

TIBETAN BUDDHIST PRACTICE SERIES

*Ancient Wisdom
For Our Times*

WORKBOOK 1

Why Bother? An Introduction

Lama Tsomo

Previous winner of Independent Publisher Book Award as
Why Is the Dalai Lama Always Smiling?



WELCOME!

How to Use This Workbook

The purpose of this workbook is to accompany you on your journey throughout this Ancient Wisdom series starting with the first book, *Why Bother?* It will serve as a guide as well as a tool for contemplation and engagement while you are reading these books either individually, with a meditation buddy, or with your Learning Circle members.

The Ancient Wisdom books are packed with all kinds of wonderful nuggets, most of which may be very new for our Western minds. It is for this reason that these books are laid out intentionally, section by section, allowing you to digest this new content bit by bit. This series is also practice-oriented, and all future books teach specific practices. *Why Bother?* provides the context and lays the foundation for the rest of the books in this series. Each chapter in this workbook will coincide with the sections of each book in the series. For example, the **Introduction** section in the beginning of this workbook parallels the **Introduction** section of *Why Bother?*

You will find the following features in this workbook to help you further engage with the content:

- Tibetan Buddhist Glossaries
- Tsomo's Tips
- Tibetan Perspectives
- Science Tidbits
- Learning Circle Corners
- Art Corner
- And more!

What is a Learning Circle?

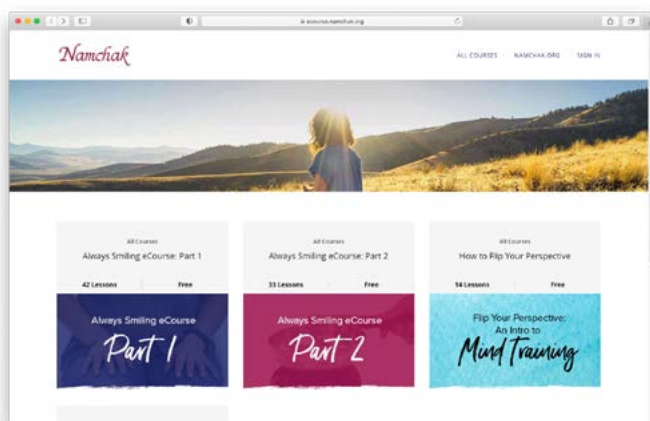
Learning Circles are small, intimate groups that meet regularly to practice meditation, share, and study together. When we explore meditation in community, it becomes a richer experience. We keep coming back to the group to feel the deep connection and meaning. At Namchak we seek to provide Learning Circles with support and tools to create truly fruitful learning environments, apply spiritual insight in a group-oriented, practical way, and ultimately make the world a better place. We encourage you to come together in groups with family and friends to practice meditation, talk together about the ideas and your experiences—your challenges and victories, small and large—and share how mindfulness might be impacting your daily lives.

Reading *Why Bother?* and the other books in this Ancient Wisdom Series are perfect activities for Learning Circles to do together! Whether you choose to read sections of *Why Bother?* individually before your Circle meets or during your Circle time, this workbook provides questions, activities, and engaging content to help you contemplate and interact with the material in the book more fully. Each section will include a “Learning Circle Corner” with specific activities for Learning Circles. However, *all* content and questions in this workbook are designed to be discussed and shared between Learning Circle members. It is also fine if you are reading this book and completing the workbook on your own; the questions can be adjusted for any audience.



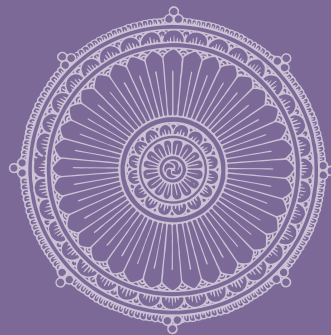
Other Supportive Resources

Because *Why Bother?* does not introduce meditation practices (you'll have to wait until the next book for those!), you may also want to enroll in our Always Smiling ecourse simultaneously, so you can learn different meditations while you are also contemplating why you would bother practicing! We also have our *Taking a Breath: Meditation and Reflection Journal* that also introduces meditation practices and provides a space for daily journaling about your mediation experience.



May This Workbook Be of Benefit

We hope that this workbook will help you to actively engage with the content in these books from a place of curiosity, enjoyment, and enthusiasm for learning this Ancient Wisdom that is being shared. May it be of great benefit to you and those around you.






INTRODUCTION

Why This Book

Lama Tsomo discusses in this first section why she “bothered” to write this book. Just as she shares her intention for writing this series, what is your intention for reading this series and embarking on this journey with these Tibetan Buddhist practices? What are you hoping to gain? The clearer you make your intent, the more chance you have of reaching it!

 Type your response below.

TIBETAN BUDDHIST GLOSSARY

As you are reading, you may be encountering new Tibetan terminology. Test your knowledge here, and flip to the next page to see the correct and more complete answers.

1. When you see the term, Rinpoche throughout this series, what does it mean?

Select one:

- a. An honorific term used for high lamas.
- b. A ritualistic food to be enjoyed during ceremonies.
- c. A cramping you experience in your foot when you've meditated too long.

2. Have you ever heard of a Tulku before reading this book? Any idea what it means?

Select one:

- a. A rare bird that can only be found in the Himalayan Mountains.
- b. A lama who has mastered their mind enough that they can control their landing in their next incarnation.
- c. A special mala that has been blessed by a high lama.

3. Do you know what a Root Lama is and why they are significant in Tibetan Buddhism?

Select one:

- a. A domesticated pack animal of the camel family that spits when threatened.
- b. A seed you plant in your garden that will grow into edible enlightenment.
- c. An individual spiritual guide and mentor who will lead you along the Vajrayana path.

4. Vajra- what, now?? What does Vajrayana mean?

Select one:

- a. An endearing name for the second cousin of a high lama.
- b. A branch of Mahayana Buddhism, which uses many skillful means from the tantras to pursue enlightenment more efficiently.
- c. A traditional Tibetan instrument used during full moon ceremonies.

Flip to the next page to see the correct answers.

CORRECT ANSWERS

Answer to Question #1:

a. An honorific term used for high lamas.

Higher than the Christian term Reverend, but lower than His Holiness. Most lamas are not referred to by this title, only the most accomplished.

Answer to Question #2:

b. A lama who has mastered their mind enough that they can control their landing in their next incarnation.

The Tulku system has been used in Tibet for heads of monasteries and sub-lineages, to allow them to shoulder their responsibilities for many lifetimes. This is why His Holiness the Dalai Lama XIV is referred to as the 14th; he has been recognized and has held the Office of the Dalai Lama 13 previous times.

Answer to Question #3:

c. An individual spiritual guide and mentor who will lead you along the Vajrayana path.

Root guru. Our individual spiritual guide and mentor. This is arguably the most intimate and karmically significant of human relationships. The relationship of the Root Lama to student is a deeply intimate one, for the lama introduces the student not only to the teachings and practices, but, over the years, to the very nature of their own mind, reality, and the relationship between the two. The student continually practices Guru Yoga, bringing out their own enlightened mind by projecting it on the Root Lama, then taking it back in and joining with it (and the Root Lama), countless times, until they realize their own true nature.

Answer to Question #4:

b. A branch of Mahayana Buddhism, which uses many skillful means from the tantras to pursue enlightenment more efficiently.

You may also hear Vajrayana referred to as “Tibetan Buddhism” or “Tantric Buddhism.”

TIBETAN PERSPECTIVE

When Tibetan masters begin a teaching by referring to “all motherly sentient beings,” this is a reference to their belief in reincarnation, and that at some point since beginningless time, we’ve all incarnated infinite times, in infinite relationships. Therefore, all beings have had a chance to have been our mothers. This is why it is paramount to practice equal appreciation and compassion for all beings, insects included! It should be noted that in Tibetan society, mothers were deeply loved and appreciated, without Freudian concepts of blaming taking away from that appreciation and love.

Using This Book

Lama Tsomo encourages us to take the information she is presenting in this book and apply it through practice instead of just leaving it in the “intellectual realm.” To feel the benefits of these practices we must...practice!

Tsomo’s Tips

“The Tibetan texts always remind us of the three essential facets of the path to enlightenment: listen, contemplate, meditate. Read a bit; reflect; then try the practice.” says Lama Tsomo

Using the journaling space in this workbook, you can contemplate and reflect on your practice.


This is an opportune moment to register for the Always Smiling ecourse, so you can learn these meditation techniques alongside reading *Why Bother?* and engaging with the activities in this workbook.



Lama Tsomo with Soongma

CONTEMPLATE


Lama Tsomo invites us not only to reflect on what she is bringing to each page of this book, but also to what we are bringing as well. What beliefs, attitudes and experiences are you bringing as you begin to read this book?

 Type your response below.

Don't worry, this is not a race to enlightenment! When learning these practices, be sure to build your foundational practices first before you move on to more advanced ones. You wouldn't study spherical trigonometry before you learn how to add or subtract, and it's the same concept with training your mind.



Are you someone who likes getting to the end result quickly? Someone who likes to savor the journey? Or do you start but have trouble continuing? What benefits do you see in taking the time to train your mind?

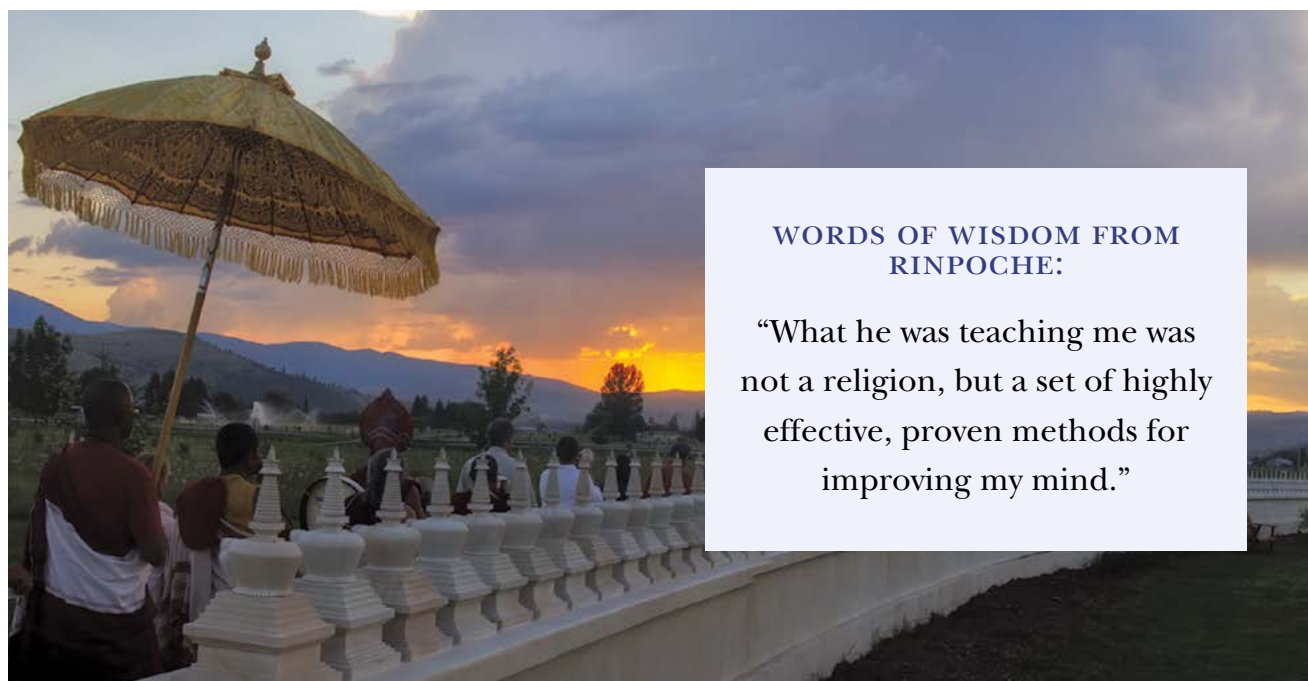
 Type your response below.

Should I automatically believe what is written on the pages of this book?

Select one:

- a. Of course! This book is written by an ordained Lama!
- b. I should believe what I like and not believe what I dislike.
- c. I do not have to take anything on blind faith. I'm encouraged to road test these methods to see if I like the results.

Scroll down to see the correct answer.



WORDS OF WISDOM FROM RINPOCHE:

“What he was teaching me was not a religion, but a set of highly effective, proven methods for improving my mind.”

Ceremony at the Garden of the 1,000 Buddhas

CORRECT ANSWER

c. I do not have to take anything on blind faith. I'm encouraged to road test these methods to see if I like the results.

“The Buddha made it very clear that blind faith is an inferior kind and that the conviction born of inquiry made with our eyes open, the conviction born of our own experience, is the very best, most unshakable faith.” (pg. 6) On the Vajrayana path, we are encouraged to study, contemplate, and meditate to gain true understanding and lived experience through these practices.

Are You as Happy as You Want to Be?

If so, stop now! This book is probably not for you.

If you would like to be happier, continue on...




Garden of the 1,000 Buddhas

SCIENCE TIDBIT

Many recent scientific studies on master Buddhist practitioners (at least 10,000 hours of practice, including retreat) have found all sorts of positive changes in their brains including improved ability to focus on a task, increased size in desirable parts of their brains, off-the-charts readings in gamma waves, evidence of ongoing improved mood, and improved longevity factors. As you continue on this meditation journey, you may want to notice if you experience any of these positive changes as well!

CONTEMPLATE

In what areas of your life would you like to be happier?


 Type your response below.



Lama Tsomo states, “If we really stop and think about it, everything we do all day long is devoted either to pursuing happiness or eliminating suffering.”



Can you think of any examples in your current life where you are trying to obtain something that will make you happy and trying to push away something that will bring you suffering?

 Type your response below.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you have been mostly happy, let's say 95%, but found yourself focusing on the 5% of what was making you unhappy?

What's up with that? Why can't we seem to stay happy when we have what we think we want? And why do our efforts to keep our suffering at bay always seem to fail?

Could it be that we are grasping after things that don't bring us ultimate happiness and that we are constantly working to push away things that we worry will make us suffer?

Learning Circle Corner

We encourage you to work with the following questions over the course of a few meetings, choosing just one or two questions per meeting.

Discuss the previous questions with your Learning Circle members, giving each member an equal opportunity to share ideas. Using some of the examples that Lama Tsomo gives starting on page eight as a guide, generate a list of situations that result in short-term happiness in our lives, potentially pulling from the experiences of those in your Learning Circle.

 Type your response below.

There is hope! The opportunity for ultimate and lasting happiness can be yours through applying these time-tested methods of ancient wisdom by following the Vajrayana path as Lama Tsomo shares on page nine.



Namchak Retreat Ranch

WHY I BOTHERED

The Early Years: Even Then, I Was on a Path

On pages 11-12, Lama Tsomo recalls a yearning from her childhood to live in the country surrounded by nature after they had moved to the city. Even as a child, it felt unnatural for her to live in the city. She also talks about her meaning-free experiences in Sunday school, regular school, TV, and nearly everything around her, despite the deep desire she had to find meaning in her life.

CONTEMPLATE

Can you recall and share any moments or chapters in your life when you have had to live a lifestyle that was contrary to the yearnings of your heart? If so, how have you coped and how has it impacted the choices you have made or would like to make now?

Can you remember any situations from your childhood/young adulthood (or even recently) where you felt that you were being asked (or forced) to learn things or engage in tasks that felt meaningless to you? From where in your life were you or are you able to derive a sense of true meaning?

Motivated to Search

On page 17, Lama Tsomo writes about feeling a sense of sadness, loneliness, and disconnection in her childhood. She states, “These circumstances— the suffering in and around me, these gaps, my sense of not being connected— motivated me to search, though at first I wasn’t really sure what I was searching for to ease my loneliness and longing.”

CONTEMPLATE

How can you relate to this statement? When have you been motivated to search for ‘something greater’ and more meaningful in order to ease your own suffering?

Namchak Retreat Ranch



Living in Alignment with Nature

In these times more than ever, we can see how the infrastructures that have been built in our world that are contrary to the laws and respect of nature (including care and respect for our fellow humans), are starting to crumble. On page 18, Lama Tsomo writes about, “building a new, sustainable infrastructure— not a house of cards— in all facets of life; agriculture, energy, housing, politics, economics, and spirituality. This infrastructure will be built on the foundation of the natural world rather than human imaginings.”

CONTEMPLATE

Given the circumstances of our world today, how do you see this ‘vision’ playing out in your community and the planet? What systematic changes do you think need to be made to support this new infrastructure? What changes in our views do you think need to happen?

TIBETAN PERSPECTIVE

On page 16, Lama Tsomo refers to “Guru Rinpoche.” He is considered the master who established Buddhism in Tibet. He is also known as Padmasambhava (Lotus Born), Founder of the Nyingma school, and is understood to be the “second Buddha.” Although there are many Gurus and Rinpoches, when we see this reference in the Vajrayana tradition, we will now know who we are referring to.



CONTEMPLATE

On pages 17-18, Lama Tsomo recalls a time when she was searching for God and wanting to be given a sign that would give her faith in this existence. She talks about opening a Baha'i prayer book and experiencing an epiphany. She describes this in the middle of page 17.

Have you ever felt like you were on a similar quest for God or the Divine, and wanting to receive a sign from the universe— to experience it directly? If so, what was your experience? Did you receive a sign or have a similar epiphany?

What in your life has inspired you to pursue a spiritual path?

Learning Circle Corner

We encourage you to work with the following questions over the course of a few meetings, choosing just one or two questions per meeting.

Discuss the previous questions with your Learning Circle members, giving each member an equal opportunity to share ideas. This would also be a good opportunity to start reflecting upon the value systems of each individual in the circle. Give your circle members time to journal about their personal values and then discuss as a group.



No Longer a Child, Not Yet a Buddhist

Lama Tsomo discusses her experience of having initially started a meditation practice, and later, after not having been able to perceive her progress, stopping her practice for the next five years. She also talks about some of life's trials and tribulations that came about during that time when she was not meditating, and she reflects, "I finally understood that without those daily moments of respite and clarity, I had made thousands of daily decisions over the past years that had directed, or misdirected, the course of my life."

CONTEMPLATE

Can you relate to her experience? Have you ever wandered from a path and then come back to it? What informs your decision-making process? How can you tell when your decisions are clear and aligned with your most authentic self?

When you are able to make space for your "still, small voice," what impact does that have on your life? You can answer on a global level, give a specific example, or both!

I Meet the Buddha on the Path

On page 22, Lama Tsomo speaks of “tasting from the spiritual smorgasbord” as part of the journey that led her to Vajrayana.

CONTEMPLATE

Have you found this to be your experience with spirituality? If so, in what ways? If not, how have you been led to your current spiritual path?

TIBETAN BUDDHIST GLOSSARY

What is Theravada?

Theravada is the foundational level branch of Buddhism, common to all branches. Of the three main branches of teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni, it was the first to be taught. It is based on the sutras, and does not include the tantras; the motivation for enlightenment is focused on one’s own liberation from Samsara.

What is Vipassana?

Vipassana is commonly called “Insight Meditation” and is usually practiced along with Shamata. It is the practice of seeing the true nature of either the object of our attention or of ourselves.

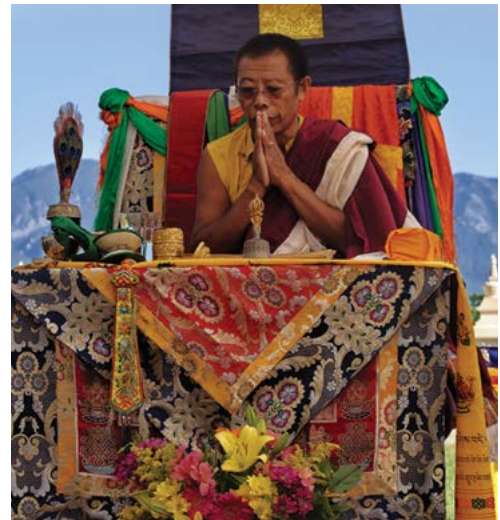
CONTEMPLATE

The sequence of events that led Lama Tsomo to meet her root lama, Tulku Sangak Rinpoche, was not necessarily happening in a way that she had planned or was even aware of at the time, even though it was something that she had been asking for.

Have you ever experienced moments of “synchronicity” where events and coincidences seemed to be lining up perfectly in your life and bringing you closer to what you were trying to manifest? If so, how did that look for you?

My Root Lama: Tulku Sangak Rinpoche

Being told by a Western lama and trusted friend that it was rude to ask many questions of a high lama, Lama Tsomo found this “advice” to be contrary to her own experience with Rinpoche as well as her own inquisitive nature. Therefore, instead of taking her friend’s word, she asked, and was pleasantly surprised to find out that it is actually encouraged to ask questions.



Tulku Sangak Rinpoche, presiding over the monthlong blessing of the Garden of One Thousand Buddhas.

CONTEMPLATE

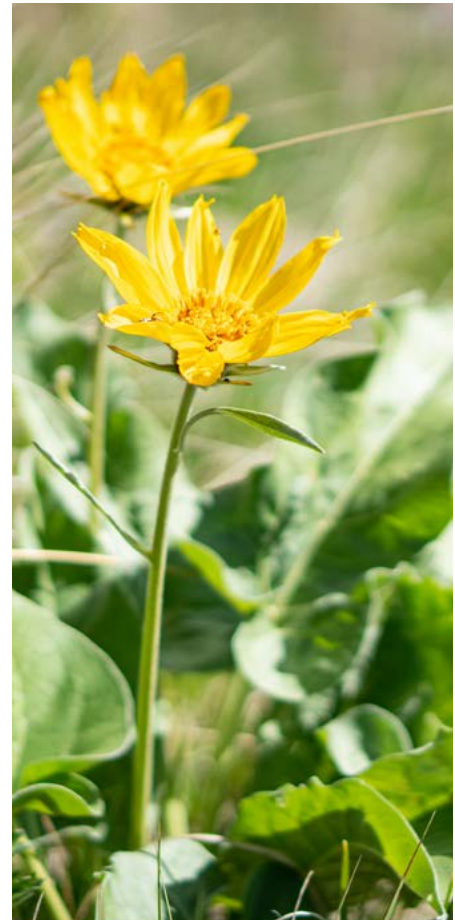
Have you ever had an experience where someone told you not to do something that felt incongruent with your own experience? How did you handle it?

TIBETAN BUDDHIST GLOSSARY

What is the Ngöndro?

The Preliminary Practices: these are a group of practices that constitute a microcosm of the entire Vajrayana path. They are practiced after Shiney/ Shamata and before more advanced practices. Actually, since the Ngöndro encapsulates the whole path, it is incorporated into the beginning of advanced practices too, hence the name.

On page 31, Lama Tsomo describes the ceremony that she attended before the first session of teachings, and how at that point, she didn't understand what these rituals had to do with the "effective mind-training methods" that had drawn her to Vajrayana. It wasn't until years later that she fully understood and experienced the richness and power of what was actually taking place during this ceremony.



CONTEMPLATE

What is your response to the ceremonial and ritualistic aspects of Tibetan Buddhism? Do they intrigue you? Do they bring up any resistance in you?

Lama Tsomo reflects on how Rinpoche sent her off to ponder a question in silence as part of the teachings she was receiving. This exercise then led to a debate between Lama Tsomo and Rinpoche, much to her delight and childhood nostalgia.



What value do you see in pondering questions in silence? What results have you gained from engaging in a similar exercise? Additionally, what is your opinion about debating? Is it something you enjoy? Shy away from? How may both of these methods be useful on your life path?

The Sanskrit word Ewam, which is what Rinpoche named his first Western nonprofit, means “the union of the realized masculine and feminine principles. What is your understanding of this concept, and what relevance do you believe it carries in the world today?”

On page 43, Lama Tsomo states that after she had received those first teachings from Rinpoche, she “was able to give up smoking... through lack of interest,” since she felt such deep satisfaction with these practices. She states that “there was much I’d turned to— taken refuge in— that I was gradually able to loosen my grip on as I went along, including angry words and behavior.”



Tulku Sangak Rinpoche, presiding over the consecration ceremony of the Stupa Garden at the Namchak Retreat Ranch

**What in samsara are you taking “refuge in” that you would like to “loosen your grip on?”
If you were able to do this, what would you take refuge in instead, and how do you think
this change would impact your life?**



Tulku Sangak Rinpoche’s brother, Namchak Khen Ngawang Gelek Rinpoche, with Lama Tsomo at the Garden of One Thousand Buddhas. Khen Rinpoche teaches at both Ewam and Namchak.



The young Tulku Sangak Rinpoche's footprint in the rock

WHY TULKU SANGAK RINPOCHE BOTHERED

TIBETAN BUDDHIST GLOSSARY

As you are reading this section, you may encounter names of important Gurus and new Tibetan terminology. Test your knowledge here, and flip to the next page to see the correct and more complete answers.

1. What is the Nyingma Lineage?

Select one:

- a. Slang in Tibetan for “One who is born onto the hamster wheel.”
- b. A lineage of secret kings.
- c. The oldest of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

2. Let’s review, who is Guru Rinpoche again?

Select one:

- a. The legendary Vajrayana master who is believed to be the second reincarnation of the Buddha and who established Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet.
- b. A Guru who will haunt you if you do not practice meditation daily.
- c. A nickname you give to an uncle who gives you great gifts on your birthday.

3. What is the Namchak Lineage?

Select one:

- a. A group of Buddhist ninjas who fight using stars, bows, and of course, nunchucks.
- b. A smaller lineage under the larger umbrella of the Nyingma Lineage.
- c. The lineage to which the Dalai Lama belongs.

Flip to the next page to see the correct answers.

CORRECT ANSWERS

Answer to Question #1:

c. The oldest of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

“Nyingma” literally means “ancient” and the Nyingmas are the original Buddhists of Tibet. Their founder was Guru Rinpoche. Later major schools are Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelugpa (the Dalai Lama is the head of this school).

Answer to Question #2:

a. The legendary Vajrayana master who is believed to be the second reincarnation of the Buddha and who established Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet.

He is also referred to as Padmasambhava, Sanskrit for Lotus Born, because his life story began with him being found, as an eight-year-old boy, on a lotus.

Answer to Question #3:

b. A smaller lineage under the larger umbrella of the Nyingma Lineage.

And yes, this is the lineage that you are learning about in this book! Tulku Sangak Rinpoche is the world Lineage Holder of the Namchak Lineage.



Tulku Sangak Rinpoche

Background

On pages 45-49 Lama Tsomo relays the story of Tulku Sangak Rinpoche's recognition, at just 3 years old, of being the Sixth Tulku (manifestation/incarnation) of the Gochen Monasteries. In addition to the footprint he left in the hard rock, he also recognized his horse bridle decoration being carried by another Rinpoche who had been his friend in his past life.

What are your thoughts on these incidents, recognitions, and reincarnated tulkus in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition?

CONTEMPLATE

Reflecting on the Chinese Cultural Revolution when monasteries were being destroyed and the Chinese government was trying to “stamp out all spirituality and religion,” what do you think you would have done if you were living during this time and trying to practice your religion? Have you experienced anything similar in your life circumstances? Has something similar occurred in the history of your ancestors?

In Prison, but Not Imprisoned

We learn on page 49 that Tulku Sangak Rinpoche was thrown into prison at age 14 for being a Tibetan spiritual leader. He remained in prison for 10 years, and during this time, underwent a major transformation. Although the conditions of prison were harsh and challenging, the most intolerable part of imprisonment for him was “the searing anger in his heart.” One of the older Rinpoches takes him under his wing and reminds him that in previous lives they have planted the seeds of karma (the law of cause and effect, action and result) that are now manifesting in this lifetime. Instead of being angry at this, they now have the opportunity to burn off this negative past karma. At the same time, he explains how the guards are planting new seeds of a heavy karmic debt, which they will reap in the form of suffering. Therefore, they truly deserve his compassion.

CONTEMPLATE

What does the word “karma” mean? What are your thoughts on these ideas of karma? If you viewed the happenings in your life from this same perspective that Tulku Orgyen Chemchok shares, how might it change (or not change) your attitude towards your life circumstances?

What comes to mind for you, in reading the story about how the prisoners were collecting food for the pigs and Rinpoche's vow to change this system?

After receiving these teachings on karma, Tulku Sangak Rinpoche changed his attitude and his actions and transformed his prison experience. As Lama Tsomo states, "Not coincidentally, he had gone from an inner hell-realm experience to that of a pure realm (the Tibetan equivalent of heaven), even though his outer circumstances hadn't changed."

What are your reflections on this transformation that he underwent? If you were able to 'turn your heart' in a similar way, how might it impact or change your perspective of reality?

Coming to America

CONTEMPLATE

Tulku Sangak recalled knowing at the age of eight that he would live in America, and even had a specific vision of where he would live and build his statue garden. Have you ever had a vision, any other intuition, or even a desire earlier on in your life that led you to where you are now?

Lama Tsomo talks about sacred relics in Tibetan Buddhism that can help “infect us” with Buddha mind. This “pure realized mind” can be radiated “through sacred architecture, mantra” etc. Have you ever had an experience with a “sacred relic” from any religious or spiritual background that has helped you, even just in a short moment, to feel more peaceful, connected, happy, or awake?

TIBETAN BUDDHIST GLOSSARY

What is a stupa?

A stupa is sacred architecture that radiates pure realized mind. Stupas are structures that represent the body of the Buddha, and just by being in the presence of a stupa, one's karma can be cleansed and compassion amplified. They often are filled with various relics and religious objects, and usually practitioners circumambulate clockwise around the stupa as a meditation practice.

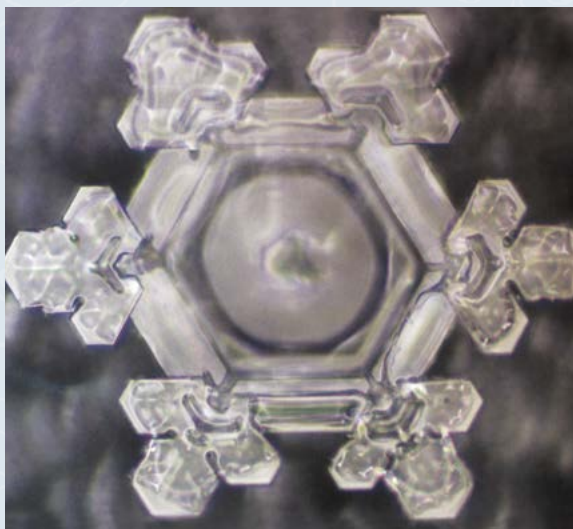


SCIENCE TIDBIT

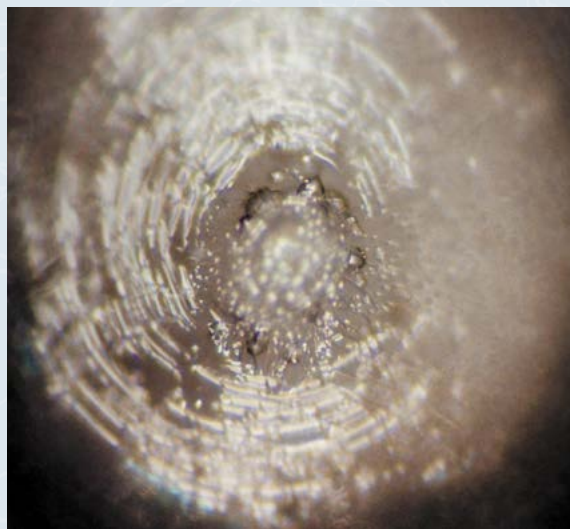
Lama Tsomo references the work of Dr. Emoto. She also talks about morpnic resonance and shares other experiments about how our thoughts can have a strong impact on our environment, specifically in reference to water. She then ends the chapter explaining how these ideas are harmonious with Buddhism.

CONTEMPLATE

What are your thoughts about these experiments she references, from the shapes of water crystals to Lake Biwa in Japan? Do you have any stories or ideas to add from your own experiences?



“Thank You”



“You Fool”

Learning Circle Corner

We encourage you to work with the following questions over the course of a few meetings, choosing just one or two questions per meeting.

Discuss the previous questions with your Learning Circle members, giving each member an equal opportunity to share ideas. Reflecting on the Science Tidbit above and Tulku Sangak's experience in prison, give members of your circle a chance to reflect on the power of the mind and how our thoughts and perspectives can impact both our internal and external environments. Invite Circle members to journal and discuss the following questions. Be sure to allow adequate time to reflect upon and discuss each one in progression:

- How do I tend to view difficult experiences in my life?
- How does the way that I view outer experiences impact my inner experiences?
- What is one situation in my life right now that is causing me suffering?
- How might I change my perspective to see the reality of the situation differently?





WHY THE BUDDHA BOTHERED

From Prince to Buddha

On these pages, we read the story of the original Buddha, Siddhartha, or the Buddha Shakyamuni as he is called by Tibetans. Is there anything about the story of his awakening that intrigues you? Confuses you? Inspires you?”

Some of What the Buddha Saw

CONTEMPLATE

When reflecting on the Four Noble Truths, how can you describe these in your own words and connect these Truths to your life right now?

The Truth of Suffering:

The Truth of the Origin of Suffering:

The Truth of the End of Suffering:

The Truth of the Path:



Share an example of a time when you became caught up in making mental movies and imagining a scenario(s) play out in your mind. How might that mental movie have shaped your real-life experiences? How does it affect your being in the moment, as you're involved in those movies?



In what areas of your life are you prone to getting caught up in mental projections? Reflect and/or share how you think awareness (cultivated through the practice of meditation) can help you distinguish mental movies from actual problem solving.

The Two Truths

CONTEMPLATE

What is your understanding of the Two Truths, and how can you compare these truths to your concept of reality?

What are some problematic aspects of living from the mindset of just Absolute Truth OR just Relative Truth? How can we hold a “super position” that includes both Truths? How can we integrate an understanding of both Truths in our day-to-day lives?

Tibetan Use of Imagery ~ Bringing It All onto the Path

On page 77, Lama Tsomo states, “Rather than blocking out the world and our experience of it, the Tibetan form of Buddhism, Vajrayana, brings everything on the path of awakening.”

CONTEMPLATE

What would bringing everything on the path of awakening look like in your life? Would it make things more difficult? Easier? More fulfilling? Pick an example from your life to explore.

Learning Circle Corner

We encourage you to work with the following questions over the course of a few meetings, choosing just one or two questions per meeting.

Discuss the previous questions with your Learning Circle members, giving each member an equal opportunity to share ideas. Reflecting on the concepts of absolute and relative truth, you can all use this exercise as an opportunity to get to know each other better, while also gaining a clearer idea of who you truly are. Invite Circle members to journal and discuss the following:

- In the Relative Truth, make a list of which roles you use to define yourself, including your family, work, hobbies, talents, etc.
- How do these roles help shape your identity?
- How can these roles help you progress on your life path? Inhibit your growth?
- Within Absolute Truth, make a list of how you would identify yourself?
- How do these attributes help shape your reality?
- How do these attributes help you progress on your life path? Inhibit your growth?
- How can you embrace both Truths as part of your identity?





WHAT'S SAMSARA, AND HOW DID WE GET HERE, ANYWAY?

The Slippery Slope

CONTEMPLATE

When thinking of true reality as the entire ocean, what problems can arise when we only identify as one wave?

In your life, what do you tend to grasp at? Think of a specific grasping that you're doing in your life right now. How is the grasping working for you? How do you feel as it's all happening? If you are to examine why you do this, what do you discover?

What do you tend to push away or become angry with? Think of something specific in your life right now that you are either angry with or pushing away. How is this working for you? How do you feel as it's all happening? If you examine why you do this, what do you discover?



Where do you normally find yourself caught in delusion, dullness, or laziness? Think of something specific in your life right now where you feel a sense of delusion, dullness, or laziness. How is this working for you? How do you feel as it's all happening? If you examine why you do this, what do you discover?

As you worked with the previous questions, did you notice that more than one category of these “afflictive emotions” played a part in the drama? As you stand back and look in general, how do you see grasping, delusion, and aversion all weaving together in your life to create more suffering? Do you notice you have a favorite of the three?

What is the lesson of the mandala, and how can you relate this to your life?



On pages 84-85 Lama Tsomo shares a moving poem about the death of her father entitled “Even This Dream.” What are your reflections on her poem? Can you connect at all with her experience?

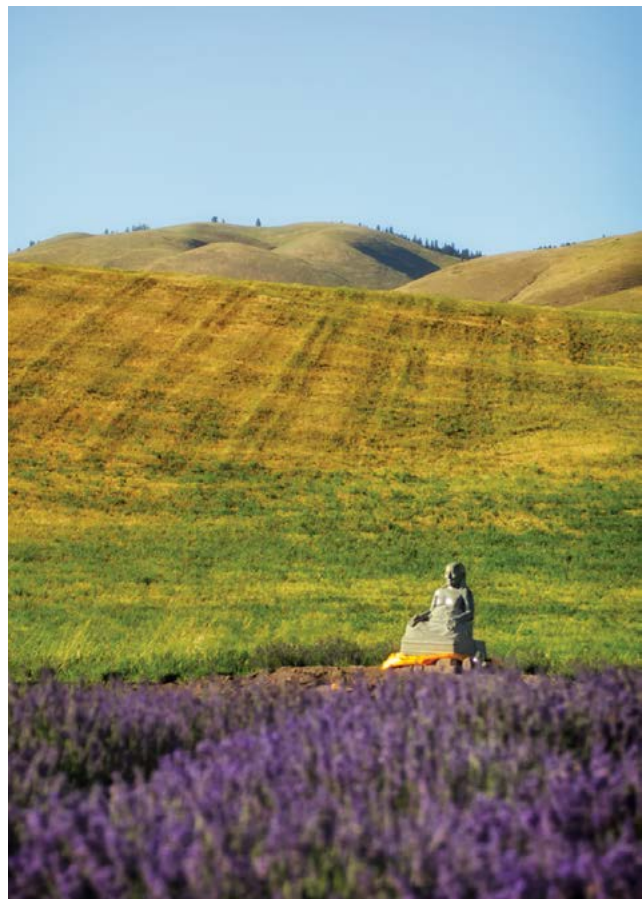
TIBETAN BUDDHIST GLOSSARY

What is karma?

(Sanskrit; “action”): In this context it refers not only to actions but to their natural consequential effects. Think, “Ye shall reap what ye sow.”

What is reincarnation?

The belief that consciousness continues after death and is born again in a new body. One continues in this cycle of rebirth and death (Samsara) until reaching enlightenment.



A Bit More About Karma

CONTEMPLATE

What is your understanding of karma, and its connection with the Three Poisons that keeps us stuck on the Wheel of Samsara?

On pages 86-87, Lama Tsomo writes, “We think we’re doing an action to somebody else, but that thought, word, or deed actually makes a trace on our own mindstream that we’ll carry with us.” Please pause a moment and reflect on a time when you committed a negative action. Can you feel whether or not that act stuck with you somehow? Can you think of a time when you acted in a negative way towards someone else, and it resulted in creating more suffering for you?

How We Stay Stuck

CONTEMPLATE

Lama Tsomo discusses reincarnation and this idea of a mindstream that continues on after death. Through contemplating the different analogies from the waves of the ocean to the folding and creasing of a piece of paper, what is your understanding of reincarnation and karma and what questions do you still have?

Lama Tsomo relays the stories she heard from Rinpoche about Tibetans who, despite all the horror and hardships they had endured during the occupation of Tibet, were not showing signs of PTSD.

How do the Tibetans' beliefs in reincarnation and karma explain this phenomenon? If you were to experience something similar, how do you think you would cope?

“We don’t get an apple when we plant a thistle.”

What is your understanding of this Tibetan metaphor, and how can you relate it to your life?

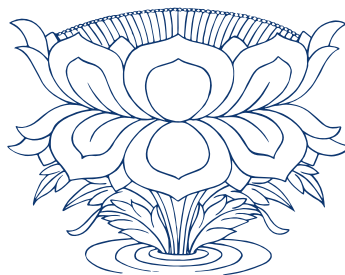
According to Lama Tsomo, why is it so hard to let go of our egos when we know how much suffering they can cause us? What do you think about that concept?

Learning Circle Corner

We encourage you to work with the following questions over the course of a few meetings, choosing just one or two questions per meeting.

Discuss the previous questions with your Learning Circle members, giving each member an equal opportunity to share ideas. Reflecting more deeply on Lama Tsomo's response to her student about the ego, invite Circle members to journal and discuss the following questions:

- In what ways do you feel like your ego controls your life?
- Why do you think your ego does this?
- If you stopped listening to your ego, what would you listen to instead?
- From a broader perspective, what happens when everyone is relating to one another from their egos?
- What would be the opposite of relating to one another from our egos, and how could this impact the world?
- What might be the right relationship of ego to greater Self?





THE GOOD NEWS

The good news that Lama Tsomo shares in the beginning of this section is that, according to Buddhism, we are all innately pure. We just need to “clean our windshields” of confused seeing, before we can realize that our natural state is purity.

“If our true essence weren’t that pure, aware emptiness, we could never reach enlightenment. If there’s no gold ore in a stone, there’s nothing we can do to get gold from it. Our true essence is like the gold ore in that stone. We have Buddha Nature, but to the untrained eye we look and act like an ordinary stone,” Lama Tsomo shares.

CONTEMPLATE

After reflecting on Lama Tsomo’s quotation above, do you believe that our original state is pure? What does “cleaning the windshield” mean to you, and how might you go about doing this?

“Many waves, one ocean.” When you identify solely with the ego or just with your own wave, how do you feel? When you are able to identify with the whole ocean, how do you feel? Can you think of examples from your life when you were caught up in your ego—seeing yourself as a separate wave? Have you had times when you could feel yourself and the whole ocean all together?



As Lama Tsomo invites us to explore, “You’re taking the time and effort to read this book because some essential core in you knows the truth and is seeking it. When something ‘rings true,’ what part of ourselves, do you suppose, recognizes it”?



Khen Rinpoche at the Namchak Retreat Ranch

The Three Kayas

“Once the Buddha was able to see with absolutely no veils, he saw that reality is one vast ocean of awareness. It actually has no solid substance, yet isn’t just a blank vacuum.

It’s aware.

Its natural quality is endless compassion, for there is truly no separation: what is felt by one part of reality is felt by the whole, vast awareness.”

CONTEMPLATE

Take a moment to pause and contemplate this reality that the Buddha was able to see. How does this land in your body? In your mind?

“Though it’s one reality, we can speak of two aspects (emptiness/awareness and appearance), just as we can speak of both the ocean and its waves. The ocean and the waves are one thing, like two sides of one coin, but we need to have ways to talk about both aspects, so we give them names.”

When reflecting on reality, what is your understanding and/or confusion about these two aspects of reality that Lama Tsomo speaks of?

SCIENCE TIDBIT

Lama Tsomo references modern physics and shares some of the work of David Bohm. Through his experiments, she recounts Bohm's understanding that despite the appearance of chaos or disorder, there is actually a hidden order in the universe. He also realized through holographic photography how the whole image can still be seen through just one part, meaning "every bit of the film contained the whole." Bohm also had the realization that we are living in an illusion of sorts, like a holographic image, where there is a deeper level or reality beneath the perceived surface, which he calls "implicate" order, and the level or reality we perceive called "explicate" order.



David Bohm. (Keystone/Hulton Archives/Getty Images)

CONTEMPLATE

What are your thoughts and understandings of Bohm's experiments being recounted? How do you see them as connecting to the Buddhist ideas that Lama Tsomo presented earlier in this section?

TIBETAN GLOSSARY

From the following list, select the three basic facets of reality that are shared in this section:

Select three:

1. **Dharmakaya:** the emptiness/awareness facet of reality, or Truth Body, the ultimate true basis behind the appearances we see
2. **KayawishIwasinhawaii:** the facet of reality where you kinda wish you could escape your life and live on a tropical island
3. **Sambhogakaya:** the appearance facet of reality that is the Body of Complete Abundance
4. **Makayaproblemsgoaway:** the facet of reality otherwise known as denial
5. **Nirmanakaya:** the other appearance facet of reality that is the Emanation Body; this one being manifestation

Flip to the next page to see the correct answers.



CORRECT ANSWERS

Option 1: Dharmakaya – The vast, pregnant emptiness out of which everything arises. It is not a dead vacuum, but pure, essential awareness. It is beyond defining but has many qualities. It is vast without limit, ultimate compassion, ultimate unity, pure potential, all-knowing, the ultimate root of all. At this level there is no form; there is unity. It is no different from complete Buddhahood.

Option 3: Sambhogakaya – The first level/aspect of spontaneous shining forth into form, from the Dharmakaya. Similar to the archetypal level of being that Jungians speak of. Rarely directly perceptible to human beings.

Option 5: Nirmanakaya – The manifestation level/aspect of shining forth from the Dharmakaya/Buddhahood. Another, further order of complexity of form, as compared with the Sambhogakaya. Perceptible to sentient beings in a warped and confused way, depending on their own karmically and habitually distorted “lens.”

CONTEMPLATE

How would you describe the Three Kayas from your own understanding? What questions do you still have about these three facets of reality? You are welcome to write down any questions and circle back to them later.

The Five Timeless Awarenesses (Yeshes)

TIBETAN GLOSSARY

Another aspect of the vast Dharmakaya is a quality of wisdom/awareness that the Tibetans call Yeshe, or Primordial Wisdom. Yeshe has sometimes been translated as Wisdom, or Timeless Awareness.

CONTEMPLATE

From your understanding of Lama Tsomo’s description, how do the Yeshes divide and weave together all the way from Dharmakaya to Nirmanakaya?

“The moment we move our focus from the unity of the Dharmakaya to the Five Yeshes, we’re no longer in the formless, unified Dharmakaya territory; we’re speaking of the Sambhogakaya” (the area of archetype). Just for fun, can you list the five Yeshes below, and without reading further, try and take a guess what each one means? You can compare answers with your Learning Circle as well!

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Lama Tsomo explores the presence of archetypes in our lives and how Tibetan Buddhism embraces this idea to help us on the road to enlightenment. What has been your experience with/exposure to archetypes? How can exploring and connecting with archetypes help us live more skillfully?

The Five Dhyani Buddhas

“Once Yeshe has divided into its five aspects, those five basic principles of reality, those Five Yeshe, have distinct qualities of awareness. To give us a way of relating to them on this level, we speak of the Five Dhyani Buddhas. We picture Yeshe which of course is enlightened mind, as a buddha sitting there, with particular clothes, mantra sounds, and other characteristics that evoke the actual archetype.”

The Five Buddha Families*							
<i>Family</i>	<i>Head of Family</i> (Male, Female)	<i>Yeshe Quality</i>	<i>Afflictive Emotion</i>	<i>Color</i>	<i>Direction</i>	<i>Element</i>	<i>Symbol</i>
Buddha	Nampar Nang-Dzey, Namka Ying-Chukma	Yeshe of Basic Space	Delusion, Laziness, Stupidity	Blue	Center	Space	Wheel
Lotus	Nangwa Tayey, Gō Karmo	Discerning Yeshe	Desire, Longing, Clinging	Red	West	Fire	Lotus
Vajra	Mi-Kyödpa, Sangye Chenma	Mirrorlike Yeshe	Anger, Aversion	White	East	Water	Vajra
Jewel	Rinchen Jungden, Mamaki	Equalizing Yeshe	Pride, Inflation	Yellow	South	Earth	Jewel
Karma	Dönyöd Drupa, Damtsik Drölma	All-Accomplishing Yeshe	Competitiveness, Jealousy	Green	North	Air	Crossed Vajras

*See Sanskrit equivalents in glossary.

Art Corner

If you have some colored pencils or markers, feel free to grab them now and enjoy some creative expression with this exercise! Below there is a 'blank canvas' to draw or map out the Five Dhyani Buddhas in your own creative way. Feel free to print this page out or use the "drawing" tools in your PDF reader program. Using the chart on pages 106-107 of the book, draw on your artistic (or non-artistic) skills to represent each of the Buddha families with their colors, directions, elements, symbols, and whatever else you would like to include from the chart!



CONTEMPLATE

After reading through this section and sitting with the chart of the Five Yeses or Buddha “families,” can you determine which family is your primary one? Secondary? The one with which you least relate?

How do you see your “favorite” Buddha family tendencies manifesting in your life, particularly with your feelings and emotions?

What are your thoughts about our Buddha “family alignment” manifesting as physical tendencies in our bodies?

The Three Yanas

TIBETAN GLOSSARY

What are the Three Yanas?

Select one:

- a. Something that you do when you are tired
- b. A humorous group of singing Monks, kind of like the Three Stooges
- c. The three major paths or vehicles in Buddhism, which are Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana

Scroll down to see the correct answer.



Lama Tsomo translating for Rinpoche at the ground consecration for the Namchak Retreat Ranch

CORRECT ANSWER

c. The three major paths or vehicles in Buddhism, which are Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. This book is specifically exploring the branch of Vajrayana or Tibetan Buddhism.

CONTEMPLATE

Why did the Buddha lay out three different paths, or vehicles, to pursue enlightenment?

Lama Tsomo discusses how the different Yanas deal with the Three Poisons in different ways. In Vajrayana, Tibetan Buddhism, we don't avoid the poison or take an antidote; we ingest the poison and "apply enough awareness that it's distilled to its purely positive quintessence." When you move through this process of "distilling the poison," what might this experience look like for you? What obstacles do you think may arise? What do you think is the purpose of moving through the poisons in this way?

CONTEMPLATE

Because these practices on the path of Vajrayana are strong medicine, Lama Tsomo speaks to the utmost importance of finding a teacher to guide you along the way. This is an important distinction between this path and the other two Yanas.

“If you’re pursuing Vajrayana on your own, it’s just too easy to fool yourself. Just as with any very powerful tool or strong medicine, if you use it incorrectly you can do more harm than good.”

Taking a moment to reflect on the statements above, what is your relationship, in general, with teachers? What are your thoughts and reflections on the reasons Lama Tsomo gives for needing the guidance of a teacher on this Vajrayana path?

Do you have an aversion towards or strong relationship with any teacher(s) in your life? As you really look at that aversion (if you have one), how might you work with it? Where could it be coming from: personal experience? cautionary tales?

Learning Circle Corner

We encourage you to work with the following questions over the course of a few meetings, choosing just one or two questions per meeting.

Discuss the previous questions with your Learning Circle members, giving each member an equal opportunity to share ideas. Now that you have come to the end of this first book, take a moment to reflect with your Learning Circle members on the following questions.

- What have been your biggest take-aways from this book as a whole?
- What were your greatest “aha!” moments where you could feel your mind expanding?
- Where did you find that you had resistance or distrust about anything that was presented?
- What were some pivotal moments or conversations with your Learning Circle while reading this book that stood out or shifted your perspective?
- What are some questions that you still have moving forward?

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