

## THE TEACHER

- 30.** My main teacher is the late Chimed Rigdzin Lama, also known as CR Lama. He was a married lama who lived with his family and, when I knew him well in India, he taught in a university. He was a great scholar, a very powerful person, and he was not at all holy. He was very ordinary in his way of life. His qualities showed themselves without his making special claims about himself. In the lineages of Tibetan Buddhism there are many different styles of practice. Some lineages display themselves as being very pure and holy; that is to say, they set themselves in the domain of the sacred and create a mood which is separate from ordinary life. When you encounter that kind of setting you have the opportunity to experience something which is not like ordinary existence. Such settings tend to be ritualised and choreographed so that everyone knows their place and what they are, and are not, allowed to do. My teacher was, however, very much in ordinary life. He was very fond of university politics, supporting his friends and attacking his enemies. This is not holy activity. But oh, so very pleasurable! For many years I was his secretary, and I had to write, on the basis of his special English, very insulting letters. In order to enter his world I had to let go many of the assumptions I held about how to live in a proper way. In the end, in order to practise, we each have to find a style which is in harmony with the energy of our potential as it responds to each unique setting in which we find ourselves. Being in the mandala, or environment, that Rinpoche created was very disturbing, and yet it was also liberating. It opened the space to see that our world is indeed a construct of our beliefs and assumptions. Freeing ourselves from relative truth, from truth based on comparing and contrasting, involves a leap of faith. Encouragement to make this leap was Rinpoche's wondrous gift.
- 31.** 'Guru' is a word that has many derivations. A key one, my teacher told me, is linked to the Sanskrit word for cow. That's because if you eat a lot of beef you feel very heavy and the Guru is one heavy dude! Essentially, a Guru is somebody who gives a teaching that is designed to bring about a transformation or awakening. The Guru represents the unbroken lineage of transmission from the time of the Buddha. The key thing about a Guru is that they should have studied a lot and understood what they were studying. They should have then practiced deeply what they had studied, and awoken to its truth. They should then be able to communicate that in a way which is impactful to people on every level, on the level of their body, their energy system, their feeling and their thinking. Through that they help to turn people, to tilt their gaze in such a way that they start to experience gaps in the flow of their assumptions. These gaps are the first taste of the space within which what is shows itself. That is the function of the Guru, and it can be performed with formality, with informality or a mixture of both.
- 32.** A common Tibetan refuge prayer says, *"I take refuge in the Buddha, the best of all the two-footed creatures. I take refuge in the Dharma, which is peaceful and free from*

*desire. I take refuge in the Sangha, the best assembly.” My teacher used to say, “The best of these is the Dharma because it is peaceful and free of desire. The Buddha wants you to get enlightened, the Sangha will try and help you get enlightened but Dharma doesn’t want anything from you. Put your money on the Dharma!” ‘Free of desire’ sounds very sweet. Dharma is just there. It is there whether you pick it up or whether you leave it alone. It is not going to feel insulted if you feel no interest in it. It is not going to feel exalted if you feel very interested in it. Dharma is just Dharma and that is a very good refuge because it is always there, open and without bias or membership cards. It always has the same taste so every time you practise Dharma you find the same focus and the same welcome. It’s not like a couple-relationship where you speak with your partner and what you say changes their mood, which in turn changes you. Your job changes, your kids change, the weather changes. Everything changes except that which doesn’t change. That which doesn’t change is emptiness and openness. This is the actual meaning of dharma.*

- 33.** CR Lama told us that when he was a child he was recognised as a tulku, an incarnate lama, and so had to be visibly involved in the monastery rituals, sitting on a throne alongside the other high lamas. Whenever there was a public initiation, the village people and outsiders would come to receive it and at the end would make some offerings. The head lama would get many offerings, but even very young tulkus like CR Lama would sometimes get something. Usually they would be offered a white scarf called a khata, but it didn't always happen. CR Lama would be sitting there and a person would come up holding out a khata. If Rinpoche leant forward to receive the khata, but it wasn't for him, then he'd get hit on the back of the head by his teacher who was sitting next to him. You have to learn not to assume that something is for you until it is actually offered. But if someone is offering it to you, you could also get hit if you did not immediately respond to their gesture. Not holding back, not rushing forward – you have to be fully present, right here.
- 34.** This is also the essential instruction for meditation. Why? Because our job is not to assume what other people, and even the contents of our mind, are going to do. We have to be present, open and aware. We respond if required. If not required we remain relaxed yet attentive. If we go off into a daydream or an expectation, we’re not here. The land of concepts is a never-never land, a realm of make-believe. Much of what occurs there is fascinating, pulling us into fantasy construction which leads only to further fantasy. This is something we can observe in ourselves. Look and see how often we bring our expectations and our assumptions into the world and act as if they are going to be the case. If we have power, we can act to coerce the environment to fulfil our expectations for a while—but sooner or later the fantasy is unsustainable and we are left confused and disappointed. Being fresh means that moment by moment we are here with what is, not somewhere else with what might be.
- 35.** When Chimed Rigdzin Rinpoche came from Tibet, he had the chance to have a very lovely little monastery in a place called Tsopema which is in the hills in Himachal Pradesh. The climate is very nice there, and the monastery is on a lake that is sacred to Padmasambhava. Perfect. He made a retreat there and got on very well with the local ruler, the King of Zahor, who became his sponsor. Rinpoche had a sweet photo of the King in evening dress wearing a bow tie and standing by his grand piano, which his

wife, in a ball-gown, was playing. What a relaxed easy atmosphere. However, if you have a monastery you need money, and if you need money you have to be pleasing to sponsors. You must spend a lot of time talking nonsense to people who are not really going to do any practice but who want to be special. So what CR Lama did instead was to get a job in an Indian university and at the end of every month he got his salary. He was given a university house to live in and a clear contract to fulfil. He said that was a better situation to be in. Being at the mercy of other people's moods and whims is not auspicious for peace of mind.

36. One of the first things that Chimed Rigdzin said to me was that there is no enlightenment-injection. There is no kind of Buddha-substance that you can get hold of and inject into your arm and space out. In engaging with the Dharma one moves into a play in which all one's own limitations, confusions and false understandings come to the surface. Learning to release one's reliance on deluding phenomena requires being present in the clarity of your own mind—no one can do this for you.
37. CR Lama often said to me that if he were to meet Padmasambhava, the first thing he would do would be to hit him. Why? Because if it's the real Padmasambhava, he's got a light-body and so he wouldn't mind. In fact, he might even be pleased that he had at least one disciple who was able to think for himself. If it wasn't the real Padmasambhava he'd run away pretty damned quick. So either way he, CR Lama, would be safe! Naivety is not a good basis for entering the Dharma. That does not mean we can't have faith or hope or trust, but it has to have a mature quality, seasoned with a bit of scepticism.
38. When I was living with my teacher I had a little room at the back of his house. The room was packed with lots of tin boxes full of paper, and it was very hot. There was a window with no glass but it had bars on it and I usually kept the shutters open. One day when I came back from the village I opened the padlock on the door, went inside, and saw a snake moving about. I went to see my teacher's wife and asked if she had a long stick to use to get this snake out of the room. My teacher came round and asked me what I was doing, because I was lying on the floor with the stick trying to chivvy the snake out of the corner. *"I am trying to get rid of the snake,"* I said. *"The only thing that is dangerous here is you!"* he replied and walked off! It is like that... it is our own mind which is dangerous. There are many snakes in India but most of them are not at all dangerous. I was making a great song and dance for no reason.
39. Agitation is not bad in itself; the issue is our involvement in the agitation. When I was translating texts with my teacher in India we would work in his back courtyard. At that time he kept dogs on the roof and they were always barking. The house servant was very noisy, clanging her pots and pans. Rinpoche's wife would be shouting at the servant, the servant would be shouting back, and I would be writing out the translation ready for the typist. The typist was sitting next to me on the table working very fast. Whenever he had finished what was there, he would be sitting tapping his fingers. There were many activities happening in our rather chaotic environment and they were all valid. The key point is that we have a choice whether to be distracted or not. If

we are waiting for the perfect conditions to come, we may have to wait a very long time.

40. All possible forms of experience arise within the spacious sphere of revelation. Where do they come from? They come from space itself, they are the forms of space. Space shows itself as these forms. Similarly the emptiness of the mind shows the forms of our various thoughts and feelings. Why does it show these different forms? When I asked my teacher that question he said, "*Well, when you meet Kuntuzangpo you ask him.*" This means, '*Shut up, and look at your own mind.*' Some questions are stupid and it is not helpful to ask them. 'Why' is often a very dangerous word, because 'why' is often a sign of our intellectualising. It is helpful to ask who is the one who is asking the question. If it's Mr Smart Ass then it's probably not very useful to continue. If it's Mr Humble you might get somewhere since open enquiry without presupposition can lead us to the site of our natural awareness.
  
41. There can be difficulties for us if we feel we need to have proof before we decide on a teacher or a teaching. People do say, "*You should check out your teacher for twelve years before you make a decision.*" but by then he might be dead! So, how do you know? I remember once when I was translating a text with CR Lama and I noticed that there was an inconsistency between the description in this text and another one. I pointed this out to Rinpoche and he said, "*Who appointed you to inspect the dharma? Are you working for the CIA?*" This is the problem. Who am I to check out whether one text or the other is true? There is a time for checking and a time for faith. The intelligence of our intuition, the sweet quickness of the mind itself, is generally more reliable and useful than the conclusion we construct out of concepts. We are the grateful recipients of dharma and we have to just eat what is put in our bowl. "*But maybe it is the wrong thing.*" Then that is our luck. But if we eat what we get we will experience directly the advantages and limitations of this situation. Test the situation by participation, observe your mind – now you have good evidence for your decision. If we stay in the realm of thinking about, judging and checking, then we remain the hub of the wheel of concepts. All the spokes come and meet in us as we compare and contrast and our ego remains the measure of all things.
  
42. I was studying a long prayer on Sukhavati, the Western Paradise, written by a Kagyu lama. The purpose of the prayer is to make a basis for connection so that when you die you will be reborn in this blissful western paradise. The text describes beautifully how after Amitabha, the presiding buddha, dies he will be succeeded by Chenrezi and when Chenrezi dies he will be succeeded by Vajrapani. The prayer tells us how long each one will be the ruler of this beautiful buddha realm. Later I was working on another text which said something completely different about Chenrezi's future. It did not even mention that he would go to Sukhavati. I asked CR Lama how this could be? He said, "*Well, when you read this book, believe in this book. When you read that book, believe in that book. If you try to compare these books you will go crazy.*" I think this is absolutely true. Faith and an open heart takes us deeper and wider than a critical reading.

43. Teachings which are special, statues that are special, teachers who are special, are all special in terms of our relationship with them. The question is whether we use that relationship in a helpful way or in an unhelpful way. We may use our connection to this perceived specialness to inflate our own ego, or we may use it to develop our devotion to the practice. The objective truth and the subjective reality are rarely the same. From a buddhist point of view everything has the same root value because of emptiness. All sentient beings have the same nature of emptiness. This is their true value and should be respected. All beings have buddha nature. If we bow to the guru, we should also bow to everyone else since it is to the buddha nature in the guru that we bow to and not to their personality. Nothing is special and everything is special. Qualities arise due to causes and conditions; they come and go. Seeing this we can relax and open to everything. Only the indestructible vajra nature never changes and so is truly reliable. It abides in the heart of all beings.
44. A key element to working with the world is to have the freedom to walk away. If you can't walk away from a situation that is a dead end then you are in collusion with limitation. You're trapped. One of the best teachings I ever had from CR Lama was, *"Always get a return ticket."* Wherever you go, always have a return ticket. Rinpoche had many experiences of travelling to teach and this usually involved staying with people. Sometimes these people behaved very strangely towards him. At first, on the telephone they were, *"Oh please come, Rinpoche, oh please, Rinpoche, we will do everything for you."* But once he got there they would feed him the food they liked to eat and were not very considerate of him. Having been trapped once in that situation in a foreign country and without a ticket home he decided never to be trapped again. *"If it's not beneficial to be there, then get out."* That's very important. Going under the power of distracted others rarely leads to anything useful.
45. My teacher often acted in ways which I found completely outrageous. I just couldn't understand his behaviour. He certainly saw a lot more possibilities to situations than I did. He could be extremely generous and kind, giving people money, time, care and attention, feeding the western waifs and strays who wandered around India, taking them into his house, being incredibly kind and courteous. He could also be extremely direct.

Once we travelled together to a conference in Benares. On arrival we got off the train with our luggage and our papers which were packed in a large tin trunk which had handles at either end. Rinpoche summoned a porter who lifted the tin trunk onto his head and carried it out to a tonga, a horse-drawn taxi, parked at the station entrance. We were going to Sarnath, the place where the Buddha first taught the dharma. When we reached the tonga the porter asked for a large fee, expecting to bargain for the actual price, but my teacher said to him, *"I will never pay you this money for this work. I will not pay you here. Now we take these boxes back to the train. I will pay you there but I never pay you here because you are a liar and a cheat."* Then he said to me, *"Okay, help me lift this box on to his head."* The porter leant down, holding his little red turban in place to receive the trunk. I held one handle and my teacher held the other handle. Suddenly Rinpoche lifted up his end and banged it down on the porter's head. Bang! The porter fell over! Then my teacher gave him all the money he had asked for, and we got into the tonga and drove off. What was all this about? I didn't understand at all. Rinpoche just said, *"Ah, these things happen."*

Later we went to the conference, and in the afternoon we walked around the stupa and Rinpoche gave a lot of money to all the beggars there. Life with him was like that. He had a range of activities that were very difficult for me to understand. I wanted him to be a 'good' lama, according to my criteria, but my templates for right and wrong could not encompass how he was. His disruption of my assumptions was often confusing and evoked many conflicting emotions in me. Trying to make sense of him, to sort out what was going on, was gradually revealed to be a waste of time. He was what he was—direct, fearless, shameless, right at the heart of the situation. Analysing it only put me on the outside, judging and drowning in concepts.

As I learned to let him be him, I was able, at least a little, to let myself be me. As ripples in the flow of life, the 'meaning' is in the being here. Why he did what he did, I don't know. Anyway, he did it.

46. Nowadays there is a great cult of happiness and one Buddhist monk is even referred to in the media as 'the happiest man in the world'... but is this the point of life? CR Lama was often not happy, he was often in a bad mood and when he was in a bad mood he didn't keep it to himself; he compassionately shared it with everyone else! He lived in his practice. He wasn't blocking or editing or being artificial. He was working with the manifestation of the energy of his life as it arose. It would have been easier for us had he been polite and pleasant all the time, because then life would have been easy and free of friction. Rinpoche, however, used to bang into everyone! In fact, he delighted in banging into people as if to say, *"Don't pretend. Nothing is gained by pretending to be other than you are. Don't play at being better than you are, happier than you are. Don't make yourself false."* Of course in the outer world, it can seem necessary to behave in a nice way, and at social events he could be very charming to everybody. This was how he worked with their limitations: for his students it was different.

There is a short praise verse to Padmasambhava that he liked very much. It begins *Ma Choe Troe Dral Lama Choe Kyi Ku*: the dharmakaya lama is free of artificiality and fantasy construction

This is exactly the quality of CR Lama that I am describing. It means being open and letting the play of illusory appearance present itself through you. Being part of the drama of your own existence, you are touched and moved without ever being touched and moved. Natural openness is indestructible.

47. Although our true actual presence is ever-open, suddenly, for no particular reason, we are caught by a thought. Being caught by the thought, we come into 'existence' as the illusion of 'I, me, myself'. This is not due to a curse, it is not the whim of a God, nor is it a punishment. It is just a moment in which the spontaneous effortless self-liberation of phenomena seems to experience a hiatus. There is a self-reflexive pulse, and an idea arises which is empty and fleeting, yet which is somehow 'sticky'. It seems to attach itself to another idea and then a chain of linking thoughts appears to hide the openness of presence in the way that minute droplets link to form clouds which seem to block out the sky. My teacher explained to me that this slippage and attachment is like a drunk man falling down the stairs. He gets to the bottom and "Uh??" First there is disorientation and then thoughts arise that seem to provide reassurance. Due to

relying on them he does not directly see where he is, relax and get his actual bearings. Instead he starts to invent ideas about where he is. Because the intrinsic presence of actuality is lost sight of in the effort to make sense of things, he faces the unending question, "What is going on?" He anxiously tries to fill the gap created by this question and so lives in a stream of answers, each of which quickly vanishes leaving the gap exposed again. The more these thoughts are taken seriously, the more they develop and increase the sense of 'I am me and you are you', intensifying dualistic separation. On the basis of this we take the illusory sense of self and other to be substantially real, and this delusion activates the perpetual motion-machine of karma.

48. Rinpoche said to me that by rubbing butter into leather we can make it soft, but if we use leather skins for storing butter then after a time the leather dries up and becomes hard and brittle. In the same way, if we make ourselves like a leather container and store the dharma inside without using it, we will become hard and brittle. We become experts who can use the words of dharma, but the actual richness of the dharma, the butter of it, doesn't soften us. We have to rub the dharma into our skins and into our hearts by giving ourselves full to our daily practice.
  
49. While I was living with CR Lama in Shantiniketan there was a woman who had once taught in the university and who had become disturbed and was sometimes quite wild. Her family found this very difficult because educated Bengali society is very proper and somewhat uptight. Once when she was in a disturbed state and vulnerable, Rinpoche's wife wanted to bring her to live in our house. However he told her, *"You bring her in, you look after her! If you have the time and the energy to look after a mad woman in this house where you have four children, three dogs, and my students, then enjoy it! But me, I am not involved. So think carefully. If she does come then don't ask me to tell her to leave!"* Of course she didn't bring the woman to the house. It was a kind idea but the reality of bringing somebody who is very disturbed into your house when you are already over-stretched is unhelpful. That would be compassion without wisdom. We need to work with circumstances and that includes the current state of our own capacity.
  
50. CR Lama always said to me, *"Don't mix your food with your shit."* This explains a lot. Food goes in one hole and shit comes out another hole. If you are a good farmer you can take your shit and spread it on the field to make more food grow, but you don't want to mix them directly. Our food is our direct presence, the absolute simplicity of being. It is not being this nor is it being that; it is not being big nor is it being small; it is not being male nor being female. Just being, simply being, pure being, reveals itself through being this and that. The being 'this and that' is the energy, the manifestation of the ground of being which is always open. The ground and its manifestation are not two and they are not one. They are non-dual, intimate in the way a mirror and the reflection within it are intimate. Because we live in duality and think in terms of this and that, we separate them in our mind and then, because they are so close together, we mix them up and live in confusion.
  
51. CR Lama used to say, *"There is nothing special."* Nothing is special, everything is the same. This is Kuntuzangpo, always good, everywhere good, everything good.

Sometimes we feel that we receive a special message, something really important like a vision or dream or that we have some special purpose to our life. This may indeed be true, but if you believe it, it will cheat you. If it's special it will be special by itself, you don't need to invest in it in any way or build upon it.

52. CR Lama told me that the best practitioners of dharma are somewhat simple and stupid. Their minds are not busy all the time. They don't have a sense of mastery, or feel that they have to be in charge, and so they just do the practice. We can be too smart for our own good. We can be ahead of ourselves. If we find ourselves in that situation we have to slow down and just be with ourselves, be as ourselves. This means listening to how we are. If we attend to ourselves we will find a lot of direct instruction, out of our own embodiment, about how to live our lives. This frees us from unnecessary and unhelpful involvement in the turbulence of transient events.
53. After I had finished doing my first set of prostrations, I told to my teacher, *"I finished my prostrations."* He said: *"Oh, are you tired?"* *"Yes,"* I answered. *"Good,"* he replied, *"Now look at your mind."* Then he explained that the only function of doing prostrations is to get tired, which is why you should do a lot at once. Doing a hundred a day is not so helpful. You should do a lot till you are completely exhausted, and then you sit and be with your mind. However it depends on the teacher. Some teachers may say: *"Each day you can do one hundred of each of the five parts of the preliminary practice and after three years or so it will all be completed."* We can focus on the virtue of doing practice or we can use it to reveal our mind
54. My teacher described how when he was young he had studied medicine with one of his uncles. The students were set the task of going out and bringing back all the things that were of no use as medicine. It was explained to them that this was so that they would recognise what was not helpful. The students went and they looked all over the hills and brought back various plants. CR Lama, however, came back with nothing. His uncle said, *"Exactly. Everything is medicine. If you know what to do, the stones, the plants, water from different pools, everything is medicine. Nothing is unhelpful."* This is at the heart of our dharma practice. We try to see that every aspect of ourselves is useful. Even our anger is useful. Once we start to see things in this way, compassion takes on a very different meaning. When what we would normally see as our negative tendencies are appreciated as actually being useful, then we start to see that the negative tendencies of other people are also very useful. Rather than helping other people to change how they are, the actual focus of compassion shifts to helping people to recognise what they're up to and to recognise who it is who is up to it!
55. Faith is a way of opening and it involves seeing if we are living in ways which restrict our potential. Although we can learn mudras, the practice is not particularly about whether we can make the mudra in the right way or not. It is about coming into a sense of the body as movement, as lyrical movement. We could all see this with CR Lama. He was very beautiful in the movement of his body. He had a very clear and powerful aesthetic sensibility. Often he might wear very strange clothes. Somebody would give him some funny orange-coloured garment and he would wear it. I remember in Wales, he used to wear a woman's peach nylon negligée. He also bought



a pink satin quilted lady's dressing gown that he liked to wear. He always looked very beautiful because he was completely at home in himself. He wasn't thinking, "Oh, what do people think of me from the outside?" He was just at home in himself, "Oh, I like this!"

56. CR Lama would say again and again, "Don't leave this life empty-handed. Don't waste your time. Value yourself. Do the practice. Have faith in Padmasambhava." The particular teaching of CR Lama was that you should pray one-pointedly to Padmasambhava. If you pray with full faith, without any doubt, all the energy systems of the body will meet in your heart. Your mind will become empty and in that moment you can recognise your own nature.
57. All the buddhas and bodhisattvas have made a fundamental commitment to help us. My teacher said that if we pray to the Buddha, he will definitely help us. Have no doubt about that! Our texts repeatedly say that doubt is a great limitation since it brings us into thinking *about* something rather than entering direct experience. Doubt cuts the rainbow bridge between our heart and the hearts of all the Buddhas.
58. Do we practise dharma to benefit everyone or to benefit people who are very close to us? CR Lama used to say, "There is no virtue in the family," by which he meant that to take care of your family is not a virtuous act because your family is an aspect of yourself; they are your world. Taking care of your children is, in some way, taking care of yourself. However to take care of someone else's children is a different matter because duty, obligation and family identification are not present, and you are having to step over the boundary of self-interest to be available to someone who is truly other. In the mahayana path a lot of time is spent reflecting on how we can become more aware of other people, more thoughtful about them, more empathically attuned with them. Even then we need to ask ourselves, "What is my self-interest in helping this person." Only when there is no self-interest does it become an altruistic gesture.
59. CR Lama used to say, "If a yogi has sex in the middle of the road, no-one will notice. However, if ordinary people have sex in the bushes everyone is staring at them." He himself was often quite shameless, unconcerned whether he was rude or not. He wasn't being self-indulgent or aiming to get away with doing bad things on account of being a lama. Rather, he was living exactly in the moment, in impermanence, in the self-liberation of all phenomena – this is the space of ungraspable presence.
60. CR Lama lived in a small university town in India. Actually it was smaller than a town, more like a village. He didn't like to walk at all, so there were always rickshaws waiting outside the house. He used to take a rickshaw to work, and sometimes he would go out just in his lungi, a short wrap-around cloth, and a tee-shirt. His wife would come out and shout at him, "Oh, you can't go to work like that. Shame on you! What are you doing?" And he would reply, "Who do you think is going to work, CR Lama or CR Lama's clothes?" If you rest in open clarity then anything and everything is okay. But once you start to bind yourself to what other people might think of you then, since

there are a lot of people with a lot of different thoughts, you will always be busy trying to second guess what they expect of you and worrying about whether you fit their expectations.

61. CR Lama used to say that he didn't like people with broken hands, meaning, people who only talked. He liked people who would do things. If something needs doing, you do it and then it is done. In that way life is very simple. Time-wasting binds us to linear time. When you don't do something when it needs to be done then you have got to remember that you haven't done it. You put it into the future but now you can't be fully in the present because you have to remember to do in the future the thing that belongs in the past!
62. The basis of ethics in the practice of dzogchen is to not be carried away by identification and interpretative structures but to stay with the immediate freshness of the living situation. In that way, we can see that all manifestations are the energy of the ground, self-arising and self-liberating.

Once when CR Lama was in retreat in Tsopema in north India a thief came to the house and took many precious possessions including his wife's jewellery. His wife wanted him to go to the police, but he said, *"Don't you believe in karma? Karma will punish the thief. It is not my job. Let it go."* That is a very open response to the situation.

Otherwise we have hopes and fears and become involved in sending someone to prison—all because we want 'justice'. However, if we understand karma, if somebody robs us, this is the result of some previous action by ourselves. Who are the criminals? Who are the bad guys? It is impossible to discriminate. So, seeing that every situation is complex and simultaneously simple in its pure nature, stay relaxed and open.

63. In the Tibetan tradition there are mantras for everything. There are mantras for the fireplace, for making beer, for protecting the beer from going off. They have mantras for finding lost sheep and they have other mantras for finding lost cows! This is a fact. When I was first learning Tibetan I went to Bodhgaya. They used to sell lots of Tibetan books around the big temple and I bought some books and took them back to my teacher and said, *"Look I have brought back all these wonderful books. Which one should I study."* He looked through them and said, *"Well this one here is for someone who has lost their cow. This is the prayer and the mantra you have to say to bring back the cow."* Now clearly in Tibet that was very important. You need to have milk and for that you need a cow and if it gets lost then that is a problem. If you believe that the thing that can protect you in life is the dharma then naturally the person you turn to for help is the lama. If the lama has a book with a prayer in it that he can read then the lama will feel confident that he is doing something helpful in the name of the Buddha to help this man find his cow. The man will be grateful; he will get his cow back and offer some of the milk or butter. This is an interlocking system of values. Some of the values are worldly and some are spiritual and they operate together. The prayer for finding the lost cow is niched within a symbolic field and has a useful purpose in that it helps the dharma to be supported and to be part of that culture. However for we westerners who are practising to develop wisdom and compassion, and who do not have cows, these prayers are not so useful. We each have to start by looking at our own situation. This will indicate what kind of dharma practice is required. There is no

limit to the creativity of the mind. So many ideas and inventions, both good and bad, arise due to causes and conditions. Everything that arises for us is the illusory movement of the energy of the mind whose nature is empty. The danger for us is that we start to believe that all these possible arisings are strongly real and this condemns us to the seeming necessity of endless activity. In terms of practice, you actually need only one tantric practice, one deity. You pray to the deity, you dissolve with the deity, you go into emptiness and you arise from that with clarity. One is enough.

Tibetans say of themselves, *"In India, people do one practice and get enlightened. In Tibet we do a hundred practices and nobody gets enlightened."* They have this saying because they have so much dharma, and all of it is valuable! So what will you do?

64. CR Lama said of himself, *"I am liar number one and cheater number one."* This is a very important teaching. Once you know how you lie to yourself, once you know how you cheat yourself, you have the beginning of true practice. When we sit in meditation we see the many ways in which we cheat ourselves. There are many, many thoughts which easily catch us, and many ways in which we abandon ourselves into whatever is arising. The basis of practice is to be honest with ourselves and to work with whatever occurs without complacency or blame. But if you think you are a 'holy buddhist practitioner' who has 'got' something, you are very likely to fall asleep in this assumption. Then the freshness of a moment of understanding becomes just a memory that you use to console yourself. Investigating how we deceive ourselves is very important. It is one thing to say, *"Now I recognise this I won't do it again,"* but that isn't going to last for very long and then our habits will come back again. Being rigid is not the point; softness is always much better. Be very close to your experience and kind to yourself in your confusion and lostness, and bring yourself gently back into the heart of the practice.
65. 'Idiot compassion', as referred to by CR Lama, means indulging in vibrating at other people's distress. True and useful compassion, *nyingje* in Tibetan, means to have a noble mind. A noble mind is a mind with dignity. When people become caught up in their suffering they often lose their dignity. They become helpless and useless and want to be saved. The actual way to help people is to bring them back to their dignity. If you encourage somebody to be a victim, dependent, useless and hopeless, this is to insult the actual basis of their existence, their own Buddha nature.
66. You can find thousands of books on dzogchen. So how come the tradition which began with Garab Dorje's three short pithy statements gave rise to tens of thousands of books? Because people like conceptual elaboration! People just don't leave well alone. I was lucky that CR Lama didn't like to talk very much and always said everything in a very simple way. He said, *"Depth and light, open, empty awareness. This is enough. With this you'll see the nature of your own mind. This is not very difficult. Here is what you do. Stay relaxed and open with whatever occurs. Don't do anything else. Now don't get lost!"* There is nothing more than this. But if you don't get it then there are plenty of techniques to help you pass the time.

67. CR lama was explaining to me Patrul Rinpoche's lines at the end of a brief text on dzogchen, *"However it is a waste not to show these instructions to those who will guard them as their life, and, practising the essential meaning, will strive to gain buddhahood on one lifetime,"* which he said were rather political. In Tibet there was a strong tradition of not making dzogchen teachings publicly available. There were many small family lineages of dzogchen practice. Dzogchen instructions would be passed on inside the family. In a big monastery, however, the instructions would often not be available to the ordinary monks, and certainly not to lay people. Patrul Rinpoche, however, liked to make teachings available to everyone. These lines indicate that it is waste of dharma if you don't help people who can learn. Many teachings are called very secret, and are sealed with protective symbols. But against whom are they to be protected? Pure motivation and impure motivation are not so easily distinguished. We meet together to practise and learn and our faults and limitations come along too. So we each have to endeavour to become the ones who will guard the teachings as our own lives. This is the basis for transmitting the dharma.
68. When I was a child I used to fight with my brother. Two brothers, two children born from the same mother. My mother used to look at us fighting and say, *"I don't understand why you are always fighting!"* The great mother, Prajnaparamita, the mother of all the buddhas, gives rise to a lot of children, but these children don't always like each other either. When you sit in meditation and thoughts of, *"I like this; I don't like that"* arise, this is the conflicted play of the mind's offspring. This is the energy of awareness showing the form of competition, rivalry, envy and so on. Why is it like that? When I used to ask my teacher CR Lama questions like this he would say, *"Well, when you get to Zangdopalri and meet Padmasambhava, then that can be your first question."* Which is to say, *"Keep quiet, look in your own mind and don't bother me with your conceptual nonsense."*
69. One of my teachers, Chatral Sangye Dorje Rinpoche explained the function of the teacher in this way. There are two brothers, one is asleep in bed having a nightmare and the other is lying awake beside him. The one who is sleeping is imagining that all kinds of terrible things are happening, but the other brother can see that he is actually asleep, safe in his own bed. Our teacher, our happily awake brother, sees us lost in our dreams and nightmares and encourages us to awaken. But we are attached to our lostness, even to our nightmares or addictions, which though terrible are perversely reassuring. When we wake up, we wake up where we are, safe in bed. We find we haven't been anywhere else, except in our delusion. Similarly awareness itself has never been contaminated, or mixed up with, or confused by, any of the events of our life. All the events of our life so far have come and gone. When we remember them, they come back to us and we can tell some stories about them, but we can't go back into the past. All that was, vanishes, so be awake to whatever is occurring and then there will be no more nightmares.
70. When I met my teacher CR Lama, the very first thing he told me was, *"The buddha is not a nice man."* This is very helpful. The buddha is not a nice man. The buddha is the unborn dharmakaya. The Buddha is inseparable from the open space of the dharmadhatu. The buddha is not a person or a thing. Buddha is not nice nor not-nice. Buddha is not anything familiar. Buddha is emptiness, the radiance of emptiness, the

inseparability of the sun and the clear blue sky. The clear blue sky symbolises the open, luminous expanse of awareness within which all manifestation is occurring. The Buddha is everything yet we keep relying on our partiality and our judgements, *“But I don’t want these anxious thoughts in my mind!”* Who says that? A thought-sequence! One thought evokes or calls into being another thought. Each of these thoughts sets off another and another and another out of which we form our sense of ourselves and our world. Our ego self is in fact just this concatenation, this linked sequence of patterning. Our life evolves as shifting patterns devoid of self-substance, for our life is the luminous display of the mind. The one who sees this is Buddha – so much more than being a nice man. Temples are full of very beautiful shiny statues and seeing them can give us the sense that our buddha nature is likewise very bright and shiny. Yes, our mind’s true nature is radiant – but the radiance is not just warm, bright, primary colours. All colours spread from it and that means the greys, browns, and blacks as well. Our good thoughts and moods and our bad thoughts and moods are equally the radiant expression of the unborn mind.

- 71.** A key instruction I received from my root teacher, is, *“Whenever you have a problem in meditation, don’t apply any antidote. Stay exactly where the problem is.”* We always want to do something. Why? Because we just want to do something. Control your breathing! Do kumbhaka! Do pranayama! Okay, now I feel better. Of course you feel better, because you went from something bad to something good. Oh! Bad is not the same as good? Hm! This is called ‘duality’. Hm... You have gone from one kind of shit-heap into another kind of shit-heap, except this one tastes like chocolate. That’s the only difference. This is very important because the fantasy of choice and control will condemn you to wander in samsara. The ego defines itself by the choices it makes but unborn awareness makes no choices. It simply reveals the display of its own energy – one form of which is our ego busy making choices!
- 72.** Rinpoche often used the image of a ring and a hook to illustrate the nature of the student-teacher connection. He frequently said that it was important to develop a strong ring of faith so that the hook of the guru’s blessing and compassion could catch that ring. In order that the vital life of the lineage continues, the transmission has to occur through the meeting of love and devotion.
- 73.** The first teachings I had from my teacher were to eat regularly and sleep regularly. These structured behaviours help our embodied system to calm down and be available to respond to circumstances. He explained that there are four activities for the yogi: walking, sitting, eating and sleeping. When you are tired, sleep, when you are hungry, eat. It is not so complicated.
- 74.** My teacher frequently told me to make life as easy as possible, to do things the quick way. This is very helpful. Life does not have to be hard. We see that work is indeed laborious yet we become inured to it. We learn to knuckle down and just get on with it. There’s a sense of drudgery. But actually work is simply the flow of energy. Since energy is always flowing and we are always within that flow as part of it, once we find the ley line of work, once we get in the rhythm of it, we are carried by the flow of the

energy of the world. Work is difficult only when we can't find the rhythm. The purpose of all the wisdom teachings in Buddhism, the teachings focussed on emptiness, is to loosen the heaviness, the concretising function of our mind, so that we become light and delicate and start to feel the possibilities of movement. Then compassion flows as required, for compassion is the capacity to be with others, to reach and make a connection with them in as many ways as possible according to the situation.

75. 'Mahamudra' is sometimes translated as 'great seal'. Here is one explanation I got from CR Lama. In Tibet when the king wrote an official letter, a formal seal would be attached to it. This was also done in medieval Europe, with a seal being pressed down on hot wax, leaving its impression on the wax. When the document is sealed in this way, nobody should change it, nobody should interfere with it. When our mind is sealed in non-duality there is nothing to be added, nothing to be subtracted – it is just as it is. This is what is meant by the 'great seal'.
76. CR Lama said that if you have a tree that you want to get rid of, you may start by picking off all the leaves. It takes a long time to take off each leaf, and by the time you have finished with the leaves on one side they are starting to grow back again on the other side. So it's much better to cut the root. You cut the root and the tree dies. The ego and all its activities are planted in concepts. Ego and the concepts or assumptions reinforce each other. We cannot stop the flow of concepts – and indeed they are part of the work of compassion – but what we can do is to cut the root of the tree of ego. The sharp knife of emptiness slices up reification and the deluded sense of individual essence. The tree dissolves, liberating the energy of life to be available for the common good.

*Excerpts from Transcripts*