

*The Five Buddha Families*  
*and*  
*The Eight Consciousnesses*

**by**

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### *Note*

We have italicized technical words the first time that they are used to alert the reader that they may be found in the Glossary of Terms.

The Tibetan words are given as they are pronounced, not spelled in Tibetan. Their actual spelling can be found in the Glossary of Tibetan Terms.

We use the convention of using BCE (Before Common Era) for "B. C." and CE (Common Era) for "A. D."

# Chapter 1

## *The Five Buddha Families*

The essential nature of a *bodhisattva* or a buddha is that he or she embraces the enlightened qualities of the five buddha families, which pervade every living being without exception, including ourselves. To achieve the realization of these five buddha families or the *five dhyana buddhas*, it is necessary to abandon the five disturbing emotions of great attachment, anger or aggression, ignorance or bewilderment, pride and envy. When these disturbing emotions are purified and removed, the five wisdoms shine forth. Realization of the five wisdoms is realization of the five dhyana buddhas.

To begin with, we have to understand what the five *disturbing emotions* (Skt. *kleshas*) are. The first, which seems to be most powerful, is anger. Anger is an emotion which arises and develops against someone or something one dislikes. If examined carefully, in the short run anger creates pain and in the long run it brings about serious harm. The immediate pain and future harm is to oneself as well as to others is due to the power of one's own aggression. We therefore need to understand the first negative emotion.

The negative emotion of anger causes temporary suffering for oneself and others for this lifetime. This emotion is so powerful that all negative actions or *karma* accumulated by wishing harm to others can lead one to take rebirth in the lower realms.<sup>1</sup> For example, intense anger can cause rebirth in the lowest hell realm where there is intense suffering. Therefore anger not only causes suffering and pain in this lifetime, but also causes us to take birth in the lower realms, where even more intense suffering ensues as a result. To be free of the experience of suffering and pain in this lifetime and to be free of the experience of taking birth in a lower realm, it is necessary to employ methods to overcome and eliminate anger and hatred.

When anger is purified and removed, we come to develop and to gradually realize *mirror-like wisdom*. With mirror-like

wisdom, there is no distinction between self and others, there is no separation between self and other phenomena so everything is experienced in unity and harmony. It is called mirror-like wisdom because phenomena appear to the mind in the same way that things appear in a clean mirror, completely accurate with no distortion. Understanding and realizing mirror-like wisdom takes place in the absence of the negative emotion of anger. Realization of mirror-like wisdom is realization of Buddha Akshobhya, who is blue in color. He holds a *vajra* in his left hand. His activity is pacifying the emotions, in particular, suffering, illness, frustration, and sorrow.

The second dhyana Buddha is the *Buddha Ratnasambhava* who is realized when the disturbing emotion of pride or ego is purified. Ego is the belief in a self which we all develop from birth as soon as our mind thinks of itself as separate from others. The next three types of pride evolve in this process of self-centeredness: (1) We feel that we are better than others who are in a less fortunate situation, (2) we feel that we are superior to others because we fail to see the equality of ourself and others; and (3) we feel we are either spiritually or materially better than others.

What causes us to embark upon the journey of ego? When the self believes that it is separate from others, the negative emotion of pride arises in which one believes oneself in some way better than others. From this then arises the belief that there are “good” i.e. things which we believe in and do and “bad” i.e. things that others believe in and do. As long as we believe ourselves to be superior to others, it is impossible to learn from them. So we must give up ego clinging to develop enlightened qualities. A purified mind does not distinguish between pure and impure, good and bad, I and others; rather it experiences all things in equality.

When one is free from pride, realization of the wisdom of equality dawns and one experiences and becomes Buddha Ratnasambhava. Buddha Ratnasambhava’s activity is enriching and as a symbol of his activity of enrichment, he is gold or yellow in color. As a symbol of his ability to enrich all living beings, he holds the precious *wish-fulfilling jewel* in his hands.

The third dhyana Buddha represents the purification and elimination of the disturbing emotion of attachment or desire.

Desire causes much suffering by being quite distracting and keeping the mind restless and busy. Why? When one is attached to things, one is never satisfied and always craves for more and better things. One is continuously engaged in achieving and acquiring the mind's desires and only experiences loss and dissatisfaction in one's life. By understanding this negative emotion and by eliminating it, the third discerning wisdom shines forth. By realizing discerning wisdom, the enlightened mind is experienced and one becomes one with the Buddha Amitabha. It is with this wisdom that one understands and has empathy with each and every living being and appreciates others' qualities. The Buddha Amitabha's nature is the absence of attachment and desire and his activity is magnetizing. As already said, attachment and desire lead to the suffering of dissatisfaction, a state in which one always wants and strives for more and better things. Desire determines one's behavior and not attaining what one desires leads to frustration and dissatisfaction. With the discerning wisdom and the realization of Buddha Amitabha, there is no attachment and desire and thus no dissatisfaction, or craving for more and better things. This realization is so powerful that all things are naturally magnetized as one's own. There is no energy and force involved as in a state of desire.

The fourth dhyana Buddha is Buddha Amogasiddha. He is realized in the absence of the negative emotion of jealousy which includes being jealous of others' wealth, success, and good fortune. With jealousy negativity is accumulated. By overcoming jealousy, Amogasiddha and the fourth all-accomplishing wisdom are realized.

Jealousy prevents and impedes an individual from accomplishing his or her own well-being and as a result he or she experiences more suffering and continues developing further jealousy towards those who have more. This is the reason all-accomplishing wisdom is experienced in the absence of jealousy, i.e., when jealousy is removed, all wishes are naturally and effortlessly accomplished.

As long as jealousy determines one's attitude, one is bound to experience more obstacles in achieving personal success and in accomplishing positive goals. This is why Buddha Amogasiddha's activity is wrathful. It is with wrath that he

removes all obstacles and hindrances preventing spiritual maturation and success. He is green in color, the same color as growing plants symbolizing the numerous activities he employs to remove hindrances.

The fifth dhyana Buddha is Buddha Vairocana, who is realized when the negative emotion of ignorance is overcome. Ignorance is failing to recognize what is wholesome and unwholesome, failing to know the ultimate and conventional truth<sup>2</sup> and failing to realize the highest state of *dharmata*. Ignorance is the root of the negative emotions, so that, for example, it is only out of ignorance that one is angry. One only acts aggressively towards others because one is ignorant that anger will only bring on pain and sorrow to oneself and others. Likewise, it is only due to ignorance that one has pride, desire, and jealousy.

Elimination of the darkness of ignorance is the realization of Buddha Vairocana. The wisdom which shines forth when ignorance is overcome is the wisdom of *dharmata*, i.e., realization of the highest state. We have failed to realize the true state up until now due to ignorance, and this ignorance causes all the mental confusion and misleading actions. Purification of ignorance engenders realization of the wisdom which sees all things as they really are.

The natural body of the purity of the wisdom of *dharmata* is Buddha Vairocana. Since the darkness of ignorance is eliminated, he is the clear color of white.

### ***Qualities Arising from Transforming Negative Emotions***

We have given a brief description of the five dhyana buddhas who represent the purified qualities of the five disturbing emotions. When these five negative emotions are purified, the qualities of the five buddhas shine forth purely. Now we will describe these five buddhas more thoroughly.

#### ***1. Buddha Akshobhya***

The disturbing emotion of anger is transformed into the Buddha Akshobhya's wisdom at enlightenment and we may ask how aggression or anger relates to Buddha Akshobhya, who is a very

peaceful activity. Or we may wonder how the absence of anger is Buddha Akshobhya. It is important to know that Akshobhya is the Sanskrit name and in Tibetan he is called *sangay mikyodpa* or the “immovable, stable and changeless Buddha.” He is called “immovable and changeless” because when the disturbing emotion of anger is present, everything inevitably changes; our face becomes red, the body begins to shake and the friend we are angry with becomes our enemy. When anger is purified, everything is peaceful and stable which is the realization of the meaning of the changeless, stable, and permanent Buddha Akshobhya.

The Buddha Akshobhya’s blue color has a symbolical meaning. The dhyana buddhas are of the five main colors of blue, red, yellow, green and white. Blue symbolizes permanence that is changeless just as the sky has always been blue, whether this year or a thousand years ago. The Buddha Akshobhya is blue to represent this changelessness. Furthermore, the buddha Akshobhya also holds a vajra in his lap which is also a symbol of his indestructible and changeless nature. He sits in the full vajra or full lotus posture to symbolize the indestructible nature and his right hand touches the earth which is also a gesture of the changeless. In a mandala Akshobhya resides in the east and is painted as being on an elephant throne. Incidentally, in a mandala the position away from one is always west regardless of what the real direction is.

## **2. Buddha Ratnasambhava**

The Buddha Ratnasambhava is the purification of pride. Ratnasambhava is Sanskrit and the Tibetan name is *sangay rinchenjungdan*. The Tibetan word *sangay* means “buddha” and the word *rinchen* means “precious” referring to all precious, good, and immaculate things. The word *jungdan* means “the source.” So Ratnasambhava is the source of all good qualities with these precious qualities being the absence of pride. When ego and pride have been removed, one is open enough to actually receive all knowledge and qualities, that is the realization of Sangay Rinchen Jungdan.

Knowing the meaning of Rinchen Jungdan, one understands why his activity encompasses the enrichment of all precious

qualities of realization. Ratnasambhava resides in the south and is yellow or gold in color. The color gold represents wealth and Ratnasambhava holds a wish-fulfilling jewel at his heart in his left hand. The wish-fulfilling jewel is a jewel which gives a person everything that he or she desires and so this also symbolizes enrichment. He is seated in the vajra posture of fulfillment on a horse's throne representing the four bases or legs of miraculous powers that enables unobstructed passage everywhere. His right hand is in the mudra of giving supreme generosity, i.e., his activity is supreme generosity.

### **3. *Buddha Amitabha***

The third dhyana buddha is Amitabha who represents the purification of desire also called attachment. When we are under the influence of attachment, we discriminate between good and bad, beautiful and ugly, and then we cling to what seems to be attractive and shun those things which seem bad or ugly. Attachment and aversion are disturbing emotions that arise from not understanding the nature of things as they are and as they appear.<sup>3</sup> It is due to ignorance that mind accepts and rejects objects of attachment and aversion. With the wisdom of discrimination, one knows things as they appear just as they are without any confused and prejudiced opinions. This comes about by purifying attachment and realizing Buddha Amitabha. Buddha Amitabha is the Sanskrit name and the Tibetan name is *sangay odpamed*, which means "boundless light." When one has developed the awareness of knowing everything as it manifests, one has developed the clarity of boundless light, which is completely free from confusion. This realization is described as *odpamed* or "boundless light." We can compare this state with an example of a lamp. A faulty lamp cannot illuminate a room clearly, whereas a perfect lamp can allow us to see things distinctly and clearly. The light of Buddha Amitabha is therefore boundless and is realized through the purification of attachment and desire.

Buddha Amitabha is of the lotus family because a lotus grows in muddy water while its blossoms remain stainless. Likewise, Amitabha represents freedom from attachment, and it is attachment which causes us to experience pain, loss, and



dissatisfaction that never finds fulfillment. Purification of the negative emotion of attachment is a state of immaculate, pure peace. Therefore, the Buddha Amitabha is seated in the full vajra posture and both hands resting in the meditative posture of mental clarity. He fully understands things as they are and as they appear without subjective notions. This state is one of peace and ease. He resides in the buddha realm of Dewachen.

#### **4. *Buddha Amogasiddha***

Buddha Amogasiddha is realization of all-accomplishing wisdom. The Tibetan word for Buddha Amogasiddha is *sangay donyodtrubpa*. The word *danyod* means “meaningful” and the word *trubpa* means “accomplishment.” So Buddha Amogasiddha means “whatever is meaningful and fruitful is accomplished.” He is also the complete purification of jealousy, which is a hindrance for both material and spiritual success. His activity is perfect accomplishment and fulfillment of meaningful aims. Furthermore, his activity removes ordinary daily hindrances such as illnesses and obstacles. This is why Ratnasambhava’s activity is meaningful accomplishment.

Buddha Amogasiddha holds a double-vajra in the form of a cross in his left hand, which symbolizes that his activity pervades and touches all directions. He sits in the full lotus posture. The left hand of all five dhyana Buddhas rests in the meditative posture of the changeless realization of dharmata. Amogasiddha’s right hand is in the mudra of fearless protection. He protects all living beings from any mishaps, obstacles, and negative influences. So his posture is known as “the mudra of fearless protection.” He is white which represents “without fault” and he rests in the center to the mandala and is on a lion’s throne. Amogasiddha is green and resides in the north holding a sword representing the cutting of existence.

#### **5. *Buddha Vairocana***

The fifth dhyana Buddha is Vairocana who is known as *sangay namparnanzad*, or in English, “perfect knowledge of all things as they manifest.” Buddha Vairocana is realized when the conflicting emotion of ignorance is removed. When one cannot

see things as they really are, one has the conflicting emotion of ignorance. As a result one judges things from a mistaken point of view. With the realization of the wisdom of dharmata, one realizes Buddha Vairocana. The example for this that is given is to say there is a rope lying on the floor in a dark room. Because of ignorance we mistake the rope for a snake and become alarmed and feel tremendous fear. The solution to this fear is to simply see the rope as really a rope and not a snake. This example shows how mind functions in a state of ignorance. The distress and fear is simply the result of misperceiving the situation and simply knowing the rope isn't a snake eliminates all the fear and distress created.

Buddha Vairocana holds the *wheel of dharma* in his hands, which symbolizes absence of ignorance and complete and clear knowledge of all things as they are and as they manifest—dharmata. He is realized when ignorance is removed, the quality of Buddha Vairocana. This wheel symbolizes the Buddha's teachings, which show us what to abandon and what to take up in our gradual advancement to enlightenment. We learn how to give up and abandon negative emotions and how to develop wisdom. Thus the dharma wheel brings us from ignorance to wisdom. In comparison, it was the wheels of a chariot in Buddha's time that brought you to your destination. The wheel of dharma similarly carries you from the darkness of ignorance to the clarity of knowing each thing as it is.

Both hands of Vairocana Buddha are placed in the *mudra* called "enlightenment" or sometimes "the mudra of turning the wheel of dharma." Since the only means to remove ignorance and defilements is by learning the dharma, Buddha Vairocana discloses the dharma to all living beings. He is white which represents "without fault" and he rests in the center to the mandala and is on a lion's throne.

So these are the five buddha families and on page 16 and 17 there is a diagram giving many of the qualities and characteristics of these five wisdoms.

The chart gives the Sanskrit and Tibetan name for the five wisdom Buddhas. Then it gives the pure realm that these buddhas live in. Each wisdom is associated with a particular skandha which is a stage of perception and with a disturbing emotion of klesha. Next is given the wisdom this buddha

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represents along with the color of the deity. One can recognize this deity because he is holding a particular object (given in H) and also is on a throne supported by a particular animal (given in L). Each wisdom has a feminine aspect which is the consort of this buddha. This wisdom also represents a particular element and a particular chakra in the body.

*The Five Buddha Families and the Eight Consciousnesses*

*Transformation of the Consciousnesses into Wisdoms*

<u>Realm</u>	<u>Consciousness</u>	<u>Wisdom</u>
Dharmakaya	8th consciousness	Mirror-like-Wisdom
Sambogakaya	7th (klesha aspect)	Wisdom of Equality
Wisdom	7th (immediate aspect)	Discriminating
Nirmanakaya	5 sensory consciousnesses and nonconceptual 6 <sup>th</sup>	All-Accomplishing Wisdom
	6th mental consciousness	Dharmadhatu wisdom

Taken from Thrangu Rinpoche's *Differentiating of Consciousness and Wisdom*. Namo Buddha Publications.

## Chapter 2

### *The Eight Consciousnesses*

There are various approaches to realize the five dhyana buddhas. One approach is that they can be realized by purifying and eliminating the five disturbing emotions. When these five disturbing emotions are removed, the five wisdoms shine forth and the five dhyana buddhas become real. Another approach teaches that they can be realized by purifying the eight consciousnesses. This approach will be discussed now.<sup>4</sup>

Our mind constantly creates confusion and doubts, and thus it is not possible to really understand mind's true meaning. Since we fail to understand what the mind is, the Buddha gave teachings on the mind by explaining the six or eight consciousnesses.<sup>5</sup> By studying the teaching of the mind as taught by the Buddha, we come to appreciate what sentient beings truly are.

When hearing about the mind, we mistakenly assume it is a solid, stable, and an independent entity. This is why the Buddha realized the importance of explaining the different types of consciousnesses.

The first consciousness is the visual consciousness. To begin, sensory organs such as an eye or ear do not differentiate or distinguish sights or sounds. Rather these sensory organs are mere gates for perception. It is the visual or auditory consciousness of mind that differentiates these things. Perception of an object is a mental process. The second auditory consciousness hears sounds. The third smell consciousness relates to the nose organ and differentiates smells. The fourth consciousness is the taste consciousness. When you taste something, it is not the tongue that distinguishes a taste, rather it is the taste consciousness. The fifth consciousness relates to the tactile organs of the body and perceives touch.

There are five gates or doors of sensory organs: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. Perception doesn't take place in the

organ but in the mind. The five sensory organs with the respective consciousnesses are called “external” and can be easily comprehended because they can be seen, felt and described. The sixth consciousness called the mental consciousness is “internal” and refers to the individual experience of happiness, suffering, excitement, and frustration. Some people think that all mental events—all thoughts, memories and anticipation of the future take place in the brain. The brain is involved, but in truth recollecting the past, reflecting on the present, and planning the future with all its emotions of happiness, sadness and frustration takes place in the sixth mental consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

Each consciousness has its own function. For example, the visual consciousness perceives an image of an object, the ear consciousness perceives a sound, and so forth. Since each sensory organ and each respective consciousness has a different function, they are not one but distinctly different consciousnesses. The Buddha explained that the five sense organs and their consciousnesses are “without thought,” meaning they do not discriminate and make judgements about the perception. The eye consciousness merely sees a visual form, the nose only smells without the ability to distinguish, for example, between two smells. It is the mental consciousness which differentiates and thinks, and therefore the mental consciousness is said to be “with thought.”

To understand the next two consciousnesses we must contemplate them thoroughly to know what they are and how they function. The seventh consciousness is known as “the afflicted mind” or “the klesha mind.” Whether awake or asleep, happy or sad, the negative mind clings to the feeling of an existent “I,” of a self, and one is very attached to this, regardless of what experiences one encounters or what time of day it is. This afflicted consciousness is like a bridge between the sixth consciousness and the eighth consciousness. It experiences the material coming from the eighth consciousness and assumes that it is a real self.

The eighth consciousness is called “the ground consciousness,” or “the alaya consciousness.” It is the foundation or “store-house” from all other consciousnesses, out

## *The Eight Consciousnesses*

of which the habits instilled by the consciousnesses arise again when the situation and circumstances are appropriate.

The eighth consciousness, the alaya, is classified into two types, the division describing its ability: (a) to know everything taking place in the moment and (b) to store or record all habitual patterns accumulated through mental and physical activities. Counting the two types of alaya, one can say there are nine consciousnesses.

Finally, there is the eighth consciousness, which is called “the ground or foundation consciousness” in English or the “alaya” consciousness (in Sanskrit). This consciousness is called this because it is the foundation out of which all the other consciousnesses arise. One function of the eighth is to store all the latent impressions that are created by the sixth consciousness. These latent impressions are called chagpa in Tibetan and if we do good and beneficial activities, we store karmically positive latencies which later come back to create positive impressions. If we do negative acts such as killing and stealing, these will create negative latencies and these latencies will create tendencies for us to kill and steal later on even into other lifetimes. For this reason, the alaya consciousness is also called the “store-house” consciousness because it stores all these impressions.

The eighth consciousness has two different functions with one function being (a) to know everything taking place in the moment in consciousness and (b) the storing or recording of all habitual patterns accumulated through our mental and physical activities. Counting these two different functions of the eighth consciousness we could say there are nine consciousnesses.

To give one very brief example of how this works: when we dream our five sensory consciousnesses are not receiving information, but we receive these latencies from the eighth consciousness and see and hear and taste things which are so vivid that we believe while we are in the dream that these are actual daytime experiences. What the mind makes up in this dream makes us feel happiness and suffering, elation and fear and yet it is all an illusion made up by part of our mind.





## Chapter 3

### *The Wisdoms Arising from the Eight Consciousnesses*

#### *1. Mirror-Like Wisdom*

The five Buddha families are realized when the eight consciousnesses are purified. As ordinary beings we perceive everything through the eight consciousnesses which are under the influence of an incorrect view of the world because our mind is overwhelmed by the disturbing emotions. By purifying the consciousnesses, the sacred outlook is achieved and everything is seen in purity. When the eighth alaya consciousness is purified, mirror-like wisdom dawns so that self and others are perceived purely, like a reflection in a mirror, which is the realization of Buddha Akshobhya.

#### *2. Wisdom of Equanimity*

The seventh consciousness is the consciousness which clings to an “I” and makes a distinct separation of “I” and “others.” The seventh consciousness by dividing subject from object, results in us desiring well-being for ourselves. To have the “I” get what it wants at the expense of “other” creates the disturbing emotions such as aggression, jealousy, and pride. We want to protect ourselves and this leads to aggression and anger. We also discover that others, especially those who we feel aren’t as good as us, have what we want and this leads to jealousy. Finally, this separation causes us to feel that we are better than others in certain ways and this leads to pride. This seventh consciousness is thus the cause for our endless struggle in samsara. When this dualism is purified, the wisdom of





equality is realized so that there is no clinging to a self and others, and all mental and physical activities are experienced impartially. Realization of the wisdom of equality is realization of the Buddha Ratnasambhava.

### ***3. Discerning Wisdom***

The sixth mental consciousness makes decisions, differentiates good, bad, and neutral feelings and creates thoughts of hope and fear. All these thoughts that arise in the sixth consciousness in absence of discriminating wisdom (Skt. *prajna*) are erroneous and therefore lead to ignorance. When the ignorance of the mental consciousness is removed, knowledge of phenomena as it is and knowledge of how phenomena manifest shines forth, producing discriminating wisdom which is the omniscience of the Buddha Shakyamuni. What is omniscient wisdom? Take the feather of a peacock as an example. It is easy to distinguish the blue, red, green or yellow colors and the designs in the feather. But if you were to ask why the peacock has such beautiful feathers, you could not find an answer. It is with the omniscience of a Buddha, who actually realizes all things as they are and how they manifest, that one knows what causes the colors of a peacock. Recognizing all phenomena as they are is the realization of Buddha Amitabha.

### ***4. All-Accomplishing Wisdom***

When the five sensory consciousnesses are completely understood and purified, all-accomplishing wisdom is attained which is the realization of Buddha Amogasiddha. This wisdom is first attained at the first bodhisattva level and continues through all the bodhisattva levels until Buddhahood. This wisdom allows the buddha to realize the nature of his pupils and what has to be done to help them along the path. For a buddha this understanding and doing what needs to be done to help students along the path is accomplished completely effortlessly.

## **5. Wisdom of Dharmata**

The alaya consciousness has the capacity to experience the present moment and it has the capacity to store habitual patterns accumulated by the other consciousnesses. Here I will discuss the second aspect of the alaya consciousness, that which stores all habitual patterns. Whatever one does, it is in response to past actions that are stored in the ground consciousness as habitual patterns. When this ground consciousness is purified and we no longer react to habitual patterns, the wisdom of dharmata shines forth. This is the realization of Buddha Vairocana.

### **Summary**

While the mind is under the influence of the negative emotions, one continues with dualistic mind to wander in the six realms of samsara. When the negative emotions are eliminated, the five wisdoms shine forth. When the five wisdoms are realized, the five dhyana buddhas are realized. One can also look at this process as our mind consisting of eight consciousnesses. When these consciousnesses are purified, five wisdoms shine forth. When the five wisdoms are realized, the five dhyana buddhas are realized.

We may ask, “Why do we experience suffering in samsara?” What causes suffering is obviously the five negative emotions. Furthermore, we may wonder, “If the five negative emotions can be overcome, is it really possible to become liberated from the suffering in samsara?” Yes, it is possible to overcome the suffering of samsara. These five negative emotions aren’t simply thrown out or discarded, rather they are transformed from a state of affliction into a state of wisdom by engaging the skillful methods of the Buddhadharma. Transformation of the five negative emotions into the five wisdoms brings realization of enlightenment.

Likewise, if we remain perceiving phenomena or reality in a state of ignorance, we will never recognize these consciousnesses and will continue to be in the suffering samsara entails. When the consciousnesses are understood, we are able to transform them into the five wisdoms, the essential nature of the five dhyana buddhas.

## ***Questions***

**Question:** When we study the six realms of samsara, we learn that there is a negative emotion from each realm. In the five negative emotions that are transformed into the dhyana buddhas, the particular conflicting emotion of greed is not included. Is that part of attachment?

**Rinpoche:** In the context of the six realms, there is a sixth negative emotion of greed which leads you to take birth in the hungry ghost realm. Negative karma accumulated through attachment leads you to take birth in the human realm where you experience the suffering of birth, illness, old age and death. Realization of the dhyana buddhas pertains to five negative emotions. Greed is very much related to attachment, as you said. Due to attachment, an individual becomes very greedy and cannot be generous. Strong attachment leads one to take birth in the hungry ghost realm, whereas attachment without much greed leads you to take birth in the human realm. Therefore, attachment and greed are treated as one when discussing the dhyana buddhas.

**Question:** I have often heard the term “vajra pride” used very positively as an accomplishment of practice. Is this similar to the transformation of pride into equanimity?

**Rinpoche:** Vajra pride and afflicted pride are in essence quite different. The conflicting emotion of pride is arrogance, in which one thinks one is better, more learned, of a higher state and looks down on others. Feeling one is superior or more intelligent is the arrogance of pride. Because of arrogance, one closes oneself to the possibility of learning from others, so it prevents spiritual and material maturation. As a result one is bound to encounter more obstacles on the path because one knows very little, although one thinks one knows everything. So, it is necessary to overcome the pride which causes one to place oneself higher than others.

Without pride one can learn from others and come to realize wisdom and the dhyana buddha.

Vajra pride is different and arises from meditation practice. When you visualize yourself as your *yidam* deity, you see yourself as the deity and identify with it completely and this is

called “vajra pride.” If you think you really aren’t the deity and only imitating, then you lack vajra pride. If you visualize yourself as the deity without any doubts or uncertainty, you have vajra pride.

**Question:** I heard Rinpoche say that the six types of consciousnesses are not one but very different with each having its own function. I don’t know why they are different.

**Rinpoche:** They are called “the six types of consciousness” because each has a different function and cannot function as one. For example, the visual consciousness makes it possible to see, but it cannot hear, taste, smell or touch objects. Therefore, the visual consciousness can only perceive visual objects. The ear consciousness hears sounds, whereas it cannot see. Likewise, each consciousness perceives only a specific sensory input. After the eye, ear, nose, tongue and tactile consciousness perceives an object, the mental consciousness judges the sensory perception with thoughts. This is how each consciousness functions on its own.

The first five sensory consciousnesses are external, whereas the mental consciousness is internal. The mind consciousness is internal, therefore it has the capacity to think. For example, you are sitting in this room and still have the capacity to think about New York and Chicago with the sixth mental consciousness. You can internally imagine Chicago, which the eye consciousness doesn’t see with the mental consciousness. Your visual consciousness sees what is in front of you, therefore the external consciousnesses are rather restricted in comparison to the mental consciousness.

**Question:** I wonder what you mean by “we also experience what makes the peacock?”

**Rinpoche:** Returning to the example of the peacock’s feathers. Everything has a cause, i.e., without a cause there is no result. On a gross level, the peacock’s feathers have the characteristics of being blue, yellow, green in color and the feathers also shine brightly. Its colors have different shapes, some are round, others have geometric forms. Our ordinary mind doesn’t know the cause of the yellow, blue, and green colors. In our ordinary ignorant mind, we perceive the various shapes and colors but don’t know why some are round, others are geometrical and why the colors shine, and so on. The Buddha’s omniscience knows

all things as they are, therefore he not only sees the colors but knows the cause of the blue, green and yellow colors as well as the geometrical forms.

When the five doors or sensory consciousnesses are completely understood and thoroughly purified, you develop the all-accomplishing wisdom of the Buddha Amogasiddha. Now, the ability to know the cause of phenomena, like the peacock's feathers, develops through purification of the sixth mental consciousness. When the mind consciousness is purified, then you have developed the wisdom that realizes all things as they are. This is discerning wisdom. Then you learn the origin and cause of such things as the feathers of a peacock.

**Question:** I read that each individual belongs to a specific Buddha family. Is it useful to understand which family suits our mind?

**Rinpoche:** Generally speaking, we all belong to one Buddha family. The easiest way to find out which Buddha family one belongs to is by checking which negative emotion is most powerful within you. For example, if your anger is strongest, then you know you must employ greater remedies in order to overcome and transform that emotion into wisdom. Then you belong to that respective Buddha family which is the vajra family. Other individuals have other negative emotions which are strongest. Therefore it is up to you to examine your emotions and to learn to purify the strongest one within yourself and this leads you to realize the respective wisdom and dhyana Buddha. Even if you know which buddha family you belong to, it is not essential to employ specific practices for that specific Buddha family. Rather practice in general causes a reduction of all the negative emotions.

**Question:** I was wondering if Rinpoche would say something about the five *skandhas*, "aggregates of being," and the process of transforming the five negative emotions into the five wisdoms?

**Rinpoche:** The five skandhas are form, feeling, perception, mental events or conception and consciousness. They are called "the five gates of ego" in English. How are they related to the five dhyana buddhas? Purification of the first skandha of form is realization of Buddha Vairocana, purification of feeling is realization of Buddha Ratnasambhava, purification of perception



is Buddha Amitabha, purification of mental events is Amogasiddha and purification of consciousness is Buddha Akshobhya. We have related the five skandhas with the five dhyana Buddhas. You know which negative emotion is purified upon realization, therefore you can find which negative emotion is related to the skandhas.

**Question:** How do you practice meditation when you are suffering from all negative emotions? How is it best to practice? With visualization of the dhyana buddha?

**Rinpoche:** The teachings on the five Buddha families, five wisdoms and the purification of the five negative emotions are general instructions. The wisdoms and Buddhas are the ultimate state. The method to reach the ultimate state by transforming the five negative emotions is achieved by following the gradual practices, beginning with *ngondro*, or “the four preliminary practices.” Upon completion of the preliminaries, one continues practicing meditation, which enables you to transform the negative emotions into wisdom and to achieve realization of the five dhyana Buddhas.

**Question:** I am a beginner in practice and noticed that when certain people approach when I am in a restaurant, I would have a feeling of fear. Also I noticed many times that I can defend against fear by getting angry. I am wondering what the place of fear is in the negative emotions and why it wasn't included?

**Rinpoche:** What did you eat in the restaurant? Fear isn't an negative emotion. Fear needs a cause and is an effect. If you see a fire, the fire brings on fear, as well as many other things. However, the method to overcome fear is believing in the presence of enlightened beings. With that belief, you think you are constantly protected by them from any causes of fire, flood, earthquake, etc. With such belief, one can overcome fear. Anger is no protection from fear, rather it brings on even greater fear, pain and frustration. For example, a very mean and wicked person nears you and if you have fear and develop anger towards him, you naturally react differently towards him and show this in your facial expression. Anger itself is very powerful and leads you to use harsh words too. In addition to the fear you are experiencing, you may get a punch in the nose. Therefore, anger isn't a solution to prevent and protect from fear.

**Question:** What is the cause of ignorance?

**Rinpoche:** The lack of being familiar with wisdom, the lack of not being used to and having developed awareness. Due to the absence of wisdom and of awareness and due to having failed to learn how phenomena manifest and how they are, the mind has built up and developed the habitual pattern of ignorance since beginningless time and remains entangled in its darkness.

## *The Glossary*

- afflicted consciousness** (Tib. *nyön yi*) The seventh consciousness. See consciousnesses, eight.
- aggregates, five** (Skt. *skandha*, Tib. *phung po nga*) Literally “heaps,” These are the five basic transformations that perceptions undergo when an object is perceived. First is form which includes all sounds, smells, etc. everything that is not thought. The second and third are sensations (pleasant and unpleasant, etc.) and identification. Fourth is mental events which actually include the second and third aggregates. The fifth is ordinary consciousness such as the sensory and mental consciousnesses.
- Akshobhya** (Tib. *mi bskyod pa*) The sambhogakaya buddha of the vajra family.
- alaya consciousness** (Tib. *kün shi nam she*) According to the Cittamatra school this is the eighth consciousness and is often called the ground consciousness or store-house consciousness.
- Amitabha** One of the five buddha family deities known as “buddha of boundless light” Usually depicted as red.
- Amoghasiddhi** One of the five buddha families and means “all-accomplishing one.” Usually depicted as green.
- bodhicitta** (Tib. *chang chup chi sem*) Literally, the mind of enlightenment. There are two kinds of bodhicitta: absolute bodhicitta, which is completely awakened mind that sees the emptiness of phenomena, and relative bodhicitta which is the aspiration to practice the six paramitas and free all beings from the suffering of samsara.
- bodhisattva** (Tib. *chang chup sem pa*) Literally, one who exhibits the mind of enlightenment. Also an individual who has committed him or herself to the mahayana path of compassion and the practice of the six paramitas to achieve Buddhahood to free all beings from samsara.
- buddhadharma** There are two kinds of dharma. Regular dharma refers to truths such as the sky is blue and buddhadharma which is the truth of Buddhism.

**Buddha Shakyamuni** (Tib. *shakya tubpa*) The Shakyamuni Buddha, often called the Gautama Buddha, refers to the latest Buddha who lived between 563 and 483 BCE.

**consciousnesses, sensory** These are the five sensory consciousnesses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and body sensation.

**consciousnesses, eight** (Skt. *vijñāna*, Tib. *nam she tsog gye*) These are the five sensory consciousnesses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and body sensation. Sixth is mental consciousness, seventh is afflicted consciousness, and eighth is ground consciousness.

**dharma** (Tib. *chö*) This has two main meanings: Any truth such as the sky is blue and secondly, as used in this text, the teachings of the Buddha (also called buddhadharma).

**dharmata** (Tib. *chö nyi*) Dharmata is often translated as “suchness” or “the true nature of things” or “things as they are.” It is phenomena as it really is or as seen by a completely enlightened being without any distortion or obscuration so one can say it is “reality.”

**five aggregates**, see aggregates, five

**five buddhas** (Tib. *gyel wa rig nga*) These are the five aspects of the victorious one who are Vairocana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, and Amoghasiddhi.

**five buddha families** (Tib. *rig nga*) These are the buddha, vajra, ratna, padma and karma families.

**five sensory consciousnesses** These are the sensory consciousnesses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch or body sensation.

**geshe** (Tib.) A scholar who has attained a doctorate in Buddhist studies. This usually takes fifteen to twenty years to attain.

**ground consciousness** See consciousnesses, eight

**insight meditation** (Skt. *vipashyana*, Tib. *lhak thong*) Meditation that develops insight into the nature of mind. The other main meditation is shamatha meditation.

**klesha** (Tib. *nyön mong*) The emotional obscurations (in contrast to intellectual obscurations) which are also translated as “poisons.” The three main kleshas are (passion or desire or attachment), (aggression or anger); and (ignorance or delusion or aversion). The five kleshas are the three above plus pride and (envy or jealousy).

- klesha consciousness** (Tib. *nyön yid*) The seventh of the eight consciousnesses. See consciousnesses, eight.
- mudra** (Tib. *chak gya*) In this book it is a “hand seal” or gestures which are preformed in specific tantric ritual practices to symbolize certain aspects of the practice being done.
- ngondro** (Tib. and pronounced “nundro”) Tibetan for preliminary practice. One usually begins the vajrayana path by doing the four preliminary practices which involve about 100,000 refuge prayers and prostrations, 100,000 vajrasattva mantras, 100,000 mañjara offerings, and 100,000 guru yoga practices.
- ratna** (Tib. *kern cho*) Literally “a jewel” but in this context refers to the three jewels which are the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha.
- Ratnasambhava** (Tib. *rinchen jungnè*) The sambhogakaya buddha of the ratna family.
- samsara** (Tib. *kor wa*) Conditioned existence of ordinary life in which suffering occurs because one still possesses attachment, aggression, and ignorance. It is contrasted to nirvana.
- sangha** (Tib. *gen dun*) These are the companions on the path. They may be all the persons on the path or the noble sangha, which are the realized ones.
- skandha** (Tib. *phung po*) Literally “heaps.” These are the five basic transformations that perceptions undergo when an object is perceived: form, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness. First is form which includes all sounds, smells, etc. everything we usually think of as outside the mind. The second and third are sensations (pleasant and unpleasant, etc.) and identification. Fourth is mental events which actually include the second and third aggregates. The fifth is ordinary consciousness such as the sensory and mental consciousnesses.
- tantra** (Tib. *gyu*) There are two paths to be followed in Buddhism. The sutra path and the tantra path. The tantra path is primarily practiced in the vajrayana. It also means the texts of the vajrayana practices.
- Tara** (Tib. *drolma*) A female meditation deity often called the mother of all Buddhas. Also considered patron saint of

*The Five Buddha Families and the Eight Consciousnesses*

Tibet. Tara is common to all four lineages and green Tara is associated with protection and white Tara is associated with healing and long life.

**Vairocana** (Tib. *nam par nang dze*) The sambhogakaya buddha of the buddha family.

**vajra** (Tib. *dorje*) Usually translated “diamond like.” This may be an implement held in the hand during certain vajrayana ceremonies.

**wheel of dharma** (Skt. *dharmacakra*) The Buddha’s teachings correspond to three levels: the hīnayana, the mahayana and the vajrayana with each set being one turning of the wheel.

**yidam** (Skt. *ishtadevata*) A tantric deity that embodies qualities of Buddhahood and is practiced in the vajrayana.

## *Glossary of Tibetan Terms*

<u>Pronounced</u>	<u>Spelled in Tibetan</u>	<u>English</u>
chak gya	phyag rgya	mudra
bag chag	bag chags	latencies
chang chup chi sem	byang chub kyi sems	bodhicitta
chang chup sem pa	byang chub sems pa	bodhisattva
chö	chos	dharma
chö nyi	chos nyid	dharmata
donyodtrubpa	don yod grub pa	Amogāsiddha
dorje	rdo rje	vajra
drolma	sgrol ma	Tara
gen dun	dge 'dun	sangha
geshe	dge bshes	scholar
gyu	rgyud	tantra
kern cho	dkon mchog	3 jewels
khor wa	'khor ba	samsara
kün shi nam she	kun gzhi' rnam shes	alaya con.
lhak thong	lhag mthong	vipashyana
manshe tsog gye	rnam shes tsog gye	8 consc.
mikyodpa	mi bskyod pa	Akshobhya
nampar nangdze	rnam par snag mdzad	Vairocana
ngondro	snggon 'gro	preliminary
nyön yi	nyon yid	klesha mind
odpamed	'od dpag med	Amitabha
phung po	phung ponga	skandhas
rig nga	rigs nga	5 families
rinchenjungdan	rin chen 'byung gnas	Ratnasambhava
sangay	sangs rgyas	buddha
sangay namparnanzad	rnam par snang mdzad	Vairocana
shakya tubpa	'sakya thub pa	Shhakyamuni

## ***Notes***

1. There are three lower realms of samsara and these are the hell realm which is full of aggression, the hungry ghost realm which is full of desire, and the animal realm which is full of ignorance.
2. Buddhists believe that our ordinary reality, called conventional truth, in which phenomena appear to be solid and outside ourselves, is actually a false reality or an illusion. The way phenomena really is and that is being empty of inherent nature (Skt. *shunyata*) can only be perceived by an enlightened being. This reality is called ultimate or absolute truth.
3. For a modern example, a table appears solid and brown in color. That is how it appears. However, a physicist will tell us it is actually composed of billions of atoms which are moving at tremendous speeds and these atoms are flying off into space all the time and the table is actually made up of 99.99% space. It appears brown simply because the atoms are emitting a particular wavelength that the human eye sees as "brown." The latter is more like the ultimate truth.
4. The following treatment is very brief. For a much fuller description of the eight consciousnesses and how they develop into the five wisdom see Thrangu Rinpoche's book *Differentiating Consciousness and Wisdom* available from Namu Buddha Publications.
5. The hinayana sutras generally discuss mind in terms of six consciousnesses, namely, the five sensory consciousnesses and the sixth mental consciousness. The mahayana Chittamatra school (Mind-only) school talks about the eight consciousness in which the first six are the same but has the 7th and 8th consciousnesses added. In the hinayana tradition the functions of the 7th and 8th consciousness are subsumed in the 6th mental consciousness.
6. Buddhists believe in reincarnation so when a person dies, part of the sixth consciousness goes on to the next lifetime. Many lamas and some ordinary persons remember experiences from the previous lifetime so the coincidence of brain activity ceasing when a person dies does not mean the mental consciousness is simply brain activity.