

'Training the Mind'

As taught by Ven. Geshe Sangey Thinley at Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling on Sunday 30th May 2004.

To make our practice genuine, we need to start by correcting our motivation by focussing on all living beings who are suffering and make the commitment to become enlightened in order to remove all living beings suffering.

In the medium scope of motivation we need to think of the immense suffering we would experience if we are reborn in the lower realms, or unfortunate states. We need to practice in order to liberate ourselves from cyclic existence and at least make the commitment that we are going to make the rest of our life meaningful and purposeful.

This means we need to recollect past actions, rejoice if we have done positive actions, and promise to do more. If we have done negative actions, we need to make the commitment not to do them again. In brief, we need to think - my life is to become more beneficial, and to create happiness, which is beneficial to others. When we talk about a meaningful and beneficial life in the context of this Buddhist viewpoint, it means decreasing our self-cherishing and increasing the attitude of cherishing others. That kind of exchanging our old attitudes means a meaningful life.

If we generate kindness and altruism, it means that we will also be more comfortable and everything becomes easier. This attitude will bring us more happiness in the long term. Contrarily, if we harm other beings or disparage them; we will experience more fear, worry and other mental disturbances like depression, stress and so on.

If we think carefully about cultivating love and compassion, or about the people who practice love and compassion, they are usually happy, without stress and anxiety. Also, if we approach those practitioners, they impact on us and we'll feel less stress, so that this is the short term benefit. In the long term, we will gain ultimate happiness.

If we are busy with conceptual thought of self cherishing and neglect others, then when others come near us, our negative energy will impact on them, and drive them away. Also, it is very destructive for ourselves and our physical well-being.

To cultivate love, compassion and the altruistic mind of enlightened beings is not easy, because we are not familiar with the attitude of cherishing other living beings, but if we try to promote these inner good qualities of mind, we can really progress.

In order to do this, we have to study, which means in this case, transforming our attitude or training our mind.

There are many different religious traditions in the world, and they are all valid and beneficial. They are all useful to human beings. Also Buddhism is valid and useful, and it is especially designed for transforming individual's mental attitude. In general, all Buddhist practices are designed for training or transforming our mind. In particular, lo jong (Tibetan) is the practice of transforming our mental attitude, which is really emphasised in the practice of Buddha Dharma.

The specific meaning in this case of training or transforming our mind, is to diminish or reduce the self-grasping attitude. There are many different teachings or practices in the field of Buddhism. Among them, the "Lam Rim" teachings and the text written by the Indian Master Shantideva, the 'Bodhisattvas way of Life" are called "Lo jong," which means training the mind or transforming our mental attitudes. They are specifically designed for training the mind. The Eight verses for Training the Mind, the Bodhisattvas Way of Life, and various Lam Rims are all mind training instructions. They are designed to familiarize our minds with good qualities and reduce the bad qualities.

When we want to gain any skill in this life, we go to school to train, on an intellectual or superficial level, but when we talk about mind training in a Buddhist context, we apply the instructions on our mind until we see and experience the results of practice; it is an inward change.

In brief, we should try and be more kind hearted and beneficial towards other living beings. If we are Buddhist practitioners, these are essential instructions. Even if we are not Buddhist, to cultivate kindness and be beneficial to other living beings is also beneficial for ourselves, it's a mutual benefit.

*So, the source of happiness is
kindness or love and compassion.*

If we look carefully, we see that all human beings depend on each other heavily, so good motivation and intentions based on kindness is really beneficial. How we know that we depend on others is because we live in a house and use many things which come from the efforts of others. So it's very obvious on the gross level that we depend on others. On a subtle level, in order to become liberated or enlightened, we depend on other people, because we need to develop love and compassion and the altruistic intention. Without other living beings, we cannot generate these good qualities of mind, so in the short term and in the long term, all our happiness depends on other living beings.

Having gained an optimum human rebirth, means, that we have leisure and freedom, and all the conducive conditions with very good facilities. In order to find such a good life in the future, we have to practice ethical discipline, generosity and the other perfections, and then make stainless prayers. These are the causes of a precious human rebirth.

So, everything depends on other living beings kindness and efforts. If we are not dependant on others, we must go in an empty valley. Even if we are healthy and strong, we won't survive there very long without the dependence of other living beings. Also, we won't be very useful to others, so everything is inter-linked. Every good thing, even for this life, like a good reputation, becoming famous and so on, depends on other living beings, even if we have all good qualities, wisdom and skills, if we go where there are no other living beings, it will be of no use, but when we are with others, we can gain name and fame and can become useful.

Even if one person is very intelligent, but is in an empty valley where there are not other people, he or she won't be rich or famous and it will be very difficult to survive. But if they are with a lot of other people, and get involved with them and depend on them, then they can gain anything. Also there are people who hold name and fame, which they would not have without other people.

So for this life's happiness and long term of future lives happiness, everything depends on other people. We have to integrate with others. Without being involved with them or benefiting them, we won't gain any happiness.

So if we think at a deeper level, we see that other living beings are very kind and precious, we can see that there's good reason to be kind or benefit them as well. If we don't think this way, but think that what we have gained comes through ones own effort, then everything can become chaos and we'll experience suffering.

So when we have any spare time or when we do practice, it's good to focus on other living beings and how they are so kind and precious to us. If we familiarize our selves with this kind of attitude, or understanding, our good qualities of mind, like love and compassion can be promoted.

In general it is essential to be kind to all sentient beings. In particular, we should try to generate kindness towards human beings, because we can help each other towards ultimate happiness. If we don't think about cherishing other living beings, but think only of oneself, becoming self centred and neglecting or ignoring other living beings, we'll face all kind of difficulties. With full understanding of other being kindness and usefulness, we should try to reduce self cherishing and promote or increase cherishing other beings.

If we are able to do that, the positive side of our mind will increase and the negative side will decrease. Eventually we will be able to uproot our negative minds.

Usually we think only of ourselves, with strong clinging attachment for our own benefit or happiness and that's why our good qualities of mind haven't progressed. All the previous bodhisattvas and enlightened beings, like Shakyamuni Buddha, have been cherishing other sentient beings, and reducing their self centred attitude, and because of this practice, they become omniscient.

The great Indian Master Shantideva says in his text, that the wise ones, like Buddha Shakyamuni cherish other living beings and that's why they become fully enlightened, but we? We are still in Samsara and experience vicious suffering, because of our self-centred attitudes. In order to establish or possess Bodhichitta, or altruistic intention we have to generate love and compassion. These two are pre-requisites of Bodhichitta.

*Love means the strong wish that all living beings enjoy happiness,
and compassion means the wish that all living beings be free from suffering.*

Once we are able to establish love and compassion sufficiently, we can gain or possess Bodhichitta or altruistic intention. There are many good qualities of our mind. Among them, the foremost or highest is the altruistic intention or Bodhichitta. We all have the potential to develop this, and it's our responsibility of whether we generate it or not. It depends on the individual. When we talk about training the mind, we can train it in many different ways, positive or negative. In this case, we are talking about the positive way, which means reducing the negative side and removing all the negative 'I' thoughts, stains and faults. According to Buddhism, the nature of the mind is clear and light. All the negative side, or pollutions of our mind are adventitious or temporary obstructions. All the shortcomings and obscuration of our mind are temporary.

We know that when we get angry and lose our temper, this arises suddenly. If it was the nature of the mind, we would be angry all the time, but this is not the case. We get angry from time to time, because of temporary negative conditions, and then disturbing emotions arise.

Another example is when we encounter or see desirable objects, then we feel clinging attachment. When we are a baby or small, we don't have this clinging attachment or desire, which means that in the nature of our mind, there are no stains or pollution, these are temporary. If we don't train our minds when we see these objects, disturbing emotions will arise.

Training the mind doesn't mean trying to do something new. We have all the potential and that's why we should try and become familiar with these good qualities and try to reduce the negative side. If all the disturbing emotions like desire and anger were an integral part of our mind, then we could not separate them. This is not the case, they are temporary and adventitious stains, if we deal with them, we can separate them and be free of them.

For example, clouds appear in the sky, but these are temporary and separate from the sky. If clouds were in the nature of the sky, they would be there all the time, but they come and go. Similarly, the disturbing emotions are not part of the mind, they can appear and they can be removed. In the same way dull or polluted water can be purified, the true nature of the water is clear, just as the true nature of our mind is clear. So we should encourage ourselves with the fact that the negative side of our minds is not an integral part of it. Once it is separated from our mind, if we sustain the practice our mind can be free from this negative side.

(translated by Tsering Samdup, transcribed by Ven. Ani Jampa Tsekyi, typed by Kaari Schleich, edited by Ven. Ani Jampa Tsekyi.)