

'Some Basic Points of Practice'

As taught by Ven. Geshe Sangey Thinley at Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling on Sunday 15 August, 2004.

To correct one's motivation when engaging in Buddhism is the foundation of all practice.

Regarding positive motivation, we should first recognise the preciousness of the human rebirth, then make the commitment to use it properly, which means using it to benefit other sentient beings. If we are able to generate our mind to be loving and compassionate, and to refrain from all non-virtuous or negative activities, then our life becomes meaningful or purposeful. When we want to accomplish any activity, we need to think logically, calculate and make a blueprint in our mind, then follow that with action and speech.

In order to generate a sincere intention to benefit other living beings, when we get up in the morning we should make the commitment and allow our minds to follow a positive attitude. In this way we will become more familiar with a positive attitude and train our minds to be serviceable. If our mind is full of negative feelings like anger and hatred it will be difficult to be beneficial and constructive. So, if we are Buddhist practitioners, when we wake in the morning we need to make a positive determination to use our body and mind for the benefit of other living beings, and try to become more familiar with this positive attitude. Then, when we go to bed we should review our day and see whether we have engaged in positive or negative activities. If we have engaged in positive activities we should rejoice and encourage ourselves to do more in the future. If we have engaged in negative attitudes we should feel shame and regret, and make the resolve not to repeat such behaviour. If we engage in this kind of activity repeatedly, our mind will become more familiar with it and more positive. And this is the time to do it. When we were very young it was difficult to do, and when we get very old, likewise we will find it difficult. Now is the time and we shouldn't miss the opportunity.

We have gained this precious human rebirth due to our positive actions in previous lives, so we should try and accumulate more positive actions for future lives. Thus we will not waste our optimum human rebirth and we will be happier and eliminate suffering in this and future lives.

Because we have a body we need food, clothing, shelter etc. These are basic necessities, but alone they are not sufficient, they cannot fulfil all our wishes. No matter how good our physical surroundings are, if there is no happiness in our minds we will be dissatisfied and depressed. This can happen to anyone and is the nature of cyclic existence or samsara; we all experience these things from time to time.

The purpose of having this precious human rebirth is to free ourselves from the suffering of cyclic existence.

It's like working to release a prisoner - we are in the prison of samsara. To do this, it's necessary to generate the intention to free ourselves, and this is the first of The Three Principal Aspects of the Path - the sincere intention or wish to be free, renunciation. We need to develop a strong dislike for cyclic existence, in the same way as we would develop a strong dislike or disgust towards something which makes us sick when we eat it.

In order to be liberated from cyclic existence completely, as well as having the sincere intention to free ourselves, we also need to have the correct view of how things exist. We have to uproot ignorance and delusions, and develop the wisdom, understanding emptiness. Additionally, if we wish to gain the highest state of omniscience it is necessary to cultivate the altruistic mind - the mind of enlightenment or Bodhicitta.

The intention to leave cyclic existence, the correct view of emptiness and generating the altruistic intention are the prerequisites to liberation, and so they are called the Three Principal Aspects of the Path.

They are indispensable to attaining liberation from cyclic existence.

Traditionally, when we gather for teachings, a mandala is offered at the beginning and end. At the beginning it is a request for the teaching to be given; it is a sincere request for the instructions for liberation and enlightenment. At the end it is a thanksgiving. The meaning of performing a mandala offering derives from the actions of the Buddha, who, in former lifetimes while training on the path underwent many hardships without concern for his body, family or resources in order to hear and practice the teachings. As a symbol of his dedication and selflessness we make this offering prior to listening to his teachings. It's a mental offering of our body, resources and roots of virtue. When we offer a mandala we should imagine that we offer the entire world system, which has been formed by our collective karma. We should visualise it in a wondrous and glorified form.

Sometimes people may think that they cannot offer all the world systems because they do not own them. But, according to Buddhist philosophy we have a share of everything. For example, we may own a small part of New Zealand, but collectively we have a share of the whole country, as everything and everyone is heavily dependent on each other.

When listening to or giving teachings our mind must be conjoined with a mind of refuge or altruism, which is seeking to help others. This is why we recite the verse of taking refuge and generating Bodhicitta three times at the beginning and this is done in conjunction with meditation and reflection.

"I go for refuge until I am enlightened to the Buddha, the Dharma and supreme community, and through the merit of listening to the teaching may I achieve Buddhahood in order to help all migrating beings."

If you are giving the teaching you say ".through the merit of giving teaching." and in general one says ".through the merit of practicing." These lines are used frequently when teachings are given or other rituals performed; they are crucial to Buddhist practice.

Regarding taking refuge, Buddhists take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. We can also take refuge in our spiritual teachers and, for non-Buddhists in whatever accords with our belief, for example God. To generate our mind means to broaden our perspective, so we generate bodhicitta to enhance our understanding of it. Cultivation of an altruistic motivation is of utmost importance because good or bad effects arise as a consequence of good or bad motivation. In reciting these prayers we bring to mind the supreme qualities of enlightened beings.

When we practice spiritual instructions and follow a spiritual path we need to practice logically and with objectives in mind. Whether we are able to accomplish these objectives depends on one's motivation. There are many different end results and what we achieve is dependent on our motivation.

We have discussed briefly the Three Principal Aspects of the Path and the importance of motivation and intentions. These are reminders. Just hearing is not sufficient, we need to think deeply about these things and penetrate into them as they are very profound. We also discussed about using our body and mind in a positive and beneficial way. Everyone would like to have a meaningful and purposeful life, so we should think about what this really means and analyse it.