

**as it is**

Volume 1



**Tulku Urgyen  
Rinpoche**



**RANGJUNG YESHE** • *Boudhanath, Hong Kong & Esby* • 1999

## The Four Dharmas of Gampopa



**B**EFORE RECEIVING TEACHINGS, LET'S MOTIVATE OURSELVES with the precious enlightened attitude of bodhichitta. Form this wish: "I will study the Dharma and correctly put it into practice in order to establish all my mothers, sentient beings as many as the sky is vast, in the state of liberation and the precious, irreversible supreme enlightenment."

I would like to present a teaching called the 'Four Dharmas of Gampopa,' which is identical with four instructions given by Longchen Rabjam. The first of these is how to turn one's mind towards Dharma practice. Included within this is the four mind-changings. The second Dharma is how to ensure that one's Dharma practice becomes the path. This includes teachings on the preliminary practices of the four times hundred thousand. Within the third Dharma, how to make the path clarify confusion, are the teachings on development stage, recitation, and completion stage. And within the fourth, how to let confusion dawn as wisdom, are teachings on how to gain certainty, realization of the natural state by means of the three great views. It is said that the ground is Mahamudra, the path is the Middle Way and the fruition is the Great Perfection. These Four Dharmas of Gampopa contain a complete path for an individual to attain full enlightenment within one body in one lifetime.

All of us here right now have obtained what is extremely difficult to obtain — the precious human body endowed with the eight freedoms and ten riches. It is something that only happens once in a hundred aeons. It has happened for us now, this time around. While we are alive in this body, it seems as if it were so easy for us to be humans. It doesn't appear to have required any effort. Honestly, though, a human body is extremely difficult to achieve and necessitates enormous merit from former lives. It is only due to our former meritorious karma combined with pure aspirations that we now have a precious human body.

Our present situation is like having found a wish-fulfilling jewel. Please don't let it go to waste. Time is quickly running out; we are all mortal. The reason why it is impossible to attain a material state of perfection in this lifetime is because nothing lasts. Everything is impermanent; everyone dies. If the moment of death were a total end, like water drying out or a flame being extinguished, it would be fine — death would be of little consequence. Unfortunately that doesn't happen. The consequences of our karmic actions follow us after death just as our shadow follows our body. The unfailing law of cause and effect requires that we experience the results of what we have done. The places where we experience the ripening of our karma are called the six realms of samsara. This situation has gone on since beginningless time and we are still not liberated.

Reflect on the meaning of these four topics I have just mentioned: the difficulty of obtaining a precious human rebirth, the fact that nothing lasts, that we are all mortals, that everyone is governed by the consequences of karmic actions, and that there is no place within samsaric existence with permanent happiness. Those are called the four mind-changings. They are extremely important to take to heart, because they are not fiction or fantasy. They are facts; they explain the circumstances and conditions that we live under within samsaric existence.

It's not impossible to understand that we do die, nor the details of what follows. We are all really just standing in line for that, waiting for it to happen. We need to face these facts in a very realistic way. Before

starting to practice the precious Dharma, it is very important to take these to heart. That was the first of the Four Dharmas of Gampopa: how to turn one's mind to the Dharma.

The second, how to make sure that one's Dharma practice becomes the path, contains the preliminary practices of the four times hundred thousand. Through the four mind-changings we develop the wish to be liberated from samsaric existence and attain the precious state of enlightenment, not merely for ourselves, but for all beings. We have become ready to take refuge in the Three Precious Ones. The Buddha is the completely and perfectly awakened state of omniscience. The Dharma is the path that leads to that, the teachings. The Sangha are all the masters who have upheld, propagated and made the teachings flourish from the time of the Buddha up until our kind personal master with whom we have managed to connect. To take refuge in these with full trust and confidence ensures that we have the possibility to also become awakened ones ourselves. Taking refuge and seeking guidance under the Three Jewels is what opens the way to becoming enlightened. That is the first of the preliminary practices.

Connected with this, as a branch, is the development of bodhichitta. Without bodhichitta, we cannot proceed on the Mahayana path. The understanding that all other sentient beings are in fact our own mothers and fathers from past lives provides a very important basis for our progress. Every little insect that we meet, without a single exception, has been our own mother and father — not just once, but many times. And all of them are on the wrong track. They want to be happy, but do not know how to accomplish this. To develop bodhichitta means to form this most courageous resolve: "I will personally take responsibility to lead all sentient beings to the state of enlightenment!" This bodhisattva vow is what makes the difference between a Hinayana and a Mahayana follower. To take this vow is called generating bodhichitta. Taking refuge and developing bodhichitta are therefore the very essence of the path.

When we do a *sadhana*, we can practice the three vehicles — Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana — simultaneously. Whenever you do a

particular deity practice, you always start out with refuge and bodhi-chitta, the Hinayana and Mahayana elements. There is no way around that. The deity itself, the recitation of mantra and visualization, is Vajrayana practice. Thus, it is impossible to practice Vajrayana without also being a practitioner of Hinayana and Mahayana. The three vehicles are invariably practiced in that same sitting.

The practices of all three vehicles are also contained in the preliminary practices. The first practice is taking refuge and developing bodhi-chitta. That is followed by Vajrasattva visualization and recitation, which is an actual Vajrayana practice. Vajrasattva practice is structured as the four remedial powers, the first of which is the power of support — to visualize the buddha Vajrasattva. The second is the power of the applied antidote, reciting the hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva and imagining the downpour and purification by means of nectar. The third is the power of remorse for past misdeeds and evil actions. The fourth is the power of resolution, promising ourselves to never commit any negative action again. The Buddha taught that practicing the Vajrasattva recitation while remembering these four remedial powers purifies all our negative karma, even if it is as huge an amount as Mt. Sumeru.

After the Vajrasattva recitation comes the mandala offering, which ensures that we will not have obstacles on the path of practice. In this practice we are creating conducive conditions by gathering provisions that we can bring along — the accumulation of merit and wisdom. There are three levels of mandala offering: the outer mandala, the offering of the external universe; the inner mandala, the offering of the content of sentient beings; and finally the innermost mandala, the offering of ultimate thatness, corresponding to the three kayas. Taken together, these three levels are called “gathering the accumulations of merit and wisdom.”

Next is guru yoga, the fourth of the preliminaries. Guru yoga is often said to be even more profound than the main part, because in it we receive the blessings from an unbroken lineage of masters. These blessings come from the dharmakaya buddha Samantabhadra all the

way down until our own root guru. It's like the pipe connecting your house to the main water source, which allows water to come out whenever you open your own faucet. The unbroken lineage of enlightened masters connected to you through your personal teachers is like that water pipe. Through this we can receive the blessings of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and of the three kayas in our own practice.

When we truly apply ourselves to the preliminary practices, we can remove obstacles on the spiritual path and create all the conducive conditions for quickly realizing the ultimate fruition. That is exactly what is meant by the second of the Four Dharmas of Gampopa: how to ensure that one's Dharma practice becomes the path.

Some people regard themselves as exclusively Mahayana or Vajrayana practitioners. Others say they only follow Theravada, that they don't know anything beyond that. But talking in this way only exposes one's lack of understanding. The three vehicles are not meant to be separated at all. We can practice all of them simultaneously — in fact, we need to in order to have a solid foundation. Without really applying ourselves to the four mind-changings and taking refuge, we have no real foundation from which to connect to the Buddhist teachings. Similarly, if you want to drink tea, you need a place to put the cup. You need a table, which is the same as the foundation of the Shravaka or Hinayana teachings. You also need the cup to contain the tea, which is the Mahayana attitude. And you need the tea as well — otherwise there is nothing to drink, and you *do* need a drink. Vajrayana teachings are like the liquid poured into the cup.

In the same way, in order to become enlightened we first need to connect to the Three Jewels. Taking refuge involves entrusting ourselves; that contains the Hinayana teachings. After that, what is the use of being the only one who is enlightened while all our mothers roam about in samsara? That would be totally shameless. It is said that the Hinayana orientation is like the little puddle of water contained in the hoof-print of a cow, while the Mahayana attitude is as vast as the entire ocean. Everyone needs to be enlightened — not only ourselves. Thirdly, without the very profound teachings of Vajrayana including

deity, mantra and samadhi there is no way we can achieve full enlightenment in this same body and lifetime. Thus, we need all three vehicles together: Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. There is no point at all in regarding oneself as some kind of superior practitioner who doesn't need 'low' or 'inferior' teachings. Such an attitude would be very unrealistic.

Ensuring that one's Dharma practice becomes the path means purifying the obscurations and misdeeds that create obstacles and block the path to the attainment of complete enlightenment. There is a profound reason to practice the preliminaries, even though some may think of them as unnecessary. It is through the preliminary practices that we are truly able to clear away obstacles and make our Dharma practice become the path of enlightenment.

Having cleared away obscurations and gathered the accumulations of merit and wisdom, we reach the third Dharma of Gampopa: how to let the path clarify confusion. Confusion here is understood as that which obscures our innate nature and prevents enlightenment. Everyone has buddha nature, all sentient beings without a single exception. Unfortunately, we don't know what we possess. We have fallen into confusion and we are wandering in samsara. Imagine a wish-fulfilling jewel that has fallen in the mud and has become encrusted in dirt. The jewel first of all needs to be acknowledged. Then it needs to be cleaned. Once this happens, it can be utilized. We are all wish-fulfilling jewels but lack the knowledge of what we actually are, and thus the ability to make use of that and actualize it. We need to clean away the dirt that covers our basic state, the wish-fulfilling jewel. The way to do this is through Vajrayana practice.

The most eminent and profound way to do so is by the three principles of Vajrayana practice: deity, mantra and samadhi. By training in the development stage consisting of deity, mantra and samadhi, we actualize what we already are. To properly practice development stage, we need to let go of any ordinary, materialistic world view. Don't chant the lines for the deity while thinking, "I am in this world, in my ordinary house, in my ordinary body." We need to first dissolve everything into

profound emptiness, then visualize the celestial palace, the throne of the deity and all the other details. Through this profound training in deity, mantra and samadhi, we are able to let the path clarify confusion.

Remember, in practicing the development stage we are not imagining that we are something that we are not. Everyone possesses the enlightened essence that is endowed with the three vajras, the three aspects of enlightenment. The way to acknowledge that fully is through deity, mantra and samadhi. Development practice is simply knowing the nature of things *as it is*. Training in this is like knowing the jewel to be the wish-fulfilling jewel that it actually is. It's not like we're imagining an ordinary stone to be a jewel. A stone will never possess the value or qualities of a jewel, no matter how hard we visualize. There is incredible profundity in the development stage practice.

Now let's look at the fourth Dharma of Gampopa, letting confusion dawn as wisdom. Even though what is going to be said now will sound very high, I haven't made up anything by myself. I don't have the ability to make up my own teachings or to invent some new, profound path, not at all! Even if I could, there would be no point in doing so, because people wouldn't be interested. I would rather repeat the words of the Buddha and the great masters of the past.

All sentient beings without a single exception have buddha nature, from the dharmakaya buddha down to the tiniest insect. There is no real difference in the quality or size of this enlightened essence between individuals. However, buddhas and fully enlightened bodhisattvas have cut the movement of dualistic mind at the very beginning. That is how they are different from sentient beings. Buddhas and bodhisattvas' expression of mind takes the form of compassionate activity. This activity, through emanations and re-emanations, appears in all samsaric realms in order to teach other beings.

Sentient beings, on the other hand, have fallen under the power of dualistic thinking. An ordinary person's attention strays according to any movement of mind. Suddenly there is the confusion of believing in self and other, subject and object, and this situation goes on and on repeating itself endlessly. This is samsaric existence. The buddhas and



bodhisattvas were successful in getting up on the dry land of enlightenment. But we sentient beings became bewildered, and are now in the unsuccessful, unsatisfactory state we all find ourselves in. We are still in the ocean of samsara; we have not yet gotten our heads fully out of the water. We have roamed about in one confused state of experience after the other, endlessly. At the same time, we haven't lost our buddha nature. Our buddha nature is never separate from our minds for even a single instant. Though we are not apart from it we do not know it, and thus we wander in samsaric existence.

*Now* is the time to free ourselves from samsara. Unless we do it in this lifetime, it is not going to happen all by itself. We have to take care of ourselves. Right now we have the ability to receive teachings and practice the Dharma. Isn't this the right time? Wouldn't that be better than continuing to act like an animal, concentrating only on eating and sleeping and letting the time run out? Why not take your future into your own hands?

It is possible to realize our nature because we have experienced the great kindness of a fully enlightened one's appearance in this world. The Buddha not only appeared, but he imparted the precious instructions on how to realize our own buddha nature. And these teachings on how to realize our enlightened essence have been made available through an unbroken lineage of great masters.

'Confusion arising as wisdom' means to realize that the buddha nature pervades all sentient beings. We have not lost it; it has never been apart from our mind for even a single instant. This buddha nature is always present, and the only thing that conceals it is our own thinking. Nothing else obscures it. The essence becomes obscured by the expression. It is the same as the sun shining brilliantly in the clear sky. The only thing that obscures the sun are the clouds. And the clouds themselves are created through the manifestations of the sun — the light and warmth. They don't come from any other place. The heat from the sun makes water evaporate and forms the clouds that obscure the sun. Likewise, the expression of our own attention takes the form of the

confused thinking that obscures us. In other words, *we* are obscuring our own buddha nature, and now is the time to clear up this confusion.

We are fortunate enough nowadays to have at hand wonderful teachings that show us how to recognize our own nature and obtain liberation from samsaric existence. If we choose to remain obscured by our actions and emotions, we don't know what will happen next. We live one day after the other. If we are going to die tomorrow, we are ignorant of that today. We are really as stupid as an animal. From another angle, we are even more stupid than an animal, because we *can* receive teachings on how to practice; in fact, we may already have done so. If we don't apply them we are far more stupid than an animal. Animals can't really help it; they are not in a body that can receive teachings. But unfortunately we human beings who have been introduced to the spiritual path can waste this precious opportunity. That would be incredibly sad!

Due to the kindness of the Three Jewels, we now have the fortune to receive the teaching through which we can allow confusion to dawn as wisdom. Confusion here means believing something to be what it is not. To be confused is the same as to be mistaken. How do we turn confusion into wisdom? First we need to understand what confusion is. Confusion is taking what isn't for what is. It's the opposite of knowing what is to be as it is. In Tibet there is a drug called *datura*, which, when you take it, makes other people appear as if they had fifty heads or thirty hands. We know that this is not possible in this world; this is an example of confusion.

Within our buddha nature are three qualities of enlightened Body, Speech and Mind. The unchanging quality that is like the openness of space is called vajra body. The unceasing quality is called vajra speech. The unmistaken quality, the capacity to perceive even without thought, is called vajra mind. These three — vajra body, speech and mind — are inherently present as the nature of all sentient beings. All we need to do is to recognize this. Even though we have the three vajras, we don't know it, and thus continue to wander in samsara. Ordinary confusion covers up our innate three vajras. Our physical body of flesh and blood

covers the vajra body. The words and sounds we utter, which are interrupted and intermittently created, obscure the unceasing quality of vajra speech. And our train of thoughts that comes and goes, and endlessly arises and ceases from moment to moment, day after day, life after life, is exactly what obscures the unmistakable quality of vajra mind. What is necessary now is to recognize our own nature, instead of going on being confused.