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## TEACHINGS ON THE PRELIMINARY PRACTICES (NGÖNDRO)

*Rinpoche sent the following teaching for those gathered to do the preliminary practices (ngöndro) at Dorje Ling in Portland, Oregon, on May 12, 2013.*

### Part 8

#### Samsara: The Power of Habit, Top to Bottom

At this moment, we can look around the six realms of samsara and see that our fixation on ordinary, deluded body, speech, and mind has extraordinary power. We can see that we are not the only ones who are this stupid—all the beings in the six realms are misinterpreting their buddhanature in this very same deluded way.

Look at all the different ways that we do it! In the hell realms, there are the extreme obscurations that lead to the extreme experiences of suffering from heat and cold. You can read all the descriptions of what all the detailed sufferings of the hell realms are. They are generally divided into those two categories: the sufferings of heat and the sufferings of cold. Those really are symbolizing the greatest possible forms of physical suffering.

For the hungry ghosts, there is the constant deep suffering of complete deprivation.

For the animals, there are the many, many different sufferings of the different kinds of animals, but they all suffer from the basic stupidity of the animal realm. They also suffer from consuming each other and from being enslaved by humans and so forth. We can actually see beings in the animal realm, while we can't at the moment see the hungry ghosts or the hell beings; so we can look at animals and see their sufferings directly rather than just imagining them.

For the humans, sure you know about human sufferings—that's all you complain about! I don't even need to say anything.

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~Translated and edited by Shashi Reitz~*

For the jealous gods, their sufferings are the sufferings of constantly envying one another, and bickering and going to war with each other and with the gods. This is like people who are so set and stuck in their pride, as if they were constipated with self-concern, that they are never able to simply be at ease. They are never able to have any kind of mental peace, and they never get along with anybody. Thus, their suffering is the suffering of always being eaten up by their own jealousy. That is the suffering of the jealous gods.

As for the suffering of the gods, the gods look like they are having a wonderful party, but the problem is at the end when they fall out of the gods' realms. It is said that this suffering is even worse than that of the beings in the hells because it is juxtaposed with their prolonged experience of bliss, which they have been enjoying for many, many eons. So, you can see that the gods, too, have not managed to free themselves from suffering.

Our minds are completely overcome by non-virtue; and, when you read the descriptions of all the different beings in the six realms, you see how in each realm the minds of the beings there are likewise overcome with non-virtue. Regarding the gods you might say, "Oh, the gods are just enjoying themselves." Well, yeah, they're enjoying themselves, but they're just like zombies or they're sort of dumb. They're just stuck in a state of bliss temporarily, but they haven't freed themselves from non-virtue altogether. Yes, it's a wonderful experience while it lasts, but it is not the same as engaging in virtue, which is going to create further causes of happiness. So, the gods are stuck in exhausting the past causes of happiness that they created without creating any more. And, of course, they are completely overcome by their ignorance like all beings in samsara, so you can see that in the gods' realm, too, they are completely filled with the three poisons. They are not free from the three poisons; they are just having a little temporary vacation from the poisons' more unpleasant effects.

If your mind is engaged in more extreme or powerful forms of non-virtue, then you are creating the causes for rebirth in the lower of the six realms. If your mind is engaged

primarily in ignorance (meaning, if that's its greatest sin, you could say, if that's its default mode, just ignorance) and lighter forms of non-virtue, then you will be reborn in the upper realms where your experience is somewhat better because your karma is somewhat less severe. But because ignorance is still your underlying or default mode, and that is what your entire experience and all of your actions are based on, then you are always only creating the causes for further rebirth in samsara—slightly better or slightly worse, maybe, but in the long run it doesn't make that much difference because you're never free of the cycle itself.

So here you have it, from top to bottom, all of samsara, the whole spectrum of experiences that beings have here—what is it all based on? It is all based on impure perception. These impure perceptions have nothing as their foundation. They do not have any foundation in reality. They do not have any connection to reality. They are simply impure projections that are built upon the habit of having impure projection—there is nothing else there. But based on this habit, the cycle perpetuates itself and will continue to do so, on and on and on forever, unless there is understanding, which is the only way to cut through or bring an end to that strong habituation to perceiving and projecting everything as impure and ordinary.

*~ teaching continues in Part 9...*