

A Brief Explanation of the Four Dharmas of Gampopa

Please bless the minds of all beings to turn towards Dharma.

Please bless us that Dharma may become the actual path.

Please bless us that our path may be cleared of delusion.

Please bless us that delusion may arise as timeless wisdom.

The incomparable Dagpo Lhaje had many names, Sonam Rinchen and so on. He was called Gampopa because he lived in the foothills of Gampo Mountain. A Lama of the Kadam teachings, he was born in 1079 of the western calendar and passed away in 1153. Just as rivers all meet back to the snow mountains, this peerless protector of living beings was the source of all four major and eight secondary lineages of the Kagyu teachings. If you wish to know more about his life, please read the extensive biographies that are available elsewhere.

Although Gampopa gave very many teachings, those which are most convenient for practice are classified in three categories: extensive, middling, and brief. The extensive one is the Sacred Dharma, the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel-Ornament of Liberation, itself. It is a scripture which, in essence, presents the entire basis, path, and result from the state of an ordinary being up to Buddhahood. It was the first Lamrim, or Stages of the Path scripture, composed by a Tibetan Lama.

The middling version is called the Jewel Garland of the Supreme Path. Between view and conduct, it is a scripture which mainly gives advice on conduct. It does not have very many pages.

The brief form is the Four Dharmas of Gampopa. It summarizes the meaning in a few words. It is very powerfully blessed. It includes the entire meaning of the basis, path, and result in four lines. It is convenient to practice and has many benefits. Here I will give a brief explanation of each line of the Four Dharmas of Gampopa for the benefit of beginners.

First, though, I'd like to briefly say something about the problems that arise when the mind does not turn towards Dharma, and the benefits that arise when it does. Many people are attracted to external wealth alone and, because of that, develop attitudes of competitiveness, jealousy, engage in killing, stealing, raiding, sexual misconduct, and so forth, committing nothing but the ten non-virtuous actions as explained in the basic moral guidelines of Buddhism. Whenever people engage in the ten non-virtues they have no peace and happiness. Buddha gave a simple summary of his teachings:

Do not commit any non-virtue.

Persevere in perfect virtue.

Fully subdue your own mind.

This is the teaching of Buddha.

Not just for Buddhists, if people would, at best, practice these four lines, or at least think about them, it would definitely bring peace and happiness to countries and

nations, society and neighbors, households and individuals. The world these days does not acknowledge those who are humble, honest, and truthful; everyone seeks power, wealth, business, and so on, and they disregard the truth. Under these conditions the super-power nations of the world voraciously compete with each other for nuclear weapons and the happiness of the seventy billion people on the planet is in the hands of a few people. It is a frightening time. If you think about it, this all comes down to people not being able to control their own minds. Even in the country of America where I have sought refuge there are serious problems with guns. Whenever gun-violence occurs people think guns are no good, and the protests and the movement for gun-control grows. If people have love, compassion, and altruism in their minds I think that it is impossible for them to ever commit such wretched acts. It is good to control access to guns, and it is even better if people could control their own minds with love and compassion. Then gun-violence could never occur.

As said in Guide to the Bodhisattva Conduct,

Where could I find enough leather
To cover the surface of the earth?
But wearing leather just on the soles of my shoes .
Is like covering the earth with it.

In any case, if people these days do very little good, and their bad actions increase day by day, the problem is their minds not moving towards the Dharma.

Secondly, as for benefits of the mind turning towards Dharma, people are not made good or bad from birth. Instead, their good or bad qualities develop from their environment, religion, friends, parents and so on. In the case of Buddhism, for example, if a good Buddhist teacher is found, there is nothing more important on the face of the earth. That is because receiving advice from a good teacher can definitely transform your life. Buddha is our first teacher and, in dependence upon his advice, the sacred Dharma he taught, the lives of many continue to be transformed for the better even today. That is why I praise the kindness of Buddhist teachers as un-repayable. That praise is based on actual fact. That is because when we are confused about what to do and what to abandon, if sacred Dharma and the teacher's advice transform our life in hugely positive ways, there is nothing that could be of more benefit to our life. Therefore, for our mind to move towards Dharma primarily depends upon having a Buddhist teacher. We can actually see many people accomplish powerfully positive actions when their minds turn towards Dharma. Examples in Buddhism include His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and in other religions there are the great beings Mohandas Gandhi of India, Mother Theresa, and so on, there are many. Such spiritual people do tremendous good in our society.

For our mind to really turn towards Dharma, we must be able to eliminate the delusions in our mind. If that happens our mind has actually turned towards Dharma. If someone has the delusions of attachment, hatred, ignorance, pride, jealousy, and so forth they will be considered a bad person in society. If you wish to learn how to eliminate delusions from your mind completely, other than entering the path of Dharma

and practicing it, there is no other method to learn. Apart from Buddhas, no one has eliminated delusions from the root; otherwise it is difficult. There definitely exists a method to lessen delusion in the mind. If delusions decrease there will be more peace in the world, and if they increase, peace will be destroyed; this should be obvious to everyone. This concludes my brief comments on the respective benefits and problems that arise depending upon whether our mind turns towards Dharma or not.

Now I will explain each of the lines in turn.

First Line: Please bless the minds of all beings to turn towards Dharma.

Each of these lines of the Four Dharmas of Gampopa includes a request for blessings, but they are not just prayers. It is good if we do not leave them as prayerful aspirations alone, but also make them into a promise: that, having been transformed through blessings, I shall turn my mind towards the Dharma; I shall make Dharma the actual path; I shall clear the path of delusion; I shall make delusions arise as timeless wisdom, thus requesting blessings to actually accomplish these just as the Kagyu lineage Lamas, Marpa, Milarepa, and Gampopa did. Contemplating in detail the benefits of your mind turning towards Dharma and the drawbacks of it not, as just described, think, I must try to turn my mind towards Dharma. The Sanskrit word, Dharma, is Chö in Tibetan. We should understand this to mean the positive transformation of our mind.

Who must transform us? It is we, who are currently enslaved by our delusions, who must transform ourselves. By what are we transformed? By these Four Dharmas of Gampopa which include the complete meaning in just a few words, and which are so incredibly blessed. How should we be transformed? By practicing this sacred teaching in the correct order without mistake, by first listening, then contemplating, and then meditating in order to develop definite understanding. What sort of transformation should we look for? We should find ourselves victorious over the delusions and experiencing pure, lasting happiness. Can we overcome the delusions? Most definitely. The delusions are only temporary and fleeting, not truly existent. Like clouds in the sky, they appear briefly but are not really part of the sky.

Buddhism is included in view and conduct. The view is that of interdependent origination. The conduct is that of non-violence. If you have a good practice of interdependence, love, compassion, selflessness, and so on, your conduct will naturally become one of non-violence towards others. The reason is that this view is the antidote to delusions. If someone pretends to have high realization of the view but their conduct remains the same as before, committing the ten non-virtues, that is a sign that their mind has not turned towards Dharma.

It is very important that your body, speech, and mind all turn towards the Dharma, but it is most important that your mind does. Again, as Buddha said,

Do not commit any non-virtue.
Persevere in perfect virtue.
Fully subdue your own mind.

This is the teaching of Buddha.

In the third line Buddha did not say that controlling your body or speech is the teaching of Buddha. He only said that bringing your mind under control is the most important thing; that is his teaching.

I would like to tell a brief story regarding this. In 2006 I opened a new Dharma center in Malaysia. I invited many guest Lamas and Abbots. One of my close friends who was an Abbot, half-jokingly said, 'This Khenpo Karten is very smart and capable! He has opened Dharma centers everywhere! How many Dharma centers do you have?'

I answered humbly, 'I have a few.'

Then I asked him, 'How many Dharma centers do you have?'

Looking at me, he took a deep breath, placed his hand slowly over his heart, and said, 'My Dharma center is right here!'

At that time, busy with ceremonial activities, I didn't pay much attention. Later, as I thought about it, I felt that was a very rare instruction that I received from him. If you have a good practice of Dharma, the monasteries and Dharma centers are not outside yourself. I continue to have regular conversations with this Abbot. He lives in Nepal.

It is for these reasons that it is important for our mind to turn towards Dharma. For that to happen we must first encounter a qualified Lama and persevere in practicing the instructions they give us without laziness or procrastination. Although there are many different teachings of Dharma, for beginners the Four Attitude Reversers are very important. These are 1) the difficulty of obtaining a precious human life with its freedoms and enriching factors; 2) the impermanence of life; 3) karmic cause and effect; and 4) the faults of samsara. If you do not train your mind in these four attitude reversers, no matter how many high-sounding teachings you receive, Dzogchen, Mahamudra, etc, it will be very difficult to receive any real benefit from them. Therefore, the Four Attitude Reversers are very important. We lack renunciation of samsara and love for sentient beings. If our mind remains hardened like a piece of iron or stone no matter how much Dharma the Lama teaches us, it is a sign that we have not thought about the Four Attitude Reversers. Even if we do not know many teachings, if we well contemplate the Four Attitude Reversers there is no doubt that our mind will eventually turn towards the Dharma.

Second: Please bless us that Dharma may become the actual path.

These days it is rare for anyone to turn their mind towards Dharma, and to be able to make Dharma the actual path. This is because they do not know the true value of Dharma. Furthermore, they do not hold pure Dharma practitioners in high regard.

I'd like to tell a short story. A few years ago I had a friend here. One day he came to see me. I offered him some tea and as we drank tea together he gave me this advice: 'If you have to live alone in this house you must get lonely! You can't always stay by yourself! This country is not like the remote, isolated land of Tibet! There are many

shows to see, places to go, places to sit. For instance, there are movies and dances, many people getting together. It is fun to enjoy them!

I answered him like this: 'I get up early each morning and do my usual practices, meditation, and so on. If I have some time, there is nowhere more pleasant to me than staying by myself in the house. What bothers me is to be amidst the hustle and bustle of many busy people!'

It was difficult for him to believe me. I know he was trying to give me kind advice with good intentions. I could not agree with his advice, however, because we had different objectives and ultimate aims. It was not his fault.

Milarepa used to say, 'From my point of view, I think the conduct of people is crazy! They think that I am crazy! In actuality, it is they who are crazy!'

It is like that.

In general, I wear monk's robes for a certain reason. The reason is that I wish that I and all others may be able to go together from happiness to happiness in this life in dependence upon the path of sacred Dharma. Even if I cannot immediately take others to happiness, I will practice just as Gampopa taught in the Four Dharmas.

In any case, after my friend left I recited the Four Dharmas of Gampopa three times in front of the altar with single-pointed concentration. At that time I thought how fortunate I was to have been born in Tibet. Having been born in a good family and having become a monk, I never even knew the word, loneliness. It was only when I encountered cultures like that of the busy West, with its stresses, depression, and so forth, that I understood how someone could be lonely. I realized how especially fortunate I was to have been born in Tibet and to have the life of a monk.

I have practiced Dharma from a young age up to the present. Even if I am not able to attain enlightenment during this lifetime, if I could not be free from disturbed states of mind such as loneliness simply because I was by myself, I think my Dharma practice would be completely meaningless! My friend was not to blame, he just didn't know the benefits of Dharma.

These days, when people meet with difficulties, they try to fix the problem solely by looking for external remedies. They may buy medicines, or use drugs, etc. There are very few who understand that the supreme medicine for our times is the holy Dharma. To find jewels, you must rely on knowledgeable geologists who know how to find them. If someone does not understand what Dharma is, they will not know how precious and sacred it is. Even if they do, it is difficult for it to become an actual antidote to their delusions.

Even when someone's mind has turned slightly towards the Dharma, it is even more rare for them to sustain it their whole life, more than a few months or years. There are nothing but distractions in present day society, and much which is contradictory and

discordant with Dharma. The mind is very sly, like a monkey. It chases after everything it sees or hears and creates many hindrances to Dharma practice.

These days people have no stability. People who practice Dharma in early life turn into adults who act badly. People who were monks when they were young, later in life become a father with many children and have to wander in samsara. I see this kind of thing with my own eyes. These are hindrances which prevent Dharma from becoming the actual path. Otherwise, if the mind has well and strongly turned towards Dharma, Dharma will become the path without much hindrance.

If the mind does not first turn very well towards Dharma, it is difficult for the second stage, the Dharma to become the path. For example, Tibetans have a saying, if you mistake the date of the first day of the month you will be mistaken all the way up to the full moon. If you are mistaken at the beginning, the rest will be mistaken. In any case, for the mind to turn towards Dharma you must have encountered pure Dharma. If you want to discover pure Dharma you must find a qualified Guru, who teaches it. Finding a qualified spiritual guide is like a key for the mind to turn towards Dharma.

Third: Please bless us that our path may be cleared of delusion.

If the mind has turned towards Dharma and Dharma has become the path as just explained, that Dharma of the path itself becomes a remedy for deception, the delusions. To a mind that perfectly understands the ultimate nature of reality, deception and transcendent wisdom do not appear to be different and separate. Conventionally, however, a beginner must learn how they exist in a manner such that one is the remedy for the other which is to be abandoned. At the first stage one fights the delusions, at the second stage delusions appear as friends, and finally the delusions are transformed into transcendent wisdom.

As a beginner you must fight the delusions so as not to be enslaved by them. It is difficult for them to appear as friends or to transform them into transcendent wisdom at first. What is it that clears the delusions? The view of emptiness. How does it clear them? They must be cleared by means of your own practice. It is not enough to know the Dharma, you have to actually practice it. Perfect wisdom is the factor which liberates your mind from all delusion.

For example, when someone is hungry, if others simply describe the taste and nutritional qualities of various foods, it will not help to satisfy their painful hunger. To get rid of their hunger they must definitely make food and eat it! Similarly, just being able to count and know the names of various teachings will not clear your disturbed states of mind. You definitely must practice.

If you practice you will eventually be able to clear delusions. The reason delusions can be cleared away is that the delusions are only temporary and transitory;

they never enter the actual nature of your mind. For example, clouds in the sky are only passing and temporary. No matter how thick they are they do not transform into blue sky. Similarly, no matter how bad are the delusions such as attachment in our minds, they only remain temporarily; they cannot turn into the clear cognitive nature of consciousness. If clear, empty transcendent wisdom awareness itself could be polluted by delusion, all of our Dharma practice would be made completely meaningless.

It is not like that. The more we practice Dharma, the more our mind will become accustomed to the side of pure timeless wisdom, while the power of the negative side of deception and delusion will become weaker and weaker. For example, on the third day of a month of Tibetan calendars you see a sliver of the new moon, and from that time up to the full moon, the white portion of the moon becomes larger and larger, while the dark part becomes smaller and smaller. Finally, at the full moon, the dark part disappears completely and everyone enjoys seeing only the round, white moon.

In brief, at all times, in all modes of conduct of body, speech, and mind, with mindfulness and alertness, we should recognize delusions such as attachment as soon as they arise in our mind, and become able to release them within the antidote of the view of emptiness, transcendent wisdom awareness.

Fourth: Please bless us that delusions may arise as timeless wisdom.

The difference between the path being cleared of deception, and deception arising as timeless wisdom, is a difference in the yogi's own mode of practice. In both cases delusions are to be eliminated, but in the context of the third line delusions are something to be eliminated by power of the path of sacred Dharma acting as its antidote. The stronger your practice becomes the more the delusions are eliminated. At the beginning you fight the delusions, gradually subduing them, and finally sever them from the root. The result depends upon the power of the path of the person's meditation.

Delusions arising as timeless wisdom is not experienced by an ordinary beginner; rather it is the experience of a practitioner who is fully accustomed to the power of meditation. In general, delusion and timeless wisdom are of one nature, only differentiable by thought; in actuality there is no delusion separate from transcendent wisdom. Delusion is nothing but the play, the display, of transcendent wisdom. It appears as delusion to the ignorance of ordinary beings, but as transcendent wisdom to the pure awareness of arya beings.

In short, as it is said, If you know, you are a Buddha, if you don't, you are a sentient being. Sentient beings follow delusions under the influence of ignorance and wander in samsara experiencing suffering, while Buddhas follow transcendent wisdom awareness and attain Liberation.

When absorbed in actual meditative equipoise you need not block the deceptive appearance of thought in the present moment. Even if you try to block them you can't. Likewise, you need not follow thoughts. If you follow them your path is mistaken. If you look nakedly at the very entity of whatever thoughts arise, they are released right where they are; that is the nature of thought. If they are recognized by pure awareness with mindfulness and alertness, the arising and release of thoughts occur simultaneously. It is like the swell of a wave in the ocean. The wave and ocean are both water by nature while appearing different in terms of their functions. Although thought and transcendent wisdom are the same nature, the way they appear to ordinary mind is different.

Anyway, if thoughts are recognized by pure awareness with mindfulness and alertness, thoughts themselves become aids to meditation. Without thoughts, there is no basis upon which to meditate, so there can be no gradual attainment of the arya state. To go to the upper floor of a building you need a staircase. In this context, thoughts are like the staircase. The more thoughts you have the more your meditation flourishes. For example, without an opposing enemy you cannot gain victory. In Mahamudra it is said that the nature of thought is Dharmakaya. This is why. In some Mahamudra instructions it says that if there are a lot of thoughts there is a lot of meditation, whereas if there are few thoughts, there is little meditation.

In any case, apart from a yogi who knows how to practice thought as being the nature of the meditation, this does not mean that ordinary beings' current thoughts of the three poisonous delusions are good! If you know how to practice the instructions by which delusions are liberated without abandoning them, thoughts do not harm you; moreover, their appearance is beneficial to your meditation.

No matter what delusions arise, without following after the object of awareness, when the nature of that which appears as delusion is viewed by timeless wisdom awareness, it is liberated on the spot. At that point delusions cannot harm your mind. That is because they are perceived by transcendent wisdom awareness with mindfulness. When delusion is instantly recognized by wisdom awareness, that is what is called 'delusion arising as transcendent wisdom.'

There are many ways of teaching the Four Dharmas of Gampopa. One is to conjoin the four lines with the four stages of Mahamudra practice: single-pointedness, freedom from elaboration, single taste, and no meditation. Another is to explain it in conjunction with the five paths, with the first line referring to the paths of accumulation and preparation, the second line referring to the path of seeing, the third to the path of meditation, and the fourth to the path of no-more training, enlightenment. Fearing this would become too long, however, I will leave it at this for now.

These Four Dharmas of Gampopa, the very essence of the glorious, incomparable Dagpo Lhaje Gampopa Sonam Rinchen's meditation, is of profound and vast meaning. It includes the complete meaning in very few words and is extremely

blessed. I, Khenpo Karten, who aspire to its practice, wrote this between sessions of meditation on May 28, 2019, in ordinary language without the addition of scriptural citations, to make it easily understandable for the benefit of those who have newly entered the path like myself.

Through this virtue may the blessings of the incomparable Dagpo Rinpoche's four Dharmas of Gampopa enter the minds of sentient beings.

SARVA MANGALAM
May all be virtuous!

translation by Jampa Tharchin

