

Three Aspects of the path, and the Four reliance's

As taught by Ven. Geshe Sangey Thinley, at Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling on Sunday 13th June 2004.

When we engage in Dharma practice or receive teachings, first of all we have to correct our motivation. When we have the correct motivation, our practice becomes effective and sincere.

Correcting our motivation means we have to expand our mind, try and understand that we have been taking rebirth since beginning-less time and during those lifetimes we have only been concerned with our own well-being.

This self-cherishing attitude means that we are still in Samsara or cyclic of existence, and we have to change this attitude to thinking about other beings and their well-being. We have a good opportunity now to engage in practice because we have gained a precious human rebirth. We shouldn't miss this opportunity, but tell ourselves to practice, not waste this opportunity and practice as soon as possible.

Geshe-la has recited a quotation from Shantideva's text "The Bodhisattvas Way of Life" which means that once we have the opportunity to practice Buddha Dharma, or these genuine instructions on the Path to Enlightenment, it will be very hard to find such conducive conditions for practice again.

If we are reborn in the lower realms, for example the animal realm, we won't have the chance to practice because in those realms there is immense suffering. Also they do not have the intelligence to understand Dharma. In Buddhism there are many different instructions and it is difficult to go through them all.

To be precise, we should at least understand the Three Principle Aspects of the Path:

- ~ Renunciation,
- ~ Bodhichitta and
- ~ Wisdom (right view).

These three principles are very important.

For example without renunciation, or the wish to be free from cyclic existence, we cannot integrate dharma properly because our mind will not be mixing with it if we are only concerned about this life.

Without Bodhichitta or the altruistic intention, our practice won't be Mahayana, and it is very important for us to make it Mahayana.

Also, to have the right view is crucial because in order to become liberated or enlightened we have to overcome the Two Obscurations. Without correct understanding we won't be able to do this.

This is why I say that the Three Principle Aspects are so crucial. I have discussed these a few times and assume you understand them well.

Without renunciation or the sincere wish to be liberated from suffering, we won't be oriented towards dharma. Our minds would be separated from genuine practice. Why is it that without renunciation our minds won't be oriented towards the Teachings? It is because without this sincere wish to be free, we will have a craving or clinging to the marvels of cyclic existence. However, if we are fed up with it and have disgust for the marvels of cyclic existence, this will not be so.

For example, if you really dislike someone, you won't want to see them or have anything to do with them. In the same way we should be fed up with the marvels of cyclic existence. This is very difficult mind training because most people don't see things this way and we have a strong craving towards worldly pleasures. When we talk about Mahayana practice it means cherishing other living beings and being concerned about their happiness at all times. Without this our practices will not be Mahayana.

The third Aspect is understanding reality correctly. In order to be liberated we need to remove the obscurations and to eliminate disturbing emotions and their imprints. In order to remove them completely we need to understand the nature of reality. Without that understanding we cannot remove these afflictive or disturbing emotions. That is why these Three Principle Aspects are so crucial.

The source of the Buddhist teachings has come to us from Shakyamuni Buddha, via the great Indian and Tibetan masters, from lineage to lineage, and it's up to us to penetrate and discover what the real meaning of them is.

If we don't understand the whole subject matter, with a holistic understanding, it can be confusing. If we read one part and think we understand it, we may find on reading another part that it is contradictory. For example, when we read the Heart Sutra, we find that it talks about "no nose, no eyes, no ears, no tactile sense" and so on, but we do actually have these. The real meaning of this needs to be understood in the context of the Buddha's teaching. When Geshe Sonam Rinchen was here he gave a teaching on this and we have audio tapes if you would like to hear them.

When we engage in spiritual practice we really need to have a clear understanding of what we are doing. When we are involved in any kind of project or task, spiritual or non-spiritual, we need a clear understanding and insight into what we are doing.

In Buddhism there are Four Reliance's and if we know what these are they can be very helpful. They are:

1. Do not rely on the person, rely on the doctrine.

This means that if someone important says something, we should take notice, but not rely on the person, only the points he is making, regardless of whether he is important or not.

2. Do not rely on the words, but rely on their meaning.

We know there are people who say things beautifully, with eloquence, but what is more crucial is the meaning of what they say. We should try and match the words with the actions of that person, and to try to discern whether his/her speech is valid or not.

3. About the meaning, we need to rely on the interpretive meaning, not the definitive meaning. This is very important. For the interpretable meaning, take for example the Heart Sutra which says "no nose, no eyes" and so on. This can be interpreted to mean that conventionally we have noses, eyes etc, but inherently we have no noses or eyes, they have no inherent existence. The definitive meaning means that it carries the meaning literally, what it says, it means. This is difficult, and the different Buddhist schools have different views on this.

I mentioned at the beginning that we have to discern the real meaning of Buddha's teaching that we have received through the Indian scholars. This means we should be able to differentiate between interpretable and definitive meanings. According to the Buddhist view we have six consciousness's (senses). Among these mental consciousness's is the most important.

4. So the 4th reliance says; Do not rely on ordinary consciousness, but exalted consciousness. Among the six consciousnesses, the mental is more stable or reliable. The others are not so reliable. For example, if we fall over a high cliff we might become unconscious and the other consciousness's will not be functioning, only the mental consciousness. Or, if we drink too much alcohol and become drunk, the eye, ear and other consciousness's become dull and don't function properly, but the mental consciousness is still alert. Also, in deep sleep all the consciousnesses but the mental seem to cease. So we shouldn't rely on ordinary consciousness, but wisdom or exalted consciousness.

These, in brief, are the Four Reliance's. If we know them; they are very helpful in our spiritual practice. Also, we can apply them in our ordinary life when we run important projects, to discern what is useful and reliable is important. Reliance means trustworthy, which I'm sure you know. It is stable and we can rely on it. This is very useful in our studies when something is unclear and causes us doubt. This is brief. I hope you understand a little bit and can apply it in a wider perspective.

(Translated by Tsering Samdup: Transcribed by Ven. Ani Jampa Tsekyi: Typed out by Yvette Phillips: Lightly edited for Dharma News by Ven. Ani Jampa Tsekyi.)