

The Four Dharmas of Gampopa
Taught by His Holiness the Dalai Lama
Jeffrey Hopkins translating

NOTE: Sometimes His Holiness spoke in English and sometimes in Tibetan. The Tibetan portions were translated on the spot by Dr. Hopkins. In both cases, the speaker is identified.

HIS HOLINESS:

Dharma friends, I am happy to see this group of people who are taking keen interest about the Dharma. Now, the basic reason why someone is practicing Dharma is the deep desire to achieve a sort of permanent mental peace or permanent happiness. In order to achieve mental peace, merely reciting or praying is not sufficient. The Eastern religions should be implemented in our daily life. In other words, any religion or any Dharma should be made part of yourself. Then you will gain the real value of Dharma.

Dharma that remains superficial or mere knowledge may not be effective or helpful. When you face problems or suffering, the real Dharma should touch that moment. If at that moment, the Dharma escapes somewhere, then there is no use practicing Dharma. When we are in a happy mood, Dharma may not be necessary at that time. But when you face a problem, when you confront illness or, eventually, death or even day to day issues, at that time the Dharma will help. At that moment, it gives you mental stability and inner strength. It helps in the sense that you are better equipped to confront that problem and it becomes much easier to overcome.

For that to happen, the most important thing is to get used to it. Over a long time, these teachings will become very close to one's own mind. Now, for example, when a small child is in distress, he will suddenly shout, "Ama," without thinking. It's something like that. When something happens to you, automatically, spontaneously, a certain practice will come to mind. .

What is Dharma? There are many different systems and teachings. Some persons practice a religion where the basic, fundamental belief is in God. For Buddhists, the basic teaching is about method and wisdom, two things. The method mainly deals with heart and wisdom mainly lives in the brain. Here, the main method is motivation. One kind of motivation is self liberation and another is liberation for all sentient beings. The wisdom has many different levels. First try to understand these meanings, then try to make them part of oneself. Get used to them.

HOPKINS:

In order to get used to these in the mind, it is necessary to meditate. There are two types of meditation, one in which you meditate on an object and in the another in which you cultivate your consciousness into another type of consciousness. The latter one, generating or cultivating a new consciousness, is like meditating on love or faith. This means that you cultivate a mind of love, cultivate a mind of faith. And then meditating on the aspect of an object means that you take an object as the mode of apprehension of your mind. For instance, to mediate on impermanence or to meditate on selflessness. When you get used to this, then when you meet with unfavorable circumstances, it is such that one's former practice can arrive at that point as an antidote to preventing a bad reaction.

There are two ways in which one can confront suffering. One is in a more superficial or temporary way, to rely on an antidote right at the spot to the particular type of problem that you're in. The second type, however, is to prevent the arising of suffering in the future. In order to do this, it is necessary to get rid of those causes that will bring suffering in the future. As a temporary method it is very helpful to reflect on impermanence, the fact that these objects are impermanent and it is also helpful to reflect that they have a nature of suffering. Even though one doesn't get rid of the suffering in that way, one's ability to confront suffering becomes much stronger. Now among people, even if they have the same type of suffering, due to their mental attitude they undergo lesser and greater degrees of suffering, right?

HIS HOLINESS:

If your own mental attitude is peaceful and calm, when some tragedy or big problem happens around you, you can retain inner peace. The outside can do little to disturb your mental peace. On the other hand, if your own mental attitude is something else, you always need some sleeping pills or tranquilizers, that kind of thing, even though you remain in a house with full comforts and facilities. So you see, one's own attitude toward problems is very effective. This is one part.

HOPKINS:

Then, the second part is to stop the causes that will bring about suffering in the future. This means to reflect on the cause and effect of actions. It is through the stopping of the causes of suffering that one can stop suffering. That is to say, one needs to stop the nonvirtuous actions that bring about suffering in order to eliminate suffering in the future. On a deeper level, one does not just stop those karmas, those nonvirtuous actions, but one also stops the ignorance that serves to motivate those actions.

Now on the first, coarser level, Buddha set forth the ten nonvirtues that are to be abandoned on the negative side, and the ten virtues that are to be achieved on the positive side. This is basic ethics. Then on the second, deeper level, in order to stop the ignorance that motivates these nonvirtuous actions, one needs to cultivate the wisdom realizing selflessness. In order that wisdom realizing selflessness is both deep and subtle, it is necessary to have the factor of samadhi, of meditative stabilization. Thus is necessary to have a meditative stabilization that is a union of calm abiding of the mind and special insight into selflessness. Whether that meditative stabilization serves as a cause only for one's own liberation or if it serves as a cause of buddhahood, that difference depends on one's motivation, on whether one has great compassion or not. In order to develop quickly this meditative stabilization, there are special techniques within the mantra vehicle. This is the essence of the type of practice of Buddhism that is present throughout Tibet.

Since this is a center of the Drikung Kagyu school, I was asked by your lama to give a commentary on the *Four Dharmas of Dakpo Lhaje*, the unparalleled Gampopa. The first one is:

*May all sentient beings, myself and so forth,
be magnificently blessed
so that our minds become the Dharma.*

The term for magnificent blessing means that one is transformed into a magnificent state, the first syllable meaning magnificent, the second one meaning transformation. Thus, the main meaning is that impure factors in one's own continuum are to be transformed into a magnificent state.

This speaks of all sentient beings—not just oneself, but oneself and all beings, because concern for the welfare of all beings is the root of the great vehicle teachings. So, as a technique for generating the type of altruism that is characteristic of the great vehicle, Shantideva in his *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, sets forth a practice for quick and easy development of comprehension. For this, one imagines one's own selfish, self-cherishing self on one side. On the other side, imagine many sentient beings who are obviously stricken by suffering.

HIS HOLINESS:

While I explain, you imagine or meditate.

HOPKINS:

It doesn't matter how you sit with your legs. The most important thing is that your legs don't cause you pain.

HIS HOLINESS:

When we practice certain yoga practices that are related to the inner chakras and certain nerve centers, physical posture is very, very important. Otherwise, sit however you like. The most important thing is that your mind is in the teaching or with the Dharma. If some pain arises, then half of your mind is with it, isn't it?

As I mentioned, imagine that on one side of the world is oneself, very selfish. There is no hesitation to take advantage of others to gain even a very small thing. On the other side, you see a group of poor people in very miserable conditions. Now imagine yourself as a third person who is neutral, unbiased, and looking at both sides. They all, both sides, genuinely want happiness and don't want suffering. No argument. Every sentient being—no matter if he is rich or poor, educated or uneducated, this race or that race, this ideology or that ideology—is the same.

Then ask a question: do these two sides have equal rights to be happy? Again, they are 100% equal. If both sides try to gain happiness and try to overcome problems or pain, their possibility of success is also equal. Now the difference is that on one side there is only one sentient being and on the other side there are many, the majority. If we compared one single dollar and a ten dollar note in a similar way, it is obvious that ten dollars is more important than a single dollar. If someone exchanged ten dollars for one single dollar. . .

HOPKINS:

If the one is used for the many, that's wonderful. That's correct. Whereas, if the many are used for the one, that's not right, it's stupid. For instance, those who are clever in business will easily give out many hundreds of dollars in order to achieve many hundreds of thousands of dollars, not the other way around.

HIS HOLINESS:

When you as the neutral person consider which is more important, then naturally your heart goes closer to the majority side, the needy people in poor condition, rather than to the one very selfish person. Do you have some feeling? Examine that old version of oneself who only thinks of his or her own benefit. Imagine that person in front of you and then check. You will easily realize the wrong things as your heart naturally goes closer to the majority side.

HOPKINS:

When you think this way in meditation, gradually you come to realize in a deep way the greater value of the majority, and lessen the emphasis on your own self cherishing.

HIS HOLINESS:

Now you see, anger and negative thoughts are so harmful. On the other side are warm feelings, a warm heart, compassion, and loving-kindness. These are so positive, so nice. Sometimes I myself feel that we human beings, if we exerted some effort, could develop such marvelous ideas! Thinking of all sentient beings and forgetting oneself. One quotation from Shantideva says: . . .

HOPKINS:

“As long as there is space and as long as there are sentient beings, may I remain to help sentient beings.” Similarly, Nagarjuna says, “Just as earth, water, fire, wind, medicines, forests and so forth are available for the use of people, so may I be available for the use of others.” And Shantideva also says, “Just as earth, water, fire, wind, and space serve as the basis for the livelihood of sentient beings, so may I serve as the basis for the livelihood, the well-being, of sentient beings.”

HIS HOLINESS:

When we start these practices, you may feel this is something impossible, just nonsense. That kind of feeling might be there. But if you do not lose your will and determination, and try, try, try year by year, your mind will become closer and closer to these noble thoughts. At first you feel that these things are not solid, just a consciousness, formless and shapeless. But once you get used to these ideas, then that consciousness becomes solid force. This gives you real inner strength, real determination to become a good person, something useful for society.

HOPKINS:

So this is the explanation of the phrase, “May all sentient beings, myself and others.” One must understand that it is suitable to cherish and value other sentient beings. All of us want happiness and don’t want suffering. The sources of happiness and suffering are a tamed mind or an untamed mind. The first line says, “May all sentient beings, myself and so forth, be magnificently blessed so that our own minds become the Dharma.” This means that our own minds have to become the practices in order to bring about the happiness that we seek. Now in order for our mind to become the Dharma, to become the practices, it was necessary that the Buddha set forth those practices. And that from the Buddha’s time until the present, there remains a continuum of teachers who maintain those teachings and the blessings of the teachings so that they can be communicated to us now. Thus, the root of receiving the present teachings is to have a qualified lama.

This is the reason why the qualifications of a lama are set forth in many sutras and tantras. Before accepting someone as a teacher, investigate whether that teacher fulfills the qualities. However, there are many people who are in a great hurry to take on a lama, and they immediately take on the lama. But then in time they find some faults in that lama and that brings them into a great deal of trouble. It would be better in the first place to send whatever spies one needs to, and to investigate the lama to see if the lama is qualified. During that period, you can view the lama as a friend of the Dharma from whom one can receive some teachings, not so much as one's own lama.

It is a different matter to receive an initiation from someone. But receiving an initiation, it is necessary to engage in the common practices of the path. The period of engaging in the common practices would be a good time to investigate the lama. Only if the lama is found to be qualified, should you take on that lama as a personal guide.

Then the second of Gampopa's Dharmas is:

*May all sentient beings, myself and so forth,
be magnificently blessed,
so that the Dharma becomes the path.*

For the Dharma to become the path, it is necessary to reflect again and again on impermanence, on the suffering nature of life, and on the cause and effect of karma. Excited enthusiasm to engage in some practice can dissipate very quickly. You can lose that enthusiasm and will not be able to bring forth the effort to stay on the path. Therefore, serious reflection is necessary for the Dharma to become one's path.

HIS HOLINESS:

Even worse, you see some cases where the Dharma itself becomes an instrument to fill your own stomach. That is the worst thing.

HOPKINS:

Instead of the Dharma serving as training for your mind, it becomes a way for you to engage in more sinful or ill deeds. When one practices Dharma, it is very important that it be done well, that it be done properly.

Then the third of the four Dharmas is:

*May all sentient beings, myself and so forth,
be magnificently blessed
so that the path removes error.*

This means that it is not sufficient just to reflect on impermanence, the suffering nature of life, and the cause and effect of karma. One must also resist the conception that these things inherently exist. Thus, this third of the four practices sets forth the need for the practice of wisdom. In a very strong and detailed manner, the supramundane victor Buddha Shakyamuni

set forth the second turning of the Wheel of Dharma. This is the teaching that all phenomena do not exist from their own side, they do not inherently exist. If you think about it everyone, whether one is English or American or Tibetan, has a sense of “I,” of someone who wants happiness and doesn’t want suffering. There is some person there who wants happiness and doesn’t want suffering.

HIS HOLINESS:

It is very obvious that there is some being here, there is an “I.” I wear a rosary, a certain kind of clothing, some shoes, and so on. Is there any doubt that you can see these things? I, too, can see a group of people. It is very well to speak this way in a general sense. But then, a further question arises as to whether I am seeing the actual being or just the body of the being. The body, naturally. I am only seeing the color and shape of the body. The thing I am seeing—is that the being itself? The answer is certainly not. It is the being’s body, not the being itself. To a certain extent, you can see my mind through my way of speaking. The same question arises: is that mind the same as the “I?” We cannot make that conclusion. I and my consciousness are two separate things. Besides my body and my consciousness, there is no other independent entity of “I.”

HOPKINS:

If one is not satisfied with that appearance, and searches for the being that is designated with the term “I,” then one cannot find it. Now when you search for the object designated with the term “I” and don’t find it, does this that you find the nonexistence of the I or does it merely mean that you didn’t find it? It doesn’t mean that you find the nonexistence of the I. It merely means that you don’t find it under such analysis. If you had discovered that the I does not exist, then I would not exist. And if one claimed that the I did not exist, that argument would be damaged by the fact that we have common perception of it. Thus it is definite that the I does indeed exist. If somebody is saying, “I don’t exist” then stick a pin or a thorn in them and see what they say.

This experience we have of the existence of the I is valid. But even though the I exists, it cannot be found under such analysis. What is the reason for this? This is because, although the I exists, it does not exist in its own right, from its own side. Therefore, it is said that the I exists through the power of designation, of imputation. Therefore, as it says in texts and as illustrated by the example of the I, all phenomena do not exist from their own side/ they are all without inherent existence. Nonetheless, it is the case that when phenomena appear to our ordinary minds, they appear as if they exist from their own side don’t they?

HIS HOLINESS:

Especially during the moment that we are getting angry or experiencing strong attachment, the object toward which you feel anger or strong attachment appears very solidly from itself—the self existing from itself. That kind of impression or appearance is very strong in that moment. That is the main basis for developing attachment and anger. The main cause of anger and all the other wrong thoughts such as jealousy, pride, and attachment is based on this ignorance. Once you realize that although things appear like that, in reality such things never exist, the negative feelings will gradually reduce. Now this is the third part.

HOPKINS:

Many people interpret the emptiness that is taught in Buddhism as nihilism, as meaning that nothing exists. However, Nagarjuna himself directly opposes this with his teaching that emptiness contains within it the full meaning of dependent arising, and dependent arising contains within it the full meaning of emptiness. There is a stanza that says that emptiness does not mean that phenomena are devoid of the ability to perform functions. Rather it means that phenomena are empty of existing from their own side or existing inherently. Dependent arising does not mean that phenomena arise inherently in dependence upon causes and conditions. That they arise in dependence upon causes and conditions is in the mode of a magician's illusion. Therefore, if one ascertains well the word and the meaning of emptiness and dependent arising and then understands the word and the meaning of emptiness and dependent arising well, one can understand how one phenomenon can be a composite of both. At the point when one comes to understand emptiness and dependent arising, wisdom can serve as a factor that assists method or compassion.

Then the fourth Dharma is:

May error dawn as pristine wisdom.

This is best explained in connection with mantra. With respect to the Great Seal or Mahamudra, there is the Great Seal of the sutra system and the Great Seal of the mantra system. This line is best explained in terms of the Great Seal of the mantra system. When you first hear, "May error dawn as pristine wisdom," it sounds amazing, fantastic, doesn't it? But as a Tibetan master taught, the innate, basic mind is the truth body and innate appearances are the waves of the truth body.

The innate, pristine wisdom is set forth in the third wheel of the doctrine, but we find its clearest and most profound form in highest yoga tantra. The Nyingma system of the old translation school uses vocabulary of basic knowledge, of *rigpa*. In the three new translation schools of the Sakya, Kagyu and Gelug, there is reference to the fundamental, innate mind of clear light. The thought of both of these sets of terminology appears to be the same.

Saying that the innate, basic mind is the truth body refers to the most subtle level of mind. It is that which will go on at the time of the fruit of buddhahood to be the exalted, pristine wisdom consciousness of a buddha. It exists from now through buddhahood, so the name "truth body" is designated to this deep, all-good, subtle consciousness, that one presently has. This all-good, deep, subtle consciousness also exists while traversing the path. At buddhahood, it is transformed into the exalted, pristine wisdom so there is a truth body at the time of fruition or result.

Within cyclic existence, this innate, basic mind, the truth body, is like an ocean and the various impure appearances that sentient beings face are like waves on the ocean. At the time of buddhahood, this innate, basic mind is also like an ocean and the pure phenomena of buddhahood are like the waves of that ocean. In both cases, the innate, basic mind is the basis for all appearances and all appearances are the waves or the sport of the innate, basic mind.

Thus, even mistaken or erroneous consciousnesses are aspects of the innate truth body.

In the Hearer vehicle, one relies on antidotes to overcome desire and hatred. In the bodhisattva vehicle, it is possible to use desire to accumulate merit and so forth. In the tantra or mantra vehicle, it is possible to use desire in the process of the path itself. It is in this sort of context that the text says, "May error dawn as pristine wisdom." So that's the meaning of the *Four Dharmas of Dakpo Lhaje* and let's leave it at that. It is a very vast and profound text. It's not sufficient that the Dharma be profound, it must also be brought into one's mind in a profound way.

HIS HOLINESS:

So finally, I want to thank everyone. You can clearly see that inner development is not easy. It takes time and needs a lot of effort. So, you should not expect too much at the beginning. Look at myself, for example. I think my age was 15 or 16 when I started quite serious practice. Now at 49, I am still gaining experience little by little. This is not at all easy to gain. Nevertheless, as time goes on, it definitely has an effect to improve one's own mental way of thinking, to help one's way of life. As a result, it is much easier to confront or face problems, tragedy, and pains. So, it is very useful. Determination, will is also very important. I urge you not to become discouraged.

Another thing I want to express to you and those people who practice Dharma very seriously, you should remain part of the society. Isolating from the rest of your society may not be suitable for the long run; it may not be in the best interest for yourself. So be a good citizen of the society, be productive. Under certain circumstances you may find it difficult to implement certain Dharma practices or ideas, or to lead a life exact according to tradition. For example, if you remain very tolerant and humble, then someone may take advantage of it. That kind of thing may happen. In that case, you can take appropriate action according to the circumstances, but without anger, without an inner ill feeling. This does not mean to hit on the other side, but merely to stop their bad practices with a good motivation. An example would be a doctor who sometimes has to treat patients harshly to achieve a better result. Surgery appears to be very harsh. It involves cutting with all different kinds of knives, with instruments for killing. But the goal is a cure or relief. So the method is harsh, sort of violent, but nobody regards the result as bad because it is helping. Similarly, in order to help persons who are really misbehaving, words alone cannot stop them. You need action to stop it, but action without anger or hatred. Act with deep respect and a strong nature.

Finally, I pray for everyone. Thank you very much.

*This event took place at the TMC in Washington, DC on September 22, 1984.
Transcription and editing by Khenmo Trinlay.*