

'Mind and Mental Factors'

As taught by Ven. Geshe Sangey Thinley at Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling on Sunday 8th August 2004.

When we engage in Buddhist practice we should have a stable foundation. This refers to having a positive motivation, which means recognising this precious life that we have, and making the determination to use it properly for the sake of other living beings.

The aim of practicing Buddhism is to subdue our mind and discipline our mental attitude. If we practice properly we will gain the result of practicing. We can become fully enlightened and omniscient, or liberated from cyclic existence. At the very least we will be fearless at death and can die peacefully without any regret. The main result of practicing and using our lives meaningfully will be experienced in future lives; we will gain long term happiness in future lives.

The proper practice of Dharma is to utilise the antidotes to minimise or eliminate disturbing emotions. If we understand about impermanence and death we will be able to generate antidotes like kindness, love, compassion and other good qualities of mind. Without any understanding of impermanence and death our practice will not be as strong or genuine. With it we will automatically engage in spiritual practice. Also, we will complete our practice because we have conviction about the nature of life. Not thinking about impermanence and death sufficiently, we may practice for a short time, then let it lapse or stop. So it's crucial to understand thoroughly about impermanence and death.

Anyone who makes an effort can change.

I mean change our mental attitude. This isn't something that will happen immediately, it takes a long time and a lot of hard work. In order to change and deal with emotions, it's crucial to analyse and establish which thoughts are useful and of benefit to us. If we are able to generate love, compassion and other positive qualities of mind, we become more peaceful and experience more happiness. But, if we are more familiar with negative emotions like anger and hatred we will experience unhappiness and frustration.

Regarding thoughts and emotion, there are many different kinds, and we need to examine ourselves and try to adopt and cultivate the useful and positive ones, and deal with the negative ones. When we engage in mundane activities we usually examine the situation and do the things which are good for ourselves and others. For example, a gardener should know the good plants from the bad ones; they nourish the good ones and uproot the weeds or bad ones. Gardeners don't plant bad or poisonous plants, and when they see them they uproot them. In the same way, we should analyse our mental states, cultivate and nourish the good, beneficial ones and uproot and eliminate the negative emotions and thoughts.

In general we speak about body and mind at the coarse level, but we can go much deeper. Our bodies have many parts, and on a more subtle level are made up of many particles and atoms. Similarly if we analyse our mind and mental factors, we can go deeply and find

many levels. It's really worthwhile to examine our minds and think about our mental attitudes, and to nourish and cultivate the constructive or positive ones and abandon the harmful or negative ones. If we can become experts of our own minds we will be really wise. To recognise and understand the constructive mental factors, then cultivate and nourish them is really beneficial.

Do you think it is useful to do this for oneself?

According to Buddhism it is necessary to cultivate the beneficial and negative aspect of our minds.

In Varanasi in India Buddha Shakyamuni taught the principles of The Four Noble Truths. These are the foundation of the Buddha Dharma. To see that they are the foundation we need to analyse and penetrate into them. Among the four, the third is known as The Truth of Cessation. This refers to the state of mind that through practice and effort sees all the negative emotions, and has been able to free itself completely from the effect of all negative thoughts and emotions. According to Buddhism, such a state of true cessation is genuine dharma, and is therefore the refuge that all practicing Buddhists seek. When we talk about taking refuge, the ultimate refuge is the true cessation of all negative thoughts and emotions. Someone who reaches this state is also an ultimate object of refuge. This makes Buddha a true refuge because he has truly gained cessation of negative thoughts and emotions. Similarly, the spiritual community or Sangha can be taken as an object of refuge because they are on the path leading to that state of cessation. In general when we speak of the spiritual community or Sangha these days, it refers to ordained people. Actually it can mean anyone who practices Buddhism or has reached the state of true cessation.

The true state of cessation can only be understood in terms of a state of mind that has been purified of all negative thoughts and emotion, due to the application of antidotes. In order to gain it ourselves we need to cultivate the antidotes to negative thoughts and emotions.

True cessation is a state of mind, and the factors that lead to this are also functions of the mind. Also, the basis of which the purification takes place is the mental continuum. Therefore an understanding of the nature of the mind is crucial for Buddhist practice. By saying this I do not mean that everything that exists is simply a projection of the mind and that apart from the mind nothing exists. However, because of the importance of understanding the nature of the mind in Buddhism it is very important to examine and look inwardly, and to distinguish between the different types of mind and mental factors - which are beneficial and which are harmful. Disturbing emotions are the main obstacle to our practice, and have to be dealt with. If we think carefully we can see that all our unpleasant feelings, unhappiness and frustrations come from the disturbing emotions and delusions. For example, when we get angry we feel unhappy.

But where did the anger come from?

It arises as a result of desire, clinging attachment or aversion, and from conceptual thought.

Mind itself is not negative or destructive; its true nature is pure and clear. If its true nature was non-virtuous or negative we would not be able to change it, but it becomes temporarily clouded by disturbing emotions and other delusions. Negative thoughts and feelings are not part of the mind, so if we use the right antidotes we can remove them. It's also important to distinguish between body and mind in order to understand how we exist. On examining our minds we can see two different types of feelings and thoughts - negative ones and beneficial ones. We should try to cultivate and nourish the positive ones and eliminate the negative ones. As a result we will experience more happiness and peace in this life and, according to Buddhist belief we will experience more in future lives. We do experience happiness and unhappiness in this life but, if we think logically we can see that the mind is the main creator of this. So, if we think positively we will be able to experience short and long term happiness.

In Buddhism we talk a lot about mind generation. This means expanding our minds, trying to look at things from a wider perspective and thinking about other beings' happiness and welfare. If we have a self-centred attitude we will experience unhappiness and find it difficult to deal with other people.

*If we can reduce our self-cherishing attitude and cherish others,
we will experience true happiness in this and future lives.*

Speaking to people who are public spirited and have altruistic intentions makes us feel better ourselves, but speaking to self-centred people can make us unhappy. So training our minds, promoting the good qualities and eliminating the negative ones, is very beneficial and it is very worthwhile putting the effort into doing it. Buddha Shakyamuni became fully enlightened by training his mind. He achieved it by his own effort; he was not such a being from the beginning. This indicates that if we make the effort and train in this way we can achieve enlightenment too. So it is purposeful and meaningful to examine our body and mind, and if we do this we can develop our good qualities. If we neglect it we will remain the same.

We do some meditation on Sundays, and if you can meditate on love and compassion for about five minutes it will be very useful for yourselves and others.