

Ven. Geshe Sangey Thinley Teaching at Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling 15 March 2015

Translated through Skype by Anton Weiersmuller, transcribed and lightly edited by Kaari Schleich.

Good morning everyone.

The first thing is, we need to have the right motivation - a positive motivation. What do we mean when we talk about this positive motivation? We talk about the mind that cherishes others.

The Panchen Lama Lobsang Chogye says that the positive and ALL good qualities come from the mind that cherishes others and respectively all faults or negative experiences come from the mind that cherishes self - our self-cherishing mind.

If we have this mind that cherishes ourselves - then from this all our disturbances and mental suffering comes about.

The reverse is also true - all the positive qualities like a peaceful state of mind, a happy state of mind, can be found from the mind that cherishes others. So when we take these two in opposition the self-cherishing mind and the mind that cherishes others we can see that all our suffering comes from the self-cherishing mind and a happy peaceful state of mind comes from cherishing others.

What are we saying when we talk about this mind that cherishes others? We are talking about the positive qualities of loving kindness, compassion and the altruistic motivation of Bodhichitta. These attitudes are what we mean by cherishing others. And when we look at the attitudes of loving kindness and compassion - on what basis can we generate these attitudes? We generate these attitudes on basis of other sentient beings - we can generate them on the basis of stones and flowers and inanimate objects - we need to have another sentient being in order to generate a mind of loving kindness and compassion from a Buddhist perspective. So on this basis of other sentient beings that we can generate genuine love and compassion.

When we talk about this compassion - Geshe-la says that most of you will be familiar with the definition of compassion - but just to clarify again. Compassion is this mind that wishes other beings to be free of suffering. So just as we have this wish ourselves to be free of suffering, so do all sentient beings wish to be free of suffering. So this attitude of compassion is that when we understand or perceive the suffering of others that we generate this strong wish that may they be free of suffering - we wish them to be free of this suffering. So in this way when we develop a mental attitude - wishing others to be free of suffering, we are developing the mind of compassion.

This attitude - feeling this genuine warmth or connection to the other person is the basis to our developing compassion. Similar to our connection with our parents. If we saw them suffering then we naturally would want them to be free of this suffering. This is based on this feeling of closeness to them, a connection to them - then this attitude of wishing for them to be free of suffering would naturally arise. So this is the kind of attitude we need to develop towards all sentient beings, feeling closeness and connectedness or warmth to others. Based on this we can develop genuine compassion.

When we look at developing this genuine attitude of love and compassion - we need to develop this on the basis of feeling a connection to all sentient beings. How do we do this? How do we go about developing this?

The key way of doing this is by remembering the kindness of all sentient beings, recognizing their kindness and this way developing this positive feeling or connection towards them.

So how do we go about this? Well just as we have this positive connection with our parents in this life-time, based on all the kindness that they have shown us, the effort to raise us and do all these positive actions towards us we can reflect on that all sentient beings have been the same to us as from a Buddhist perspective all sentient beings have been our mothers. This is based on the fact that as Buddhists we believe that we have had countless rebirths, right? So through all these countless rebirths we cannot find one sentient being that may not have been your mother. Not only in the human realm but also in the animal and other realms. Also in these realms one can still see the kindness of the mother, right? So we actually need to check logically - if we hold this belief that we have had countless lives and countless rebirths then in fact therefore all sentient beings may have been our mothers – not only once but many times and in this way have shown us many kindnesses. So concordant with holding the mother and parents in this life, we need to generate the same kind of positive attitude towards all sentient beings based on the kindness they have shown us in previous lives.

All of this is based on the belief of countless lives and the fact that all beings have been our mothers – so on what basis do we establish this belief? We base it on the fact that this mind this mental continuum is not something that is created at birth and ceases at death. It is something that continues on through past and previous life to the next and present life. So based on this understanding we can see that at the end of one life, we have the two components – the body and the mind. We can say that at the end of the life the body stops. When we pass away the body starts to decay and that continuum dissipates. We cannot say the same about the mind which will continue on to the next rebirth. We can't say the mind is like a cloud that dissipates back into the sky – the mind is not something like this that disappears at death.

So when we look at this idea of past and future rebirths – obviously when we take rebirth it may not be as a human being. There are two main types of rebirths – one in a happy state and one in the state of suffering like a hell being or animal realm and so forth. But what is it that causes you to take rebirth in these realms? It is your actions in this life, so for example if you do a lot of non-virtuous actions and cause others suffering in this life then that will be creating the causes to be reborn in the lower realms in the future, right? Whereas the reverse is true – if you spend your life doing positive actions and actions that benefit others, then you will be creating the cases for a positive rebirth in the future.

So when we talk about these lower realms – we are talking about the three lower realms: the hell realms, the preta or hungry ghost realms and the animal realms. Now when we look at these realms, we need to understand that there are various sufferings of each hell – like the hot and colds of the hell realms, the hunger and thirsts of the preta realms and the various sufferings of the animal realms. We can actually see and understand the sufferings of the animal realms quite easily - both on the land and in the oceans – the various problems with predators etc . For more detailed explanation of all these sufferings of these various states can be found in several texts and in the Lam Rim. It's really important that you look and understand the sufferings of these realms. The question is – why do we need to do this? It's not to create some sense of depression but through understanding the sufferings experienced by sentient beings in these lower realms you generate some genuine shock or fear of these realms and this in turn will help you become more aware and affect the actions of your life time. This will help you focus more on engaging and creating positive virtues and stop you from creating or engaging in non-virtuous actions based on the understanding of the sufferings of the lower realms and wishing to avoid being reborn there. So your actions will become more virtuous and your non-virtuous actions will decline.

As the Kadampa masters used to say – if you want to know what your actions were like in a previous life – look at your physical situation in this life, and if you want to know what your future rebirth will be like – look at the state of your mind in this life.

So what do we mean by this? Well if one looks at human rebirth – in this state – various different types of people have different situations, like some have a positive or wealthy situation whilst some are having great difficulties and really even struggle to get their basic needs together. So we can see that even within the human realm beings find themselves in different situations or states within that. So by looking at this we can see – if we have a lot of wealth it means that we practiced lots of generosity in a previous life. So we can see by our physical state what kind of actions we have created in previous life. And now if we examine our actions and our mind state in this life – these will determine our rebirth into our future life. So if one wants to have positive results one needs to engage in and create positive causes now. In this way we can understand why we are in the situation we are in now and what our future situation is also going to be.

So as Buddhists who believe in the law of cause and effect we need to understand what is the key determining factor for our rebirth? At the time of death – just as one is dying – our mental state is the key determining factor for in what our next rebirth. So if we have a positive state of mind at our death – it becomes the seed or the propelling factor in us having a positive rebirth. But in order to actually have this focus on generating this positive mind state at death comes from some sort of fear or strong wish wanting to avoid or not to be born in the lower realms and fully aware that at the time of death if we have a negative state of mind we will be born in these lower realms. Based on this understanding we develop a strong wish for this not to happen one will then use this as volition to generate a positive mental attitude at death. And the flip side to this is also true – if one does not have an understanding, respect or fear of the lower realms and one is quite slack with ones mind at the time of death – then it is quite possible that one will generate a state of anger or attachment, or fear and will create a cause for us to be born in the lower realms in the future.

If one really genuinely wants to generate a genuinely positive attitude like loving kindness and compassion or faith in the dharma or ones guru at the time of death then how does this come about? It comes about through familiarizing oneself with these positive attitudes in one's life so that one becomes very familiar with say the mind of loving kindness and compassion all the time, and then at the time of one's death – which can be quite an extreme time, one can have some confidence that because one is familiar with this mind state that one will be able to generate this at the time of one's death naturally. Whereas if one doesn't really familiarize oneself with these positive states of mind, but are more familiar with non-virtuous mental attitudes, then that is the habituation and then there is a great danger that non-virtuous state of mind will arise at the time of our death. So it is important to familiarize our minds with positive and virtuous states of mind now.

As Buddhists – of course we have this aspiration to reach the state of full liberation, Enlightenment and Buddhahood, but most of us do not have the potential like Milarepa to attain full enlightenment in this lifetime right? However even if we don't reach this full state of liberation and enlightenment, if we do make a genuine effort to practice the dharma as best as we can, as well as we can, then we can have some confidence that we will make some improvement and if at the time of our death we have a positive mental attitude and we are able to obtain another precious human rebirth or be born in a state where we are able to continue with our dharma study and practice then again we can gradually develop and improve and over several life-times we will be able to develop further and eventually attain the state of liberation and full enlightenment. So at least at minimum if we are not able to attain liberation in this life, we need to ensure that we at least gain another precious human rebirth.

So also – when we look at this dharma path that we are on, with the ability that we have to attain the state of liberation and enlightenment, well on what basis will this actually come about? Well this of course comes out on the basis of other sentient beings. All dharma practices of loving kindness, compassion, The Six Perfections, all the practices that we need to practice in order to obtain any realisations, but especially liberation and enlightenment, this all comes about through the basis of sentient beings. Without other sentient beings we wouldn't be able to engage in any sincere dharma practice. So we need to develop this understanding. Not only our basic needs are provided through the kindness of other sentient beings – but also our spiritual development as well is totally dependent on the kindness of other sentient beings – so this way we need to recognize develop an attitude of gratitude and loving kindness, compassion and attitude to all sentient beings.

This attitude of loving kindness and compassion is not only useful to Buddhist practitioners only – it needs to be practiced by non-Buddhists too, and is useful to all beings. We can see that ANY person who practices these positive attitudes of loving kindness and compassion and so forth is going to have happiness in their life. Their mind state will be happy. And if they don't, and their mind is constantly filled with anger, attachment and aversion – these non-virtuous attitudes then of course if one is constantly going to be disturbed and they are not going to be happy. So if we see that for any sentient being that this attitude of loving kindness and compassion is a source of happiness for us, and if we don't have this attitude, we will always be creating our own unhappiness and strife.

So we really need to see – by looking at great practitioners, Buddha's, Bodhisattvas and great beings, we may be impressed by the depth of their power and their level of incredible compassion, but what we need to understand is HOW this came about. This is not something that just appeared in their minds magically one day, these attitudes were gradually developed over time.

So if we take a look at ourselves, even though we may feel like we have minimal genuine compassion – no matter what level of compassion we have, in all of our mind-streams, in all beings mind-streams, there is the seed of compassion there, there is some aspect of compassion there. So whatever level it is at, we can work on developing this compassion by familiarizing ourselves and by using proper dharma techniques and meditation, this compassion can actually be developed and grown. And anybody who works on it by using these techniques WILL be able to gradually develop this loving kindness and compassion and gradually achieve Bodhicitta.

So as Shakyamuni Buddha said in the Sutra – “I cannot wipe away the sufferings of migratory beings with my hand, nor can I give them the positive qualities with my hand.” What this means is that even though the Buddha who has all these extra-ordinary qualities, abilities and omniscient mind – he does not have the ability merely to take away ones suffering with his miraculous powers, if he could have – he would have done this. It's not possible for him to be able to do this, nor is he able to simply give us the positive qualities he has, like loving kindness, Bodhicitta, compassion, patience as of course if he could have, he would already have done this. And if we look at how do these qualities come about, we will find that they come about through the practices of his teachings, so this was his advice – the teachings. So if the Buddha cannot give you these qualities, how do we develop these? Through the practice of the dharma – then we can gradually develop these positive qualities and in time reach the high state of enlightenment. The point of all of this, is developing these qualities is not something that can happen by themselves or be given to you, one has to generate and develop these ourselves through our own practice and effort.

It's the same if we want to learn anything in the world? If we want to learn a new skill or say learn how to play a sport like rugby or cricket. How is it that these players learn to develop the skills that they have? Well at first they need to find a qualified teacher who understands how to play the game well. But at the point of finding a skilled teacher – this teacher is unable to just pass over the

skills that he or she has acquired. The player has to take the advice from this teacher and put it into practice. And based on this through practicing the teachers advice and techniques they are able to develop the skills and over time can develop all the skills that their teacher has provided within themselves provided that they have listened to their teachers advice and taken this on board and in this way become quite skilled players based on the guidance of their teacher. It is by taking their teachers advice and actually putting it into practice and practicing the skills that they have been taught that they develop these skills within themselves. And it's the same with our dharma practice – one cannot expect just to be given the qualities the teacher has, but if one takes on board their advice and practice what they teach, then they can develop these qualities within oneself.

So when we look at the situation we are in now – Shakyamuni Buddha taught about 2600 years ago that he actually passed away. Almost 3000 years ago. Well we didn't have the karma to be born at that time and take teachings directly from the Buddha, however even though the Buddha himself has passed away, his teachings remain. And we have many qualified masters around now who are able to teach us. So if we actually find a qualified teacher and listen to their advice, listen to what they teach, listen to teachings and put these into practice the correct way, and use these techniques in a proper way – through these methods we are able to train and develop our minds. So we definitely have this opportunity to learn and develop dharma based on the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha himself and the many lineages of great and qualified masters that followed him. If we follow the advice of these teachers and the advice of our lama living today, we can use this opportunity to develop our mind and definitely develop our inner qualities.

So this Tibetan word 'Lama' – is the same in Sanskrit word 'Guru' – why is this lama or guru held in such reverence? Considered so important or holy? Why is the lama seen in this way? It's because we were not able to receive teachings directly from Shakyamuni Buddha himself, we did not have this opportunity but if we want to practice dharma how do we go about this? Well we ourselves don't understand fully how to practice dharma in the correct way, so who is it that tells us or gives us the correct advice? Our lama or guru will advise us and ensure that we are doing the correct practice that suits our mental disposition and not only what to practice but will ensure that we are practicing this in the correct way. If we genuinely rely on our spiritual teacher or guru in this way, they will offer us the guidance that we need to develop our practice purely. For this reason we hold our guru or teacher in reverence, as it is through the guru that we are able to develop our practice correctly and will become effective and will actually be of benefit to both us and others.

The main thing to understand from teachings is how to develop this attitude of loving kindness and compassion and remove this self-cherishing attitude. The way to do this is to understand the faults of the self-cherishing attitude and understand the benefits of cherishing others. So if we continue to reinforce this attitude of self-cherishing attitude then not only will this continue to cause us suffering in this life, but it will also cause us to be reborn in the lower realms and experience suffering in our future lives. The reverse is also true – if we practice loving kindness and compassion and this attitude of cherishing others, then we will not only have happiness in this life, but we will be creating positive causes for happiness in future lives. But again the most important thing to understand is not to think that I will be able to develop this overnight – there is not a magic pill that one can take and then suddenly you have it. This attitude of cherishing others needs to be developed through meditation, through practice, through study, and if one practices developing these through the correct techniques and methods taught by our teacher, then over time we will be able to see that our positive qualities like loving kindness and compassion grow, and our negative self-grasping attitudes will gradually diminish.