. This refers to purification by means of reciting certain mantras in the context of special rituals.

The most common mantra of purification in tantric practice is the one hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva. Those who have received an initiation into the practice of Vajrasattva can use this method.

Vajrasattva is invited from his divine abode in a pure land. He comes to the top of your head, and after you pay him respect and make offerings, you confess your misdeeds and request him to purify your negative karma. Then you recite the mantra, with the one hundred syllables circling at the heart of Vajrasattva, and as you repeat the mantra a stream of light and nectar flows down from the mantra at Vajrasattva's heart. This stream enters your heart, and as it fills your body it pushes out all negativities and obscurations in the form of black filth, and replaces it with the white nectar of bliss and emptiness.

This is one example of the special kind of ritual taught in the tantric scriptures that can be utilized as a method of purification.

The purifying power of recitation is praised in *The Tantra Requested by Subahu* (Subahu-pariprccha-tantra):

*Just as the flames of a fire spreading through a spring forest,
Raging out of control, incinerate all the underbrush,
The winds of ethical conduct fan the fire of recitation,
And the flames of great effort burn up seeds of nonvirtue.*

*Just as the rays of the sun striking the snow
Melt it with irresistible brilliance,
The snow of nonvirtuous action melts away when struck
By the rays of the sun of ethical conduct and recitation.*

*Just as lighting a lamp in pitch blackness
Clears away every last bit of the darkness,
So the darkness of nonvirtue accumulated in thousands of lifetimes,
Is quickly cleared away by the lamp of recitation.*

The first stanza says that the combination of pure conduct and the recitation of mantras and special prayers, intensified by diligent effort, burns up the seeds of negative karma in the same way that a raging forest fire turns an entire forest to ash.

In the context of this tantric text, ethical discipline refers particularly to taking and keeping the tantric vows. When these are kept purely, it intensifies the power of your tantric recitations, just as a strong wind whips up the flames of a fire. Persevering effort spreads the purifying power of the recitation to all the seeds of negative karma, just as the tongues of flame effortlessly leap from tree to tree, spreading the fire in every direction.

The imagery of this scripture indicates just how important this method of recitation is for the practice of purifying nonvirtue. Whether you recite the Confession to the Thirty-five Buddhas, or use the tantric method of the one hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva, the important thing is to practice these rituals in the manner in which they were taught, and to apply them diligently and from the heart. When you practice recitation properly and sincerely, it has the power to purify all the powerful negative potential you have amassed over many lifetimes.

How long do you have to recite such mantras and prayers? Until you see a certain kind of sign or indication that your negative karma has been

purified. Before you enter onto the tantric path, or undertake any grand virtuous endeavor such as a meditation retreat, you should prepare by purifying negative karma. You do this by entering a special preparatory retreat to practice a purification ritual, such as that of Vajrasattva. For how long do you have to do this preparatory purification practice? Until there is some sign of success.

What are some of the signs that your purification practice is working? The text called the Formula of Exhortation (skul byed kyi gzungs) lists the following images that you might see in a dream. Your purification is having some success if you dream any of the following: vomiting bad food; drinking such foods as milk or yoghurt; again, vomiting; seeing the sun and moon; walking in space; seeing a blazing fire; being able to subdue a water buffalo; being able to subdue a dark or demonic person (although the text says "black man" here, it is not a racial description, but refers to the utterly black countenance of a demonic figure); seeing a Sangha consisting of bhikṣus or bhikṣunis; seeing a plant which produces a milk-like substance- perhaps milk-weed, sometimes used in tantric rituals; riding on an elephant; climbing to the top of a mountain or a high throne supported by lions; or listening to Dharma teachings.

The point is not to get attached to these auspicious signs and feel superior if you happen to have a dream like this. These signs have meaning only if you are engaged in an intensive purification practice, and if the signs begin to appear with some frequency. Until that happens you should continue to work energetically to purify past negative karma.

4. Relying on images. Once you have generated sincere faith in the perfected qualities of the Buddha, you naturally want to show respect to the Buddha's body, speech, and mind. Since you too want to attain perfect buddhahood, you need to purify nonvirtues and accumulate merits. One method to do that is to create images of the buddhas in the form of statues, thangkas, tsa-tsas, and other representations of their body, speech, and mind. When it is done out of faith, the physical activity of creating such

images is an effective method of purification, especially of bodily negative karma.

In Tibet it was common before embarking on a major tantric practice, such as a three-year retreat, to make many tsa-tsas- small clay images of a meditational deity- as a means of purification. Usually a practitioner would make one hundred thousand of them, using a mold to stamp them out.

5. Relying on worship. This includes a variety of spiritual activities through which we honor and demonstrate our respect for the buddhas. The central practice is making offerings of various substances to the buddhas, and to images that represent the buddhas. For example, you can offer clothing to a statue of the Buddha; in Tibet we traditionally offered special brocade garments. Or you can offer the gold leaf to gild a statue, or pure water, as when we offer water bowls on the altar every day, or you can offer just one flower. What you offer does not matter as much as the attitude with which you offer it, because the statue does not need any of these things. The purpose is to advance your own spiritual development by purifying past negative actions and accumulating the positive potential of merit.

6. Relying on names. This is related to the third method, “relying on recitation, and it refers to reciting, hearing, and remembering the names of the buddhas and great bodhisattvas. In Tibetan culture there were many examples of this practice, such as carving the mantra of Avalokiteśvara, Om māṇi peme hum, on stones all over the country, or setting out prayer flags with prayers and mantras. These spiritual artifacts would constantly remind people of the buddhas, and bring to their minds the names of Avalokitesvara or Manjuśrī. Even illiterate people would see an image painted on a stone by a roadside and it would bring to their mind Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion.

In Tibet the butchers were a special caste, something like the outcastes of India. They had faith in the Dharma, they believed in karma and rebirth,

and they understood that they were doing the worst kind of job and committing serious nonvirtue. They did not enjoy killing, but their livelihood depended on it, and they really didn't have much choice. They were born into that caste and that was the only way they could feed their children and their parents. So when they were going to kill an animal, let's say a sheep, they would chant the one hundred-syllable mantra out loud so that they themselves would hear it and the sheep who was about to die would hear it also. Then they killed the animal. In this way they mitigated the strength of that karma of killing; they made it an incomplete karma because they lacked a strong motivation to kill. Their action had no enjoyment or satisfaction in the result because they didn't really want to kill animals. On the contrary, there was a reluctance to kill, but they were forced to do it by their circumstances.

Not only did they lack the motivation to kill, but by bringing to mind the name of Vajrasattva as they did the act, they were already applying a strong antidote to their action. This is a good example of relying on the name of a buddha as a powerful antidote to negative action.

Many people recite mantras out loud to their pets, or when they encounter other animals. It is believed that when the animal hears these powerful sounds having connection to the buddhas, seeds of positive potential are planted in its mind. Therefore, people think, "Maybe this will help them. Maybe they will not be born again in a lower realm."

The practice of reciting Om māni padme hūm, the mantra of Avalokitesvara was practically universal in Tibet. The effectiveness of these syllables to purify negative karma comes from the dedication that Avalokitesvara himself made. He empowered his own name by praying that whoever recited it with sincere faith would receive blessings.

All six of these practices are effective methods of purifying past karma when they are based on a deep understanding of the perfected qualities of buddhahood. You need to know the nature of a buddha's activity- its

wisdom, compassion, and power- and how all of a buddha's actions are for the sake of other beings. When your practice is based that understanding, then building images or reciting the names of the buddhas can be of great benefit to yourself and others. Tsongkhapa emphasizes that these are the purification practices that are specifically mentioned in Shantideva's *Compendium of Trainings*, but there are many others as well.

3" THE THIRD POWER: TURNING AWAY FROM FAULTS

The third power is the resolve to avoid performing unwholesome actions in the future. Having understood the disadvantages of collecting negative karma, you make a decisive commitment to restrain yourself from doing any of the ten nonvirtuous actions. This resolve is rooted in your understanding of the consequences of each of these harmful actions, and it leads to a very concentrated determination to avoid them in the future. Sometimes this resolution is even expressed out loud, in words.

If you see the faults of your previous bad actions and you feel sincere regret, and based upon that you resolve that you will not repeat those actions, that resolve, that turning away, has the power to destroy many nonvirtuous karmic seeds. The Sun Essence Sutra teaches that such well-grounded restraint can destroy whatever unwholesome karma you have created, as well as the afflictions, and obstacles to the Dharma. Whether you did these actions yourself, caused others to do them, or merely rejoiced in seeing them done all these previously created nonvirtues can be destroyed by this power of turning away from nonvirtue.

However, if the resolution to refrain from nonvirtue in the future is not made with sincerity, it becomes mere words. For example, according to the pratimokṣa vows of bhikṣus like myself, we have a ritual of confession twice each month. All the Sangha members at a monastic institution gather together to reflect on what negative actions they have done during that month. In the course of the ritual they confess to each other the downfalls they have committed. During the ritual each monk or nun responds to a set

of questions: "Have you seen your own misdeeds?" To which one responds, "Yes, I have seen them." Then comes the question, "In the future will you refrain from them?" Response: "Yes, I will refrain."

When you are making this kind of confession, if the words come from deep in the heart- if you are thinking with sincere regret about your actions and genuinely committing to avoid them in the future, that is the real confession. However, if you respond by saying the right things, but in your heart there is no real remorse and no genuine resolve, then your confession is nothing but words.

Therefore, in the Vinaya we are taught to reflect on our past deeds. At the end of every day you should recall your actions: which ones were on the unwholesome side, which ones were beneficial, even examining what kind of dreams you had that night.

This was a famous practice of the great Kadampa masters. You can sit at the end of the day with a pile of stones and recall your activities for that day. When you see a virtuous action, you put a white stone on the table. When you see a nonvirtue, put a black stone. When you are done, check to see which of the two piles of stones is bigger. If the black stones make a bigger pile, you have something to worry about. If the white stones are more numerous, maybe you can relax a little bit. If there are no black stones at all you may feel quite pleasant.

If you are a serious practitioner, you will keep your body, speech, and mind pure and clean. Since afflictions like attachment, hatred, jealousy, and pride are so deeply ingrained in your mind-stream, and are always ready to rise out of habit, it is difficult to put a stop to negative behavior all at once. But even if you cannot completely stop a bad habit, you can at least resolve to diminish its frequency, to lessen it as much as you can. For example, at the time of confessing and applying the antidotes you can resolve, "Instead of getting angry ten times a day, I will not do so more than nine times, or eight times." Later, you can reduce the number even more. The point is to

make a decision that you will improve in the future, and then follow through with that resolve. In this way you reduce negative actions and the positive antidotes are strengthened.

You should look into your own situation and make a judgment about which behaviors you can stop completely and which you can only gradually reduce. But making the decision that you will eventually stop is the most important thing.

The arising of this kind of strong resolve depends on the first power; remorse. It requires you to see that activity as a fault, and to regret doing it. The strength of your resolve to turn away from an action will ultimately depend on the strength of the regret you feel for having done it. And all of these four powers of purification depend on a lucid understanding of the cause and effect of karma. You can recite the Sutra of Confession a thousand times each day, but without an understanding of the benefit and harm of virtue and nonvirtue you will merely be saying the words.

4" THE FOURTH POWER: RELIANCE

In order to succeed in this practice of purifying past negative karma and refraining from it in the future, you need to base your efforts on a source of reliance and reinforce it with other supports. The basis of reliance is taking refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. In fact, merely taking refuge in them with heartfelt trust and a willingness to rely on the Three Jewels will itself purify many negative karmas.

Of course the Buddha's teaching is always pure and free of any causes of unwholesome action. When you take refuge and place your trust in the Dharma, the way of the Buddha, you are placing yourself in reliable hands, and you will be following a path that leads only to virtuous actions and happy results. By trusting in the Sangha you choose as your companions those who share in your aspirations. Your central relationships and friendships are with people who are also striving to perform virtue and

purify nonvirtue, and this too has a powerful influence on how you lead your life.

So the Three Jewels of refuge are the first support of your practice of purification. The second is meditation on bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta means wanting to attain the highest goal of buddhahood in order to help other sentient beings. You want to help them because you see how they are trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of misery, which is perpetuated by their own misunderstanding, attachment, and hatred. You see how these mental afflictions produce wrong action, and how this cycle of afflictions and harmful action causes their lives of misery to go on and on.

You empathize with these suffering sentient beings and you want to help them. In order to rescue them from the mire of cyclic existence, you want to lead them to perfect buddhahood. In order to do that, you know that you yourself must first obtain enlightenment. This is what bodhicitta means: wanting to save all other living beings, and in order to do that, wanting to quickly become a perfect being oneself, wanting to attain the perfect wisdom, perfect compassion, and perfect power of a buddha. Once you have completed these qualities of a buddha, you can of course be of immeasurable benefit to all beings. Until then, the help you can offer will be quite limited.

This altruistic mind of bodhicitta is itself a powerful tool to remove negative karma. Describing the power of bodhicitta, Santideva says in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*:

*Just like the fire at the end of an age,
It instantly consumes all great nonvirtue.*

Once bodhicitta arises, in every moment many negative karmas can be destroyed. Bodhicitta has that kind of power because negative karma comes

from harming other beings and taking pleasure in their suffering. Bodhicitta is precisely the opposite attitude. It is the wish for all living beings to have the highest happiness. It is the wish to lead all beings to freedom from all misery. It is the wish to quickly obtain enlightenment for that purpose. Such an attitude of course has great power.

Therefore, meditating on bodhicitta, together with taking refuge in the Three Jewels, constitute the power of reliance.

The Buddha taught many ways to purify negative karma in general. Among these, the complete antidote requires that all four of these powers are fully accomplished; all four must be working in harmony. Under those circumstances, with these four fully actualized, you can destroy many mountains of negative karma.

There are several mechanisms by means of which the purification of negative karma can take place. The first way in which nonvirtues are purified is that powerful negative karmic seeds, which have the potential to create a horrible rebirth, are transformed into causes of a birth that is not so bad. In other words, the harshness of the negative results can be lessened.

A second possibility is that you are born in a lower realm, but you do not experience the pain and suffering of that realm. And the third mechanism by which purification can work is that the karma to be born in a suffering rebirth ripens into nothing more than a headache in this life. In other words, heavy karma that could have had disastrous results is so attenuated that it yields only a small discomfort. Finally, the need to experience suffering for a long time can be reduced to a very brief encounter with that suffering.

There is no absolute rule or way to know for sure how the process of purification will operate, because it depends on a variety of factors: whether the purification was done with all four powers complete, how intensively it was done, and for how long it was done. The essential point is

that whatever unwholesome action you have done can definitely be purified. There is no negative karma that cannot be purified. There is no such thing as a permanent, absolute sin. All unwholesome actions are temporary events, created by one's own mind and body. If you apply the proper antidote they can be removed. Some of them can be destroyed from the root. Others may be pushed into the far distant future. Still others will not meet the conditions to bring forth their results. And some will be attenuated, so the results will be less intense, shorter in duration, or reduced to insignificance.

But if that is true, a question arises. It says in the sutras and in the Vinaya that "karma can never be lost, even in one hundred cons." In other words, karma will not fade away and ultimately you have to experience the result. How is it that the purification of karma by this use of antidotes does not contradict the scriptures?

The answer is that the sutra is talking about karma to which you have not applied an antidote. If you have not purified a karma to any degree by means of the four powers, then that karmic seed will certainly yield its result, no matter how long it takes. But if you have cultivated the four powers as an antidote, you can destroy the seeds and prevent any negative results. This is true even of so-called definite karma.

This is the view of the Mahayana system: no matter how powerful a negative karma may be, if the proper antidote is applied, it can be purified. The Vaibhāṣika and some other Hinayana schools disagree with this and say that the most powerful negative karma, such as the five automatic transgressions, cannot be purified during the life in which they are committed. These points are explained by Haribhadra in his *Long Explanation of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines* (Abhisamayalamkāra):

Thus, whatever has the nature of diminishing when it is brought into the proximity of the antidotes can be permanently extinguished by the antidotes. An example of

this is the tarnish on gold. According to that logic, downfalls that occur out of arrogance, even such powerful negative actions as wrong view, which are obstructions to the holy Dharma, can be utterly extinguished.

You should understand such statements from scripture as, "no karma at all will be lost, even in one hundred eons," as referring to karma for which the antidotes have not been cultivated. If that were not the case, it would contradict reason and contradict many sutras.

And you should understand the statement that there is karma that will definitely be experienced" as also referring to karma for which you have not cultivated the antidotes. "Karma that is not definite" should be distinguished as karma that only sometimes yields results, even when you have not cultivated any antidotes.

The argument here is that nonvirtuous karmic seeds are to the antidotes as water is to heat: as water gets closer and more exposed to the source of heat it gradually evaporates and diminishes. That is the nature of water: to diminish in proportion to its exposure to a source of heat. Like that, the nature of nonvirtuous karmic seeds is to diminish in proportion to their exposure to correct antidotes like the four powers. Whatever has that nature can be completely eliminated. If you apply enough heat, water can be completely evaporated. If you apply the antidotes with sufficient intensity for a long enough time, the seeds of nonvirtue can be totally expunged. That is their nature.

I used the example of water and heat. The example Haribhadra uses is the tarnish on gold. The tarnish is an impurity that can be removed gradually, in proportion to the effort you put into the cleaning process. Its nature is that ultimately it can be completely removed. Similarly, the nature of one's own negative karma is that it can be removed gradually, in proportion to the effort you put into cultivating the antidotes. Ultimately, it can be completely eliminated.

This is the same logical argument that Dharmakīrti uses in his Commentary on the "*Compendium of Valid Cognition*" (Pramāna-vārttika-kārikā) to prove that enlightenment is possible. Liberation, the complete exhaustion of suffering, is possible. The reason is that the cause of suffering is karma, and the cause of karma is kleśa, the obscuring afflictions, which are themselves rooted in ignorance. Is that root destroyable or not? Does that root have an antidote or not?

The answer is yes. It is the nature of ignorance and all the afflictions that arise from ignorance that they naturally diminish as they come into proximity with, or are affected by, their antidotes. The more and more the antidotes are cultivated and applied, the weaker and weaker the afflictions become. That is their nature. And whatever has that nature can ultimately be completely removed. Therefore, there can be the total cessation of ignorance, of the obscuring afflictions, and thereby of suffering. That cessation is emancipation.

The Four Opponent Powers, from The Tantric Path of Purification, by Lama Yeshe

{Note: This is the same teaching as the one titled ‘The Four Powerful Remedies’, although the wording is different. Since they each add something useful, I thought to include both versions.}

The Heruka Vajrasattva sadhana is divided into three parts: taking refuge, generating bodhichitta, and the actual yoga method. Why are taking refuge and generating bodhichitta parts of this purification practice? Because negative actions are usually created in relation either to holy objects such as the Three Jewels of Refuge, or to other sentient beings.

You can see for yourself that this is true. Most of your problems arise from the people around you, not from bricks, rocks, or trees. And the most common problems can be found between people who are close to each other - the closer the connection, the more mental complications arise. For example, if you stay away from tar, you’ll be okay; but if you touch it, it will get all over you, will be hard to get rid of, and will cause you much difficulty. In the same way, proximity to other people can lead to sticky situations.

Some simple examples of common negativities will clarify this. We ourselves, the subject, act under the influence of our negative minds, but we usually need an object upon which to act. For example, when we kill, there has to be another being whose life we take; when we steal, there has to be an owner of the thing we take; when we lie, there has to be someone to lie to. Of course, our ignorant, dissatisfied, greedy, selfish mind is always there, but other beings have to be there, too. In this way we create negativities in dependence upon others. We purify this kind of negative karma by generating bodhichitta.

We also create negativities in dependence upon holy objects. Sometimes, with a negative mind, we might criticize a buddha, denigrate a bodhisattva,

treat books or statues disrespectfully, or complain about monks or nuns. There are countless ways to create such negative karma, and we purify it by taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

To generate bodhichitta we must feel unbearable great compassion for all sentient beings, irrespective of their species, race, nationality, or philosophical and religious beliefs. As well, we must have the strong, enthusiastic will to lead them to perfect enlightenment, taking the responsibility for doing so upon ourselves alone. Simply having this attitude releases us from a great deal of negativity.

For example, your karmic connection with your parents is very strong, but it is out of control. Although they have been so kind to you, you cause them great suffering. You cannot cut the connection with your parents by saying that you are completely fed up with them and running off to the mountains. Separating yourself from them physically is not enough. To exhaust the negative karma with your parents you have to purify it by experiencing great compassion for them and generating bodhichitta with them in mind. Similarly, your karmic connection with other people can't be cut intellectually, by just saying you're finished with them. These bonds have to be severed by purification.

The best way to purify negativities is by using the four opponent powers. The first of these is *the power of the object*, which means taking refuge and generating bodhichitta. In the practice I am describing here, the object of refuge is Heruka Vajrasattva, who is one with the Three Jewels of refuge: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. We can also say he is one with the guru, the absolute guru, but I'll discuss that more fully later. His divine wisdom understands the nature of both positive and negative energy. He becomes your liberator, and you go to him for refuge.

The second power is the power of release. It is sometimes called the power of regret, but this is misleading, for this power derives from wisdom, not from some kind of emotional sorrow or guilt. Such feelings actually reinforce our negative propensities. Think instead of a person who suddenly realizes that he has

just swallowed poison: he wants to take the antidote right away. *The power of release is the wisdom that understands the negative repercussions of unwholesome actions so well that the moment you become aware that you have created a negative action, you want to purify it immediately.*

The third is *the power of the remedy*. It is with this power that you counteract the force of your amassed negativities. With single-pointed concentration on Heruka Vajrasattva - the manifestation of blissful, transcendental, divine wisdom who is one with your guru - you do the yoga method and powerfully recite the purifying mantra. This practice is the actual remedy.

I'm not sure that the fourth power can be succinctly translated into English. It is something like *the power of indestructible determination*. It is not so much a vow or a promise or a resolution or *a decision*. Simultaneous with the power of the remedy you have this great determination never to create any negative actions again. There is something complete about it. It is firm and strong and comes from wisdom. Within you there is a subtle energy that protects you from moral falls. It is far more than an intellectually motivated decision; it is a force that totally counteracts the old habits, a realization that instinctively protects you. Of course this power has degrees, but when fully developed it offers perfect protection.

For example, when you take the eight Mahayana precepts for a day, in the early morning you generate the great determination to keep the vows intact. From that moment on you must practice perfect awareness to maintain them throughout the day. Determination to keep the precepts at the time of the ceremony alone is not enough; it has to be maintained minute by minute for the duration of the commitment. Otherwise, as soon as the ordination ceremony is over, you will fall straight back into your old samsaric ways, as if unconscious, completely unaware of what you are doing.

Vows are not broken spontaneously. The motivation for an action that will break a vow evolves gradually in the mind. You have a long history of

similarly uncontrolled energy patterns. Therefore, if your early morning determination is accompanied by exceptional continuous conscious awareness, there is no way you can break your vows. Within you there is that very subtle, accumulated energy that completely protects you from defiled actions.

Ways to Repent and Purify Vows, by Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoche

From Gateway to the Vajrayana

There are four ways to purify and restore broken vows: to purify with realization of emptiness; to purify with the power of meditation; to purify with relative bodhicitta; to purify with noble deeds.

To Purify with Realization of Emptiness

This is the most sublime purification. By way of practicing emptiness, one who has attained realization of emptiness can not only completely purify all negative karma resulting from violations of the three types of precepts but also obliterate the habitual tendencies and seed of such karma.

However, this method is beyond the capability of ordinary people like us. Of course, I am in no position to judge your state of realization. The Buddha prohibited followers from passing judgment on others without basis; for all I know, some of you may have already attained a high level of realization. In any case, I am referring to a situation in general; to a person in the early stages of practice, this method is not helpful even if it is very sacred.

To Purify with the Power of Meditation

This is a simple and effective method that ordinary people like us may use to succeed. In Vajrayana, there are many practices for purification, but we don't need to seek those complicated practices; just the Vajrasattva practice, the most classic and sublime meditation practice for contrition, is enough.

Visualize the main deity Vajrasattva and the hundred-syllable mantra from which the nectar drops and washes down one's body so that one's negative karma is completely purified. These are all done with visualization, which is also the best kind of meditation to purify obscurations.

The Venerable Atisa said that tantric vows are more stringent and relatively easy to break, but there are also very specific, uncommon, directly pertinent, and extremely effective methods to repent the transgressions of vows in Vajrayana.

There are broad, medium, and concise versions of the Vajrasattva practice: H.H. Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok taught a concise practice and Mipham Rinpoche had an even shorter version of the practice; the more complex version is the one in the inner preliminaries. We can choose any of these based on our own situation.

All purification practices must contain the four opponent powers.

The first is the power of refuge, that is, the object that one relies on for support when undertaking the purification practice. For the Vajrasattva practice, the deity Vajrasattva is the power of refuge; when practicing bodhicitta, bodhicitta is the power of refuge; if practicing emptiness, emptiness is the power of refuge.

The second is the power of regret, that is, a strong sense of remorse over past wrongdoings. This is critically important. Without this sense of regret, negative karma can be diminished to a certain degree by reciting the hundred-syllable mantra, but it would be very difficult to have it purified completely.

The third is the power of resolution, which is vowing to change one's ways right away and not repeat previous misdeeds. Absent this resolution, and any change in one's speech or action, negative karma can only be lessened but not totally eliminated. This is also very crucial.

The fourth is the power of remedy, which is any antidote one can apply to purify negative karma, such as recitation of the heart mantra of Vajrasattva, prostration, life release, and so on.

It does not matter what kind of method one uses for purification; the method must include the four opponent powers. Although we are not capable of applying other kinds of meditation for purification, all Vajrasattva practices in broad, medium, and concise versions are easy to do; they are also the best meditation for purification.

On the premise that the four opponent powers are applied, reciting the hundred-syllable mantra 100,000 times will ensure all negative karma we have accumulated since beginningless time is purified. This is what the Buddha said in the Vajrayana tantras; it is the ultimate of the real meaning of his words, not stated only as an expedient to guide or to free certain sentient beings from suffering.

The Buddha also said in the tantras that just reciting the heart mantra of Vajrasattva Om Benza Satva Hum 100,000 times can also purify all negative karma, including the transgressions of root samayas. During the time of the Buddha, people did not suffer as much from afflictions, so reciting this mantra 100,000 times was sufficient; now in this degenerate time of confusion and intense suffering, people must recite the mantra 400,000 times, that is, four times as much, in order to completely purify negative karma.

As this is not too hard to do, H.H. Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok used to ask everyone to recite the heart mantra of Vajrasattva 400,000 times during the annual puja of Vajrasattva.

By inference, people in this period of declining Dharma should also recite the hundred-syllable mantra 400,000 times. But the hundred-syllable mantra is relatively long and takes more time to complete; to recite the

mantra 400,000 times entails some difficulty, thus we are not asked to meet this more stringent requirement. Even so, as long as one can recite the hundred-syllable mantra sincerely 100,000 times, all negative karma, including wrong actions such as killing, stealing, telling lies, etc. committed before taking the vows and any transgression of tantric samaya after taking the vows, can surely be purified.

The seriousness of breaking the pratimoksa vows is like an itchy skin rash compared with breaking the bodhisattva vows; damage from transgressing the bodhisattva vows is only skin deep versus that from losing the tantric samayas. A violation of the tantric vows is much more serious than a violation of the pratimoksa vows. But even breaking a samaya can be thoroughly purified with this method, let alone a transgression of the pratimoksa and bodhisattva vows. This is not a casual remark by me but a statement the Buddha made personally in the tantras. We have substantial evidence from the texts to support this point.

So, there is no need to despair if we do break a vow. Instead, we should have confidence all negative karma can be purified completely through the Vajrasattva practice. Although there are many ways to purify negative karma with the power of meditation, only a brief introduction to the importance and the sublime significance of the Vajrasattva practice is given here. For the specific practice itself, you should refer to the relevant sadhana texts.

To Purify with Bodhicitta

Bodhicitta is all-powerful. As long as bodhicitta is aroused, one can easily accomplish any aspiration, whether it is to gather merit, purify negative karma, or take the path to liberation; on the other hand, when there is no bodhicitta, one can do everything possible for accumulation and purification, and wreck one's brain to seek liberation, the effort will still be too weak to yield any result.

It is said in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, “Bodhicitta is like the inferno at the end of time that can destroy all serious negative karma in an instant.” This means once there is relative bodhicitta, all negative karma can be purified completely at once. So, one who has genuine bodhicitta but has violated the tantric vows should not despair but instead encourage oneself this way:

Even if I have broken the tantric vows, I must not give up my goal because I have pledged to free sentient beings from suffering. I will resolutely continue to fulfill my aspiration, no matter what difficulties lie ahead or what karmic results I have to bear.

With this, all negative karma including that of losing samaya can be naturally purified even without having to undertake any specific purification practice. Bodhicitta, the all-powerful weapon that can subdue any adversary, the panacea that can cure all afflictions and make life anew, should be applied whenever possible; it’s not meant to be stored. Of course, it would be even better to practice purification on the basis of this aspiration.

As for the bodhicitta practice, it is elucidated in both *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and *Finding Rest in the Nature of Mind* by Longchenpa; the practice adopted by all the schools of Tibetan Buddhism is also presented rather clearly in the Luminous Wisdom Series.

In summary, bodhicitta is the most effective antidote. We do not rule out purification practices such as the practice of Vajrasattva, but bodhicitta alone is powerful enough to replace all purification practices. This is absolutely true.

To Purify with Noble Deeds

Noble deeds are primarily actions taken courageously and wholeheartedly to deliver sentient beings from suffering without concern for one’s own ability. Even as ordinary people, if we exert real effort to do what we can

little by little, our own karma can be purified at the same time we strive to benefit other beings.

For example, to cultivate unconditional giving is a very good purification practice; any form of giving, whether it is giving of material things, of Dharma, or of protection to those in distress or danger, can purify the negative karma of breaking tantric vows. Although many Buddhists are not qualified to transmit the Dharma, reciting mantras or the names of the buddhas to beings during life release is also a form of giving of Dharma.

This act of generosity is very pure because it is selfless; we recite the mantras only to benefit these beings, not to gain anything in return. The Buddha said in the sutras the supreme and most sublime form of giving is giving of protection; the most precious and highest level of discipline is not harming any sentient beings. Therefore, performing life release to give protection to beings is truly a meaningful act.

Apart from this, there are four other noble deeds. That is, on the basis of not serving self-interest or obtaining commercial gains, to build hospitals and treat the sick; to build schools to spread the Dharma or teach the original language of the Buddhadharma; to establish the venues for Dharma activities or group practice for the public; to provide places for others to do retreat, or food and other necessities for practitioners in retreat. These four are all considered noble deeds that can purify negative karma.

In addition, to construct stupas, make tsa-tsas (figurines of stupas or buddhas), performing fire offerings, prostrations, the seven-branch prayer, and so on are also noble deeds. But we need to pay attention to one thing. The requirement for conducting fire offering or tsok (feast offering) is quite high; the practitioner must have achieved certain stability in meditation as well as accomplishment in the generation and completion stages. It is true the practice of fire offering and tsok can purify many obscurations if all the preconditions are met. However, nowadays in many places, it is more

popular to do fire offering by just piling up lots of foodstuff and throwing them into the fire. This is not an authentic fire offering or tsok practice, merely a formality devoid of its original spirit.

The sutras also mention life release specifically, which attests to its importance as a purification practice. However, when we undertake this activity, our aim should never be to purify our own negative karma, but to resolve the temporary suffering (the purpose of giving of protection) and ultimate peace and happiness (the purpose of giving of Dharma) of beings. If we only act for our own sake, despite having certain merit, we will not fully benefit from undertaking the virtuous action because our motivation is not pure.

Whereas Sakyamuni Buddha, from the time of generating his initial aspiration to benefit sentient beings to the time of attaining enlightenment, never considered his own interest, only that of others, he nevertheless, transcended cyclic existence for himself while devoting his life to benefitting other beings.

In comparison, from time immemorial until now, we have not paid attention to the interest of others; whatever we say or do has been to secure our own happiness, but to date we have gained nothing for ourselves, not even the right to control our own destiny. Obviously, there is no value in all the effort made toward satisfying self-interest. It is only when we endeavor purely for the sake of other beings that our own interest can be taken care of satisfactorily.

Additionally, to hear the Dharma teachings is also considered one of the great deeds. Whether one understands the teaching or not, as long as one makes the effort to attend and hear the profound teachings, it is always meritorious.

Similarly, to provide places to gather, living quarters, copies of texts, food and other necessities for people who come to hear the teachings is also a

great deed as well. Here, the texts refer to all the sutras of the Great and Lesser Vehicles, as well as expositions of Buddhist philosophy on the Four Noble Truths, the Middle Way, and the likes.

The aforementioned methods of purification were compiled from related contents in the tantras by the great Nyingma master Rongzom Pandita. I have only introduced the parts that are easy to understand and apply. There are many other methods which require the practice of generation and completion stages as the foundation. They are beyond what beginners can handle and are thus excluded from the discussion here for the time being.

Among the methods mentioned above, the bodhicitta and Vajrasattva practices are rather easy to grasp. Whether one can purify negative karma primarily depends on one's own diligence. The practice of emptiness is still somewhat beyond our ability at the moment, but we can try to ease into it after completion of the preliminary practices.

As for the great deeds, some require certain financial capability to accomplish but some don't, so money is not the issue. Whether one can purify negative karma really depends on one's spiritual practice rather than material wealth. Especially with life release events which we have many opportunities to participate in every year, and which people actively attend; if only we can modify our motivations for joining these activities, all negative karma accumulated from beginningless time can certainly be purified.

It would be best if we can practice all the virtuous actions above for purification, but it is not necessary to do all. To practice just one perfectly is enough to achieve full purification. On the other hand, with virtuous deeds, it's always the more we do the better, so we should make every effort to do as much as possible.

Conclusion

The Buddha once said there are two types of people that deserve praise: those who keep vows completely pure, that is, who never break a vow; those who break vows but repent immediately and do everything they can to restore their vows.

Atisha once said, "I have never violated the pratimoksha vows, but I have violated the bodhisattva vows on occasion and the tantric vows many times." As Atisha is the embodiment of the Buddha, he could not possibly have committed such downfalls, so the purpose of his statement was to emphasize the hierarchical significance of the three types of precepts and remind followers to take caution before making tantric commitments.

We should receive tantric vows only when we have sufficient confidence in upholding them; if keeping the tantric vows pure is difficult, we should receive the less stringent precepts first and wait for conditions to mature before taking the tantric vows.

However, Atisha continued to say, "Although I have broken vows, I have never allowed a transgression to go uncorrected overnight." That means no matter which vow was violated, Atisha always made a point of repenting his fault thoroughly within twenty four hours.

It is hard not to break any vow, but a broken vow can be restored if we take all incidents of transgression seriously and proceed to offer penitence with due respect. Therefore, both types of people praised by the Buddha can attain liberation.

Of course, in terms of the speed of attaining liberation, there is a marked difference between those who never break a vow and those who commit violations but repent afterwards. Therefore, we should still place ourselves on high alert to identify and destroy any cause that might possibly lead to vow downfalls before it even has a chance to materialize.

In case a vow is broken, repent immediately. Even if we cannot be sure of keeping our vows completely pure, we must at least not refuse to repent. If we allow negative karma to grow unimpeded, there may not be any remedy left to turn things around at the end.

The bodhicitta and Vajrasattva practices are both easy and powerful methods of purification through which our negative karma can be purified. I believe all wise people know best what to do. The decision is actually in our own hands.