

**The Three Symbolic Supports of the Dharma:
Teaching on the Benefits of Constructing
Statues and Stupas**

A Teaching by

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Opening Comments: The Importance of Motivation

This teaching is all about the benefits of building stupas, statues, monasteries, and writing dharma texts. It is good to understand the benefits clearly, so we can apply them in our daily life. This is not a teaching that we need to sit down and practice every day, morning and night.

There are immense benefits to building stupas, statues, monasteries, and writing dharma texts, but they all depend upon our motivation. Everything depends upon our motivation. If we have a very pure motivation, then even though our action may appear to be non-virtuous, actually it is virtuous.

The Kunzang Lama Shalung tells a story of how in Tibet, there were many small temples with many stones arranged in rows which were imprinted with OM MANI PADME HUNG, and OM BENZAR GURU PADME SIDDHI HUNG. On one side of these rows, someone had placed a tsa tsa. One day it was raining really badly, and a person came along and thought, “This rain is going to spoil this tsa tsa; I must protect this tsa tsa.” So he looked here and there for something to protect it with, but all he could find was an old piece of torn shoe. So he placed it over the tsa tsa to protect it. Actually, the torn piece of shoe was really very dirty, but his motivation was good, because he only wanted to protect the tsa tsa.

Then another person came along and thought, “Who did this? This tsa tsa is really very pure, and some stupid person put this old piece of torn shoe over it. This tsa tsa must be respected, and this piece of shoe is really very dirty.” So he removed the shoe and threw it away.

Then the text says that although the two men’s actions were completely opposite -- the one who put the torn piece of shoe on the tsa tsa, and the one who took it off -- both accumulated the same amount of merit, because both had the same purity of heart: one wanted only to protect it, and the other thought the shoe was dirty and wanted only to respect and purify it.

Similarly, if we have a good motivation when we build stupas, temples, or dharma centers, or write dharma texts, since the main subject is dharma, we will definitely accumulate merit; but if our motivation isn’t pure, and many negative thoughts and emotions are arising within us, even though we might be practicing in a dharma center, we will accomplish nothing, and we’re certainly not applying the proper antidote to our negative emotions. So it is very important to remember our

motivation at all times.

If we have a good motivation when we help someone, we will accumulate merit. For example, if a person is addicted to drugs, and doesn't have much money, he'll need more money to buy drugs; otherwise, he can't have peace of mind. If this person asks us for money, and we want to be generous, so we give him one, two, or three dollars, we will accumulate merit. But if we give him money and think, "He'll use it to buy more drugs, then he'll become even more spoiled," that is a non-virtuous, negative emotion, and we won't accumulate any merit. But if we think, "If I give him money, and am really kind to him, he will just go buy more drugs and spoil himself," and we refuse to give him money, because we thought of him, we will accumulate merit.

Our motivation is very important. Whether we are listening to teachings, doing practice, or making a simple offering to the altar, we should try to have a pure motivation, and generate compassion and bodhicitta. You are all old dharma practitioners, and must have heard many times from many lamas how important it is to generate compassion and bodhicitta. It is basic. If we don't have pure motivation, and compassion and bodhicitta, then the mantras we accumulate will produce some kind of energy, but they won't be the cause for enlightenment. To attain enlightenment, we must generate compassion and bodhicitta.

The Benefits in Four Parts

This text was written by Schechen Gyaltsap, a great Nyingma scholar and practitioner who achieved realization. The author says there is a very detailed explanation of the many benefits of building stupas, statues, monasteries and writing texts in the Kangyur, but he has given here a condensed version of these benefits.

Part 1 - The General Benefits of Building the Three Supports

The first part of this teaching is the general benefits of building the three supports. The second part is the special benefits achieved through pure motivation and pure activity. And the third part is the benefits achieved through making lots of offerings and paying respect. The last part is dedicating whatever merit has been accumulated through virtuous thought, speech, or action for the enlightenment of self and others, and making prayers of aspiration.

The first part, the benefits of building the three supports, begins with a quote from the Sutra: “The sons of the Buddha, the great Bodhisattvas, are very skillful when they accumulate merit. They are able to ripen the minds of sentient beings into true practice.” There are many methods to accumulate merit. We need to take into account the capacities of various individuals, the kind of accumulation they wish, and what virtuous thoughts, speech and actions generate lots of merit; then we can ripen the minds of sentient beings.

The Buddha gave three sermons, and each and every one was according to the right time, the capacity of people’s minds, and their desires and wishes. He always gave teachings in a way that would exactly suit the people, so they could really get into them. We can’t always start with the highest teachings, like on emptiness and the true nature of phenomena and the mind. Even though these are very profound teachings, some people won’t be able to understand them, and won’t feel easy with them. That is why the Buddha gave teachings according to each person’s mind.

The Buddha gave many methods to subdue our wild, uncontrolled minds. Some sentient beings are subdued by a great bodhisattva, others by a Sravakabuddha monk or Arhat, and others by a Pratyekabuddha. Pratyekabuddhas have accumulated a lot of merit and wisdom in their previous lifetimes, and just have one lifetime left before they achieve the state of Arhat. There are two kinds of Pratyekabuddhas: those who like to stay in a group, like the parrot, and those who like to stay alone, like the rhinoceros.

The second type of Pratyekabuddha accumulated merit and wisdom in their previous lifetimes. They don’t have a master in this lifetime. They are born when the Buddha and his teachings are not present, and everything in the universe is just ordinary. They go to graveyards and meditate on the bones, and think, “How did this bone get here? Oh, this is a bone of some creature who died. How did this creature die? Because of samsara. How did this creature get in samsara? Due

to desire and attachment. How did attachment arise? Due to feelings of happiness, suffering, and equanimity. How did these feelings arise? Due to objects, senses and activity.”

Objects, senses and activity are one of the 12 branches of interdependent origination, known collectively as feelings, or sensations. First we see an object, then we think it is nice and we feel happy, or we think it is awful and feel sad, then we become attached and want it, or we feel aversion and want to keep it away. Then, according to these feelings, we act.

Then the Pratyekabuddhas think, “Where do feelings come from? They come from the five sense organs and faculties. Where did the five sense organs and faculties come from? They came from the consciousness being going into the mother’s womb. Where did the consciousness being come from? It came from the activity of its previous lifetime. Where did that activity come from? It came from ignorance.”

Then the Pratyekabuddhas understand that samsara came from ignorance, and if they apply the antidote of transcendent wisdom, there will be no ignorance. If there’s no ignorance, there’s no activity. If there’s no activity, there’s no consciousness being going into the mother’s womb. If there’s no consciousness being going into the mother’s womb, no body is generated. If there’s no body, there are no faculties. If there are no faculties, there are no objects. If there are no objects, there’s no feelings. If there’s no feelings, there’s no attachment. If there’s no attachment, there’s no samsara. And if there’s no samsara, there’s no birth or death.

So Pratyekabuddhas go back from the result, into the true cause of samsara. Then they understand that if there is no true cause of samsara, there is just nirvana. Then they begin to meditate on the absolute true nature, the transcendent wisdom. Then, when they achieve all four stages of the Hinayana realization, and become an Arhat, they subdue all negative emotions and actions.

There is a little controversy in Tibetan Buddhism between the Hinayana and Mahayana concerning subduing actions. Phagpa Lamchung (Phagpa means Arhat, and Lamchung was his name) was a great Arhat who realized the identitylessness of self. He was liberated from samsara because he had subdued all negative thoughts, which according to Abidharma Kosh, there are about 98 of. But even though Phagpa Lamchung subdued all 98 negative emotions, and was a realized arhat, he had to suffer and die from hunger. This means that even though he subdued all 98 negative thoughts of the three realms -- the desire realm, form realm and formless realm, which also contain

the six realms -- he still couldn't purify his previous karma, and he had to die from hunger.

When Pratyekabuddhas achieve the state of Arhat, they never give teachings. They perform miracles, like flying, fire burning from the tops of their heads, and sleeping in the sky -- then naturally people feel very devoted, and want to do virtuous actions. This is how Pratyekabuddhas subdue the minds of sentient beings.

Some beings are subdued by the gods Indra, Vishnu and other Hindu gods. In Buddhism, these Hindu gods are called dharma protectors. In a text called "The Specialized Praise to the Buddha," by a great Hindu brahmin and scholar of the four vedas, he tells the story of how in the 10th or 11th century, his family worshipped Shangkhari. There were also many great Buddhist scholars and practitioners in the area, and his brother also liked Buddhism. So the two brothers, one a great Hindu scholar, and the other a good Hindu who also had faith in Buddhism, would debate about which was best: Hinduism or Buddhism.

One day the mother heard them arguing. She asked them, "Why are you always quarreling? I give you food, clothing, and everything you need to do your own study, so why are you always quarreling?" Then the boys explained that they weren't quarreling, they were trying to come to a decision about who was the most perfect: Shangkhari or Buddha. They told her that one of them had more Buddhist ideas, and the other more Hindu ideas, and they were debating to see which religion was the best. Then the mother told them to stop debating, and go ask Shangkhari himself.

On the way to see Shangkhari, they went through many nice forests with lots of fruit trees. Then they saw Shangkhari's wife, Hum Uma, who knew immediately why they had come, and welcomed them in. At that time, Shangkhari had invited all of the Buddha's followers, the great Arhats, over for lunch, and everyone was really busy. The two brothers waited a while, lunch was offered, and Uma brought them many fruits she had picked from the jungle. Then, after a while, all of the Buddha's followers made prayers of dedication and left.

Then Shangkhari invited the two brothers in, telling them he knew why they had come. He said he too served the Buddha's followers, and had confidence and faith in the Buddha's teachings, so they could feel comfortable worshipping the Buddha too. So they got their answer.

Hindus believe in the gods Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, and Indra, but they also pray to Buddha. So even the gods can subdue and tame people's minds. Some beings are subdued by nagas, others by miracles, and others by the great Bodhisattva kings, like King Indrabodhi.

There is a short story in the Bodhisattva text about a Bodhisattva king from the country Pemachen. At that time, many people were suffering from an incurable disease. So the King called all of his great doctors together, and the doctors decided they needed the flesh of the rohida fish to cure the disease. The King asked the doctors where this rohida fish could be found, and they told him it was very difficult, and could only be found in a big ocean. Then the King went to the top of his palace, made a prayer that he would die and be reborn as a really huge rohida fish, that his people would eat him and be cured of their disease, and may he not die until all had eaten his flesh, then he threw himself down from his six-story palace and died.

The King was immediately reborn in the ocean as a really huge rohida fish, then he waited for his people to find him. Then one person came along, and the fish told him that if he ate his flesh, he would be cured of all disease. He said that in his previous lifetime he had been the King of the country Pemachen, and to go tell everyone there to come and eat his flesh. So the man ate a little flesh, then went and told everyone about the fish, then all of the people started coming.

So first the fish would lay on one side, and when the people had finished eating all the flesh on that side, he would turn over to the other side. Then when they finished that side, he would turn over again, and due to his strong bodhicitta and aspirational prayer, that side would be completely recovered. Then again, when they finished eating that side, he would turn over and the other side would be recovered. In this way, he cured all of his subjects.

Another example of a bodhisattva king was King Srongtsen Gampo of Tibet. He was an emanation of Chenresig, Avalokitesvara. There is one amazing story about Srongtsen Gampo's two queens: when they died, they both dissolved into the King, then the King dissolved into Buddha Shakyamuni. One of the King's devoted ministers witnessed this, and when he saw the King and queens dissolve into the Buddha, he was very sad and cried. Then the people asked the minister, "Where is the King?" and not knowing how to answer, he just cried. Then again, from the heart of Shakyamuni Buddha, King Srongtsen Gampo's head appeared like through a window, and explained everything to him. Then on his right and left sides the heads of both his queens appeared. The King gave advice to him, then the King and his queens dissolved back into Shakyamuni Buddha.

Some beings are subdued by a particular meditation practice, others by listening to dharma teachings. The more dharma teachings we hear, the more our minds will just naturally turn toward the dharma, and the more we will understand that we need to perform virtuous actions, and

tame our minds. Other beings are subdued by seeing miracles, or seeing great Buddhas, or by seeing the Buddha's relics, or by building stupas, temples, and monasteries. Some are subdued by circumambulating temples and stupas, or by creating gardens. With these many methods, sentient beings can accumulate a lot of merit, become purified, turn their minds toward the real practice, and achieve the final result quite easily.

A lot of merit can be accumulated by building statues of the Buddha or deities, consecrating them properly, decorating them with beautiful gold and silver designs, and painting them with gold paint. Also, by making offerings to the great masters, and by being respectful, and always serving them. Or by writing down dharma teachings, or asking questions during a teaching when we're not clear about something. If we ask a question, and the master gives us the right answer, many people who have the same question can also be benefited. During the Buddha's time, two men named Kunga and Wusung asked the Buddha a question, and when the Buddha gave a very detailed answer, many people had their minds cleared.

We can also accumulate merit just by reading. In Tibet, there is a tradition of reading the Kangyur: all of the monks gather in the temple and read the Kangyur. Merit can also be accumulated by offering lamps. In Tibet, after the Chinese came, they thought the Tibetans were really very stupid to offer so many butter lamps to the altar. They thought the butter should be given to poor people, beggars, or those who would benefit from it, instead of just wasting it. They could only see with their eyes. They couldn't see the benefit of this type of offering, and that a lot of merit is accumulated by making offerings to deities.

Merit is also accumulated by offering incense, flowers, or nice smelling perfume, or by making the eight different kinds of offerings. Also, by offering different ornaments to thrones, statues, and stupas. When we accumulate merit, naturally we can understand the dharma.

There is a story about a man who lived during the Buddha's time who couldn't even chant OM AH HUNG; he couldn't even remember these three syllables he was so stupid and dull minded. He would repeat OM and then forget AH and HUNG, or he would repeat AH and forget the HUNG. All he did was sweep the temple every day. As he would sweep away the dust he would imagine he was sweeping away his ignorance. So he would sweep, and when he had finished half the temple, the wind would blow everything back inside -- so even in a whole day he couldn't finish sweeping the temple. In this way, he accumulated merit and was purified, and before he died he became an Arhat. This is something we can do also. This is not just a story, this really happened

during the Buddha's time. In this way, we can also become purified, and achieve realization.

Hindus don't believe that we can accumulate merit in these ways. For example, they believe that when we build a temple we need lots of mud, and when we gather lots of mud we kill many insects; so we really accumulate more non-virtue than virtue when we build a temple. But Buddha Shakyamuni said we can accumulate a lot of merit, and become purified through all these methods.

Another quote from the Vinaya Sutra says, "We can accumulate a lot of merit by building temples and monasteries for monks, nuns and dharma practitioners, and by being helpful to those who are very sick, and by welcoming and serving great pilgrims who come from afar."

There are seven main ways to accumulate merit: (1) building temples, (2) providing food and sleeping places for monks, (3) providing food and sleeping places for nuns, (4) providing food and sleeping places for dharma practitioners, (5) helping sick people, (6) being generous with food in times of famine, and (7) building gardens around temples and monasteries.

Of these seven, the most important is making offerings to the sangha. This is because the sangha has many needs, like building stupas and monasteries, and Buddha and deity statues to put inside the monasteries, and getting teaching texts, etc. So naturally, wherever there is a sangha, all these activities are happening; where there isn't a sangha, these activities won't be happening, so no one can accumulate merit.

These kinds of activities are just beginning in Western countries. For example, no one here really knows what a stupa is. Even so, we can accumulate a lot of merit just by seeing a stupa, and thinking that it is really beautiful. Then, when someone explains to us that building a stupa is a way to accumulate lots of merit, and that inside there are many relics, mantras, and other good things, if we have a positive feeling about it instead of a negative one, we can accumulate a lot of merit.

Even if we hear the name of a deity, like Chenresig or Amitabha, though we might not be drawn to certain practices right away, or feel devoted in this lifetime, some merit is accumulated, and after a long time we will be subdued by the deities, stupas, monasteries, and other things.

We can also accumulate non-virtue by thinking, "What is the use of these stupas, statues and monasteries?" There is a story of a gelong who lived before the Buddha's time. At this time, a very virtuous dharma king was building a very big stupa. The gelong was helping build the stupa, and thought, "Why is this king building such a big stupa? When are we going to finish this?" He was worried that it would take years and years to build because it was so big, or that they would never

finish it. He didn't think it was a good idea to build such a big stupa. But after working on it for a few years, they did finish it. Then he regretted having thought it was stupid to build such a big stupa, because now it was finished, and it really had seemed to go by very quickly, and the stupa was really very nice.

One day he went begging for money, and when he got some money, he bought a big bell that had a really good sound and offered it to the stupa. He tied it on top of the stupa and it sounded very sweet when it rang. Then he passed away, and in his next lifetime he was born as a human being. But according to the karma of thinking it was stupid to build such a big stupa, his body and face were so ugly that whoever saw him felt like vomiting, but his voice was so sweet that everyone was really attracted to it.

One day a monk was giving teachings, and some people had gathered around. They could all hear the sound of the gelong's voice outside. One monk was so attracted to the sound of his voice, which was so sweet and nice, he thought he must be very handsome to look at. But when he went to see him, immediately he started vomiting because he was so ugly. The monk wondered how a person could have such a nice voice but such an ugly body, so he asked the Buddha to explain. The Buddha said this is his karma, because in his previous life a king built a stupa, and he had the negative thought that it was stupid to build such a big stupa, and they would never finish it. Because of that thought, he was reborn with an ugly looking body and face. But after the stupa was finished, he regretted his thoughts, and offered a nice sounding bell. Because of that thought, he was reborn with a really nice voice.

When we build temples, statues, and stupas, or write texts, we should have positive thoughts, positive speech and positive actions, then we will definitely accumulate a lot of merit; otherwise, we will accumulate negativity. We need to clearly understand that these actions are the foundation for accumulating a lot of merit. So we should put a lot of effort into doing these things.

When we build a stupa, we will continue to accumulate merit until that stupa is totally destroyed. If we build a bridge where many people need to cross, we will continue to accumulate merit until that bridge is totally destroyed. When we build temples or write dharma texts we will accumulate merit until that temple or text is destroyed. So we can accumulate merit for a long time.

If we think, "Oh, this is a nice teaching," we can accumulate merit and the potential to achieve nirvana, Arhathood, or enlightenment. If we place the mantra which says, "Whoever sees, or

chants, or passes under this mantra can purify all of the negativity of his past lifetimes and become enlightened” over a doorway, we can accumulate merit and eventually become enlightened. This doesn’t mean we’ll become enlightened and purified just by seeing this mantra one time, or chanting this mantra one time, or passing under this mantra one time. It means if we go under this mantra thousands of times, we have the potential to become purified, and accumulate the two merits, and eventually become enlightened.

All of these methods become a particular cause to achieve realization. If there is no cause, nothing will happen; not samsara, not nirvana. Even scientists and great physicians can do nothing without a cause. Each and every creation of modern science is due to causes being assembled together. Everything depends upon a cause, a potential.

Similarly, all sentient beings have the potential of Buddha nature. But other conditions need to be assembled together in order for our Buddha nature to ripen. In the White Lotus Compassion Sutra the Buddha addressed Kungawa: “If you depend on me, and make offerings and prostrations to me, and have faith and devotion in me, you can accumulate so much merit that it is difficult to compare it to anything else.” Palpuchendo said, “It only takes a small fire to burn a mountain of dry grass into ashes. If you make even a small offering to the great Tathagatas, the great Buddhas, all defilements and negative emotions can be burned away, and you can realize nirvana or enlightenment.”

You’ve probably already heard the story of King Ashok of India. King Ashok was born 500 years after the Buddha’s death. He ruled over all of India. His actions were very non-virtuous before he met the Buddha’s sangha, but then he realized what virtuous deeds were and became a Buddhist. He accumulated lots and lots of merit by building 108 great stupas and 1000 small stupas. He always invited the Buddha’s disciples over for lunch. In these ways, he accumulated a lot of merit, and he was also very rich.

How did he achieve these results? Not by his present efforts. The Buddha explained that in his previous lifetime he and some other small boys were building a sand castle when the third Buddha Resung walked by. The boy thought, “I must offer something to the Buddha,” but he didn’t have anything to offer. So one story says the three boys climbed on top of each other and this boy offered a handful of sand to Buddha Resung, who was very tall. His mind was very pure, he wasn’t trying to tease the Buddha, and he never thought the sand was nothing, he just thought he had to offer something to the Buddha. Due to that merit, in his next lifetime, in Buddha Shakyamuni’s

time, he was born as a prince with all the luxuries.

So if we have a pure motivation, we can even offer sand to the Buddha and achieve this kind of result. We've all seen amazing movies on television, but the Buddha, who sees the past, present and future, can see the most amazing movies of all: our immeasurable past, present and future lifetimes. Buddha explained that King Ashok achieved these results due to the merit accumulated in his previous lifetime. We too can accumulate a lot of merit by making offerings to Buddha.

We can also accumulate merit, and become purified, by having a pure motivation and wish to see Mt. Kailash in Tibet. This is the pure land of Avalokitesvara. If we even hear the name Mt. Kailash we can purify many kinds of sickness in this lifetime, and create good habitual tendencies which can carry over to our next lifetime. We can accumulate merit by seeing Buddha Shakyamuni in his Nirmanakaya form, with the 32 major and 80 minor marks, or by making prayers to the Buddhas.

However, just because we see a statue, or have devotion, or make prayers to be successful in whatever we do, doesn't mean we'll get whatever we want. Sometimes we pray for a specific benefit, but we don't get the right result. Then we think, "What happened? I did this prayer, yet I am still experiencing obstacles. What happened to the Buddha? What happened to the compassion of the deities? What happened to my practice?" We should continue to make aspirational prayers, and eventually we will achieve the results we are hoping for. But in this present lifetime mostly we experience our karma, and until we can purify our karma, which is really powerful, we cannot change what we experience. These experiences occur naturally, and we cannot refuse them. No one is torturing us, we just have to bear the results of our actions. We cannot just change them into whatever we wish.

Around the world, sincere practitioners experience more obstacles, and more sickness. They get very upset and think, "I'm working hard at my practice. I'm serious and pure, but I have more obstacles than anyone else." It's true that some people never do any kind of virtuous action or practice, and are always bad and mean, like killing, robbing, etc., but they are always healthy and have all their wishes fulfilled. We might get confused and think, "This practice is nothing. I don't believe in karma, because I always do the right thing, but I'm not happy, while these other people are non-virtuous, and still get what they want." We don't really know why these people are happy, and why we are sad. We don't know why things happen the way they do. No one can say they never did any negative action in their many previous lifetimes. We have all done many negative actions -

- that's why we have been born in samsara. Sometimes we incur a karmic debt that requires us to go down to hell and suffer greatly for a thousand years. We have to bear the karma of our negative actions.

When we do serious, good practice, our negative karma ripens in this lifetime; then we get a headache or experience some other problem. In this way, we purify our accumulated negativity which would otherwise result in a hell birth. Then we can have a peaceful life, and achieve the state of Arhat, or realization. Similarly, those really non-virtuous people accumulated a lot of merit in their previous lifetimes, and as it ripens in this lifetime, they are able to do non-virtuous actions and still be successful and healthy; but in their next lifetime, they will suffer in hell or in the hungry ghost realm.

The cause and effect of karma is really profound. Even minor things that can't be seen with our eyes or consciousness produce karma. For example, when doctors look at our blood under a microscope, they see many germs, but when we look at our blood with our eyes, we don't see any germs. Then we find it hard to believe the doctor. Then the doctor says, "You can't see them with your eyes, but come look through the microscope and you'll see thousands of germs." It is the same with karma. Unless we experience it in a certain way, it's hard to believe in. Karma is really sharp and deep. We can't understand it through this present consciousness. That is why all sentient beings are confused about the results of their actions. If it was clear, no one would do bad actions.

By accumulating merit, we can become purified and attain realization. The great King Srongsen Gampo said, "A person who has faith in the Buddha, and who thinks the Buddha is really great, can accumulate merit." We can become purified and accumulate merit by having strong devotion, making prayers, doing prostrations or khorwa around a stupa, monastery or temple, accumulating mantras, and chanting texts. Then we can have the potential to realize enlightenment.

We can accumulate a lot of merit by making praises to the Buddha. For example, "You were born as Prince Siddhartha, and from a young age you had so much compassion and wisdom which understands the nature of samsara, which is birth, old age, sickness and death, and understanding that you renounced your princely life and went into deep practice, then you achieved enlightenment, then you gave the three great sermon teachings which enlightened the minds of millions of sentient beings, and may I become just like you."

Whatever virtuous actions we accumulate will never be spoiled at any time. For example,

when we type teachings into a modern computer, they remain there unspoiled. The karma computer is even sharper, and can store with the utmost clarity even our slightest virtuous or non-virtuous thought, speech, or action, so that eventually we can have our own result. But sometimes the disc of a modern computer gets damaged, and all the teachings get lost, then we have to start at the beginning. But the karma computer never forgets. It is so sharp, and it doesn't care if we are rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, American or Tibetan, high caste or low caste. It stores all of our records, then each of us must bear the results.

Another example is the police: they keep their records, and if someone gets caught for a crime, they look in their records to see what other crimes this person has committed. Then, if they find out that they have a history of criminal activity, they say, "You are a criminal. You have to be punished. You must go to jail for this amount of time, and if you ever do this again, you will really have to suffer."

Another example is the government: if they want a good person for a job, they look in their records and see, "Oh, you studied at the university, then you were a teacher, then a professor, then you served in the government, so you are very capable to do this job for us."

Similarly, all our happiness and suffering is due to the karma computer, the karma police, the karma judgment. Sometimes we think a criminal is very clever: he kills someone, runs away, and no one catches him for years and years. The criminal himself thinks he is very clever. But after a while he gets caught, because the police never stop watching out for him. The karma police are a million times sharper. All of our virtues and non-virtues are in the karma computer, and it's just a matter of time before we get caught. Unfortunately, we can't see them, so they are very difficult to believe in.

The Lamas tell us if we build stupas, statues, monasteries, whatever, we will accumulate a lot of merit. But our minds are very tricky. We think, "Maybe the Lama is just saying this to make us build a stupa. Probably nothing will happen." So we need to understand how karma really works, and that our minds are very sharp, and hold everything there.

The Mindfulness Sutra tells the benefits of building the three supports: The great kings, queens and ministers accumulated a lot of merit for the benefit of sentient beings by building temples, stupas, and Buddha and deity statues, so beings could make different offerings to them, like gold, or even pieces of stone. If we have a pure motivation when we make offerings, we can accumulate a lot of merit. But if we think, "I will offer one hundred thousand dollars to the people,

then they will think I am very rich, generous and great, and I will be famous,” we can accumulate merit, but not as much as someone who only gives one or two dollars and has a pure heart. Everything depends on our motivation.

We can accumulate a great amount of merit, and gain the potential to achieve realization, by making offerings to all the dharma sanghas in the four directions. There is always a lot of dharma activity going on around a temple or monastery, like dharma practices and ceremonies, to turn people’s minds toward practice. People outside the monastery can also develop a karmic relationship to the dharma just by coming and going to the monastery, and thinking of the good activities occurring there. Then, even though they might not be fully open to the dharma in this lifetime, in their next lifetime they will have a relationship to it.

We can also accumulate a lot of merit by having a pure mind when we are in a temple. If we build a temple, we can accumulate a lot of merit when we are working on it, and also while we are sleeping. How much? So much that it can’t be measured.

The main thing that all of the Buddha’s followers must have is the good intention to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Then we must understand the profound teaching of the Buddha, and develop wisdom. But the real practice is to have the motivation to benefit other beings. We must have compassion from the core of our heart. Then, when a temple is built, and the sangha gathers there, it is very important not to have any conflict or non-virtuous action occur there. The sangha must overcome any group obstacles, and individually we must subdue the obstacles of our own practice, even though they are as big as mountains. Then we can get purified, and establish the five stages and ten bhumis in our mind streams. We must follow the path step by step, and do all the practices. That is what it means to have a good sangha who gathers together in a good dharma center.

In the time of the Buddha, monks didn’t work at all, they only practiced. Lay people gave them food, clothing and everything they needed. If they didn’t have clothing, they would go to the graveyards and take the nice cloths that the great people who died were wrapped in. No one wanted these cloths, so the monks were allowed to have them. Then they would wash, and purify them, and cut them into pieces, and sew them into red and yellow robes. They didn’t have any attachment to clothing, and they never created any negativity to get them, like stealing, and they didn’t have to buy them, or ask a sponsor for them, or get them as a present from anyone.

Milarepa, who practiced in a cave, said that both he and the families who supported him could realize enlightenment because of interdependent origination. A song by Milarepa says that when a practitioner really practices, with a really pure heart, it is very good. At the same time, whoever serves this practitioner with a really pure heart will definitely accumulate merit and wisdom. Because of interdependent origination, both can achieve enlightenment.

If we make offerings to the great sanghas, monasteries, and temples where great lamas reside, build beautiful temples, offer many decorations, and visualize the temple to be like the celestial palace of the great Buddhas, we can accumulate a lot of merit. Then, even though we might not achieve enlightenment, we can take rebirth in the pure land of Amitabha, or Guru Rinpoche, or Avalokitesvara, or Tara, where we can do many kinds of practices very easily. We can accumulate merit very quickly in these pure lands. The most revered persons are there always doing virtuous actions, and wherever we go we can hear teachings and see people practicing tranquility meditation. So there is really no other choice for us but to practice; then it will be very easy to get realized. These are some ways to accumulate merit and get purified.

Part 2 - The Benefit of Building Buddha Statues: The Supports of Enlightened Body

The second part of this teaching is the benefit of building Buddha statues. It begins with a quote from the Tathagata's Bodies chapter which says, "A Buddha statue can be made from any kind of substance, like clay, stone, wood, brass, iron, gold, silver, lapis, crystal, diamond, pearl, etc., and Buddha thangkas can be painted on wood, walls, etc." This means that statues can be made of anything, and thangkas can be painted on anything. If something is damaged on a statue or thangka, we should repair it, then we can accumulate the same amount of merit as the one who built the statue, or painted the thangka.

If we build a Buddha statue, if we are born in a low caste we will be purified, and in our next lifetime we will be born in a high caste as a king or brahmin. If we've done many negative actions we will be purified, and in our next lifetime we won't do negative actions. In later lifetimes we won't have wrong view, like certain cultures that don't believe in past and future lifetimes.

According to the absolute true nature of samsara, death doesn't stop the consciousness of the body from migrating from life to life. It is wrong view to think this doesn't happen. Cyclic existence, and the transmigration of the consciousness, is the true nature of samsara. We must avoid wrong view, and cultivate right view. We need to study deeply, and see that past, present and future lifetimes exist just like yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Many people don't believe in the cause and effect of karma either. They think if they do negative actions there will be no result, and if they do good actions there will be no result. They think their actions begin and end today. This is ignorance, and it is an extreme wrong view. We cannot accumulate merit if we have wrong view. It is very important not to have wrong view.

If we build Buddha or deity statues, in our next lifetime we won't be born blind, dumb, or deformed. These handicaps occur because of the negative actions we committed in previous lifetimes. Even if we act very negatively, and don't believe in the Buddha, if we study and come to understand that the Buddha is an enlightened being who helps all sentient beings, and develop faith in the Buddha and the deity, we will begin to have faith in ourselves. Then, if we build a Buddha statue, we can purify any non-virtuous karma we might have which would cause us to go to hell to suffer for thousands of years.

There is a story about the son of Makita. He was involved with a bad friend, and became enemies with his father the king. When his father returned from a great battle, the son killed his father. Then he realized he had been influenced by a bad friend, and had done a very bad crime, and

he regretted it. Then he did purification practices. Then the text says that because he committed one of the five heinous crimes, he had to go to hell, but he went to hell like a ball: if we throw a ball on the ground, it immediately bounces back. So even though he did all the purification practices, he still had to go to hell, but it was like the bounce of a ball, and he didn't have to suffer for a long time. In the same way, we too can purify a lot of non-virtue by building Buddha statues, making tsa tsas, and painting deities.

At first, not everyone is devoted to one of the three Yanas of Buddhism. Some people might want to be great scholars, or great artists. But then an artist might build a great statue or stupa, or paint a deity to show their artistic skills. That accumulates merit. When they accumulate merit, they become purified. Then they feel they have done a very good thing. Then they might start liking the teaching, and want to practice.

If we get shit on our body, immediately we feel very dirty and want to wash it off. Then we burn incense, and put on perfume so we don't smell like shit. Similarly, if we do some negative action, we should feel very, very dirty, and try to purify ourselves. If we have faith in the Buddha, then when we build a Buddha statue, or paint a thangka, we can purify all of the ten non-virtuous actions and their results. The merit accumulated by building a Buddha statue, or painting a thangka, is like a fire which can burn anything.

A quote from the White Lotus Dharma Text says, "It is very good to build statues from precious jewels, like turquoise, rubies, and diamonds." The great sculptor, Zo Bhikshu Karma, who manifested from the Buddha's tsuktor, built three statues during the Buddha's time from precious jewels. The gods Indra and Bhrama collected all the precious jewels and gave them to the sculptor, then he built Buddha statues from them. He made one statue of an eight-year old Buddha, one of a twelve to fifteen-year old Buddha, and one of a twenty-five-year old Shakyamuni Buddha. The latter statue resides in the Potala in Lhasa.

If we build a Buddha statue from the seven precious jewels, we can accumulate a lot of merit, and become even more purified. In our next lifetime, we will have lots of wealth, food, and clothing, and our life will be very, very good. We will purify a lot of negativity, and eventually we'll achieve the 32 major and 80 minor auspicious marks of the Buddha, and achieve enlightenment. If we make a Buddha statue out of copper, brass, iron, lead, clay or wood, truly we will achieve Buddhahood.

We can accumulate a lot of merit by painting thangkas of the Buddha or deities on walls or cloth. We can accumulate more merit by applying gold to the painting after it is finished. Then we

will become purified, our minds will naturally become more virtuous, and we'll want to do more practice.

The first thangka ever painted came from Sri Lanka. The story of the first thangka is that a certain princess of Sri Lanka was a maid in her previous lifetime to a rich family who was receiving the Buddha's teachings. At that time, she didn't have the opportunity to really listen to the teachings, but just before she died she thought of the Buddha with strong faith and devotion. Then, in her next lifetime, she was born as a princess in Sri Lanka.

At that time, there were many good merchants who sailed around the ocean, and the men on the ships sang praises to the Buddha. One of these ships sailed near Sri Lanka, and the princess heard them singing and became very excited. She invited the merchants to her kingdom, and asked them what they were chanting. They said praises to the Buddha. She asked, who is the Buddha. They said he is a great, enlightened being, whose compassion is really great. She asked them what the Buddha looked like. Then, one of the merchants, who was a very good artist, drew a picture of the Buddha on a piece of cloth for her. That was the first painting of the Buddha on cloth. That is how the tradition of painting thangkas on cloth began. The princess accumulated a lot of merit, and in her next lifetime she received a lot of purification.

The benefits of building statues, and painting Buddhas and deities are: in our future life, we won't be born blind, deaf or dumb; all our sense faculties will be intact. We won't have an ugly face or body; we will be handsome and beautiful. We will attain the 32 auspicious signs of the Buddha. In our next lifetime, we'll be born as a human being. Our mind will be very pure. We will ask virtuous questions that will benefit many sentient beings. Wherever we live, we will only hear good news. We will be successful in whatever we study or practice. Whoever sees us will become happy and peaceful. We won't create any negativity in the near future. We won't hate or be angry with others. We won't steal from others. We will have a lot of power and freedom in life. All our wishes will be fulfilled. We will have a lot of loving kindness towards all sentient beings. Our minds will always be powerful with the wish to benefit sentient beings. We won't feel inferior to anyone.

We will be very intelligent. Our minds will naturally turn toward virtuous action and right practice. Naturally we will be rich. We will have the power to build many statues from many precious jewels, like gold, silver, turquoise, ruby, etc. We will attain the state of a Chakravartin, and rule over the four continents. There are four kinds of Chakravartins: those who rule over one, two, three or four continents. So we can have all the world's wealth and happiness.

We can take rebirth in heaven, like Indra, the King of the Gods, and have anything we want

-- all pleasure and happiness. We can guide all of the gods onto the right path. We will never be born as a servant or slave to anyone else. We will be intelligent and wise. We will achieve transcendental wisdom. In this lifetime, we will always have peace of mind and be happy. All our wishes will be fulfilled. We will never be born as a hell being, hungry ghost or animal due to our negative actions.

Even if we've never benefited anyone, other people will naturally want to help us. People will always be very kind and happy with us. Naturally, we will be devoted to the teachings, and turn our minds toward serious practice. Even if we don't become realized, we will take rebirth in heaven for many, many lifetimes. If we are born as a human being, we will be born in a rich family and not experience any problems or suffering. Eventually, we will be born in the Buddha's pureland. We will have visions of all the deities and their celestial palaces, just like in the Vajrayana practices.

There is a quote here from the King of Samadhi Sutra. The reason we quote so much from the Buddha's Sutras is because everyone has 100% confidence and faith in the Buddha's teachings. When I was in Boulder, at Trungpa Rinpoche's center, there was a translation of the root text of Lama Mipam. Khenpo wrote a commentary on it, then Trungpa Rinpoche's students translated it. The text is about the two logics of direct and inferior perception. It proves in many ways that the Buddha's knowledge was fully complete, and he was a fully enlightened being. It proves that Buddha was an authentic master, and that his teachings were very logical, and extremely true.

Then, from the point of view of Western philosophy, the students asked me some questions: "How can you say that Buddha is an authentic master, a fully enlightened being, and that his teachings are true? How can you prove that? Just like you, we too can say that the Christian teachings from the Bible are true because they came from God." Then I asked them a question as an answer, "Have you found any mistakes in the Buddha's teachings? Is there anything in samsara that isn't like he said it was? Can you prove that the Buddha had some wrong information?" Then one lady told me that so far in her Buddhist studies, she hadn't found anything that wasn't how samsara really is. Another man, who was very good in philosophy, said he had never found anything either.

So we can say that the Buddha gave teachings according to the real nature of samsara, and the real nature of absolute truth. He gave true teachings. There is not a single word missing in his whole teaching, not even in the whole Kangyur. So then we've proved that he has the kind of wisdom and intellect to teach without mistake. So we've proved that Buddha is an authentic master, with the omniscient mind of an enlightened being.

The quote says, "We can become purified by building a Buddha statue out of a beautiful, perfect crystal." When a statue is made from crystal, it is so clear, and it shines so beautifully, that

our mind is immediately attracted to it. If we build that kind of statue, then in a very short time we will be able to practice shamatha meditation, then insight meditation, and eventually achieve realization.

If we build a Buddha statue out of gold, silver, or sandalwood, we'll also be able to practice tranquility and insight meditation, and eventually achieve realization. If we build a Buddha statue out of clay, stones, or ordinary wood, or draw Buddhas on walls or wood tables, we can achieve the same result. This comes from the Buddha himself, so it is true that we can have the same result.

King Tsogyal, who lived during the Buddha's time, asked the Buddha how it was possible for a person to accumulate enough merit to have happiness, pleasure, and luxury in samsara, in heaven, and also achieve enlightenment. The Buddha answered that if we build just one statue, or one stupa, or paint one painting, we can accumulate an incalculable amount of merit. He said that even if we could count the number of particles of mud contained in one small, clay statue, which is quite impossible, that number couldn't compare to the amount of merit we would accumulate by building one statue, one stupa, or drawing one painting. With this merit, we can be born in the god realm, or the human realm, with the same incalculable amount of luxury. This means we can enjoy luxury in these realms for many, many thousands of lifetimes. Then, after many, many lifetimes in the god or human realm, we can practice tranquility and insight meditation. Then we won't experience sickness or old age, our happiness won't change into suffering, and we will continue to experience a happier life, until eventually we can achieve enlightenment, Buddhahood.

Accumulating merit like this, and becoming purified, becomes the particular cause for us to be born in our next lifetime in the pure land of the Buddhas, where we will be liberated from all kinds of sickness and suffering. Then we won't be born as a slave or servant to anyone else. We'll never be born really poor, or in a low caste, or with faulty sense organs. So whatever kind of life we have now is due to the karma we accumulated in our previous lifetimes.

After a statue is built, there are five special benefits to having a Buddha or deity statue in a temple, room, or on our altar: (1) whenever we look at it we can feel the presence of that Buddha or deity; (2) it is an object which bestows blessings and peace of mind; (3) it bestows long life and lots of happiness, so naturally we will become rich and have lots of clothing, food, houses, grain, and everything we need, and people will serve us without reason, since we've accumulated this kind of merit, power and energy; (4) lifetime after lifetime we will be born with all our sense organs intact, and our skandhas will be very clear; and (5) if we build a stupa or statue, or paint a thangka, and be generous, we will be born as a Chakravartin, and eventually achieve the ultimate realization.

There are five additional benefits of having a Buddha or deity statue in our temple, room, or altar: (1) we will have long life, fame, and happiness, (2) wealth, many relatives, good friends, and servants, (3) for many lifetimes we will be born with an attractive appearance, and we'll have lots of ornaments naturally, (4) we can be born as a Chakravartin, a conqueror of the four continents, and (5) if we are born in the god realm, we will have about ten times more powers than the other gods. The Kangyur, the original teaching of the Buddha, contains very detailed explanations of the benefits of building Buddha statues and painting thangkas, but this is a condensed explanation.

A quote from another Sutra says, "Manjushri, if you were to make many types of offerings, like jewels, food, clothing and wealth, for many aeons to a great son of a Bodhisattva, or the son and daughter of the great master of all the Bodhisattvas, or a Pratyekabuddha, or a great Arhat, it would be impossible to calculate the amount of merit that is accumulated. For example, the Ganga river in India starts at the top of the Himalayas, and goes down into the Bay of Bengal through Varanasi. If you could count all of the sand particles along the Ganga River, which would be impossible since we can't even count the particles in one handful of sand, it couldn't compare to the amount of merit that is accumulated by making offerings to a realized being. But that merit cannot compare to the amount of merit that is accumulated when someone makes a drawing of a Buddha, or builds a small Buddha statue with a pure motivation." So a lot of merit is accumulated.

In another sutra a girl named Rinchen asks many questions of the Buddha: "Why is your body so beautiful? Why does it shine more than the best gold? Why is it that whoever looks at you just once is so charmed that their eyes don't even feel like blinking? Why do people want to give so much to you? Why do you have the 32 and 80 auspicious signs, and all these qualities?" Then the Buddha replied, "All of the Tathagatas, and Shakyamuni Buddhas, have these great auspicious signs and special qualities because in many, many previous lifetimes, with pure motivation and devotion, they built Buddha statues, painted Buddha thangkas, repaired stupas, gave refuge to those in need of shelter, and tried to stop people from fighting and be friends again."

There was a great businessman named Lodro who also asked the Buddha, "Why did the Buddhas have devotion in their previous lifetimes? Why were their minds fully turned toward practice? How could they have all of these special qualities?" The Buddha replied, "Because in their previous lifetimes as ordinary human beings, all of the Tathagatsa and Buddhas asked people to build Buddha statues, and they also put their own effort into building statues. They explained the teachings of the Buddha to others, and instructed them to meditate on loving kindness and practice. They always respected and served the masters. They helped many people take refuge in the Buddha.

They were always compassionate. They always put a lot of effort into their practice. Because of this, in their next lifetime they are always born in the presence of the refuge tree, the triple gem, and the Buddhas, where they could listen to the Buddha's teaching. Then they were able to accomplish all of the practices without any effort, and eventually achieve the absolute realization, enlightenment. So the Buddhas have all of these qualities because they accumulated merit when they were ordinary human beings."

Then the King of the Nagas asked the Buddha, "How can we never be separate from the Buddha and deities?" The Buddha replied, "If you build Buddha statues, and paint Buddha thangkas, you can accumulate merit so that you will never be separate from the Buddha. When you build a Buddha statue, your mind must really concentrate on what the Buddha looks like, so you can make an exact replica of the Buddha. Then your mind will develop a strong image of the Buddha's figure. Also, when you paint a Buddha thangka, you have to concentrate very hard, and be careful to get all of the measurements and details correct. When you concentrate and focus in this way, you accumulate a lot of merit. In addition, your mind develops a strong image of the Buddha's figure, so you can always be reminded of the Buddha. Then you can get enlightened and have all of the qualities of the Buddha."

A quote from another Sutra says, "If a person looks at a Buddha statue, stupa, or painting, or builds or draws them, or makes offerings of incense, flowers, etc., this becomes the main cause to realize enlightenment, and develop all the qualities of the Buddha."

There is a story from the Buddha's Sutra about a man named Loapon Pal. Before he got this name, he was a very great Hindu scholar named Logon Tion. Logon Tion was born in the northern part of India. At that time, there were many great Hindu saints and scholars who Logon Tion had debated and beat. So he developed a lot of pride and thought, "I am the greatest scholar on earth. Nobody can challenge my scholarly understanding."

Logon Tion's mother had a lot of faith in Buddhism. She wanted her son to go to Nalanda University and debate all of the great Buddhist scholars. She hoped he would be defeated, and even convert to Buddhism. She thought her son had a lot of pride to think that no one could challenge him in debate. So one day his mother asked him, "Why are you so proud when you have debated only a few scholars? There are plenty more scholars on this earth -- have you heard of the scholars at Nalanda University? If you could debate and win these Nalanda panditas, then you could really have some pride." So he agreed, and immediately went to Nalanda University.

When he arrived at Nalanda University, he found all of the Buddhist scholars in the temple

performing a ceremony. He had so much pride, and disrespected the Buddhist scholars so much, that he immediately started teasing them. Holding a small stick in his hand, he very boldly started counting the scholars -- one, two, three -- touching the stick to their heads as he counted. Then they immediately knew he must be a very, very learned Hindu scholar who wanted to debate them; otherwise, how would he dare be so prideful and bold as to treat them like that.

So they called a meeting and decided to find out more about this man. They discovered he was a really great Hindu scholar who was also very learned in Buddhism. Then they thought, we cannot all debate him, we need Nagarjuna, or Arya Deva to subdue him. Then they made a torma and put it on a stick, and on the stick they wrote a four line letter to Nagarjuna and Arya Deva which said, "There is a great Hindu scholar here who wants to debate a Buddhist scholar. We don't have anyone here who can challenge him. This is your responsibility. You must take care of it." Then they completed their ceremony.

After a while a crow, who was a manifestation of Mahakala, came and took the letter to Nagarjuna and Arya Deva. Nagarjuna and Arya Deva read the shloka, then Arya Deva said, "I will go" then Nagarjuna said, "I will go" -- they both wanted to go. So they decided to debate each other to decide who would go: Nagarjuna would be the Hindu scholar, and Arya Deva would be the Buddhist scholar, and whoever won would go.

Nagarjuna was also a really great scholar in Hinduism. He asked the first question. Then Arya Deva asked many questions. Then Nagarjuna went really deep into the Hindu philosophy. Then Arya Deva thought, "How can this be? This is my master, a great Buddhist scholar -- how can he have so much deep knowledge about Hindu philosophy?" Then Arya Deva asked Nagarjuna many more deep questions, then he burst out, "You are subdued." Arya Deva was very good, but he was Nagarjuna's disciple. Then Nagarjuna immediately stopped and said, "You really have a very deep scholarly understanding of Buddhist philosophy. Of course you can win, and I am glad of that, but at the same time you forgot that I am your master, so there will be an obstacle. But that's okay, you go to Nalanda University to debate the Hindu scholar." Then Arya Deva calmed down, and felt really sorry. He explained that he got really involved in the debate and couldn't control himself. Then Arya Deva headed off toward Nalanda University.

Along the way he saw a woman who was a manifestation of a devil, with one blind eye. She came in front of Arya Deva and said, "It would be really nice if you could give me one of your eyeballs, because I can't see with this one eye, and the other eye is fully blind." So being a really great bodhisattva, he immediately took out one of his eyes and gave it to her. Then as he proceeded on

he thought, "I wonder what she will do with that eye." At that time, no one had the skill to perform medical operations, and as he looked behind him he saw her put his eyeball down on a stone, then on another, then throw it down on the ground. Then he thought, "Why did she do that? She is really very mean to waste my eyeball. She didn't use it for herself, and she didn't want me to have it either. I gave her my eyeball for nothing." Because of this, he could not recover his eye. That was the obstacle.

Then he continued on with just one eye. When he reached Nalanda University, he told a monk to tell the Abbot that he had arrived. The monk thought, "What does he mean, 'I have arrived?'" Then the monk told the abbot a person was here who said, "I have arrived." Then the Khenpo immediately understood that this must be Arya Deva or Nagarjuna.

In the meantime, every day Logon Tion had been coming into the temple to knock the scholars on the head with his stick and ask them when they were going to debate him. The next morning Arya Deva came into the temple and seated himself in the last row. When Logon Tion came in and started counting heads, and he was quite familiar by now with how many heads there were in that temple, he found one more head than usual. "Where did this head come from?," he asked. Arya Deva replied that it came out of his neck. Logon Tion thought he wanted to tease him, so he just let it go by.

They asked many questions like this before they began their real debate. One time Logon Tion was holding a small bird in his hand, and he asked Arya Deva, "What do you think of this bird? Is he alive or dead?" Arya Deva replied, "That depends on your mind. If I say it is alive, you will squeeze the bird to death and say it is dead, and if I say it is dead, you will release the bird and say it's alive. So it depends on your mind." Since that was the right answer, Logon Tion had nothing to say.

Another time Logon Tion was standing in the doorway, and when Arya Deva came by he asked him, "What do you think? Am I going inside or outside?" Again, Arya Deva replied, "That depends on your mind. If I say you are going inside, you will come outside, and if I say you are going outside, you will come inside. You will do the opposite of whatever I say. So it depends on your mind." Again, Logon Tion had nothing to reply, because that was the right answer.

Another time Logon Tion was taking a bath in the Ganges River. Arya Deva came by and asked him, "What are you doing?" Logon Tion replied, "I am purifying all of my negativity with this great purifying water of the Ganges River." Arya Deva didn't say anything, but just continued on.

The next day, Arya Deva took a very clean, crystal bottle, and put some shit inside. Then

he went to the Ganges River, and when he saw Logon Tion coming, he started washing the bottle. Logon Tion asked him, "What are you doing?" Arya Deva replied, "I am cleaning this bottle both outside and inside." Then Logon Tion said, "You are very stupid. How can you clean the shit which is inside by only washing the outside?" Arya Deva replied, "How can you purify your negative emotions and negative actions, which are in your mindstream, by only taking a bath?" Again, Logon Tion couldn't say anything.

Then Logon Tion declared, "You are the person who wants to debate me." Arya Deva said yes, he could do that. Then they told the king they were going to debate. Two thrones were prepared: one for Arya Deva and one for Logon Tion. In front, many kings, ministers, and Hindu and Buddhist scholars sat in a row, and behind many thousands of people watched. Then they made a bet that if Logon Tion, the Hindu philosopher, lost, he and all of his followers would become Buddhists, and if Arya Deva lost, he and all of his followers would become Hindus.

Then the questions and answers began. Quickly they went very deeply into their debate, until even the scholars who were watching didn't know what was being asked and what was being answered. As they went deeper and deeper, Logon Tion was defeated. Then Logon Tion had a vision of the Mahadeva Shangkar. Shangkar manifested a black boat in front of Logon Tion, and when Arya Deva asked him a question, Shangkar wrote the answer in the boat for Logon Tion to read. Immediately Arya Deva manifested an oily cloth, and rubbed the black boat with it so that Shangkar's writing couldn't be seen. Then Uma Devi, Shangkar's wife, who was also trying to help him, appeared in front of him and gave him the answers. Arya Deva manifested a naked man in front of her, then she felt ashamed and left. Then Shangkar manifested a parrot to give Logon Tion the right answers. Then Arya Deva manifested a hawk to chase the parrot away. Then, thinking that he was really losing, Logon Tion started to fly away, since he had some miraculous powers. Immediately Arya Deva chased him and caught him by the leg, and brought him down. So Logon Tion lost.

Then Arya Deva put Logon Tion inside a big library, where he became very sad and wouldn't eat or do anything. Then Logon Tion noticed that a text was laying face down, but one page was moving as if the wind was blowing it. Wondering why that one page was moving, he went over to it. There, he read all of the predictions about himself: That a great scholar named Logon Tion would debate with Arya Deva and lose, then he would become a great Buddhist scholar. All of the details of his life were there. Then he realized that Buddhism was really something great, and he repented having debated with Arya Deva. Then he went out and said, "Now I want to become

Buddhist. I want to become your student Arya Deva.” Then his name became Lupon Pal, and he became a great Buddhist scholar.

Lupon Pal wrote many prayers to the Buddha. There is one prayer here which he wrote about the Buddha’s life which is so poetic, and so sweet, that if we could translate it exactly, we would see how very interesting and nice it is. A quote from it says, “When you build a Buddha statue, first it overcomes all of your depression and unhappiness, then it overcomes all of your doubts. It brings you joy and happiness. A Buddha statue is a special object through which you can always accumulate a lot of merit. Then, in your next lifetime, you can be very beautiful or handsome looking, and you will always speak very humbly and gently with others. You will have a lot of power and dignity. You will have a lot of intelligence, and understand the profound teachings of the Buddha. You won’t have any ignorance, or a dull mind. Your sense organs and faculties will be very sharp. You can subdue all negative thoughts and negative objects. You will develop wisdom. Naturally, you will be very generous, and make lots and lots of offerings to Buddha statues, stupas, etc. Then you will accumulate merit which is comparable to the number of atoms or particles in those statues. Wherever you are born, whether it is in the human or god realm, you will always be born as the king of human beings, or the king of gods. Then you can practice the tranquility meditation of the form and formless gods. Then you will always experience happiness and pleasure. Then you can overcome all suffering, and eventually achieve the ultimate realization of enlightenment. These are the great benefits of building Buddha statues, and drawing thangkas of the Buddha.”

“Then, after you realize enlightenment, you will be adorned with the 32 and 80 auspicious signs. Chakras will appear in the palms of your hands and feet. A special light will permeate your body. Whoever sees your form will be benefited. You can overcome all enemies. Your sense faculties and organs will always be good: you won’t be born deaf, dumb or blind. You will never be reborn in the three lower realms, or in a low caste. Your speech will always be very true. Whoever hears you will be attracted to you. You will remember all of your past lifetimes. You will have the power of the five omnisciences. Naturally, you will have a lot of devotion and faith in the Buddha and his teaching. Then you can overcome all negative emotions, like desire, ignorance, and hatred. All good things will come to you as a result of just building Buddha statues, or drawing thangkas of the Buddha.”

“Then, when you make offerings to statues or stupas, you will never be born as a slave or a servant. You will never be poor. You will have the freedom of your own life. If you make many

offerings to the local deities, and preserve the eight vows of the genyen, you will accumulate more merit than any other way. If you are devoted to a realized monk, and follow his teaching, you can have the four realizations of the Hinayana, like arhathood. Listening to the teachings of the arhats, like the Sravaka and Pratyekabuddhas, you can have every benefit. You will always be happy. You will always hear good news. When you see a statue, stupa or painting of the Buddha, if you fold your hands in devotion, you can also accumulate a lot of merit, and enjoy positive results in your next lifetime.” So these are the words which he has written so poetically.

There are also two texts from the Compendium of Precepts: one is Nagarjuna’s and one is Shantideva’s. A quote from one text says, “In this present world, if you are very generous to a genyen, (one who keeps the five precepts), you will accumulate a lot of merit. If you make offerings to a upasaka monk, you will accumulate even more merit. If you make offerings to a gelong, a fully ordained monk, you will accumulate even more merit. If you make offerings and pay respect to a Vajra master, you will accumulate even more merit. But you accumulate the most merit by building a Buddha statue, with all the characteristics and correct measurements, and by paying respect and making offerings to it.“

Q & A

Do you have any questions?

Q.: What is the difference between merit which results in worldly benefit, and merit which results in enlightenment?

A.: To accumulate merit which results in enlightenment, you must have the proper motivation, generate compassion, and at the end, dedicate the merit for the benefit of all sentient beings. Then you will accumulate merit which will result in enlightenment.

To accumulate merit which will make you very rich depends mainly upon making many offerings. For example, if you have a Buddha statue, if you put gold and many ornaments on it, and offer many foods, and the seven or eight kinds of offerings, then in your next lifetime you will be very rich. Or if you have a text, and you wrap it in nice cloth, in your next lifetime you will have a lot of clothing.

The main cause to be born in the form god or formless god realm is the tranquility meditation practice. To be born in the desire god realm, like Indra, you need to be generous and make many kinds of offerings, and also practice the tranquility meditation. So to be born in the god realm, your actions need to be about 90% virtuous.

To be born as a human being, mainly you need to have moral discipline, a little practice of the six perfections, and make aspirational prayers. The main cause is moral discipline. To be born as a human being, 60% - 80% of your actions should be virtuous.

To be born as a human being who is also very rich, you need to really be generous. You should always make offerings to Buddha statues, stupas, texts, etc. You get the fruit of whatever seed you plant in the soil.

Part 3 - The Benefit of Building Stupas: The Supports of Enlightened Mind

The third section is on the benefit of building stupas, the support of the heart. Whether we build a big or a small stupa, the merit we accumulate is equal to the number of atoms or dust contained in that stupa. Accumulating this much merit, eventually we will achieve enlightenment.

King Tsogyal asked the Buddha about the benefits of building stupas. The Buddha answered, “Whether you are rich or poor, high or low caste, king or beggar, if you build a stupa with a lot of devotion and faith, and have confidence in the benefits of building stupas, and after the stupa is finished you pay it a lot of respect, and make many different kinds of offerings to it, you can accumulate a lot of merit. Even if you don’t dedicate the merit for the enlightenment of yourself and others, you will have a lot of wealth and luxury in this lifetime, and in your next lifetime you can be reborn in the god realm where you won’t need to put any kind of effort at all into having all of your wishes fulfilled.”

We can accumulate a lot of merit by building stupas. If we want to achieve enlightenment, we need to accumulate merit. To do that it is very good to build stupas, then consecrate them correctly with all the mantras. If we just want to be rich and happy in this lifetime and the next, we also need to accumulate a lot of merit. For that we can also build stupas.

If we offer the tree which goes inside the stupa, we can also accumulate a lot of merit. If we make any kind of offering to a stupa that is being built, with a lot of devotion and faith, we can accumulate the same amount of merit as the one who builds it. If we just rejoice and feel happy and comfortable about it, we can accumulate the same amount of merit as if we’d built it. If we build a stupa with devotion and faith, and have confidence in the benefits of building stupas, in this lifetime and the next we can keep all of the moral disciplines very well. In our next lifetime, we will be very learned. Naturally we will have a lot of patience, like when someone criticizes or insults us. Wherever we are born in samsara we will be successful in whatever we try to accomplish, because we have the accumulation of merit which is the seed of our wishes. When we have the seed, we can have the fruit; if we don’t have the seed, which is the accumulation of merit, no matter how much effort we put out, no matter how much we water it, we won’t get the fruit.

So it explains here that whatever merit we accumulate we can utilize in this lifetime to be happy and have our wishes fulfilled, and in our next lifetime to achieve all of the other qualities. This is the seed of enlightenment. Even if we offer just one umbrella on top of a stupa,

we can accumulate a lot of merit. So it explains here that the benefits of building stupas is just immeasurable, both in this lifetime and the next.

Another quote from the Sutra says, “By building a stupa, we can be born as a prince with a very handsome body, lots and lots of wealth, a really long life, a body that is strong as a vajra, with the 37 auspicious signs of the Buddha, and all qualities and happiness. To be born in the three upper realms -- human beings, demi-gods and god realms -- also depends upon merit. To attain enlightenment also depends upon the accumulation of merit. All of these benefits can happen if we build a stupa with devotion and faith.”

Another quote says, “If we write down the great Buddha’s mantras, and insert them into a stupa along with the relics, we can accumulate a lot of merit as long as the stupa exists.”

Stupas can also benefit a lot of sentient beings. Even if a person doesn’t have much faith and devotion in Buddhism, if they see a stupa and think, “This is nice,” they can accumulate a small amount of merit which can become the seed to accumulate even more merit in the future.

The Buddha blessed many stupas during his time. The Buddha said if a person prostrates, or makes offerings to a stupa which contains the Buddha’s relics, or prostrates and makes offerings to a real enlightened being like Buddha Shakyamuni, the merit accumulated is the same, there is no difference at all, because it all depends upon the mind, upon the emotional feeling when we make the offerings.

I told the story before about the king who was building a big stupa, and the monk who thought it was too big, and it would take too long to build, then he regretted and offered the bell, and was reborn with a nice voice but an ugly body. In the same way, when we build a stupa, or make offerings, the result depends upon our state of mind when we make the offering. If we relate purely to a precious object like a stupa, we can accumulate a lot of merit, but if we relate impurely, we can accumulate a lot of negativity.

When we build a stupa, the karma that is produced is so profound it can only be explained by the Buddhas. We can see the results of karma, but we can’t see how it happens. Blessings come from building stupas because of the dharma’s power, the blessings of the Buddha, the truth of his teachings, and interdependent origination. If we become involved with these energies, we get blessed with certain benefits.

If we build a stupa from beginning to end, or make offerings to a stupa after it is finished, we can become liberated from samsara, and get enlightened. Even if we make just one prostration, or do one khorwa around a stupa, we can accumulate enough merit so we will never be born in the

narak hell, the lowest hell realm.

Wherever a stupa exists, due to the virtuous activity of building the stupa, and the energy of the stupa, all the gods and kings of the four directions will always protect that area.

Stupas can also be built for specific purposes: to purify all kinds of disease in a certain area, or to subdue wars and quarrels. An area that has a lot of stupas will never experience bad storms, accidents, or harm.

No matter what substance a stupa or statue is made from, whether it is rocks, mud, wood, gold, or silver, we need to insert the right mantras and consecrate it. When it has been blessed in this way, the stupa or statue becomes very powerful, and will naturally protect the whole area around it. Then, whoever pays respect or makes offerings to it can accumulate a lot of merit.

Whoever builds a stupa and puts some of the Buddha's relics, or some great Bodhisattva's body in it, even if it is only a tiny piece, since it is not just ordinary flesh and bones, but is purified, it can protect us from falling down into the three lower realms. If we put these kinds of relics into a stupa, we can accumulate lots and lots of merit.

If we build a stupa or statue out of gold, copper, silver, iron, earth, stones, wood, or certain medicines, like ground up hooves added to water, then we insert the appropriate mantras, we can accumulate lots and lots of merit. If we just make offerings to a stupa or statue, we can accumulate the same amount of merit as the person who builds it.

When we build a stupa or statue, naturally all the Buddhas in the ten directions will bless that holy stupa or statue. The merit we accumulate is equal to however much the Buddha's eyes can see. If we make offerings, prostrations, or rounds, we can accumulate the same amount of merit as the person who built it. If we write mantras on paper, cloth, or wood, and then insert them into the statue or stupa, we can have all of our wishes fulfilled, and accumulate a lot of merit. This has been explained by the Buddha himself.

Part 4 - The Benefits of the Supports of Enlightened Speech

We can also accumulate a lot of merit by writing texts, transcribing teachings, publishing dharma books, etc. This is called the Support of the Speech. It doesn't matter whether the texts are in Tibetan or English, or if the shape of the dharma textbook is Tibetan long style or English book style, it is the subject that matters, that they are dharma teachings.

In a text called *Uma*, which Maitreya Buddha gave to Acharya Asanga, it says, "These are the ten, great virtuous actions through which we can accumulate a lot of merit: (1) writing or compiling a dharma textbook, (2) keeping it in a pure place on the altar, and making offerings and prostrations to it, (3) being generous, like publishing some small dharma teaching book, then offering it to all dharma practitioners, (4) listening to a teaching, (5) reading a dharma textbook, (6) explaining a dharma textbook to someone, (7) doing our own daily practices, (8) chanting prayers, (9) having mindfulness of the dharma teachings, and (10) meditating on the dharma teachings."

The benefits of the ten virtuous actions are explained both generally and specifically. A general explanation from the *Nampar Tarpa Sutra* says, "If we make an offering to the Buddha of the 3,000 universes which have been filled up with seven kinds of jewels, we cannot imagine how much merit is accumulated. If we make an offering to the Buddha of just this world filled up with seven kinds of jewels, we cannot imagine how much merit is accumulated. But in this Kali Yuga, the merit accumulated is far greater if we write down just four lines of the dharma teaching very nicely, with devotion, or if we try to explain just four lines of a dharma teaching to someone, or if we listen to and try to understand just four lines of a dharma teaching. The merit accumulated from making an offering to the Buddha of the 3,000 universes filled up with the seven kinds of jewels is nothing compared to the accumulation of merit we're speaking of."

Another quote from the Buddha's teachings says, "If we build a really big stupa out of seven kinds of jewels, like gold, silver, turquoise, lapis, rubies, etc., and make many different kinds of offerings to it for 100,000 years, not only offerings of worldly things, but god-like offerings, like flowers, amrita, and clothing of the gods, we will accumulate a lot of merit. If we give a teaching that all practitioners can practice and achieve realization from, we can also accumulate a lot of merit. Still, neither of these examples compare to the amount of merit we accumulate when we write just four lines of the Buddha's teachings, or we touch the Buddha's teachings, or we listen to, or read the Buddha's teachings." This has also been explained by Buddha Shakyamuni.

Another quote from the Buddha's teachings says, "If we teach just four lines of a dharma teaching, or listen to four lines of a dharma teaching, or ask questions, or try to write down just four lines very clearly, or we try to explain to someone that we have the intention to achieve enlightenment, we can accumulate enough merit to achieve realization. Then it is appropriate that all worldly people make prostrations to us. If we write down a dharma teaching without hesitation or doubt, or listen to a dharma teaching, or build a stupa or statue, we can accumulate more merit than even the Bodhisattvas who practice the six perfections."

Many Sutras and Tantras explain that if we read, write, explain, or practice the Buddha's teachings, we can accumulate an immeasurable amount of merit. Of course, if we build a stupa or statue we can accumulate a lot of merit, but if we compare that to just writing down the teachings, or listening to the teachings, or practicing the teachings, it is not near as much. Also, if we have the intention to realize enlightenment, and we build a stupa from the seven different kinds of jewels, and make many kinds of offerings, like food, clothing, jewels, ornaments, etc. to it, we can accumulate an immeasurable amount of merit. Still, that is not very much compared to the merit accumulated by just practicing the real practice, or listening to the teachings, or just writing the dharma teachings.

If we teach the four noble truths to many sentient beings so they can achieve some type of realization, like arhathood, of course we can accumulate lots and lots of merit. Still, if we try to write down the Prajnaparamita text, and try to understand it, and give the Prajnaparamita teaching to other people, we can accumulate far more merit than that.

Why is so much merit accumulated just by writing down the Prajnaparamita, or giving teachings, or listening to teachings, compared to building a stupa, and making lots of offerings to it? Because the real practice of dharma is what liberates all sentient beings. The dharma is the most important thing. Of course, when we build statues and stupas, we can accumulate a lot of merit, but that is not the most important thing. The most important thing is the dharma teaching. So whatever dharma teachings we hear or read, if we really practice them in our daily life, and train our mind accordingly, then of course when our mind is fully trained with the absolute true nature of our mind, we can realize the first level of the bodhisattva realization, arya hood, then slowly we can achieve enlightenment. That is why hearing, reading, writing, and teaching the dharma accumulates more merit than anything else.

So it explains here that of course, when we build a Buddha or deity statue, or paint the Buddha's figure with all the correct measurements, we can accumulate a lot of merit. But we can accumulate a lot more merit when we build a stupa, whether it is big or small, with all the correct

measurements, and consecrate it exactly according to the text, and make many offerings to it, like relics. But still, we can accumulate the most merit if we can understand, or write, or read, or listen to the dharma, or try to explain the dharma to someone.

The Buddha explained that if we try to understand just four verses of the Prajnaparamita text, or just listen to it, or try to teach it to someone, or try to memorize these verses, we will accumulate so much merit that it cannot be measured.

During the Buddha's time a man named Ocean of Great Intellect asked some questions of the Buddha, and the Buddha gave some teachings in reply. A quote from that sutra says, "If we make an offering to the Buddha of the 3,000 universes filled up with all the precious jewels, with a lot of faith and devotion, of course we can accumulate a lot of merit because the offering is to the Buddha, and the offering is not a minor thing: it is the seven jewels, and gold which is very precious and expensive. But we accumulate even more merit if we hear the Prajnaparamita, write it down, try to memorize it, or try to explain the meaning of it to someone else. The amount of merit accumulated is like double, or triple the merit accumulated by offering the 3,000 universes filled with the seven jewels to the Buddha."

There are a lot of quotes like this. Of course, if we build a Buddha statue or stupa, or paint a thangka, we can accumulate a lot of merit, and when sentient beings see that statue, stupa or thangka, they can be benefited, even those who don't know anything about the Buddha's qualities. That also becomes a part of our accumulation of merit. Buddha statues, stupas and thangkas are particular objects which can slowly train people's minds toward the dharma, and through these objects people can accumulate some merit, but to accumulate merit that will result in enlightenment, we must receive dharma teachings, and practice them. Then we can achieve enlightenment.

The Sutra gives the benefits of listening to the teachings. It says, "When we receive detailed teachings on the cause and effect of karma, we can act clearly in daily life, because then we know what is the right thing to do, and what is the wrong thing to do. When we develop a more intellectual understanding of the cause and effect of karma, it is like having eyes to see everything very clearly with. This is how we can overcome ignorance."

The Prajnaparamita commentary, which came down to the earth through Asanga from Maitreya Buddha says, "When we listen to the teachings a lot, we can understand all about the six perfections. When we understand the six perfections, we can do right practice. When we can do right practice, we can achieve the realization of the Bodhisattva, like the Arya, and achieve enlightenment. These are the benefits of listening to the teachings a lot."

If we have a good motivation, we can also accumulate merit by just thinking that we want to go and listen to a teaching. Then, if we take one or two steps towards that, or if we are driving, depending on how many steps we take, or how many times our car wheels turn round, we can accumulate that much merit.

During the Buddha's time, of course Buddha was the greatest master. He could read people's minds, so he gave teachings that exactly suited the minds of individuals. At the same time, there were lots of arhats and aryas, great realized beings around, and also lots of really great practitioners. So the environment was really devoted. But nowadays, it is really difficult to find a great master like the Buddha who is fully enlightened, and it is also really difficult to find an environment where there is a lot of teaching and practice going on. So the Buddha's teaching is in decline. During these very hard times, if we can spend even one minute hearing the dharma teachings, or trying to write it down, or trying to explain it to someone, the merit accumulated is beyond our imagination.

The Mahayana Sutra of Avalokitesvara says, "When the Buddha's teachings are declining, it is not the qualities or wisdom of the Buddhas that is declining, and it's not the dharma that is declining, it is the people's minds which are distracted from understanding dharma, cause and effect of karma, and the nature of the mind. That is why the Buddha's teachings are declining. During these times, whoever practices, or listens, or tries to write down, or tries to understand, or tries to explain the dharma to someone, will accumulate an immeasurable amount of merit. The great Bodhisattvas will appreciate and make lots of praise to them."

If we build Buddha statues or stupas, then make offerings, prostrations, and rounds to them for many aeons, of course we can accumulate a lot of merit. But far more merit and benefit is achieved through the real teaching of the Buddha. If we try to memorize the Buddha's teachings just once in the morning and once at night, or meditate for just a short while, we can accumulate far more merit and benefit than by building Buddha statues and stupas.

In these declining times, whoever listens to and practices the Buddha's teachings, and tries to protect them, will never lose their wealth or intellect, or feel sick, or suffer from famine. They will always have a lot of patience, and will definitely achieve the state of a bodhisattva, and eventually achieve enlightenment. This is what is known as making offerings and praise to Buddha Shakyamuni, having devotion to Buddha, and protecting the Buddha's teachings.

A quote from the Sutras says, "When the Buddha's great disciples, like Shariputra, realize arhathood, they accumulate merit equal to how many sentient beings the Buddha's eyes can see when he looks at this world. Whoever makes lots of offerings to statues and stupas can also

accumulate a lot of merit. But whoever tries to practice the Buddha's teachings, even for one day or night, accumulates so much merit that it cannot be compared to the previous examples."

If we make offerings for many aeons to realized beings, like the Pratyekabuddhas, of food, drink, clothing, flowers, incense, and perfume, we will accumulate a lot of merit. If we make prostrations to a great arhat, with a clear mind, and strong faith and devotion, we will accumulate even more merit. If we make offerings to a Buddha statue or stupa, we can accumulate even more merit. But when the Buddha's teachings are declining, if we try to listen to the teaching for one day, or practice, or explain the Buddha's teachings to someone, or try to memorize even four lines of the Buddha's teachings, we will accumulate far more merit than any of the previous. There are many quotes here which explain that the real training of the mind can only be done through the teaching of the Buddha.

The Tantrayana gives the benefits of listening to teachings. According to Nyingma practice and philosophy, there are nine yanas, nine views, nine paths, nine vehicles, nine basic foundations, nine moral disciplines, and nine practices. The ultimate result of all paths -- Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana -- is enlightenment. But the big difference between these three is how long it takes to achieve the result. Of course, the Hinayana and Mahayana are right paths, but it takes a long time to achieve enlightenment through them, whereas the Vajrayana takes a very short time. This is due to the view, the many methods employed, and the skillfulness with which they are practiced. If we are really capable of practicing the Vajrayana, we can achieve enlightenment in one lifetime. So the most important thing to understand in the very beginning is the view. That is what empowerment is for, to ripen our minds so we can understand the view very clearly.

There are different views according to the different mental capacities of individuals. The Vajrayana view is known as the right, perfect view, because it describes the ultimate nature of the mind. For example, the Atiyana directly introduces us to the absolute true nature of our mind, whereas the Hinayana explains just a small part of our nature, and has no direct introduction to it. This is why Vajrayana practice is said to be very fast, because it has many methods, and is a far more skillful way to achieve enlightenment. The view is really very high, because it introduces us to the ultimate true nature of our mind.

In the Hinayana and Mahayana, we practice according to the teachings, and of course we're very careful to avoid any negativity concerning our body, speech, or mind, but Vajrayana practice is more relaxed and free, and something that may seem to be negative is actually the real practice, if we understand the right view.

We can accumulate merit much faster in the Vajrayana than in the Hinayana and Mahayana. The Buddhas of the past, present and future all understood that the Vajrayana has the right view, and its methods are more skillful for achieving enlightenment. That is how all the Buddhas got enlightened. That is why Buddha Shakyamuni gave the Vajrayana teachings, so that all sentient beings could get enlightened faster and easier.

According to The King of the Vajrayana text, sentient beings who have been wandering in cyclic existence for many aeons can get enlightened just like all of the Buddhas of the past, present and future, by being introduced correctly to the Vajrayana, having the right view, having a clear understanding of the practice, (for example that a particular mandala contains the whole universe, and that there is no nirvana or samsara), visualizing the deities, chanting the deity's mantra, having confidence in the practice, and believing that oneself and all sentient beings are the deity. Carrying that as the most important practice of the Vajrayana, all sentient beings can get enlightened just like all of the Buddhas.

We need to understand very clearly that samsara is nirvana, that nothing is impure, and that everything is the whole mandala of all the supreme deities. There is nothing more to realize than this. This kind of right view and clear understanding can only be gotten in the Vajrayana. That is why the Vajrayana is known as the result itself.

Another Vajrayana text explains that the nature of all phenomena, whether it is consciousness, object, deity, nirvana, the qualities of the Buddha, the Buddha himself, or the Buddha's wisdom, is just emptiness. Also, the nature of emptiness has its own luminosity, which has never been separate from emptiness, is not separate, and will never be separate -- just like fire and its hotness. Due to this luminosity, when our minds are not purified, we perceive the objects and sentient beings of the external world. But according to the absolute view of our true nature, in reality the luminosity of emptiness is only the rainbow form of the deity. In addition, emptiness and its luminosity, or lucid clarity, has its own quality of immeasurable compassion, which has never been separate and will never be separate -- just like a fire's hotness burns.

The ultimate right view of the Vajrayana practice is that the nature of the mind is these three: empty, luminous, and immeasurably compassionate. We need to understand everything according to this ultimate view, both the external world and all sentient beings; otherwise, we'll perceive things wrongly, and we won't be able to realize our true nature. Then we need to meditate on the view. When we can focus on the view all the time, that is known as enlightenment. When we are enlightened, there is no samsara, no nirvana, no sentient beings, and no Buddha, which means there

is no dualistic mind.

These are the main essence teachings which come from the Tantrayana. If we can understand them very clearly, it is like momentary enlightenment. Enlightenment is not far away. We don't have to travel far to reach it. It is always here, we just can't recognize it. But if we can recognize it, we can have all of the qualities of the Buddhas. We already have all of these Buddha qualities spontaneously within us. We've never been separate, and will never be separate from these qualities, because they are the nature of our mind.

If we can have this type of realization, it is like striking a match in a room that has been dark for many, many hundreds of years -- instantly we can see everything inside. In the same way, for many, many thousands of lifetimes we sentient beings have been unable to recognize our Buddha nature -- that is why we are born as sentient beings, in the darkness. But when we have the right view of the Vajrayana, it is like a light. Finally, when we practice, it is like lighting up the room so we can see our Buddha nature, and we become enlightened.

What are the benefits of drawing a mandala? A quote from the Yeshe Gyepa, a Vajrayana text, says, "If we make an offering of the entire universe filled up with the seven jewels to the Buddhas of the ten directions, of course we can accumulate a lot of merit. But if we draw a mandala, the celestial palace of the deities, with the correct measurements and symbols, we accumulate incomparably more merit."

A quote from the Three Vows says, "If we paint a picture of the Buddha on paper, cloth, or wood, we can accumulate a lot of merit." There must be a limit to the amount of merit a practitioner needs to accumulate to achieve enlightenment. To accumulate merit very quickly, we should do mantra practice. At the same time, if we draw a picture of a Buddha or deity, with all the correct measurements, symbols and colors, we can achieve the siddhis, blessings, and enlightenment faster.

Another quote from a Vajrayana text called Jnanadhatu says, "If we have created a lot of negativity for many, many lifetimes, just by seeing a picture, thangka or statue of a Buddha, we can purify all of that negativity. If we write down the teachings of the Buddha, and create a dharma text, we can eventually receive all of the teachings of the Buddha."

Another quote from a Tantrayana text says, "If we build a Buddha statue out of the seven different precious jewels, of course we can accumulate a lot of merit and benefit. But far more merit is accumulated by practicing just four lines of the Buddha's teachings."

If we make many kinds of offerings, like food, clothing, wealth, water, incense or flowers, to a Buddha or deity statue, stupa, or painting, we can accumulate a lot of merit and eventually

achieve enlightenment. If we write down the Buddha's teachings, we can accumulate a lot of merit, and become very intelligent, and be able to understand the Buddha's teachings. Then, almost all our wishes will be fulfilled. Then, if we make offerings and praise to these precious objects, we can have all of the general and particular blessings, and eventually achieve enlightenment.

We can also accumulate a lot of merit by just reading or memorizing the Buddha's teachings. Then we will be able to receive all of the teachings of the Buddha in this lifetime, and in our next lifetime we'll be able to practice them very well.

Avalokitesvara explained, "Whoever builds a stupa or statue, or draws a stupa or statue, or writes down the teachings of the Buddha, or saves the life of another sentient being, or builds a bridge over a big river in order to benefit many people, or is very generous and makes lots of offerings, or does many rotations around a stupa, statue, or monastery, or always tries to keep the moral discipline very purely, whoever tries to benefit all sentient beings in these ways are the great sons of the Buddhas. When these beings die, and leave their karmic body, they will immediately be reborn in the pureland of Amitabha, Dewachen."

If we try to understand a dharma text, or try to memorize it, or make offerings to thangkas, or make offerings to the Buddhas, and do all of these virtuous activities, we will accumulate so much merit that we won't be able to use it up for many, many aeons. This means we can have lots of happiness and wealth for many, many aeons of lifetimes.

Another Vajrayana text says, "Whoever builds the three supports -- stupas, statues, monasteries -- can accumulate merit as long as the stupa, statue or monastery lasts. Through these pure objects, many sentient beings can be benefited. They can purify the obscurations and defilements of their dualistic minds. They can accumulate a lot of merit. They can achieve the potential to achieve enlightenment. In their future lifetimes, they will have long lives, and all auspicious things. They will have almost all their wishes fulfilled. Wherever they go they will have lots and lots of happiness, and everyone will take care of them. All the local gods will protect them, and they will have the best merit."

If we want to benefit all sentient beings, it is very good to build a big statue, stupa, or temple, or write a very good text like this one. Then, when people see or hear it, or get a little involved with it, they can accumulate a lot of merit. Then they can have the potential to receive the Buddha's teachings, practice, and eventually achieve realization.

Concluding Remarks: Motivation, Purity of Mind, and Bodhicitta

This has been a very brief explanation of the benefits of building the three supports, which has been taken from various Sutras. When we build the three supports, so much merit and benefit is accumulated that it cannot be expressed in words, even though we can experience the result of it. These benefits can be utilized in cyclic existence, and also to achieve enlightenment. So it causes all great things to happen.

At the same time, more depends on our mind. If we have a pure motivation, try to generate compassion and bodhicitta, or write down just a few words of a dharma teaching to benefit sentient beings, this is really virtuous, and accumulates a lot of merit.

Sentient beings can accumulate a lot of merit when we build the three supports of body, speech and mind: temples, statues, stupas, and texts. They can make prostrations, offerings, and rotations. Even a person who makes a rotation by accident can accumulate merit, and develop a link with the right teachings and practice.

If we can't build a stupa or statue, or write down a dharma text, but we just suggest to someone else to do these things, then they go ahead and do that, we can accumulate the same amount of merit as they do, both in this lifetime and the next, because our intention and theirs is the same.

For example, on an autumn night, when the sky is very clear, the oceans reflect the moon very clearly. This is because both the sky and the ocean is clear, and the ocean has the power to hold the image of the moon. In the same way, if our mind is very pure, then whatever we do will be virtuous, and our actions and speech will have the power to accumulate a lot of merit, which will benefit both ourselves and all sentient beings in this lifetime and the next.

Until we accomplish the non-dualistic mind, we need to do lots of purification, and accumulate a lot of merit. We need to do a lot of practice, so we can accumulate merit and wisdom. Then, when we accumulate enough merit and wisdom, we can become enlightened, and achieve the bodhisattva realization.

We also need to have the three purities: pure thought, pure object, and pure activity. With these three purities, we can accumulate even more merit and benefit. How can we have pure thought, pure mind, or pure intention? Whatever dharma activity we are involved with, whether it is building a Buddha statue or stupa, writing a text, being very generous, keeping our moral discipline,

doing meditation practice, whatever, whether it is great or small, what determines whether it will be a virtuous action, and accumulate a lot of merit is the mind's pure intention. If we have a good intention, good motivation, and pure thought from the very beginning, then whatever dharma activity we do will naturally become virtuous, and accumulate a lot of merit.

A quote from the Dhammapada says, "The first thing to rely on, before anything else, is the mind. Mind is like the king, and the speech and actions are like ministers and subjects." So first we have an idea, or thought, then we speak and act. So speech and action follow thought.

In ancient times, there was a boy who had a really pure mind. He would always generate compassion for sentient beings, and always think how he could benefit all sentient beings. With that pure mind, he liked to sleep under the shade of a tree. And as the day passed by, no matter what time it was, the shade would always be on him. So even though the sun would rise in the east and set in the west, because he had such a pure mind, and liked to sleep in the shade, he always had a shadow on him. In the same way, if we have a pure mind, whatever we say or do will accumulate merit, benefit others, and fulfill our wishes.

However, if we don't have a pure mind, or pure thought, then misfortune will befall us. For example, once there was a beggar who thought, "The King is always riding around in his golden chariot, enjoying himself. I hope he dies someday with his neck under his chariot." One day he was sleeping in the street when the King's chariot came by so fast that it couldn't stop when they saw the beggar lying there. The chariot ran over his neck and killed him. Because he had that negative thought about the king dying with his neck under his chariot, he himself had to bear that karma. When our mind is impure, then naturally, instead of that impure intention going out to harm someone else, it turns toward oneself so that we have to bear the result of it. This occurs with both pure and impure thoughts. We create our own karma, our own happiness and suffering.

If we want to be happy and more relaxed, and attain enlightenment, we need to accumulate a lot of merit, and always try to generate compassion and bodhicitta, and always think of benefiting other sentient beings.

All activity depends upon thought, consciousness. Without thought, there is no activity. This might be a little hard to understand here in the West, where technology makes things work even though they don't have consciousness, like the television. But in real life, tables, chairs, and walls are all just matter. They cannot act. Activity is something that sentient beings do, because of their consciousness, their thought. All activity takes place through body, speech and mind. Body and speech are always subordinate to the mind. If there is no consciousness, no thought, no idea, no

emotion, there is no action of body or speech. Everything depends on the mind.

If we train our mind in the right way, our body and speech will automatically be trained. That is why Buddha taught 84,000 teachings, to train our mind in the right direction, toward its true nature, instead of against its true nature. The mind determines the actions of body and speech. Virtuous and non-virtuous thoughts, virtuous and non-virtuous speech, and virtuous and non-virtuous actions created all of samsara, all sentient beings. If we purify all of these non-virtuous thoughts, speech, and actions, we'll only have virtuous thoughts, virtuous speech, and virtuous actions. Then of course we'll only experience happiness, peace, and pleasure.

All sentient beings can have this. That is why we need to understand that the mind is the main source of everything, both external objects and internal living beings. Everything is the creation of our minds. There is not anything that was not created by our minds. That is why all the Buddha's teachings explain in the very beginning that we must have a pure intention, a pure motivation, and try to generate compassion and bodhicitta, then, whatever we do will accumulate merit. Then of course good things will happen to us in this lifetime and the next, and eventually we can attain enlightenment itself.

To subdue and tame our wild mind, we need to understand its true nature. At the same time, we need to understand that this whole universe is the creation of our own mind. When we understand this, we can train our mind in the right way, then we won't be fooled by our own magic. The great leader of all sentient beings, the supreme conqueror who is fully enlightened, the Buddha himself has explained this: everything is the creation of our own mind. So these teachings must be exactly true.

A quote from Jigme Lingpa's Staff says, "If the root or seed is medicine, the result will be a medicine tree; if the root or seed is poison, the result will be a poisonous tree. In the same way, if our mind is pure like medicine, whatever we do will naturally be virtuous and create happiness; if our mind is impure like poison, whatever we do will be non-virtuous and create suffering." So virtuous actions are like medicine, and non-virtuous actions are like poison.

In a text called, "The Lamp of the Bodhisattva Path," Jowo Atisha Dipamkhara explains that there are three types of people, depending on their type of motivation: inferior, mediocre and superior. The inferior person thinks only of his own happiness, peace and pleasure in this present life, and is scared of falling down into the three lower realms. The mediocre person is scared of samsara and thinks, "I want to be liberated from this," so he practices for himself. The superior person thinks of the suffering of all sentient beings, and practices in order to liberate all sentient

beings from the six realms.

The first type of person, who is scared of falling down into the three lower realms, knows that if he kills a sentient being out of anger, he will go to hell. So he makes sure he doesn't kill anyone, because he doesn't want to fall down into the hell realms and suffer. He also knows that if he is very generous, and keeps all the moral disciplines, he'll take rebirth in the human or god realm. So he tries to keep the moral disciplines and be generous so he can take rebirth in the human or god realm. This is his practice, which is really very minor, because he hasn't given up his attachment to samsara, or to the happiness of the human or god realms.

The second type of person practices the Hinayana, or middle path. He knows that if he kills someone, he will suffer. He knows that if he is generous and keeps the moral discipline, the best he can hope for is to be born in the human or god realm in his next lifetime, and those are still places of suffering. So he wants to get liberated from all the six realms. He doesn't think of others at all. He realizes that in order to cut the root of samsara, he must realize the identitylessness of self. This is why the main practice in the Hinayana is to meditate on the identitylessness of self. Then, after he realizes the identitylessness of self, all his defilements are subdued. When there are no defilements, there is no negative speech, action, or emotion. When there is no negative thought, speech, or action, there is no cause to take rebirth in samsara. Then he'll get liberated from samsara. But all along he has the selfish thought that he wants to get liberated from samsara. That is why he meditates on the identitylessness of self.

The third type of person practices the Bodhisattva path. He realizes that all sentient beings are his mother, and in order to pay back their kindness, he must liberate all sentient beings. That is why he practices, only to benefit sentient beings. A Bodhisattva meditates on the identitylessness of phenomena, which is the meditation on emptiness. Then, when he realizes emptiness, he can benefit all sentient beings.

When we build a stupa or statue, draw a mandala, or write a text, we should always have one of the last two motivations: wanting to get liberated for oneself, and wanting to get liberated for all sentient beings. But the best way to think and practice is like a bodhisattva.

Maitreya Buddha said sentient beings want to have happiness and peace, but are always creating the causes of suffering. This is because they are so attached to themselves, and they are always thinking "I want to get liberated from the three lower realms," like the Hinayana practitioners. Due to this selfishness and ignorance, which always thinks "I," they must suffer in samsara.

The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas always generate bodhicitta -- that is why they are already liberated from samsara. We need to follow the example of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and always generate bodhicitta, and practice the six perfections. Then we can attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

For example, the first type of person thinks only about his happiness in this world, and the happiness of the human or god realms. But that happiness doesn't last long. It isn't reliable. It changes. One moment we'll be experiencing happiness and pleasure, and in the next misery. That is why we have to give up these thoughts, and think like a bodhisattva. That is why when Buddha instructed the kings, he explained that the whole universe, all of samsara, is impermanent, and wherever sentient beings are born in any of the six realms they must suffer. So we should give up the idea that the human and god realms are places of happiness and pleasure, because they are places of suffering.

Nagarjuna said that even Indra, the king of the gods, who is born in the 33rd realm of the gods, has everything he wishes, but when he has used up his accumulation of merit, he must fall down into the three lower realms, or human realm to suffer. So even Indra's happiness and pleasure isn't reliable. Also, the four types of Chakravartins, who rule over one, two, three, or four continents, and have all the wealth, when their accumulation of merit is over, their happiness is over too. Then they have to be born as a slave and suffer. That is why we have to give up any desire to be born in the god realms, because a god's happiness and peace is not reliable, it's not permanent. If we are very attached to the happiness of this life, or the happiness of the god realm, we'll be so distracted that we'll never find time to practice.

If our minds are full of attachment and desire, then whatever we create through our body, speech and mind will be a cause of suffering in future lifetimes. That is why we have to give up the thought that worldly pleasures are really something great. If we are born as a human being or god, then when our merit is used up, we will fall down into the hell realms and suffer for a long time. Then we will realize that we never did any kind of practice, or virtuous action, speech, or thought, but by that time it is too late -- we are already suffering in the hell realm. So before that happens, we must try to give up attachment, and do right practice, and have a pure motivation to benefit all sentient beings. Then we can have pure speech and pure action.

Beings in the god realm don't have to make any effort to get everything they want. There is a wishfulfilling tree that can give them everything they want. But gods spend their whole lives being attached to their luxury and happiness, and when their merit is over, they have to bear the karma of

any negativity they created in their previous lifetimes. Then, when they find themselves suffering in the hell realm, they feel very sorry.

Nagarjuna taught that all sentient beings are just circling through the different realms of samsara. There isn't one sentient being who hasn't been born in the god realm as the king of the gods, and there isn't one sentient being who hasn't been born as a hell being. All sentient beings have experienced the worldly happiness of a god, and the worldly suffering of a hell being. So why should we get all attached to the happiness of the gods when after some time we'll have to suffer as a hell being? We have to try and understand that this happiness is not reliable, it isn't permanent, and what we need to do is get liberated from the six realms.

If we aren't capable of generating the bodhicitta, we should meditate on the identitylessness of self, and achieve the realization of an arhat, then we'll have the merit to follow the Mahayana path, generate bodhicitta, and achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Whatever our circumstances in life, whether we have lots of houses, cars, luxury, money, or happiness, when we die we can't carry any of it with us. We may enjoy these luxuries for 80 or 90 years, but when death comes, it's like a robber coming to snatch all of our wealth away. The only thing we can carry with us, lifetime after lifetime, are our good and bad actions. We can't even take this body which we are so attached to. This is why we try to forget all of our attachment to these things.

The Buddha instructed the kings that even though they are kings right now, with a lot of worldly wealth, relatives, subjects, and ministers, and when they walk many ministers follow them, and many thousands of people pay them respect, when death comes, none of those relatives, subjects, or ministers will follow them. And they can't buy their lives back by paying all their treasure. They have to go alone. But the results of their previous actions will follow them like a shadow. That is why we must always be virtuous, because the only thing we carry with us is our actions.

For example, shit is shit no matter where we find it, whether it is American, Tibetan, or Indian shit. And nobody likes shit. Similarly, it doesn't matter whether we are born in America, Tibet, as a human being, or a hell being, samsara is samsara, and there is no happiness in samsara. The happiness we know is not real happiness, it is just pretend happiness. That is why we have to give it up.

The happiness of the human and god realm is not real happiness, but pretend happiness. We can't see the hidden suffering behind this so-called happiness -- that is why we think we are

happy. For example, in Tibet we used to burn a lot of wood. When a lot of wood is burned, a lot of ash results. The upper part of the ash cools faster than what's underneath. So if we think the whole pile of ash is cool because the upper part is cool, as soon as we put our hand down deep we'll get burned. Similarly, we think we're experiencing happiness and pleasure, but as soon as we try to enjoy it, it turns into suffering. So we need to realize that happiness is not actually happiness, but suffering.

What kind of suffering occurs in the six realms? In the hot hell realms beings are burned by fire. In the cold hell realm beings freeze to death. In the hungry ghost realm beings are always hungry and thirsty, because they have nothing to eat or drink. In the animal realm the big animals eat the smaller ones, and the small animals eat parts of the big animals. The tigers, leopards, and panthers eat the deer, the snakes eat the frogs, the frogs eat the insects, and the insects eat other insects. All animals suffering from being eaten by other animals. Even domestic animals suffer. For example, we might enjoy watching a horse race, but the poor race horse has to jump, gallop and run. He can't say he is tired and wants to rest awhile. He has to do whatever his rider wants him to. If the horse refuses to gallop, his rider will hit with a whip, and then he'll suffer more.

Human beings suffer from birth, old age, sickness and death. Whatever we want, we can't have; whatever we don't want, we can't push away. In the jealous god realm, beings are always fighting with each other. In the god realm, beings are distracted with being happy, but when their life is over, they see where they will be reborn in the hell or animal realm, then they feel really scared. But they can't bring back the happiness they enjoyed in the god realm, they just have to suffer.

There is no happiness in samsara, not even an amount equal to the tip of a pin. We need to realize that all of samsara is full of suffering. If we really look deeply into it, we can understand this.

Everyone is searching for happiness. If we really want to have happiness and peace, first we need to understand what actions are virtuous and non-virtuous, then we need to meditate on emptiness. We need to do deity practice, and chant the mantra. We need to meditate, and accumulate merit. Then we can have real happiness and peace which will never go away.

This is why whenever we do any dharma activity, we need to have pure motivation. When we build stupas, statues, listen to teachings, or do dharma practice, our motivation should be to get liberated from samsara, because there is no happiness in samsara. We should do all of these things to accumulate merit, so that we can find permanent happiness.

So if we are a mediocre person, we realize that wherever we are born in the six realms, there is nothing but suffering. So we selfishly desire to be liberated from suffering. To do that, we must cut the root of samsara. To cut the root, we need to find the real cause of samsara. Then, if we don't

create the cause, we won't take rebirth in samsara.

The real cause of samsara is ignorance. The antidote to ignorance is meditation on the identitylessness of self, ego, I. So we can't just mouth words, we have to really analyze our body and consciousness, and go deeper and deeper until we see that there is no I, no ego, no person, no self. Realizing that there is no self, first we get a clear idea of it, then we need to meditate, then we can realize that self doesn't exist at all, we have just deceived ourselves. There is no self, yet we are attached to it. It is like being attached to a rabbit's horn. A rabbit doesn't have a horn, and if we think it does, we are totally wrong. Similarly, there is no person at all, and if we think there is, that is really ignorant, and we need to give it up.

To get liberated from samsara, and this false belief in self, we need to be born in the human realm. Then we can receive the teachings, study, accumulate merit, and practice. The human birth is really very rare and precious. That is why we should never rest, but should take full advantage of it, and practice.

Mahayana practice has two parts to it: the intention to liberate self, and the intention to liberate others. Meditating on emptiness cuts the root of samsara, and generating compassion benefits all sentient beings. That is why we must always practice both compassion and emptiness. We shouldn't practice one without the other. Compassion and emptiness are like the right and left wings of a bird, or an airplane -- without a right and left wing, neither will fly right. So we train our mind by meditating on emptiness, and generating compassion. This is why we practice these two in our daily life.

Meditation on emptiness clears our mind of attachment to objects and sentient beings, and generating compassion is the antidote to believing in self, and always thinking of "I."

All sentient beings have this strong feeling of self: "I need food, I need drink, I need money, I need this, I need that." This thought of "I" arises immediately, and we never think of anyone else. But it is really an isolated thought. It's not the nature of the mind itself. That is why we must give up this belief in self, and generate compassion, and put others before ourselves. Then our mind will naturally become pure. But we need to train. Then, when we meditate on emptiness, we can cut through ignorance. Then we can get liberated from samsara, and become enlightened, and also benefit all sentient beings.

The beings who are suffering in the hell realm -- no one sent them there. They created all the negativity. That is why they are suffering. The gods who are enjoying the god realms -- no one sent them there. They accumulated all the merit. That is why they are enjoying. The Buddhas

and Bodhisattvas who never suffer in samsara -- they themselves practiced the right path. That is why they are liberated from samsara. All sentient beings suffer in samsara because they themselves created that situation. That is why we must give up all negative thoughts, and follow the right path.

Shantideva, in his *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, and Asanga in the *Prajnaparamita*, explained all these practices in more detail. But this is not just an explanation, a teaching, this is the truth of how it really is. This is the true nature of the mind, and how to get liberated from samsara. This is the real path, and we need to follow it. Only then can we have the result. We have to practice, and realize it, then we must make our realization very stable. When our realization is very stable, then nothing can harm us, nothing can distract us, and we will realize the true nature of our mind.