

Atisha's Bodhisattva Garland of Gems

Led by

VEN. GESHE LHAKDOR

A Compilation of the Synopses

Weekly Virtual Teachings

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Session I:

In the first session, Ven. Geshe Lhakdor began with a brief introduction of Atisha's life and contextualised the text as being drawn from the conversations between Atisha (982–1054) and Domtonpa (1008–1064) that are of two main categories: Teachings of the Spiritual Father and Teachings of the Spiritual Son. *Bodhisattva Garland of Gems* is a part of the former. Geshe la covered the homage section of the text largely focussing on paying homage to the Great Compassion and the Spiritual Master, the Lama. Paying homage, Geshe la explained, is to purify our negative emotions and to imbibe the good qualities of the recipient of our homage. He cited the three types of compassion: Compassion towards sentient beings, compassion focussing on impermanence and compassion focussing on the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena from Candrakirti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*. On paying homage to the lama, Geshe la advised to take time to find a teacher.

Session II:

Ven. Geshe Lhakdor began the second session of the teachings with a brief guided meditation on the Four Immeasurable Qualities: 1. Immeasurable Compassion, 2. Immeasurable Loving Kindness, 3. Immeasurable Joy and 4. Immeasurable Equanimity. Immeasurable Equanimity was explained as being the foundation for developing all the other immeasurable qualities. Using an analogy of gardening mentioned in Kamalashila's Stages of Meditation, Geshe la explained the process of cultivating the Four Immeasurable Qualities - prepare the ground with practice of equanimity, moisten it with loving kindness, plant the seed of compassion and reap the sapling the Bodhicitta. Continuing with the Homage part of the text, Geshe explained the third homage of bowing to the deities of devotion. We pay homage to the deities because they are in higher realms of spiritual practice. During the discussion in the text on which deities of devotion should one pay homage to since there are so many deities, Atisha advises Dontonpa to focus on one with whom a person has special karmic connection. Geshe explained that in the Tibetan tradition there are many deities, just as in the Indian tradition, hence it is wise to focus on one. Atisha specifies four deities of devotion: 1. Buddha, 2. Avalokiteshvara, 3. Miyowa (Acala) and 4. Green Tara. Atisha further elaborates on the significance of these deities. Buddha, Atisha explains, represents all the three precious gems of refuge — the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Avalokitesha because it is the embodiment of compassion and shares a special karmic connection with Tibet as its patron deity. Geshe la will explain the reason for

devotion to Miyowa and Green Tara in the following sessions. For review, we strongly recommend you watch video recordings of the past two sessions.

Session III:

Continuing with the reasons for the devotion to the four deities, Geshe la explained that Green Tara is to be devoted to for the reason that she protects us from the eight fears and many other reasons. The eight fears are fears from: 1. Arrogance, 2. Ignorance, 3. Hatred, 4. Jealousy, 5. Wrong View, 6. Stinginess, 7. Attachment and 8. Doubt. Acala is to be devoted to because he's a reliable Dharma protector and representative of all the wrathful male deities. Geshe la further explained that those of us who are uncertain of which deities to follow need just seek refuge in the three precious gems wholeheartedly and need not propitiate any deities or Dharma protectors for the true Dharma protectors shall guide us regardless of our devotion as it is their own commitment to protect the Dharma. Geshe la then elaborated on the following verse: Discard all doubt Cherish persistent practice Thoroughly relinquish sleep, lethargy and laziness And aspire constant perseverance. This was contextualized as being drawn from the discussion between Atisha and Dontonpa on what teachings to follow. Atisha advised Dontonpa to follow the teachings of the Tripitaka or the three baskets: 1. Vinaya, 2. Sutta and 3. Abhidhamma. Atisha explains that one must wholeheartedly practice Dharma by discarding all doubts — especially the doubt towards the truth of law of causality, and persevere in the practice with delight. For the sustenance of the practice, one must overcome sleep, lethargy and laziness. Geshe la mentioned that in the 5th chapter of the Abhidhamma, it says that when one pursues the path to liberation, there are three main types of obstacles: 1. Not wishing to go on the path, 2. Although wishing but not knowing the path to follow and therefore choosing the wrong path, and 3. Having doubt and therefore giving up on the path.

Session IV:

Recapitulating some key aspects from the discourse of the previous week, Geshe noted that we must 'discard all doubts' by devoting to the study of the three pitakas and restrain our tendency to overreach for things. We must also 'cherish persistent practice'. He explained that we must not only work hard towards cultivating the virtues but also delight in them. Explaining the verse "Thoroughly relinquish sleep, lethargy and laziness", Geshe la said that according to Buddhist teachings, we all suffer in this samsara due to our ignorance about

what to adopt and what to avoid. Here Atisha advises that we relinquish sleep that is unnecessary and at odd hours. Laziness here refers to the laziness of taking pleasure in the wrong deeds, laziness of avoiding doing the right thing, and belittling oneself, among others. We are advised to meditate on 'impermanence' or 'human fragility' as Geshe la puts it, whenever we feel we are succumbing to sleep, lethargy and laziness. Quoting Gunthang Jamphel Yang, he mentioned that we should relentlessly put effort to develop positive qualities, like a stream of river that flows ceaselessly. Moving on to the next verse, "Guard the doors of the senses / With mindfulness, introspection and care", Geshe explained the three features of mindfulness: 1. Familiarizing your mind with the virtues, 2. Not forgetting the positive practice and 3. Not getting distracted. Introspection, he explained, is to judge the state of one's mind. Once the guard or introspection relaxes, mindfulness will slip away. To care is to be heedful.

Session V:

Geshe la summarized the verse, "Guard the door of the senses / With mindfulness, introspection and care / Continuously examine your mind / Three times a day and three times a night" as basically focusing on restraining the senses so as to enable the practitioner to practice well. As a context for this verse, it was mentioned that when Dontompa, overjoyed with the fulfillment of the prophecies of Atisha's arrival in Tibet and dissemination of his teachings requested for more teachings, Atisha advises him to give up cravings and grasping to this life and isolate himself in a secluded place so he could restrain his senses and practice more effectively. Atisha particularly advises that he make concentrated effort to practice the Seven Limbs. The Seven Limbs or Branches of practices are: 1. Paying Homage, 2. Making Offerings, 3. Confessing non-virtues, 4. Rejoicing in virtue, 5. Requesting lamas for teachings, 6. Requesting lamas to live for long and 7. Dedicating merits. Atisha also tells Dontompa that more than mere study of the profound teachings, one must engage in the twin practices of method and wisdom. Just as we eat three times a day to nourish our bodies, Geshe la explained, we must practice "Three times a day and three times a night" to nourish our mind. Speaking of the current predicaments, he reminded how spiritually and mentally deprived individuals are today. Spiritual practices are food for the mind, he said. Blaming the arousal of negative emotions as a result of our grasping to permanence and unrestrained five senses, Geshe la commented on the need for contentment. For this, he made reference to an article titled, The Disease of More. In his explanation of the following verse, "Declare your faults and / Do not seek the faults of others

/ Conceal your abilities/ And reveal those of others”, Geshe la said we must declare our faults. The main intention of engaging in spiritual practice is to remove our faults. We must reveal the good qualities of others to encourage them.

Session VI:

Geshe la greeted everyone with a ‘Tashi Delek’ and briefly explained that it means —May there be auspiciousness and wellbeing — likening it to the Indian prayer ‘Om Svasti’. To attain auspiciousness and wellbeing, we need to acquire a realistic point of view mainly based on genuine understanding of impermanence. Everything is constantly changing; we must adapt and change accordingly. There are two aspects to a change: positive and negative. A positive change leads to happiness and peace, and a negative change leads to more suffering. We must cultivate a positive change in our mental attitude and behavior. All our learning without putting them into practice is akin to reading a medical prescription but not taking the medicines. Continuing with his commentary on the text, he explained that the verse, “Declare your faults and/ Do not seek the faults of others / Conceal your abilities/ And reveal those of others”, basically emphasizes that all the blame goes to one. That ‘one’ is the egocentric grasping to a false idea of ‘oneself’. When one grasps to oneself alone, the focus becomes too narrow, and therefore draws unnecessary suffering. Quoting His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama, Geshe la said, “If you want to be selfish, be wisely selfish”. Think and act more towards others’ wellbeing so our wellbeing is taken care of too. Unless one declares one’s faults, one cannot remove them, and unless one removes them one cannot free oneself of the faults. In one’s good qualities, one must rejoice but not make a show of it. Moving onto the next verse, “Give up wealth and respect/ And forever give up arrogance and fame / Reduce desire and be content / Repay deeds of kindness”, Geshe la clarified that one must have enough wealth but not mistake accumulation of it for the ultimate aspiration. Wealth is to be shared lest it leads to more greed. What one practices is more important than how others perceive of it, therefore, one must not fall for hollow words of fame and false distractions, and maintain one’s integrity at all times. Arrogance, Geshe la, is like a fully inflated balloon that no drop of water can pass in. Without humility, one cannot receive good qualities. One must be grateful and repay deeds of kindness.

Session VII:

The session began with a focus on ‘practice’. Geshe la said, “the question is not so much about whether you’ve understood or not, but whether you are able to practice what you have understood”. We continue with our negative habits despite our knowledge of their consequences, and therefore we continue to suffer. Similarly, while we know we should engage in positive deeds, we tend to procrastinate and postpone action. Geshe la suggested that we should make it a point to start targeting one negative emotion at a time. If one is able to achieve success in one positive practice, it can open the door to many other positive habits. In explaining verse six of the Text, “Meditate on love and compassion / And stabilize Bodhicitta / Discard the ten non-virtues / And forever secure faith”, Geshe la elaborated on the ten non-virtues. Three are related to the Body: killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct; Four are related to the Speech: lying, sowing discord, harsh speech, and idle gossip or chatter and; Three pertain to the Mind: covetousness, wishing harm on others, and wrong views. Verse seven of the Text, “Discard anger and pride / And equip the mind with humility/ Give up wrong livelihood/And be nourished by living the Dharma”, discusses “entering into the virtuous practice after having abandoned the objects that must be abandoned”. Anger here could mean annoyance, irritation or spite. Anger usually arises in relation to other human beings. You develop anger towards those who harmed you or your loved ones in the past, who are still harmful, and who, you think, will be harmful in the future. External environment and situations can provoke anger, and mental unhappiness fuels it. It is therefore imperative to maintain happiness and calmness. Anger destroys the most important part of human brain — the capacity to judge what is right and what is wrong. Geshe la explicated the meaning of Pride, which can also be translated as arrogance and conceit. Arrogance arises from the narrow and false focus on oneself; believing in the permanence of one’s psychophysical aggregate. In moments of arrogance, one can apply the antidote — “equip the mind with humility”. With humility, you become receptive and sensitive to other people’s needs, and to higher teachings. As long as we live, we need to earn livelihood, so we have to understand the advice to “Give up wrong livelihood” wisely. Wrong livelihood includes activities as stealing and burglary, but it also includes gaining advantage through flattery, temptations, hints, force, hypocrisy, and so forth. So, instead of wrong livelihood “be nourished by living the Dharma”. “Living the Dharma” here means the Dharma practice in general, and development of faith and the seven wealth of superior beings in particular — the indestructible wealth.

Session VIII:

Geshe la greeted everyone with “Namaste”. Combination of two letters, “Namah” — to pay respect and obeisance, and “te” — you in Sanksrit, means, “I bow down to you, the real person, and your inner good qualities”. A similar concept in Buddhism is: ‘Tathagatha-garbh,’ implying existence of the Buddha essence or Buddha nature in everyone and therefore making them worthy of paying homage. Verse 8 of the Text, "Give up all material objects / And be adorned by the gems of the Excelled Ones / Give up the noisiness of daily life / And live in isolation", focuses on the cultivation of the wealth of superior beings. By "Give up all material objects / And be adorned by the gems of the Excelled Ones", Atisha does not advocate impulsive giving up of all belongings. He asks for mental renunciation of attachment to objects. Accumulating wealth itself is not the problem, clinging to it is. Ultimately, the real wealth is one’s inner wealth. Elaborating on the real wealth, Geshe la made a reference to verse 6 of the Text, "Meditate on love and compassion / And stabilize Bodhichitta". At the root of inner wealth are: loving kindness, compassion and Bodhichitta. It’s a wish for happiness of all sentient beings; elimination of their suffering; and to take responsibility to help them meet with happiness. These come when we see the interconnected reality; hold others as dear and close to our hearts. Only giving money or material facilities is not sufficient. Despite the technological and material advancements at our disposal today, our sufferings remain. These indicate the need to address inner problems. Even from our current predicaments, we can see how our mind is so forgetful and happiness eludes it. We need to make a commitment to learn and act in the interest of longer term plans to make a difference. Atisha advises that this is the time to search for inner wealth, and instructs on seven kinds of wealth of the superior beings. Instead of running wild with relentless desire for material accumulation stemming out of self-grasping, Atisha advises that people change their course of direction and run inwards to develop inner qualities. The seven superior inner wealth are: 1. Faith towards the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, 2. Morality, 3. Practice of generosity/ giving, 4. Study of the teachings, 5. A sense of shame, 6. Consideration for others, and 7. Wisdom.

Session IX:

Geshe la began the session with a prayer written by Shantideva: “May all those who are sick in this world may quickly be relieved, and may in the future sickness never exist in the world”. He stated that it is important to learn from every difficult and challenging situation. Quoting Shantideva again, he said, “Suffering is the introduction to happiness”. There are

many reasons to be happy and joyful about, despite our sufferings due to the nature of our fragile bodies. We need to avoid being overwhelmed, and take care of ourselves too. Buddhist teachings say that taking care of oneself is taking care of others, taking care of others is taking care of oneself. Following Atisha's instruction to nourish oneself and become rich with the wealth of Aryas not ordinary material wealth, Dontonpa asks him what would be the most suitable place for one to cultivate these seven precious wealth of practices, and what distractions should one avoid? Atisha warns that distractions will come from different places, especially those of crowd and commotion. Hustle and bustle — the evil forces of commotion will lead people into idle chatting. One must avoid clinging to self-grasping caused by mundane worldly activities. Trying to practice amidst these distractions is like constructing a house near the bed of a river. Even if it were a fancy three-story house with colorful paints, banners and canopies, being oblivious to its weak foundation, it will only lead to erosion and collapse. Or, it's like trying to fill a pot with leaky bottom — it will retain nothing. Instead one must obtain a secure place to practice. This precious human life offers opportunities to receive teachings, vows such as the three vows, individual liberation and so forth. Therefore, we need to withdraw to a place of solitude. Geshe la added that it is often advised in the teachings that we must distance ourselves from crowd and negative thoughts. Mental isolation is emphasized more than physical. As for the wealth, as soon as human life ceases, none of the material accumulation can be taken along. Neither can the body be taken along. Atisha further advises to recognize the forces of Samsara, take refuge in the three jewels, avoid gossip, and recite mantras. Dontonpa then summarizes this teaching in the verse 9 of the Text, "Abandon words of gossip / And always restrain your speech / Cultivate veneration and respect / When you see lamas and abbots" and titles it the Pure Song. In conclusion, Geshe la—citing from Nagarjuna's Letter to a Friend where he mentions three kinds of thoughts: 1. Drawing on water, 2. Drawing on earth, and 3. Carving on a stone—advised that our virtuous practices should be like carving on stone – creating strong imprints, and bad deeds like things drawn on water – fleeting.

Session X:

Geshe la expressed his joy at being able to read and share the teachings of Atisha. Atisha was a highly realized being. History has it that his manifestations appeared many times to help the King and the Translators who were enroute to India to invite him to Tibet. When asked for the name, it is said, his appearances replied, "you'll know in time". Knowledge is important but more important, Geshe la emphasized, is to implement. Otherwise, a deluge

of borrowed ideas just complicates our lives. In the absence of practice, we are like a person who's carried by an ocean and dies of thirst. We must adopt the three methods: hearing, thinking and meditating or previewing the upcoming teaching, attending the actual teaching and then reviewing the teaching, as Geshe la puts it, as a part of our lives to let the positive qualities transform our lives and benefit others. Useless worldly activities, unending like the waves of ocean are so powerful that we are compelled to get sucked in. Spiritual practice, like any other great achievement, demands courage, boldness and decisiveness. We needn't fear anything for there is nothing to be feared, everything to be understood. Verse 10 of the Text, "Individuals with dharma eye/ and sentient beings at the initial stage / Be considered as the teacher (Buddha)/ When you see them", is primarily about two things: 1. respecting and venerating senior teachers and ordinary people doing good practice and 2. to look after all sentient beings. Drom-tonpa mentions that he sees many good people but very few with pure morality like stars in the day time. Among those with pure morality, there are a very few without selfishness. Atisha clarifies that those that have selfishness cannot be called to have pure morality. He further advises that people should cultivate altruism — the wish to benefit others. Altruism, the mind of Bodhicitta, is like daily bread, a basic need not a luxury. Even the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas, due to having strains of selfishness, are not completely enlightened beings. Geshe la quoted Khunnu Lama, a teacher deeply revered by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who once said, "if you're happy practice Bodhicitta, if you're unhappy, practice Bodhicitta, if you want to fulfill your purpose, practice Bodhicitta, if you want to fulfill purpose of others, practice Bodhicitta." By "Individuals with dharma eye" Atisha means those individuals with spiritual insight — the ones truly deserving of respect not because of name and power. These can be ordinary beings but with extraordinary qualities. One can pay respect by practicing the teachings, praying for the long life of spiritual teachers and beings and so forth. Even "sentient beings at the initial stage" should be respected and "be considered as the teacher (Buddha)" for they are making effort. Chandrakirti, in his *Entering the Middle Way*, pays homage to the beginners for they will become Buddhas eventually, just like the Crescent Moon that gradually becomes the Full Moon. First two lines of Verse 11 of the Text teaches us to, "Regard all sentient beings / As your parents or children" so that we can consider them close to us and make special effort to benefit them.

Session XI:

The chapter summed up in the verse 11 of the Text, “Give up negative friends / And seek spiritual friends. / Eliminate hatred and unhappiness in your mind / And wherever you go, go in peace”, discusses the ways to lead a life of a sublime being, a good practitioner.

Ordinary people are vulnerable and susceptible to the dictates of negative friends. The negative friends, Geshe la quoted from Gyalsey Thokmey Sangpo’s 37 Practices of Bodhisattva, are those in whose association the three poisons increase in us, and our virtuous practices decline. In the same vein, Gungthang Lama had warned that the negative friends, as opposed to coming with horns and frightening clothes, appear with illusions of love and friendship. Atisha says that negative friends are like a butcher that takes away the life of nirvana; they interrupt and interfere in the path to happiness. Geshe la quipped that negative friends are more dangerous than the Covid-19; the Buddhist texts refer to them as the ‘pandemic’ of negative friend. Distance yourself from the negative friends but not lose love and compassion for them. Atisha explains that we need to go into solitude — a conducive place for virtuous practices — and find kalyan mitra, spiritual friends, in whose association our faults will decrease and our positive qualities prosper. We are advised to discard hatred and unhappy mind especially because hatred is the most destructive negative emotion. Hatred, as compared to conflagration of fire, destroys everything that it comes in contact with. Hatred comes from unhappy mind. It is not always easy to maintain the calmness of mind but just as we go after the difficult tasks of finding food and livelihood, we must work towards it. Atisha reminds that human beings cannot afford to waste this precious human life and mental capacity for petty things. We must abide by His Holiness’s ‘50-50’ advice; devote half our activities for this life and half for the next. Capacity to think differently, therefore to act differently is possible for everyone. And, “wherever you go, go in peace”, should be everyone’s slogan, said Geshe la. Verse 12 of the Text, “Release attachment to anything / And remain without attachments. / Attachment does not lead to even a beneficial rebirth, / Instead, it also severs the life of liberation” primarily emphasizes the need to lift up our morality from attachment just as we lift the hems of our clothes while crossing through mud. We should “release attachment to anything” — even to Buddha, Shunyata and so forth. Attachment leads to development of hatred of the ‘other’.

Tsongkhapa wrote that attachment is like a drop of oil on a piece of cloth that becomes difficult to separate. Geshe la shared His Holiness’s comparing of attachment to being pulled towards an object making one lose stability. Attachment blinds you of reality.

Compassion is not attachment. Unlike our ‘business love’, as Geshe la puts it, where we say I

love you so long as you love me, compassion says, I love you whether or not you love me because you're just like me — wanting happiness and not suffering.

Session XII:

The session started with Geshe la leading a group recitation of the long life prayer for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In his explanation of the prayer, Geshe la mentioned how 'Phen' and 'Dewa' meant temporary and lasting happiness, respectively, of which His Holiness is the source. His Holiness, holding everyone close to him with genuine concern for their wellbeing, is undoubtedly Avalokiteshvara's manifestation. Geshe la recalled an observation made by a longtime friend, John B. Field, who once noted that the only imaginable difference between His Holiness and Avalokiteshvara is the halo around the latter's head. As an introduction to the Text, Geshe la remarked that all the Buddhist teachings basically emphasise the two essential elements: Bodhicitta and Wisdom understanding reality. These are like the two wings with which we can soar into the sky. Their combination erases the petty divisions made by small-minded people and guides us to penetrate into the depths of the ultimate reality. With them we can transform our attitude to build better planet earth. Geshe la emphasized the possibility of developing these two aspects and advised us to start by creating a warm atmosphere at home. Gradually it will create a ripple effect and widen our circle of love and compassion. For their cultivation, we need to remove the hurdles: self-cherishing attitude, which obstructs Bodhicitta, and self-grasping, which obstructs wisdom understanding reality. Recapitulating verse 12 of the Text, "Abandon attachment to anything / And remain without attachments. / Attachment does not lead to even a beneficial rebirth, / Instead, it also severs the life of liberation", Geshe la explained that it primarily underlines the necessity to come out of the muddy waters of attachment. Attachment, like muddy water, not only stains us but also risks getting us completely stuck in the cycle of samsara. Although this chapter speaks in detail about the 12 links of dependent origination of which the most powerful cause is ignorance, it lays more emphasis on discarding attachment. This negative emotion is one of the main causes which projects us into the cycle of existence and make us remain stuck there. For example, ordinarily, when a loved one is on the deathbed and the near and dears hover around, the dying wishes to live longer with them. With the cries and lamentations of loved ones, the dying's tranquility of mind is disturbed and results in her/his rebirth in the circle of samsara. Great practitioners, on their deathbed, request their students to recite prayers of Bodhicitta and Dependent Origination and say good bye peacefully just as we do in our regular life. When

someone asked His Holiness what to do for the dying, he advised to provide a peaceful environment to the dying according to her/his mental disposition. If one were to try to explain Dependent Origination or any other complicated philosophy to someone who'd never heard of it before, it will cause more confusion and disturbance.

Session XIII:

Geshe la began the session with recitation of a verse by Shantideva, “May those with fear be fearless / May those under bondage be freed / May those powerless be empowered / May our hearts join in friendship”. The chapter summed up in the verse, 12 of the Text, “Abandon attachment to anything / And remain without attachments. / Attachment does not lead to even a beneficial rebirth, / Instead, it also severs the life of liberation”, focuses on the 12 links of dependent origination. It primarily focuses on discarding attachment. The 12 links are depicted as: 1. Ignorance by an old, blind person hobbling with a cane, 2. Action by a potter making a pot, 3. Consciousness by a monkey, 4. Name and form by a person in a boat, 5. Senses by an empty house with six windows, 6. Contact by a man and woman touching or kissing, 7. Feeling by a person with eye stuck by an arrow, 8. Craving by a group of persons partying or drinking wine, 9. Grasping by a person grabbing a piece of fruit on a tree, 10. Existence by a couple copulating or by a pregnant woman, 11. Birth by a woman giving birth, and 12. Aging and death by a corpse carried by people. They delineate the process of our coming into existence which is mainly due to ignorance. Out of ignorance, actions are committed. Actions lead to forming of imprints on the mind that further leads to unfolding of the 12 links of which there are four classes: 1. Projecting cause, 2. Projected cause, 3. Actualizing cause and 4. Actualized cause. This cycle is generally completed in two lifetimes and at the longest in three lifetimes. It is dependent on the fruition of our actions, our karma. Remember we have committed so many karmas. Out of these the first to come to fruition are the heavier ones and then the most recent ones, and then those with whom we are more habituated. The cycle itself is very intricate and depends on complex interplay of causes and conditions. In the illustration of the wheel of life — the cycle of existence, the three poisons: ignorance, attachment, and hatred are represented by pig, cock and snake respectively. Among the three poisons the one that is more obvious and active in our day to day life is attachment or greed. Therefore, this chapter lays lot of emphasis on how to shun attachment. Due to attachment, we develop obsession with everything within the purview of our six senses. Taking advantage of our obsession, the clever business people or the sellers flood the market with all kinds of goods and things. We become their victims due to

unchecked greed and thus contributing immensely to dwindling of natural resources and environmental pollution. The main cause for our coming into the cycle of existence is attachment. We have to restrain our mind. The scriptures teach us to differentiate between reality and appearance. Appearances are deceptive. We can reduce attachment by meditating on emptiness and seeing the transient nature of the object of attachment which basically means seeing the way things are without exaggeration. One of Buddha's first and last teaching was on impermanence. One powerful method to refrain from attachment is to see the faults or shortcomings of the objects of attachment including its transient nature. See the complete picture, Geshe la emphasized. Nothing has inherent independent existence.

Session XIV:

The session began with Geshe la's reminder that everyone wants long lasting peace and happiness, which primarily comes from within oneself. With control over our mind, we can achieve lasting peace without trying to change the events in the world over which we do not have much control. He shared the story of a person who built a beautiful mansion, which all his friends visited and praised. Just one day before his family was to move there, it was all destroyed by a fire. As his friends lamented the destruction, he declared that having his family members intact meant he had lost nothing. Positive attitude makes all the difference. The true valuables are our internal positive qualities, which we should not lose. We must expect and accept changes so as to endure surprises and shocks. The last two lines of verse 13 of the Text, "Forever, strive for peace/ wherever it is seen", emphasize the importance of recognizing the source of peace and happiness and striving for it. "Use intelligent mind and the three processes of study: listening, meditating and contemplating", Geshe la said. Through consistent practice and effort, one can attain unwavering conviction in the importance of compassion and understanding of emptiness as the main sources of peace. Once the conviction is developed, strive for it — practice. We fail to meditate and contemplate on them due to our habituation with negative emotions. Geshe la used a scientific explanation from a book, which points out that our genetic memory comes from several generations as we continue to evolve as a species. Correlating this with the idea that human existence is not aimed at Buddhahood or enlightenment but for survival and continuity of lineage, justifying the fight and flight response, Geshe la concluded that this means for many centuries we've been trying to protect ourselves with negative emotions and therefore are habituated to them. However, we still possess the capacity to break the

habit and follow a different path. Elaborating on the verse 14 of the Text, “Whatever you have started initially/ That should be accomplished first/ By doing so, all will be finely done and completed. / Otherwise both will not be accomplished”, Geshe la recalled Nagarjuna’s advice in the Letter to a Friend where he urges the King to simply focus on one practice such as generosity. Don’t promise too much! Do what you can and do what is useful, and accomplish it well. From the purview of life being short and precious, one cannot afford to squander it on many useless things. Otherwise, Geshe la quipped, “before the deadline you’ll be a dead person”. This chapter is based on the discussion between Atisha and Drom-tonpa arising out of the latter’s concern for the preservation and continuity of ‘spiritual father and son’ inheritance. At the core of this inheritance is the practice of paying homage to the four Kadampa deities and propagation of the three Kadampa teachings. The session concluded with Geshe la’s brief explanation of the six-syllable mantra: Om Mani Padme Hum. Om is a combination of three letters — Ah, U, and Ma — which represents the two tiers of 1. The exalted body, speech and mind of the Buddha and 2. The ordinary body, speech and mind of a devotee. Mani means a precious jewel, which symbolizes skillful means. Padme, the lotus, represents wisdom arising from understanding emptiness. Hum means to become one, become indivisible. In short, the mantra is to aim at becoming one with the Buddha through a union of method and wisdom.

Session XV:

Offering greetings for the New Year, Geshe la reminded everyone that it’s not time but people who change. He appreciated the attendees for their perseverance and effort. Real enjoyment lies in exploring one’s inner resources and reflecting on the intricacies of life.

Verse 15 of the Text, “*Due to constant separation from delighting in what is negative / whenever mental inflation arises^[SEP]/ At that point arrogance should be reduced^[SEP]/And the instructions of the lama be recalled*”, summarizes the chapter titled, *how to uproot suffering, and meditate on the equality of mental sinking and mental excitement?*

Suffering means unpleasant or unhappy feelings. Buddhism provides an in depth understanding of suffering. There are three types of suffering in Buddhism: 1. Obvious suffering, 2. Suffering of change and 3. Conditioned suffering. Headache, stomach pain and so forth are obvious sufferings that even animals understand. The existence of hospitals and medicine indicate that we don’t want these sufferings. Suffering of change is more subtle

but we must endeavor to understand it. Everything changes. In the absence of this knowledge, we cling to fleeting moments and wish for them to last forever. Our misconceptions make us suffer. Therefore, we need to prepare our mind and not become victims of change. We have to accept, and adapt to changes just like a good swimmer passing through different tides. The most crucial is the understanding of the third type of suffering —conditioned suffering. Our psychophysical aggregates are by nature fragile. Life itself is susceptible to vulnerability; we are made of flesh and bones. Even more fragile is our mind — easily drowned in the ups and downs of emotions.

Ignorance is the root of suffering. We must meditate on wisdom and understand the reality of interdependence and impermanence. Mental sinking/dullness and mental excitement are the two main obstructions in our meditation. We are mostly very fickle, always on the verge of extremes. We must cultivate stability and avoid getting too excited at small achievements and too discouraged at small misfortunes. To dispel ignorance, we must meditate on developing compassion and wisdom to understand the reality. When we misperceive reality, we cling to I, me and mine, and therefore become arrogant. The verse says, ‘when the ugly head of arrogance arises, crush and destroy it immediately’. To overcome arrogance, we must remember the instructions of our teachers, especially the Buddha.

When Atisha praises the sufferings as being the greatest teacher, Dromtonpa asks if it is, then, better to suffer? To this, Atisha answers that since sufferings are products of our self-grasping, the root of all sufferings lies within. Therefore, one must discard this body itself. The long-term resolution is to exit the cycle of existence. In the short term, our practice helps us reduce the unpleasant feelings.

Session XVI:

At the beginning of the session everyone rejoiced in the blessings in receiving these teachings. Geshe la explained that the Tibetan word for blessing, ‘*jinlap*’ comes from two words: ‘*jin*’ (magnificence) and ‘*lap*’ (transformation). Being blessed means transformation into the state of magnificence. That, he quoted His Holiness the Dalai Lama, can come only from within, through one’s own practice.

The verse, “*Where attachment and hatred appear / View them as illusions and emanations / When unpleasant words are heard*”^[SEP] / *See them as echoes*”, summarizes the chapter

titled, “*How to train your mind by seeing what appears to us and what is known to us as empty?*”

Drom-tonpa asks, what is the main fault of a practitioner? Attachment and hatred, Atisha replies. The best way to end this is to see everything as illusion. Atisha narrates the story of the householder by the name Pal, who rides on an illusory horse sold by his magician friend, Chandrabhadra, to him and who faces unbearable suffering of loss, death and separation — all in the realm of fantasy! Atisha points out that one can endure enormous suffering even under gross illusion. We suffer due to our misconceptions, which lead to clinging and grasping. Like the horse, all the phenomena are like a magician’s creation.

Understanding the Ultimate Reality through the three-fold method of study is most important. Atisha advises that one must see one’s object of hatred and attachment as mere illusions. When one encounters unpleasant words from people around, one must “see them as echoes”. Nagarjuna teaches us to see the harmful people as sick and therefore develop special compassion for them. Geshe la explained how despite our loved ones’ wrong doings we only get superficially angry but retain deep affection and compassion for them. Similarly, we must develop loving kindness for all the sentient beings through understanding the Ultimate Reality — emptiness. Geshe Potowa, in his *Heap of Examples*, mentions that emptiness is like a small hole through which you can look at the greater space. One can begin by understanding the emptiness of one little thing that one cherishes and understand emptiness of all as they are of similar nature.

The key to understanding emptiness is understanding the nature of one’s own mind. Drom-tonpa quips that whether the rock on the mountain is empty or not is irrelevant, what is relevant is that one understands one’s own emptiness. Geshe la concluded by saying: train your mind, meditate on emptiness, and gradually remove the thick layer of negative imprints on the mind. Understand impermanence, the gross and the subtle, and you’ll understand suffering. Through understanding your own suffering you’ll understand emptiness of the self. With this one can reach the state of enlightenment from where one can help all the sentient beings effortlessly.

Session XVII:

In this session, Geshe la elaborated on the 16th chapter that deals with how to practice morality and discipline in isolation. A series of pertinent questions by Drom-tonpa are answered by Atisha during this discussion.

Drom-tonpa begins by asking *which place is bad* for a practitioner. Atisha replies: “the great prison of your fatherland and motherland”. This, Geshe la explained, is because our loved ones in the native places are essentially ordinary human beings with untrained minds – strongly inclined towards negative actions. Since we are bound to share only what we have, we end up sharing our negative attitude and deeds. *Who is a bad friend?* Those stuck in the ordinary worldly activities. *What is the obstructing force* for Dharma practice? A mind of partiality. Due to this we fight the ‘others’. It leads to destructive divisions. Geshe la quoted Shantarakshita who comments that a biased mind is without peace. To attain peace, we must understand the way things are: the reality. For that, mind should be unbiased. *What is a bad food* for a practitioner? Wrong livelihood. This includes everything attained through corrupt methods, stealing, cheating, exploitation and so forth. Wrong livelihood obscures the mind, which induces lack of clarity. Without clarity, the mind retains nothing, achieves nothing. *What is a bad behavior?* Any unnecessary activity, whether it’s a walk or a jump, or a run, everything should be done for a good purpose. *Who is the worst enemy?* Negative friends. Geshe la explained that negative friends are those who can lure us into non-virtuous ways of life. Many a time, the friends do not even intentionally lead us astray. It is, as mentioned earlier, due to simply sharing what they know. Since ordinary beings lack the capacity to remain unstained, it is especially important. *What is obstructive factor for an ordained person?* Women for a monk and men for a nun. *How best to serve the lama?* Although there are several ways of doing this, such as physically serving one’s teacher, offering material gifts and so forth, the best way to serve is by living in such a way that everything one does becomes Dharma practice. Even the ordinary householders can engage in other ways of service. However, intentionally avoiding any way of service indicates disrespect. *What are signs of a monkhood’s decline?* When one constantly stays in a household. In the company of one’s family and friends, one becomes distant from one’s revered teachers and abbots, develops interest in material and wealth, and gradually even begins to “long for a sweet heart”. This makes the ordained slip into samsaric ways of life.

At the end, Drom-tonpa asks: then “*where should I go?*” and “*How should I die?*” The answer is summed up in the verse, “*Live well in remote and isolated places / Like the dead*”

body of a wild animal / One should hide oneself/ And live without attachment”, which is the crux of the discussion.

Session XVIII:

In Chapter 17 of the Text, summarized in the verse, *“Always be firm with your commitments / And when laziness and attachment to sensual pleasures arise / Scold and reprimand yourself / And recall the essence of ethical conduct”*, Atisha and Drom-tonpa deliberate on the importance of fulfilling one’s promises and the perfect religious system. Geshe la remarked that the sublime beings do not make unreasonable promises and commitments, and make good on the ones they make; their promises are like carving on a stone, which remains even when the stone breaks. Geshe la advised to only start something one is fully committed to accomplish, and with the right motivation. Any work one commits to must be done with full knowledge of its importance and the motivation to benefit others.

As for the perfect religious system, the whole system of Buddhist practice starts with taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha – the triple gems. It is a basic human tendency to seek refuge in others when incapable of doing something oneself. Samsara is full of suffering. Our very psychophysical aggregate is conditioned by negative emotions and contaminated actions, making us susceptible to all kinds of problems. When a sense of fear arises out of this realization, we seek refuge. Since the Buddha has taught the process of removing negative emotions and achieving long lasting happiness, the Dharma contains all these subjects, and the Sangha’s association and example encourage us to move forward on the path, we can wholeheartedly seek refuge in them. Using an analogy of a bed-ridden patient, Geshe la related that we’re mentally sick with negative emotions wherefore we need the right doctor that is the Buddha, right medicines that is the Dharma and a nurse that is the Sangha.

The chapter also discusses Morality. Nagarjuna, Geshe la quoted, said just as all things moving and unmoving depend on the ground to stand upon, development of any virtuous practice depends on the foundation of morality. The Hindi word for morality - ‘*sheel*’ is derived from the word ‘*sheetalta*’ meaning ‘coolness’. Morality means not harming others, developing virtuous practices and benefiting others. When one has morality, one’s mind is devoid of any regret, and therefore has the ‘coolness’ to pursue any virtuous practice.

Training of morality is one of the three main precepts of training the mind; the other two being: training of one-pointed meditation and training of wisdom.

The chapter ends with an advice to rely on the four deities and three pitakas. One has to hear, think and meditate relentlessly on both the profound and the vast teachings. Vast teachings refer to the Stages of the Path. The main hurdle to follow on this is laziness. There are four main types of laziness: 1. not doing things, 2. procrastination, 3. belittling oneself and 4. attachment to trivial things. Laziness is caused by ignorance. Therefore, one must develop conviction in the infallibility of law of causality and meditate on the *shunyata*, emptiness. Understanding of emptiness entails the middle way which negates absolutism of independent existence and nihilism of nothingness. Objects appear when causes and conditions come together and wither when they disintegrate. This unity of appearance and emptiness can be understood only through analysis, meditation.

Session XIX:

The Chapter 18 of the text is drawn from the discourse between Atisha and Drom-tonpa on the behaviour of a sublime being in relation to other human beings. To Drom-tonpa's question on how to physically meet others, Atisha replies: "When you see others / Speak honestly, calmly and straight-forwardly / Give up the grimace and scowl / And forever live with a smile". He advises against flattery and hypocrisy. When Drom-tonpa shares that some people make it difficult to "...forever live with a smile", Atisha responds that this is the reason why it is called a merit and requires practice. Atisha teaches on the importance of giving to others, "Do not be stingy but delight in giving freely". Geshe la elaborated on the significance of giving. It is the first of the three main practices for collecting merit, the other two are Morality and Meditation. It is also first of the six perfections. Recommended especially for the lay people, it helps lessen attachment. Giving endows people with material facilities to fulfil their well-intentioned endeavours; the more you share, the more you flourish. Giving should be done with four purities, purity of: 1. beneficiary, 2. object of offering, 3. motivation, and 4. dedication. When you give, people become closer to you so you can share your Dharma lessons. Atisha tells Drom-tonpa that one can repay the kindness of one's teachers and everyone by the practice of giving with no attachment, no stinginess. When Drom-tonpa complains that it is difficult to deal with people of different capacities: the high, middling and low, Atisha says it emanates from jealousy. You can't compete with the superiors, you lack compassion for the inferiors and for the equals, you do

not have a sense of shame and consideration. Atisha therefore counsels to “discard all jealousy”. Jealousy leads to other negative emotions such as anger and hatred. Drom-tonpa then asks, what to do when others still harm you? Atisha guides, “Discard all debates and disputations/ And forever be equipped with patience”. This is “to respect the mind of others” and your own. Geshe la added that often in our everyday arguments, we talk more and listen less and do so to defend our false views. Atisha further advises to speak softly to others; not too loud, not too weak. A sublime being’s behaviour is poised to benefit others. For such a being, appearance does not matter, manners do. Atisha assures Drom-tonpa that with persistent practice of these behaviours, others will surely change just as a hard iron rod melts upon repeated heating. Drom-tonpa asks: what if the other person still reacts badly? Then, pray for the person, Atisha advises. At the beginning of the session, Geshe la highlighted the importance of being able to extract the essence from one’s studies. There’s no end to learning, what is important is to practice what you learn, he said. Otherwise, it’s just like a person drowning in the ocean but dying of thirst.

Session XX:

Geshe la began by expressing his joy at the attendees’ presence. “It is a blessing to have obtained this human life and we’re doubly blessed to be able to meet the precious teachings”, he remarked. Due to our heavy negative imprints from the past, we have the tendency to be quick with pursuits of negative actions like a big boulder rolling swiftly down the hills and reluctant like a loaded donkey moving uphill when it comes to doing positive deeds. Chapter 19 of the Text focusses on ‘always working to benefit others’. The discourse begins with Drom-tonpa beseeching instructions from Atisha on how to associate with other people. Atisha replies that one should seek friendship of positive friends. Genuine friends cannot be found in hurry and by flattery. Examine the people you associate with. Take time to find genuine friends, don’t be fickle, Geshe la added. What is more important – faith or to be good person in general as a foundation for developing virtuous qualities? Both, Atisha responds. In general, it is important to be a good person. However, having faith is the precursor to obtain all the good qualities. A person without faith lacks clarity of mind which provides the conviction to pursue virtuous practices. No plant can grow from a burnt seed! Faith here refers to the faith based on reason. There are three kinds of faith: 1. Clear faith, 2. Trusting faith and 3. Aspiring faith. How to generally be a good person? Do not follow the so-called great people whose achievements are overshadowed by arrogance. A good person is humble and treats everybody equally with a clear understanding of everyone’s desire for

happiness and fear of sufferings. How can my faith help others? When you consistently engage in positive deeds with faith and conviction, people will trust you and learn from your example, Atisha reassures. Just as a child who completely trusts and follows the mother. The chapter is summed up in the Verse, “Do not act in infatuation or adulation / Always remain stable and firm / Give up despising others / And remain respectful / When instructing others / Have a compassionate and benevolent mind.” Geshe la closed the session with this advice: to overcome suffering, we need to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and delight in the great many qualities of nirvana. For that, the recognition of samsara’s defects is crucial. Aryadeva in his 400 Verses mentions that somebody who is not fed up with samsara cannot develop the conviction to leave it. This is why we fear death; we remain distracted in and attached to samsara. Meditate to nurture the internal ornaments of love, compassion and wisdom. The purpose of meditation is to identify, lessen and remove the negative emotions, not to merely offer a temporary pause or rest. Don’t let meditation become just another worldly activity. Just as a heavily laden traveller tries to adjust one’s load and moves forward, quoting Atisha, Geshe la said, “now is the time to set right your burden and reach your destination”.

Session XXI:

Geshe la opened the session with an emphasis on the transformation of negative emotions into positive ones as being the purpose of learning and practice of the Dharma. Absence of such a transformation is akin to getting one’s vision corrected but not one’s perspective.

The 20th Chapter presents Drom-tonpa and Atisha’s discourse on *how to practice one’s own profound religion without defaming other religions*. Geshe la stressed on the contemporary relevance of this topic.

Drom-tonpa begins by sharing his observation on the existence of many religious systems and differences even amongst the followers of the same teacher. He asks Atisha *what is truly the right path?* Atisha agrees with his observation and explains that even the Buddha himself gave different teachings—interpretative and definitive—to different disciples based on their inclinations, dispositions and capabilities. However, it is imperative to understand one’s own religion completely through uninterrupted effort, like a constantly running river. One arrives on the right path by use of logical reasoning: does the path alleviate suffering, eliminate negative emotions and bring benefit to everyone? One must understand and

remove the underlying obstructions to the path: grasping at oneself and grasping at phenomena which stem out of lack of knowledge and misconception of reality. With conviction, engage in the practices of a sublime being such as the 10 virtuous practices: writing, making offerings, generosity, listening to the Dharma, memorizing, reading, teaching, recitation, contemplation and meditation.

As Drom-tonpa laments the absence of actual practice even amongst the so-called religious practitioners, Atisha summarises the three main reasons that discourage one's practice. In youth, one wishes to practice in one's maturity; in adulthood, one indulges in worldly pursuits; and in old age, one is incapable of practicing effectively. Without practice, Geshe la added, one is simply an actor in a play who performs a particular role several times but never leads that life in reality. One's hunger can never be satiated through mere reading of a menu at an eatery or by simply ordering a meal. One has to eat. One has to practice!

Drom-tonpa recounts the instructions: one must hold onto one's own religion but not develop excessive attachment towards it. One must not exaggerate and defame other religions but study them and integrate the best lessons on what to adopt and what to discard. The foundational motivation to benefit others is important whatever path one follows. This is summarized in the verse, *"Do not deprecate the Dharma / Aspire to that which you like / And strive to live each day and night / By the ten virtuous deeds."*

Atisha then asks Drom-tonpa, "When you know all this, why do you ask me?"

"It is not important what you and I know. What is important is to have these discussions many times over to benefit others. There's no harm in repeating what's beneficial", responds Drom-tonpa. Geshe la elaborated on this with the example of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's teachings. His teachings, despite the similarity of their content, are tremendously valued because they come from the heart and His Holiness lives by his words.

Session XXII:

Geshe la began the session with the recitation of the Four Immeasurables Prayer.

Towards the end of the discussion between Drom-tonpa and Atisha, Drom-tonpa, having praised his master, Atisha, profusely, for his unsurpassable qualities, calls him the perfect

witness for his efforts in gaining knowledge and putting them into practice. He then seeks his instruction on *how to make confession and offer dedication* to ensure that the merits earned from these positive actions are never lost. The Chapter 21 of the Text summarizes this discourse.

It is extremely important to confess and regret the negative deeds that we commit knowingly and unknowingly. The Tibetan word for ‘confession’ is ‘shak-pa’ which means to split open, to reveal the truth. Geshe la related that Atisha used to carry a stupa behind him everywhere he went; every time he committed a wrong, he’d prostrate to the stupa and confess it.

Dedication is offering of the merits of one’s good deeds and qualities to others. Atisha explains that it should have the three main factors: good preparation, good actual practice and good conclusion. His advice on dedication is summarized in the Verse, “*Whatever virtues accumulated in the three times / Be dedicated for the unsurpassing great enlightenment / Offer the merits of practice to sentient beings*”. Whenever you engage in a positive deed, it is imperative to dedicate the merits earned to become enlightened so that one can benefit all the sentient beings. If one has previously made a wrong dedication or offered it for an inferior purpose, one can change one’s dedication. One can even dedicate the merits earned from unintentional good deeds! Geshe la said that it is through the power of prayers and dedication that virtuous deeds and qualities become a cause for good results and lasting benefits. Otherwise, just like unmoulded precious metals yet to transform into beautiful jewelleries, they remain neutral.

Atisha responds to Drom-tonpa’s questions on the benefits of dedication and their validity. Dedication can bring benefit to the suffering beings just like a drowning person rescued by relatives and loved ones. A deceased can benefit from dedications made by one’s loved ones as long as one’s name is remembered. Dedications benefit those with whom we share some kind of relationship. If a group of people on a boat were crossing a river, those tied together can help the ones falling off. Relationships are formed through three main ties: family, shared wealth and Dharma. It’s difficult to help someone devoid of any of these relationships. Geshe la narrated the story of how even the Buddha himself could not help some suffering beings and his students could.

Atisha further advises, *“Always offer great prayers / Of the seven limbs.”* Geshe la explained that offering prayers is different from dedication. One prays for something as an aspiration. For the beginners, recitation of prayers is a powerful way to find inspiration to inculcate good thoughts, words and actions. The seven limbs practices are: 1. Paying Homage, 2. Offering, 3. Confession, 4. Rejoicing, 5. Requesting the lamas to teach, 6. Requesting long-life of lamas, and 7. Dedication.

“By doing so, both merit and wisdom / Will be accomplished. / The two obscurations will also cease”, he adds. Geshe la elucidated that ‘merit’ refers to the practices like giving, development of compassion and so forth, and ‘wisdom’ means the clear understanding of reality. The two obscurations are: obscuration of afflictive emotions to Nirvana and of imprints of negative emotions to enlightenment.

When both the obscurations cease, Atisha maintains, *“Thus the actualized human life becomes meaningful. / And the unsurpassed enlightenment will be actualized.”* What is the meaning of human life? Geshe la asked. It is human flourishing through inner value development. Whether one calls it the pursuit of happiness or the wish to benefit others, it’s the same.

Geshe la concluded with his advice to imagine the presence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas while engaging in Dharma practices of prayers, confessions and dedications.

Session XXIII:

Chapter 22 of the Text outlines the discussion between Atisha and Drom-tonpa on the *Seven Wealth* summed up in the verse, *“The gems of faith and of morality, / The gems of giving and of hearing, / The gems of shame and consideration for others / And of wisdom-these are the seven gems.”*

Faith is the precursor to the development of all other wealth and qualities. Faith removes mental turbidity and provides clarity so the mind can become receptive to higher attainments. Faith here refers to the faith based on logical reasoning. To understand more, Geshe la recommended to read the first chapter of Nagarjuna’s *Ratnavali*. Drom-tonpa likens faith to the lamp that lights up both oneself and others.

Morality entails avoiding negative deeds, collecting virtuous deeds and helping others. It is the foundation for all other wealth. It is akin to a fertile piece of land upon which anything can grow. It is not a discipline imposed by others. With morality, one achieves peace and calm necessary to cultivate wisdom and compassion. The Buddha has assured that those who have morality will never suffer from any kind of deprivation, especially spiritual poverty.

Giving includes giving of material wealth, Dharma teachings and fearlessness. Atisha tells Drom-tonpa that even the followers of lesser vehicles such as sravakas and pratyekbuddhas can acquire the wealth of faith and morality. However, it is only the higher practitioner who can give away everything, including one's loved ones and one's own body, without attachment and expectation.

If one does not seek the understanding of the profound and the vast through *Listening to the teachings*, then one will fall into the lower realms. We need to study through hearing, contemplating and meditating so as to make a distinction between the superficial and the profound.

The gems of *Shame* (avoiding destructive actions for reasons of personal conscience) and *Consideration for Others* (taking others into account) underlines the need for sense of shame and concern for others so that one can approach any activity with an intention to benefit oneself and others. Texts like *Shikshasamuchaya*, advise to ask this question before every action – will this make others lose faith? This is not to encourage people to pander to other people's whims but to approach every action from the larger perspective. The lack of this quality leads to disgraceful actions of stealing, gossip, flattery and so forth.

The wealth of *Wisdom* is the supreme wealth of all. Wisdom enables acquisition of all knowledge and practice. It helps one fulfil the twin purposes of benefiting oneself and others.

Having expounded the *Seven Wealth*, Atisha tells Drom-tonpa that “*These are the sublime treasures of / The seven inexhaustible jewels / And should not be shared with non-human*”. Geshe la explained that here “non-human” refers to those people who're not mentally prepared to receive these instructions. Atisha then points out to Drom-tonpa that

even if he attained supreme knowledge capable of pulverizing all mountains, it would amount to nothing if it did not benefit others.

Concluding Session XXIV:

At the end of the discourse, Drom-tonpa requests Atisha to summarize the teachings in terms of practices that can be done in the midst of many and those that can be done in isolation so the ordinary followers can have the essence to hold onto. In the concluding Chapter, Atisha explains the two auspicious examinations summed up in the verse, “*When among many, / watch your words / When alone, / watch your mind*”.

When among many, Atisha instructs, one should guard one’s speech. Geshe la explained that one must primarily examine one’s speech as we are habituated to verbal communication. It’s obvious that gossip, flattery, defamation, arrogant remarks and so forth are destructive. But also destructive are the well-intended words expressed to an improper vessel. Any speech, good or bad, has the capacity to incite attachment, anger and hatred. Therefore, Atisha warns to be careful with one’s words. He instructs to observe the recipient of words. Remain silent if there are too many people. Share good knowledge and qualities with the devoted and faithful. Praise the learned and the disciplined ones. Talk about practices with those with a good heart. When among the sinful ones, gently avoid them or deal in an appropriate manner. He further advises to hold one’s words in one’s throat and examine if they are well intended, honest, and beneficial and so forth before speaking them. For ordinary beings, without clairvoyance, it’s imperative to be skilful in one’s verbal communication and restrain false speech at all times. Geshe la added that the intelligent ones listen more, talk less.

When alone, in solitude or isolation, Atisha advises to examine one’s mind. Body, speech and mind are the three gateways through which we express our practices. The mind dictates our words and actions depending on whether or not it is influenced by the three poisons of hatred, attachment and ignorance. Mind has the ability to restrain all negative deeds. Geshe la referred to a Dzogchen teaching that advises to watch the mind, let things appear distant, and not chase them. Mind is an exaggerated conceptual phenomena; one can see the true nature of mind through repeated observation. This leads to understanding of reality of everything.

Geshe la remarked that ordinary beings have to act as if one is deaf, dumb and blind on many occasions in order to avoid the negative influence of the surroundings. He also shared that there's another text, which says, "When in crowd watch your mouth, when alone watch your hand, at all times watch your mind".

Concluding the session, Geshe la thanked everyone for attending the teachings. "Just like you have regular meals to sustain the body, have spiritual food regularly too", he advised. He expressed his joy in the belief that no matter how desperate a person, deep down at the core of one's heart, one aspires for goodness in oneself and in others.

THANK YOU!!!

*May all beings everywhere,
Plagued with sufferings of body and mind,
Obtain an ocean of happiness and joy
By virtue of my merits.*

(Shantideva's A guide to Bodhisattva Way of Life,10:2)