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***Planned Parenting:
How to Make Having
a Child Meaningful***

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While chanting the following request to Avalokiteshvara during the 100 Million Mani Retreat in Institut Vajra Yogini, Lavaur, France, in May 2009, Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche was inspired by the words "father and mother sentient beings" to give a talk on the need for parents to make a long-term plan for raising their children.

Please quickly free me and all mother and father sentient beings
Of the six realms from the ocean of cyclic existence.
Please enable the profound and extensive peerless
Bodhichitta to quickly grow in our mindstreams.

We are All One Big Family

Thinking that yourself and all the numberless hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, asuras, and suras, are all one big family, recite this prayer. It is actually true that you are one family because everyone has been your mother, not just one time, but numberless times from beginningless rebirths. And when they were your mother, they gave you numberless kindnesses. They gave you a body numberless times, not just a human body but also the bodies of all the different kinds of animals, pretas, and so forth. They did this each time you were born from a womb or born from heat and moisture, like bugs, lice, and the rest which are born from the heat of the body. Even with a human body, each and every sentient being has given birth to you numberless times, such that even the numberless hell beings have been a human mother to you numberless times. After giving birth to you, they treated you with kindness. And all this is from beginningless rebirths. Each time they protected your life from hundreds of dangers every day, including when you were born as a human being. From beginningless rebirths, they gave you an education numberless times, including when they gave birth to you as a human being numberless times. When as a human being they were your mothers, they bore so many hardships for your well-being, and also created so much negative karma for the sake of your happiness. All this from beginningless rebirths. Each sentient being – each hell being, each hungry ghost, each animal, each human being, each asura, and each sura – has done that for you. Then expand on this thought to include when you were born as an animal, for example, how many insects, flies, and worms your bird mother killed in order to feed you.

Your Child is a Sentient Being

All these mothers of old protected you, bore so many hardships for you, and created so much negative karma for you. It is truly unbelievable. Can you even begin to imagine their kindness? In fact, almost every single action of theirs was negative karma because it was done out of attachment. For this reason I advise people that the way to take care of a child is as a sentient being, rather than as "MY child." At the beginning of a sadhana, a meditation, or a practice, when you generate bodhichitta toward all sentient beings, you should think that your child is one of those sentient beings. Likewise, when you dedicate your merit to achieve enlightenment for sentient beings, you should think that your child is one of them.

You should have the same motivation to take care of your child as you would for any other sentient being. Your child is a sentient being from whom you have received every happiness that you have experienced from beginningless rebirths, from whom you receive all your present happiness, and from whom you will receive every single happiness, not just one, in all your future lives. Your child is also a sentient being from whom you receive liberation from samsara, and from whom you receive the realizations of the whole entire path up to enlightenment. With that recognition, with that understanding, think of your child as being the most precious and kindest being in your life. Of course, it is the same for all other sentient beings, exactly the same, but you have a particular karmic connection with the one that is your child and are responsible to take particular care of it. However, you should do so with the consideration that it is a sentient being.

In short, when you do a sadhana or begin a practice and generate the motivation of bodhichitta wishing to attain enlightenment for all sentient beings, keep in mind that your child is one of those sentient beings. In this way you will have a totally different attitude toward him or her. You will not have the slightest negative attitude. The black thought of the eight worldly concerns will not be there, whereas the unbelievably good

thought of cherishing a sentient being will be there. On the other hand, with the eight worldly concerns, if your child treats you well you will take care of him, whereas if he goes against your wishes your attitude changes and you might even end up abandoning him, leaving him or her to die.

With Bodhichitta Your Child Becomes the Most Precious Being in Your Life

If you have bodhichitta, you will feel that your child is the most precious, the kindest, being in your life. In general, this is the case for all sentient beings, but you should keep in mind that your child is one of those sentient beings. By doing so, you will take care of it with a healthy, positive mind, rather than with negative emotional thoughts and the pain of attachment. Consider your child to be the most precious, kindest being, and remember that you are responsible for take caring of him. Rejoice in this thinking, “How wonderful it is that my life is beneficial, that I am able to take care of at least one sentient being. How wonderful it is that my limbs can be useful for looking after one sentient being, to cause happiness to even just one sentient being. How wonderful this is.” Rejoice in this way. With bodhichitta, you can rejoice in a positive way. I don’t know whether this is possible with attachment, but with bodhichitta your rejoicing definitely becomes positive and pure.

When you encounter difficulties, when your child does not listen to you, when you cannot control him, when you have a job and many things to do, and you become disappointed and parenting becomes very difficult for you, then it is good to rejoice thinking: “My life is beneficial for at least one sentient being. My limbs are beneficial for the happiness of this one sentient being.” If you can rejoice like this, there will be no difficulties in your mind or in your heart. With this positive wish to help your child, the thought of being annoyed or exhausted by your child will not arise.

Bodhichitta is the Best Attitude

Of course, you should have exactly the same attitude when working in an old folks home, or when you are being paid to look after children. This is the best attitude to have when doing your job. In this way, everything that you do, every hardship that you undergo, every single service that you do to take care of others, becomes purification because of your bodhichitta motivation and the thought that they are so kind, so precious. It purifies the negative karma that you have been collecting from beginningless rebirths. It becomes a great purification and a great means to collect extensive merit. It becomes an incredible practice. In this way, your service to others will include the practice of all six perfections or paramitas: charity, morality, patience, perseverance, concentration, and wisdom. Here wisdom refers specifically to the understanding that the I, the action, and the child are empty, that they exist only as merely labeled by mind.

Therefore, the motivation for going to work to take care of old people or to take care of children should be exactly the same as the motivation you have for taking care of your own child. You should think: “This person is the most precious, the very kindest, one.” Then whatever service you do, whatever hardships you bear, all of it will become an unbelievable means of purifying the negative karma you have collected from beginningless rebirths, as well as an unbelievable means of collecting extensive merits. Everything you do will become a cause for you to attain enlightenment. Everything you do to take care of your child will become a quick path to enlightenment because with bodhichitta you collect extensive merit. It is recounted that even though Buddha Maitreya generated compassion and bodhichitta much earlier than Buddha Shakyamuni, Buddha Shakyamuni actually became enlightened first because his compassion was much stronger than Maitreya’s compassion. Due to his compassion, Buddha Shakyamuni was able to collect much more extensive merit and purify far greater negative karma accumulated in the past. For example, when in one life as brothers they came across a family of five tigers dying of starvation, Maitreya did not offer his body to them whereas Buddha Shakyamuni did. This is why Buddha Shakyamuni became enlightened before Maitreya. It is the same for you in that if you are able to generate strong compassion for your child, and instead of being involved with attachment practice the Dharma, your child will give you enlightenment. Similarly, if you are working in an old folks home, you will receive enlightenment from that old lady or that old man. The same is true of taking care of an animal, it becomes a quick way to achieve enlightenment.

We See Having Children as Blissful

In brief, we need to learn how to take care of children. Whether you are a mother or father, or even if you are not a parent but are involved in taking care of a child, the attitude is the very same: you should take that child as your main object of meditation. That person with whom parents spend so many years of their life is a very important object of meditation. By saying this, I am not suggesting that everyone make children! My point is that if you are going to make children, you should be really careful. Before making a child, you yourself should receive some education about how to make a child's life most beneficial. Of course, each child has its own particular karma so there is no guarantee that he or she will do everything you say. However, as parents you have much influence over your child because normally a child spends a lot of time with its parents. Because of this, parents have a huge responsibility in terms of what the child will grow up to be. But the problem is that people usually don't think about this. They don't plan what they will do with that new life after giving birth to it. They think of a child as being only bliss, a total dream, without one single problem.

We Also See Relationships as Blissful

It is exactly the same for marriage in that you think: "If I can be with him or her, then that's it. That is all I need in life." You never think of there being problems. You just see a life filled with beauty and bliss. You never think of problems, but think of bliss: "If I could only live with this person, I could say good-bye to the rest of the world, even it were to be destroyed by fire." It is very, very interesting to examine how the mind thinks, how attachment thinks, the particular "trip" of attachment. Your attachment sees only beauty, only bliss. That person is the most beautiful, fantastic, and best thing in your life. Even before you meet that particular person, you have the hope to meet him or her and you imagine how it would be to be together with that person. You make up a whole series of stories, creating a visualization or dream of how it will be. You think only about all the nice things that will happen. At this point you don't need to actually spend any money, whereas afterward, in order to meet that person, some people are willing to spend even thousands, or hundreds of thousands, or even millions of dollars to meet that person and then give billions and zillions of gifts to make the relationship happen.

At the beginning of the relationship there is excitement, you meet each other more and more often and come to think: "If we could only live together that would be fantastic." Then you either get married or begin to live together. When I was a child in Solo Khumbu, I remember attending some weddings of benefactors. The celebration went on for several days, during which the groom's family received the bride from the other family. The tradition there is that marriages are arranged by the parents, perhaps similar to how it is done in Chinese families, although the son might also be consulted. For several days the wedding guests dance around a pillar playing cymbals, drinking a lot of alcoholic drinks made from rice and barley, and eating a lot of food. In the meantime, the wedding party sits to one side without dancing, as if they were doing a puja! Although the bride was all dressed up, I noticed that in many cases she would keep her face down and seemed to be crying for many hours, all day long. She was so sad to leave her home as she had had no choice in the matter, the marriage having been decided for her by her parents. I remember this is what happened in the Himalaya mountains of Nepal.

So then it finally happens, you manage to succeed in living together and even find a house. But now you begin to really see the person. Before you just met each other for an hour here and there, perhaps in a park or at a restaurant to have a meal together. Initially you were very attracted to each other, but now you begin to really see the other person. One day, two days, three days, four days pass, and gradually the anger starts to come. The other person behaves in a way that you don't like. You begin to notice many different things, including the unpleasant smell of his or her body and his or her excrement. Gradually you come to see many mistakes. You begin to see the selfish mind of the other person, that he or she doesn't want to do what you want, but wants to do what he or she wants. It starts from there and gradually increases more and more.

At the beginning, there weren't any problems, only bliss. You were completely absorbed in bliss. Now that bliss is like a cloud or a rainbow disappearing from the sky, first there is just a trace left and then it is

completely gone. As the days pass, there are more and more problems. Later, your greatest wish is expressed in the thought: "When can I become free from this person?"! Your way of thinking has become completely opposite to what you thought at the beginning, completely opposite. Now what you are praying for every day, what you are wishing for from the bottom of your heart, is to become free from this person. That becomes the most important thing for your happiness. Day and night, while you are out at work and when you return home, you think: "When am I going to be free?" Life becomes filled with tears and misery. You look for a way to make this happen, and as a result there is more and more fighting. While physically you still live together, life goes by in fighting and quarrelling. You blame each other saying "You did this. You did that." Eventually either you leave or the other person leaves. Then, the very best thing becomes to never ever meet that person again! Whereas before the best thing imaginable was to meet the person, now the best thing, the happiest thing in your life, is to never again meet that person.

One time when I was staying in Singapore, an Indian family came to visit me. The parents couldn't wait for their daughter to get married and so they asked me to pray for that to happen. I advised them to be careful, to take their time, to not rush, but I didn't go into details like I have here. They had no idea what they were saying, they were as if totally hallucinated. For them, that their daughter get married was the biggest thing in their life, the most important thing in their life. This is because they had no idea what happens after that, that it is not always sun-shining bliss. So the parents, and not only the couple, never actually think about what will happen in the future. Even though you hear about or see so many problems, you still don't think about what will come later on. However, at one point there will be many problems. If one of the people is wealthy, you also begin to fight over material things. There are so many problems. When the experience starts to become negative, you see more and more problems and at the same time your attachment diminishes more and more until all the excitement is gone. But even while that is happening, while that first relationship is still ending, you begin another relationship with someone else. Before the first one is completely finished, you start another one, thinking: "This person loves me more than that person." You do exactly the same as before. You start another book: "This person is fantastic, he or she loves only me. If I can be with this person, there will be no problems, only bliss. No darkness, only sun-shining, happiness." Then the same story starts all over again. But when you start to live together, once again it is the same. Gradually the other person learns more about who you are, and you also begin to see problems that you did not notice before. You find more and more mistakes in each other, and more and more lose interest in each other. So once again it is the same. Then again you find someone else and think: "This person loves me so much more than that person."

Using a Relationship to Practice Dharma

It tends to happen that when you have a child, all the focus goes to the child. Whereas before the focus was on each other, when you have a child all the focus goes on him or her, and then you easily feel that the other person doesn't love you any more. Then the problems start, the mind becomes unhappy. Because of this, it is important to use a relationship, your being together with someone, for your Dharma practice. This is basically the same as what I said earlier on about the way to take care of a child – to make sure that it becomes your Dharma practice and that there is nothing worldly involved in it. In particular, that it become the cause of enlightenment, given that the motivation is bodhichitta, cherishing that other sentient being, serving and dedicating your life to him or her, in the same way as you are supposed to do for all sentient beings.

So you should also use a relationship as a means to practice Dharma. You can use it to practice morality by, for example, taking the five lay vows and abstaining from killing, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from telling lies, and abstaining from having sex with someone who belongs to another person. In addition to the many moralities that you can practice, you can also engage in the practice of charity, the practice of patience, and the practice of perseverance, as well as concentration and wisdom. Like this, you use the relationship to practice the six paramitas in the same way as I mentioned in relation to your child. In particular, you can use a relationship to learn patience from the other person, the paramita of patience. If you can do that, it means that the person you are living with is giving you enlightenment. You use the relationship to practice Dharma. If you are able to use your life to practice Dharma, it becomes a very

healthy life. Just as when taking care of a child, an old person, or your parents, likewise in a relationship you should see yourself as a servant and the other person, that other sentient being, as your boss. You see yourself as a servant serving that sentient being, freeing him or her from suffering and causing him or her happiness. This is the attitude of a bodhisattva towards sentient beings. They consider themselves to be a servant serving sentient beings, and see sentient beings as their lord.

In short, a relationship is exactly as I mentioned in the case of a child. From that person you have received every happiness that you have experienced from beginningless rebirths. Just that kindness is unimaginable, but, on top of that, you also receive all your future happiness from that person. In addition, you receive liberation from every suffering, which is even much more precious. Then, you also receive enlightenment from that person, so he or she is the most precious, most dear, person in your entire life. You can also think that that person has been your mother many times and at that time has given you the four types of kindnesses. By thinking of the extensive kindness you have received from that person, you will come to see yourself as his or her servant. In this way, your living together becomes Dharma. Everything you do in that relationship is done to achieve enlightenment for sentient beings. With the attitude that the other person is the most precious and most kind, while you are his or her servant, your every single action becomes a means of collecting extensive merit. Because it is done with bodhichitta, you collect limitless skies of merit. Due to the thought to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, you think "I am going to offer service to this person, this most precious sentient being." Everyday you collect limitless skies of merit and also purify the defilements that you have collected from beginningless rebirths. As a result, your life has so much hope in that you constantly create the cause for the biggest success – enlightenment – for all sentient beings. This motivation is better than that of the hearer-listeners and solitary realizers, in that even though they have achieved the path of merit, the preparatory path, and even the right seeing path, their motivation remains that of achieving their own liberation. Since they have no thought to benefit all sentient beings, your motivation is much more fortunate than that of even these meditators who have achieved high spiritual paths. Those people are living their lives only for the sake of their own happiness, for the sake of their own liberation from samsara.

Taking Karma into Account

Of course, past karma also has to be taken into account. Remembering this, you keep in mind that everything you expect to happen will not happen because things go according to past karma, your own and the other person's. You should remember that everyday. That is very helpful. When you remember karma, there is not much suffering for your mind or in your life. When you relate events to karma thinking, "This is my karma" and "This is his or her karma," the problem does not even become a problem because you accept the situation. Because it doesn't bother you, there is peace in your heart. If, on the other hand, you don't think of and don't accept this fact, there will be mountains of problems in your life. You will feel like you are being crushed under mountains of problems. However, this is due to your mental projections, it is your way of thinking that makes you feel like that.

If you remember karma, then even if one day that person leaves you, there will be no problem at all. You will respect the decision of that person through remembering how dear, precious, and kind he or she has been due to being the source of all your past happiness. Since there is no clinging attachment, if the person wants to leave you, you will offer that person whatever is best for him or her. If the relationship begins with the thought of the other person's kindness, then the end will also be good. If it ends with that thought, there will be happiness. If, on the contrary, the motivation at the beginning is mistaken, then at the end, when separation occurs, there will be huge suffering, such that you may even think to commit suicide.

If you can think in the way that I have explained here, you will be able to enjoy life. You will find satisfaction and fulfillment, and have a happy life. You will experience inner happiness and peace. If not, your heart will always be empty. No matter how much external excitement there is, how many things are happening around you, your heart will always be empty. In fact, this experience is common in life in the West as well as in samsara in general. In short, your life will be filled with misery.

A Good Plan

You need a good parenting plan, that is, a healthy, positive motivation for bringing up your child that is based on a good heart, rather than on attachment. Even though your karma and your child's karma are not the same, how a child's life turns out depends greatly on its parents. The parents' character and their attitude toward life – their having a good heart, their living their life to benefit others, and their doing good things to benefit others in their daily life – provide a lot of potential for the child to develop in a positive way. The parents' attitude becomes an incredible help and support enabling the child to grow up with a healthy, positive, Dharma mind: a mind that does not cause harm to himself or herself, to other sentient beings, including animals, and to the world, the country, the neighbors, and the family. Not only that, such a mind will bring so much happiness to sentient beings, to the world, the country, the neighbors, and the family. As the child learns from what the parents do, he or she receives a positive, beneficial influence, not a harmful influence. Then when that child has its own children, he or she will pass on that education – to live life in a way that is beneficial for others and to have a good heart. These children will be an example for their children, that is, for your grandchildren, whereby the lineage that is passed down from generation to generation is a good one. The most important thing is a good heart, as then there will be unbelievable benefit. You will do good things every day and that education will be passed on from parents to children. Because of this, parents can be of incredible benefit, they can help to transmit from generation to generation the attitude of a good heart, non-violence toward others, and the importance of being beneficial to others. If you do that, it will bring so much happiness to sentient beings from life to life, in this world, in your country, for your neighbors, and for your family. In your family life there will be much happiness and peace. Life will become very yummy.

The Sixteen Guidelines

In the FPMT we now have a project for secular education based on Buddhist principles called Essential Education. Long ago in the past, the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo made a set of Dharma rules for the whole of Tibet in order to ensure that everyone's life be filled with goodness and that it not become a source of harm to others, but only a source of peace and happiness. Although Songtsen Gampo is an emanation of Avalokiteshvara, what he did was manifest himself as a thief and murderer. In other words, in order to educate people he manifested himself as a common criminal. He killed many people and piled their heads up in a heap. In reality, however, no one was killed, the bodies were just his manifestations meant to educate people.

There is a story about two monks who traveled on foot from very far away to receive teachings from Songtsen Gampo. When they arrived there they saw a big pile of heads on the ground and were totally disillusioned. They arose heresy, thinking that he had killed ordinary people. Their minds changed totally. Although in the end they met Songtsen Gampo, they didn't receive any teachings from him, just a present of sack of earth or salt. Even though Songtsen Gampo was in reality Avalokiteshvara, they didn't understand this. It was only when they returned home that they discovered that they had received a big sack of gold from him. But that is all they received, they didn't receive any teachings from him. If they hadn't arisen heresy toward Songtsen Gampo, they could have become enlightened. In short, I just want to mention that Essential Education has created a book based on the sixteen Dharmas of King Songtsen Gampo called *Sixteen Guidelines for Life*. Seven of these sixteen guidelines are a particularly important foundation for educating children.

Seven Guidelines for Educating Children

Kindness and Delight

The first guideline is kindness. It encourages the practice of kindness day and night, not just with human beings but also with animals. The second is the practice of delight or joyfulness. When you see good things happen to others, whether their business is going well or they have found a beautiful house, feel happy and rejoice. This doesn't mean that you want that thing for yourself, but that you think how wonderful it is that another sentient being has found happiness. Delighting in others' good fortune will keep your mind always happy and at peace. You will have a healthy mind.

These two attitudes, kindness and rejoicing, can be taught even without explaining to the child that he or she is creating good karma. This is because even without telling someone that, he or she still creates good karma. In reality when you practice kindness and rejoicing, because you create good karma, it will bring success and happiness in your life. From one act of kindness or rejoicing, you will have success and happiness for hundreds of thousands of lifetimes because karma has the characteristic of expanding over time. This is the case for both karma, or action, that brings the good result of happiness, and for karma that brings the bad result of suffering. In either case the result expands – from one small karma, or one small action, you will experience results for hundreds of thousands of lifetimes. Therefore, in reality even if it is not appropriate to explain karma to children in, for example, a public school, in reality they create good karma from each act of kindness and rejoicing that will bring thousands of successes even in this life. For example, when you practice kindness, your mind will always be happy and healthy. Likewise, a rejoicing mind is a happy mind. When your mind is happy, your body becomes healthy, and even the chances of heart attack and other illnesses that come from anger and selfishness are greatly reduced. In fact, researchers have seen that angry people have far more chance of having a heart attack or stroke. I read an article by a doctor in a Delhi newspaper in which he said that in his experience heart attacks happen due to talking badly about other people. I think there is a lot to be learned from what this doctor said. If you put a negative label on a life situation, then it will appear negative. If you see your life or another person's situation in a negative light, you will become unhappy. It will disturb your mind. In the long term this creates high blood pressure that can lead to a heart attack.

Patience

The third point is patience. Patience, the opposite of becoming angry, means that you do not harm yourself or others. The result of this is that it stops you from creating an unbelievable amount of negative karma. To stop harming yourself and others, including animals, and instead practice patience has the positive effect in future lives of your continuing to be patient and to not harm others. All this comes from the positive imprints left on your mind in this life. In addition, even in this life you will bring peace and happiness to your family, to your neighbors, and to the entire world. It has happened many times in the history of the world that people in powerful positions did not practice patience and instead killed many people, including children. Practicing and training your mind in patience now will help you in future lives to avoid becoming angry and to be more patient. Thus, the effect continues into future lives, whereby you have ever more patience and refrain from harming sentient beings. As a result, what sentient beings receive from you is first peace and then enlightenment.

Contentment

The next one is contentment. There is an unbelievable need for this quality given that the problem of so many young people is a lack of contentment. Because of this, they get involved in drugs and become unable to live a normal, ordinary life, never mind practice Dharma. Having entered into the vicious cycle of addiction to alcohol and drugs, they become unable to hold down a job, and eventually totally destroy their entire life. Their life becomes completely submersed in problems for years and years, it is as though they are sinking in quicksand, unable to get out.

There are so many problems in the world due to a lack of contentment. We see even wealthy people, millionaires and zillionaires, who go to prison after they have been found to be embezzling funds. All this occurs as a result of a lack of contentment. Contentment is therefore very important for peace.

Forgiveness

When someone harms you or disrespects you, the best response is forgiveness. Forgiveness is extremely important. If you are able to forgive others, it will bring peace in your heart and in the heart of the other person. There will be peace in your mind and in your life. Then, one by one, you will be able to bring peace to the rest of the people in the world, including your own family. If, on the other hand, you are unable to bring peace to the world, the purpose of your human life will be lost.

One time in the United States I saw an interview on TV with a mother whose daughter had been kidnapped, raped, and killed by a man, I don't think she was a Buddhist, but when she was interviewed she said that she didn't want that man to be killed, instead she forgave him. That attitude is so amazing. Although she did not seem to be a Buddhist, she had unbelievably good heart. Another time a man who had been shot six times was interviewed, and he too said that he did not want to kill the man who had shot him. He too was not a Buddhist, but still he was so kind and had such an incredibly good heart.

Humility

Then, when you do something that harms another person, for example, you insult someone or get angry with someone, you should immediately apologize for your mistake. That will bring peace in the heart of that person and he or she will not hold a grudge against you. Whereas with forgiveness you yourself do not hold a grudge against others, with humility the other person does not hold a grudge against you. This is one way that you can make a significant contribution to world peace.

Courage

The last one of the seven guidelines is courage. Many people have the tendency to think "I am hopeless," whereby they put themselves down. It's as if they have no potential, as if they have no qualities. With courage you can build up the strength that is needed to develop the qualities that will enable you to lead others to happiness. For this reason, courage is extremely important.

The reason why I am promoting these particular guidelines for children is that they can be used as a basis for educating them. These guidelines give a clear idea of how to bring up children such that instead of a child harming himself or herself and his or her family, he or she will be able from life to life to bring benefit to the world, to the surrounding people, and to his or her family. Other people will receive unbelievable benefit and happiness from the person who puts these guidelines into practice. That person will be able to do so many good things for others.

Parents Have an Enormous Responsibility

Because parents spend so much time with their child, they have incredible influence on him or her. However, even though the outcome has much to do with the parents, since the child still has his or her own individual karma, it doesn't mean that the child will do everything that the parents say. The child may in fact not listen to his or her parents. Or due to strong karma from past lives, the child's life may turn out to be something completely different from the education that he or she has received. In spite of this, parents need to take responsibility to help their children and need to have a clear idea about how to educate them. If they don't have a clear idea about how to direct a child's life in a positive way, then the child's future will not be clear. In that case their having become parents will be a great loss. While many good things could have happened to the child, because the parents did not have a clear idea about parenting, the child's whole life can turn into one of suffering and problems.

Parenting Made Worthwhile

The conclusion is that if a child can put even just the first of these seven guidelines, kindness, into practice with everyone he or she meets, the result on other people will be amazing. Each time that the child does something positive, then however much the parents suffered for that child, it will all become worthwhile. For nine months the mother carried the child in her womb, bearing all sorts of difficulties. Then after the child was born, the parents worked so hard to make money to build or buy a house. Long before that, the parents themselves went from kindergarten to primary school and then on to college in order to get an education that would enable them to find a job and make enough money to buy a house for their future children. They spend so many years sacrificing their life for their child before and after it is born. Just living with a child brings so much exhaustion, tiredness, worry, and fears, but now, whatever difficult times the parents went through in the past, it all becomes worthwhile. Therefore, my conclusion is that if a child is brought up with a clear plan for his or her life to be beneficial to sentient beings (or at least to this world, the country, the neighbors, the surrounding people, and the family), due to which he or she practiced good heart and refrained from harming others, or even just practiced the first guideline, kindness, then each

time the child does this, however many years the parents spent worrying and suffering, it all becomes worthwhile.

There is an expression “An apple a day keeps the doctor away.” Likewise, if once a day a child practices good heart or does one act of kindness, this will keep difficulties away for the parents. All the unbelievable sufferings, worries, and fears that they experienced for that child will become worthwhile and the parents will be able to rejoice. They will see the results of the efforts that they made to educate their child. So you must do that, otherwise parenting will not become Dharma, it will be done out of total attachment and nothing to do with Dharma. After your child is born, there will be so much suffering, worry, and fear, so much exhaustion and hard work, and in the end the child won't have a good life. There won't be any contentment. Life will become an experience of unbelievable suffering. Likewise, for the child there will be much suffering, his or her life will become only suffering. Everything will be very difficult and there will be no contentment. Besides the child's own problems, there will be so much suffering for the parents and the entire family, so much extra worry and fear for the child. Your entire life will pass in only suffering. Then death will happen. This is how things go in samsara.

Make a Good Plan

The point here is that if you choose that particular way of life, that of having children, you must have a good plan as to how you can make it beneficial for the world and for all sentient beings, Even if all the guidelines cannot be practiced, at least you should try to educate your children in as many of them as possible. Then as parents you need to practice them yourselves in order to set an example for your children. In this way, your children will learn from you and will put these qualities into practice.

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Transcribed and edited by Joan Nicell.

May Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche have a long life and may all his wishes be fulfilled.