

Attaining Lasting Satisfaction Excerpts

(From Reincarnation: Fact or Fiction)

I'm going to talk about reincarnation, but first I would like to introduce to you the meaning of some of the prayers we're doing in the beginning of each session. The first is the mantra:

TAYATA GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SOHA

This mantra is Buddha's mantra. Philip Glass and Allen Ginsberg created an opera some time ago called *Hydrogen Jukebox*. This mantra is used in there quite a lot. It really means, "Gone, gone, gone beyond." There are a lot of explanations for this, but I can't go into them at this time because if I did, I would do nothing else. Let me just say that there are five steps in the Buddhist tradition, whether you look into the Hinayana or Mahayana. In this mantra, the five steps are introduced.

Mantra recitation is very powerful. Reciting a mantra makes quite a difference to everything—health, social development, and even in business. About 10 years ago I was in Southeast Asia. A group of upcoming bankers approached me and they wanted mantras for all kinds of purposes. They would spend 45 minutes before starting work to say their mantras. They asked me for a particular mantra, to help with the business. One of them said, "I've lost my sharpness of mind. I need a mantra to give me more sharpness, so I can kill my competition." I told them I had such a mantra. They all came close to listen, and I said, "The mantra is: O money come, money come, money come quick soha." I did this as a joke, but the actual mantras really work.

Next, we have NAMO GURUBYA NAMO BUDDHAYA NAMO DHARMAYA NAMO SANGAYA. This is a mantra to mark your practice as Buddhist practice. You are taking refuge to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

Then we have the practice of the Seven Limbs. This is one of the best meditations you can do. The first limb is showing respect to the divine beings. The next is offering. Offering is a very important practice. The next is purification. Whatever mistakes we may have made, we can regret, and then purify. 2,600 years of Buddhist wisdom have told me that whatever mistakes we make are not a dead end. We make mistakes because we are human beings, but every mistake we make can be purified. There is no situation that is hopeless, where we can do nothing. To Buddha, that was not acceptable. If we did not make mistakes, we would be divine beings. Mistakes can be purified and we can become perfect.

Yes, it is true. If you kill somebody, no one can bring that person back, but that doesn't mean that you cannot change things for yourself. Any mistake can be rectified. The example for that is silver. Over time, silver gets tarnished, but it can be cleaned. It can be nice, shiny, white silver again and again. The reason is that by its nature silver is not tarnished. It just becomes tarnished, particularly pure silver tarnishes. Nowadays, we have sterling silver. That is not really 100% silver. In old Tibet, I used to have things made out of pure silver. That silver gets tarnished very easily, but when it does you can clean and polish it and it will become shiny again because its nature is not tarnished. Similarly, our nature, as human beings, is beautiful. We are wonderful, kind, and compassionate beings. We are beautiful in nature. However, we make mistakes. We get angry. While naturally, we are kind, sometimes we generate hatred, but our deeper nature as human beings will not be tarnished by that. It remains pure. We have to maintain this pureness.

I have been trained for over 60 years in the tradition of Buddhism in Tibet. Nowadays, many people look to Tibet as their spiritual home. I never realized that when I was in Tibet. When I came to know that old Tibet was already gone. In that tradition I learned that our mistakes can be purified. They don't affect our deeper nature. Our mistakes are like the skin of oranges that we can peel off. I particularly refuse to accept guilt. No one can give me a guilt trip. I won't take it. In our American understanding guilt means we are in a hopeless situation. You can do nothing. I refuse to accept that. There are many reasons, but the most important reason I can give you is that everything is impermanent. Nothing is a done deal. It changes. We all change. I remember that once I was not a big person like I am today. I was once young and quite handsome, but I've changed. I never used to wear glasses before, but now I have to because I won't see those small lines anymore. Everything changes, our looks, our way of living, our way of thinking, our friends, enemies, all of them change. Today's friend can become tomorrow's enemy. Otherwise you would not have any enemies at all. Our worst enemies are our previous friends. Business partners start cheating each other, for example. All phenomena and beings change. All our bad actions can also change. They don't remain forever. Our good deeds change, our bad deeds change. They are impermanent in nature, and that is why I refuse to accept hopeless situations. It is not just wishful thinking. Impermanence has been a Buddhist teaching for 2,600 years. Everything is changeable, whether it is movable or immovable. Even the so-called permanent structures are changeable. I have seen the Statue of Liberty being dismantled and cleaned.

These seven limbs are among the most important spiritual activities anybody can do. Today I'm simply introducing them to you. Next in our prayers we have the mantra OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA. This is also Buddha's mantra. Then, we have a very long compassion mantra. I introduced that during the last Iraqi war. A number of people on both sides have died and are still dying today. That's why we are continuing to say this mantra. It is followed by the short compassion mantra OM MANI PADME HUM.

The last mantra we recite here is OM TARE TUTARE TURE SOHA. This is a beautiful mantra. It is the mantra of Tara. She is like Mother Mary in the Christian tradition. Within her mantra there are so many activities. There is a lot of emphasis on healing. There is the healing of energies and the healing of the elements within our body. Especially in Jewel Heart it has worked so well over the years. In my own case, about five years ago I was supposed to go. I'm not supposed to be here today. Because of this mantra I'm still here. There was also a friend, within Jewel Heart in Holland. She was herself a doctor. One day she discovered that she had a terrible cancer. It was growing everywhere in her body, and it could not be treated. They opened her up, realized that nothing could be done, and just stitched her back up. The prognosis given by the doctors and by herself was a couple of months at the most, and possibly a few weeks. She was a very determined woman, and she spent a lot of time and energy on meditating on Tara and saying her mantra. She lived five more years leading a normal life. She kept busy, driving herself everywhere, shopping, and doing her gardening.

We say that mantra a lot in Jewel Heart, especially during retreats. We do guided meditations and use different visualizations, especially for healing the five elements within our body. The earth elements includes all our bones and flesh. The liquid parts of our body are the water element. The digestive power and the heat in our body is the fire element. The circulation is the air element. Power is very good for healing each of these individual elements and also collectively for us and others. The mantra is short and simple, but there are many different practices and visualizations associated with it. Even if I kept explaining for 30 days and nights, you would still not be able to learn everything. Yet to do it in practice is easy, and even if you make mistakes it doesn't matter. Tara forgives.

(From: How to Contemplate Spiritual Topics)

I am going to give you guidelines for a daily meditation practice. Everybody would like to be a spiritual practitioner, but many of us have quite a lot of difficulties deciding where to begin, what to do and to even recognize what a spiritual practice really is. This country is such a wonderful place, very open. Many people think that anything non-material is already spiritual. I can only talk to you about the spiritual path that I know.

I am going to talk about the Seven Practices which is part of our chants in the beginning of each session here. They are as follows:

I bow down in body, speech and mind.

I offer the best I have to give, both real and imagined, to fill the space between us.

I regret and purify all transgressions.

I rejoice in all virtues.

I request you to remain until total enlightenment.

I request wise and compassionate guidance.

I dedicate my merit for the sake of all beings.

These Seven Practices are really useful for everybody, whether you come from a Buddhist, Hindu or Christian background or even if you have no background at all and just want to be doing something spiritual. You may not want to lock yourself into a box having to belong to a particular spiritual denomination. In the west there is a tendency to put everything in boxes. You make boxes, put labels on them and then put the people in there. Then they are Buddhists, Hindus and Christians and so on and you think that the situation is under control, but by putting people in boxes the situation is not under control. On the contrary, it is a recipe for division and chaos. That is my view.

How do you do a daily practice? The first point you have to be clear about is what you want to achieve with that. It is not the question of what you should do but what you want to get out of that. The purpose of your spiritual practice has to be clear to you, then you can frame and generate your practice and make it fit your purpose. That might not be accepted in western culture. You may be thinking there is one prescribed formula, and you have to follow it, but I doubt whether that is the only thing you can do. Where I come from, spiritual practice is a huge field and adaptable to anything you want to achieve. It is like wearing a dress. It has to fit you. It is no good putting on a coat which is three times the size of what you wear. Your spiritual practice can be tailored and made to fit your needs. All the great teachers, from Buddha up to my late masters have done that and there have been millions of other people who have done that too.

According to Buddha the best possible achievement is that of enlightenment. This means having total awareness. There is nothing that a buddha doesn't know. This knowledge is simultaneously in the past, present and future, including the changes in the future and where it is finally going to land. All of that is simultaneously known to a buddha. Also, it is also not just his own circumstances and those of a few others that he has total awareness of, but of all living beings, including the tiniest insects. Everything about their lives is totally known to Buddha. That is why it is called total knowledge or enlightenment.

Today nobody will criticize Buddha. Most people will like what he did and even those who don't, at least keep respectfully quiet, but in his lifetime he had a lot of critics. They openly challenged his claims to total knowledge. He said, "I will be happy to prove it. Ask me any question." They said, "You may have the capacity

to read minds a little bit, so there is no point in asking you questions.” Then Buddha suggested to them, “All the citizens of this area should go home and bring back a few grains from their own home. Have them put them in a little piece of cloth and put their personal mark on the bundle. Don’t let them tell anyone what that mark is. Bring these bundles here and I will tell everybody which is their bundle.” Some 50,000 bundles were collected. Buddha picked them up one by one and returned them to their respective owners. He did a lot of those demonstrations of his total knowledge. Whenever he was challenged, he proved each and every claim he made. There is a huge volume about his activities called “Days of Conversations.” Actually, the whole of Buddhism developed out of it. Buddha did not write down anything and teach Buddhism as a system. He was asked questions and answered them individually, as the situation required. Later all of it was written down and compiled and that is how Buddhism came about. Buddha moved from incident to incident and all that combined together became Buddhism.

According to Buddha the best goal that human beings can achieve is total knowledge. His reasoning for that was, “If I could achieve it, why can’t you? There is no difference between you and me, except that I have been working hard and you so far have been lazy.” This is true. Human capacity has no limit, whether in the spiritual, material, scientific or any other field. There is no equivalent to human capacity. We are very proud of scientific achievement. Science now proclaims that we will be able to prolong our life and also maintain good health. We have been sending human beings in rockets to the moon and now we are thinking about sending them to Mars and to other planets. That may be a scientific achievement, but it is first and foremost a human achievement. The particles and machine parts don’t just collect together by themselves and become a rocket. There are human minds behind that. Years and years of research, inch by inch pushing forward with human knowledge has made these things possible. This shows that the capacity of human beings is basically unlimited. We too have that capacity. We are human beings too, but so far, we haven’t been able to use it to our full advantage. I don’t even know how to properly pronounce the word “contemplate.” You can say it and I can’t. You have learned it as your mother tongue and I have been too lazy to catch up in that area of knowledge. This is how it works everywhere. On the other hand, I may know a little bit more about Buddhism because I have been born into it and again, it is almost like my mother tongue. It isn’t for you people, because you were born here and not in Asia, but we all have the same capacity. If we use it, we can achieve anything.

The best goal is to achieve total enlightenment, but there are many other goals along the way. You can reach to the level where you become a kind, compassionate person who is caring for everybody with loving kindness. In Buddhism such a person is called “Bodhisattva.” Sometimes it is good to use Buddhist terminology. Very often I try to avoid it, thinking that it would be very difficult for people who are not used to it. I did that a few days ago during the opening ceremony of Garrison Institute. I tried not to use any Buddhist terminology. After me there were a number of other speakers who used the term Bodhisattva. So that became funny. Here I am, from the background of that culture, trying not to use those terms and there are other speakers from here who freely use these very terms.

So being a Bodhisattva really means having ultimate, unlimited, unconditional love and compassion. Once you have that you will be a Bodhisattva. The next, easier goal is to achieve nirvana. That means freedom from negative emotions, from disturbing thoughts and actions. If that is too difficult you can try to get a good life, a life which allows you to fulfill your wishes and guide you to a better future life.

There are so many levels of spiritual achievement. Before starting a practice, you have to think about to what aim you want to focus your efforts. Once you decide what you want to get out of it then you figure out how you

can do that and what you need to do. In that way you can tailor your practice to your own needs and wishes. That is the rich value of Tibetan Buddhism. It is almost individually tailored to the practitioner's circumstances.

If you are unable to make a choice you can follow Buddha's advice. He says, "Why settle for less than best?" Maybe you don't get the highest achievement very soon. It doesn't matter. You will get to a certain level.

Almost all practices can be made to fit your goal. The techniques you use are often the same, but according to your goal you use them differently. Because of the motivation the practices will become tailored accordingly. It makes a difference.

Let me give you one example. Let's say you see a hungry dog and you feel motivated to help it. You give this dog a piece of bread. Now, you could have the motivation to do this in order to serve all living beings and help them achieve total enlightenment. Your action is giving a piece of bread to a dog, but what you achieve is something different. With a great motivation you achieve a huge benefit. With a limited motivation the benefit of the same action is limited. If you only have the idea of giving some bread to a dog the benefit will be just that of giving a piece of bread to a dog. With great motivation the same action will have a result that is a zillion times stronger. Buddha therefore always emphasizes motivation. In any meditation, first watch your motivation. Even when you come here to listen to these talks, think about what your motivation is. If you come here with a motivation of gaining spiritual development in order to serve all living beings and help them, and in order to help them, you would like to learn, then with that motivation you get a lot of merit. Merit is very similar to luck or good karma. So, the best thing is to think that whatever you want to do you are not just doing it for yourself but for everyone. At least have that mind. Even if you just do your daily chores in your own home, like vacuuming your carpets, you can do it with that motivation. You are not doing anything extra. It is still the same task. Tidying up with that motivation becomes a much stronger positive action. With such a motivation, pick up your dirty underwear and socks and think, "I am cleaning up this space not only in order to make myself feel good but also to create an atmosphere where I can do a spiritual practice for the benefit of all." With that motivation picking up your dirty socks and underwear becomes spiritual work. As you pick them up and throw them in your washing machine, think "I am purifying all negativities and wrongdoing for the benefit of all beings." The dirty laundry water goes down the drain and your clothes become clean.

Once I asked one of my great masters, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, the senior tutor to the present Dalai Lama, about mindfulness practice. He said, "Yes, you have to be mindful and meditate." I asked him how to do that and he got up and walked to the door. He opened the door and said, "I am now opening the door." Then he went outside and said, "I am now outside the room." Then he came back in and said, "I am now inside the room, and I am now closing the door." Then he said, "That is mindfulness meditation, but there is more you can do." Again he opened the door and said, "I am now opening the door for all living beings. I am stepping outside for the benefit of all beings. I am going back inside for the benefit of all beings. Now I am closing the door for the benefit of all beings." Then he said, "That's not all. You can do even more. He opened the door again, saying, "I am opening the door to liberation for all beings. I am closing the door of suffering for all beings." If you do it that way the practice becomes more and more powerful. How many times a day do we open and close our doors? If you remember to think like that every time you walk in and out of a room, how much benefit could you get from that, instead of banging the door? These are the little practice tricks you can learn.

Setting your motivation is the first thing, then add awareness and mindfulness. And with these preliminaries, you can begin the Seven Practices. They are very good, especially those I am going to highlight now. One of the

great Indian Buddhist saints called Shantideva, which directly translated means “God of Peace,” wrote, “Buddhas have thought for eons about the best possible practice, and they came up with the Seven Practices.”

When he says “Buddhas” that means enlightened beings. These are not only Buddhist saints, but they could be anyone—man, woman, black, white, yellow or whatever. As long as you are fully enlightened, according to Buddhism you are a Buddha, no matter which tradition you have come through.

These Seven Practices are not just some fancy little things picked up from here and there, but they are the Enlightened Ones’ conclusion after eons of contemplation. Of course, today we are making them as short as possible and as easy as possible. Traditionally, these practices would be very lengthy.

1. I bow down in body, speech and mind

It is not a question of bowing down as much as admiring their qualities and also showing interest in developing the same qualities they have. As far as Buddhism is concerned, we not only look at Buddha as a role model and supreme being, but also as someone who can guide us on the spiritual path and not only that, also as an example of what we can be. That is a little different from the western model. Buddha represents the ideal manifestation of the ultimate spiritual development. I am not saying that everybody should do this but as Buddhists that is what we should do. Therefore, we look at the historical Buddha for the quality of his mind, his knowledge, his compassion, and his love. We admire his qualities and express that we would like to be like him. If you think this is useful for you to incorporate in your practice that is fine. If you think it is not going to work very well with your practice, then you don’t have to do this.

If you admire something it is a sign that you want to have it. You signal that you wouldn’t mind having that or being like that. That is how you build up your aspiration. So, this first point is much more than just bowing down. It is not just expressing your respect. Respect is fine, but more than that you want to become like them. You have a goal and a purpose. You put your energy in that direction so that it is not scattered all over the place but focused.

Traditionally, it would go on for page after page. You could be chanting the whole day. There is also a practice including actual physical prostrations, something which we don’t do in western culture at all. It comes from the Indian culture and is a means of showing respect. You are actually touching the highest point of your body to the lowest point of their body. That is the old culture. It became a practice to do 100,000 of these prostrations. At that time that was no big deal. Today we make it as short and easy as possible, but at least when we do that we should focus, concentrate and practice as much as possible through our body, speech and mind.

The word “bowing down” does not really capture the meaning of the Tibetan *chag tsal*. *Chag* means showing my respect to you by touching the highest point of my body to the lowest point of your body. I am touching my forehead to your foot and acknowledging how wonderful you are. I do that because I admire your qualities, not because you are a king, queen, general or rich and powerful. I admire your qualities and I would like to have the same qualities. When you don’t know that background and just say, “I bow down,” it does not give you that message at all. For the time being we don’t have a better translation, so we have to explain that a little bit.

Now, the question is: To whom are we paying respect? If possible, to the enlightened beings, Buddha, Jesus or whomever, as long as they are enlightened. You think they are great and you would like to have their qualities. That makes them objects of refuge. They become the focal point of all the Seven Practices. Buddhists call that “object of refuge” and also “spiritual field of merit.” There is a reason why it is called “field.” In an ordinary field you grow your corn or vegetables. In the spiritual field you grow your merit. Whomever is your field of merit, or refuge, is entirely up to you. No one can tell you whom you should worship. You make your choice for whatever reasons you want to. If you have good reasons, that’s great. If not, too bad.

There is one strong recommendation from Buddha: Don’t worship ghosts and spirits. Don’t go into haunted houses and pray to them. It doesn’t work very well because these ghosts are subject to compassion themselves. Actually, if you don’t believe there are ghosts you are better off. Milarepa, the famous Tibetan saint said, “If you have a lot of doubt and superstition, then even a house with nothing in it will instantly attract thieves.”

If you go to a haunted house on Halloween night that is fine, but don’t go there to worship them. They are not free themselves. Actually, they are as much afraid of us as we are of them. It is very simple: If you go there without fear they won’t do anything bad to you. If you go there with fear and doubt, they will do something. It is the same as with tigers and dogs. You know how to deal with animals. It is very similar with ghosts. Take it from me: I do know about this. If you go to Southeast Asia, there are so many ghosts. They possess people and make them go into trance. All kinds of things happen. I try to avoid them as much as I can. Sometimes however, you can’t avoid it.

One time, in Central Malaysia, I came to know about a girl who was suffering tremendously, because ghosts had possessed her. The parents and relatives were trying to make an appointment with me, but I tried to avoid them. I had no desire to encounter with a ghost. If I could help, fine, but if I couldn’t help, then why should I? Then, a few days later I was giving a talk in front of a large audience, and I saw that family there. They brought that possessed kid. They tried to talk to me while I was teaching. I signaled them to go to a nearby room until I was finished. This girl was a little over eleven years old. When I came into the room, I told the father and the other relatives to leave me alone with the girl. They insisted to stay. When I asked why they said, “You won’t be able to hold her. Another Rinpoche tried to deal with this problem and she went crazy and kicked and slapped him. Four of us couldn’t hold her down.” However, the idea is if you know what you are doing you don’t have to be afraid. The relatives told the girl, “Go see Rinpoche,” but the girl did not want to. She said, “There is no Rinpoche there, but a strange blue man.” She was trying to run away, scratching at the doors of a cupboard, trying to get in there and hide. Now I knew that I had the upper hand. I went after her and pulled her back by the leg. I asked that girl, “Who are you really?” And what I heard was such a sad story.

There was a family feud, and people had been killing each other. The dead became ghosts and eleven of them entered the poor little girl. They came one after another and tried to explain to me why they were there. I had to negotiate with all eleven of them. The last one was a ghost who had been a Thai Buddhist monk. I said to him, “You are wearing the robes of Buddha and look what you got yourself into! Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?” He said, “What could I do? My sponsor and benefactor got killed by this evil family and I had to avenge him.” I asked him when that had happened and he said, “60 years ago.” Finally, I made an agreement with these ghosts that they would leave the girl alone if I performed a puja for them. I did a fire puja a few days later and that day they all left and never bothered the girl again. I was lucky to be able to manage that. This is not because I am somebody special, but I had my mind straight, and I knew what I am doing, but I am not really a ghost buster.

So that is why you can't take refuge in ghosts. These ghosts for example were themselves suffering, because they had tried to take revenge. And the poor little girl had nothing to do with these people. None of her family had anything to do with them. These ghosts could not get into anybody else. They can only enter someone who has low self-esteem. They look for a little opening and get in.

This is all by way of saying, your spiritual business has to be conducted with a person who is fit to be an object of refuge. They have to be free from the problems that we are suffering from. They have to have overcome them and therefore they know what to do. They don't care if you give them ten dollars or a million dollars or nothing at all. It makes no difference to them. They do it out of compassion. We on the other hand would do a monkey dance for a thousand dollars.

We have just begun to establish the object of refuge as the basis on whom we can do the Seven Practices. This is who you worship or whatever you want to do. It is a serious business by which you can gain big profit. By bowing down to a correct object of refuge, you purify negativities. At the same time, you ask for qualities, and you seek these qualities for the benefit of all beings. You are working with your body, speech and mind together. You don't just bow down and say the words, but you think why you are doing this. Physically you have to offer at least a gesture. Even if you don't bow down, you can at least fold your hands. You say the words, and in your mind, you admire the qualities of body, speech, mind, knowledge and activities of the object of refuge. These qualities are unlimited. Reflect on them. If you are a Buddhist, you will choose the historical Buddha Shakyamuni as your object of refuge and admire his qualities and seek them for yourself. You will think, "I have an immature Buddha within me. It is my future Buddha. I am linking the qualities of the historical Buddha with my capacity to develop these same qualities." If you think this way it becomes a powerful practice. So far, I have only been talking about the first of the Seven Practices.

2. I offer the best I have to give, both real and imagined to fill the space between us

Here we are not just talking about putting some money into a hat that is passed around. You are offering the "best you have to give." This is generosity. You all know what a great thing generosity is. You offer mentally as well. If you give a flower, think about its purity and beauty and color, and about the art of presentation. Then think that it is not just one flower but that the whole of space is filled up with flowers. Imagine there are zillions of them and there is one for each and every sentient being. You can see that the mind has no limitations. Materially there is a limit, but mentally there isn't. A single little flower can become zillions of flowers in your imagination. You can offer a flower to all enlightened beings and to all sentient beings. This really works. So, use your mind. Visualize and imagine. There is no limit in what you can think and imagine.

Offering doesn't just mean taking money out of your wallet. If we limit our offerings to cash and checks it would be pathetic. Even if you are as rich as George Soros or Bill Gates your wealth won't be enough to do anything. Generosity is mind more so than material things. It is the mind of sharing, the mind of offering.

Imagination can become reality. Even scientists today confirm this. We spent a weekend with the Dalai Lama at MIT, where people were trying to prove this. Don't limit what you can give. You can multiply the offerings you give by imagining they fill the ground and the sky. You imagine an unlimited, huge offering. The quality is pure, the material is pure, to whom you give is pure. It is also pure in the way you give, without attachment and hope of return.

3. I regret and purify all transgressions

If you think about this deeply you will discover it has huge meaning and consequences for your life. Purification in itself is fantastic, but the question is: Can you purify everything you have done wrong? My answer is yes, it is possible no matter how heavy the negativities may be, how horrifying they may be. Of course, if somebody has killed somebody else you can't bring that person back through purification. The point rather is this: Is the person who has done the killing going to be blacklisted forever? No, that is not the case, because people are all impermanent. They change. Everything is impermanent and changes. We did something wrong, and whatever that is we can change it. Changing is in our nature. We are not permanent. At one time, we all were cute, nice little babies whom everybody loved, but we have changed and continue to change. We are young, we get older and then we die. Our consciousness changes. Our personality changes. Everything changes. Therefore, our wrong doings can also change. This is one of the Buddha's spiritual experiences. Whatever has been created is by nature impermanent. Look at anything and point out to me a single item that is permanent. You can't. Even the seemingly permanent monuments are impermanent. I have seen people taking the Statue of Liberty apart and repairing it.

Our deeds, good and bad, are impermanent. Therefore, they are changeable. We have opportunities to purify. Even in our own culture we understand forgiveness, although some people don't want to forgive. However, it doesn't matter if a person forgives you, as long as you are seeking forgiveness from them with a pure mind. Whether the other person forgives you or not is philosophically speaking not at their discretion. The person has a right to refuse to forgive, but that does not affect the action of the person who is purifying. From the purifying person's point of view, it is important to seek forgiveness with a pure mind. From the Buddhist point of view, it is actually not even recommended to go to anyone and seek forgiveness. We don't have those little confession boxes where you sit on one side and agent 007 sits on the other. On the other hand, that doesn't save Buddhism from having issues with corruption. There is just as much corruption in Buddhism as in Christian churches. Eastern temples have their own problems.

The point is that purification does not depend on the other person forgiving you. Yes, you do have to do as much as you can to compensate a person who has suffered through your actions. You can give money, save a life, tell the truth. However, it is not required that your offer of compensation be accepted by the person whom you have hurt. You are the one who is purifying, not them. You can purify in the presence of God, Buddha, or other people, but you can also purify by yourself. There are certain specific purifications that may have to be done according to specific systems but in general the main requirement for purification is strong regret. If we don't regret what we have done there is no reason why we should purify. If I am proud of what I did, why would I want to purify? Even if I am not proud of what I did but I also don't regret it, I won't feel the need to purify. If I realize that I did something wrong, if I hurt people, then I will want to purify.

Good and bad are extremely difficult to tell apart. Who can say that something is good and something else is not good? Only those who know—God or Buddha. You and I can't judge that for others. Our knowledge is limited. So how can I make the distinction for myself? There is one simple guideline: Have I hurt somebody? If that is the case, what I have done is wrong. If I hurt myself, that is also wrong. Some people think they have the right to take their own life, but that is a huge mistake. Some also think, "I have brought you into the world, so I have a right to take you out." That is definitely wrong. It is negative. All negative actions will have negative consequences and will need to be purified. Through purification you can neutralize negative karma so you don't get the consequences. That is the meaning of purification. That is why purification is one of the most important tools to have in your spiritual practice. Do it every day. We create negativities without knowledge,

unconsciously, day and night. Even in our sleep we do it. We can dream of killing our enemies. Even our dreams can carry some negativity. It is not as big a deal as actually killing somebody, but still, it is a negativity. It is very important to analyze and find out for yourself if your wrong doings can really be purified.

In western culture we carry a lot of guilt. We think that we have done something wrong and now we are helpless, hopeless and useless and we are going to have to pay for it. To a certain extent that may be true, but never forget that purification works. Don't let your negative actions hang over your head. Don't let them torture you. We are all human beings, with a great mind, with all kinds of spiritual possibilities, traditions and alternatives. We don't have to torture ourselves with guilt. Therefore, regretting and purifying all transgressions is one of the most important spiritual activities. Of course, if we are not interested in developing spiritually, we don't have to worry about purification. If there is no spiritual concern, then as long as the police don't catch us, we could do whatever we want and we would be okay, but we won't feel okay if we have a sense of spiritual responsibility. If so, we will know when we have done something wrong. We need to know that we can actually do something to change it. We can't bring somebody dead back to life, but we can change what we did wrong through regret and purification.

I don't buy into guilt trips. If somebody puts a guilt trip on me, I run away 500 miles, without looking back. People like to guilt trip each other. They like to pressure each other into doing what they want. I know somebody who told me, "If you don't do your exercise, I won't do my meditation practice." I said, "Absolutely fine if you don't want to do your practice. It is your choice. Doesn't make a difference to me. Do what you want. It's your life. I will be happy if you do it, and unhappy if you don't do it, but you can't use this as a guilt trip on me." Don't submit to any guilt trip. Purify whatever you did wrong. Remember that everything is impermanent.

4. I rejoice in all virtues

Buddha said that if we rejoice we can generate tremendous amounts of merit. We can rejoice in things that we did ourselves and in what others have done. We can just sit here and rejoice in what Mother Theresa has done, what Dr. Martin Luther King has done, what Mahatma Gandhi has done and what the Dalai Lama is doing. We let them work and we enjoy and benefit from rejoicing in what they do. I call this a great investment without risk. This is another spiritual tool. You can rejoice in Buddha and in Jesus. You don't have to do anything yourself. You can just be a couch-potato and keep on rejoicing in everybody's wonderful deeds, but we don't do that. Instead, we get jealous. When we try to rejoice, jealousy will pop up and say, "Yes, but ..." That is the language of jealousy. It is the job of negative emotions like jealousy to take you away from rejoicing. Positive emotions will encourage you to rejoice. Just by thinking how well others have done you can get a lot of benefit. Whether their motivation is right or wrong is their own business. We don't have to worry about that. We want benefit, not disadvantages. We rejoice in people's good work. If on the other hand you rejoice in the actions of George W Bush, you get negativities, because it involves a lot of killing and destruction in Iraq. That is risky. You have to be careful in whom you rejoice. It is almost the same as in whom you take refuge.

It is great to rejoice in Gandhi's work, but it not necessarily that great to rejoice in Gandhi's persuasion of others to hurt themselves. You have to use your intelligence here. There is one side and that is Gandhi's selflessness in helping his people, but do you have to rejoice in Gandhi forcing the Indian people to get beaten by the British soldiers? That is a different question. We rejoice in *ahimsa*, his system of non-violence, but we don't have to rejoice in hurting. In general, though, we rejoice in Gandhi because he did great work. So,

rejoicing in virtuous activities is a very profitable, risk-free investment, and requires only a few seconds of using our mind. Why wouldn't we do that?

5. I request you to remain until total enlightenment

6. I request wise and compassionate guidance

The next two parts of the Seven Practices are not that important right now, but the last one, dedication, is again very important. Therefore, on the whole I strongly recommend that you pay attention to the first two, the third and fourth, and the seventh.

7. I dedicate my merit for the sake of all beings

Dedication is safeguarding your positive virtue. As I said earlier, wrong actions and right actions, both can be changed. We may create enormous positive virtue, but hatred can quickly burn it all up. Many of us may not be aware of it, but that is how it works. Actually, any religious service in any tradition carries these elements of the Seven Practices. There are praises, offerings, there is purification and there are sections of the service where you make yourself feel great.

Once you have dedicated something it is safeguarded. Karma works like that. It is like a contract. It says that if you dedicate your positive virtue to a particular goal, that virtue won't be exhausted until your goal has materialized. Without knowing we are subject to that contract. It is like when you get a credit card. You sign for it and you are bound by the contract. We are all subject to the karmic contract from birth. It doesn't matter whether you are Buddhist, Christian, atheist or anything else. According to this contract, the positive karma you dedicate is protected and will not be wasted. Otherwise, hatred burns all virtues, just as purification burns all non-virtues. Virtue and non-virtue are equal in strength. We like to see the virtue win, but they are equal. Virtue has a powerful weapon called purification, and non-virtue has a powerful weapon called hatred. They cancel each other out. Dedication protects your virtues against hatred.

You can dedicate your virtue to whatever you want to. It is yours, but don't dedicate it to something cheap. Dedicate it to something worthwhile, something that is hard to achieve, a good, long-term goal. Buddha recommends dedicating our positive virtue to everyone becoming enlightened. That doesn't mean that you cannot dedicate your virtue to someone getting healed, or to yourself being successful and comfortable. It is your money. You can spend it on whatever you want to.

These Seven Practices are something everybody can do without any difficulties, in your own living room or even in the bathroom and certainly in a place of worship, like a church, synagogue, meditation center or wherever it may be. So, when you ask how to begin a spiritual practice this is what you can do. You can use this in connection with any tradition. You can use any object of worship anywhere.

The Seven Practices is a spiritual tool you can use every day. You don't have to chant it, but think about the Seven Practices and meditate on them. Analyze, for example, if it is possible to purify your negative actions. Did you do something right or something wrong? The analytical meditation will give you a good idea. If you are convinced that you have done something wrong, then have regret. You may concede that you have done something wrong, but you may not get regret if you have pride. Then you have to activate your analytical thinking again. Why don't I feel regret? Ask yourself. You may say, "Because I don't want to admit it. I am not convinced that I was wrong." You do that again and again until you are convinced. You may have some regret,

but if you agree that you did something wrong, why only have a little regret? Might as well have strong regret. How much regret are you willing to have? You have to keep on thinking like that. It will help you to overcome your negative addictions. That is spiritual practice. God and Buddha will help us. The spiritual masters will guide us, but the work is ours. We have to be honest with ourselves. You cannot really deceive yourself because your mind is very well known to you. There is nobody to cheat, lie to or blame. It is within us. Once you are convinced you have to concentrate on it. If you feel regret, build a strong regret and then purify.

In a way, spiritual practice is simple. On the other hand, it is complicated. Here we are making it as easy and short as possible. In Tibet there were volumes written on the Seven Practices and people would spend months thinking about them. For us it has been shortened to one line each, but you have to build your understanding of these lines, otherwise, there is no value in them. But if you work it through in your mind, these few lines are very powerful. It is the result of the meditation of many masters over thousands of years. That is how it was made short and easy, like a ready-made TV dinner, but it is better than that because it has great nutritional value.