

“Liberation and Enlightenment”

As taught by Ven. Geshe Sangey Thinley at Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling on Sunday 25 October 2015

It's always important to generate a proper, positive motivation. There can be many different types of positive motivations; but the ones we are referring to here are attitudes such as loving kindness, compassion, the wish to benefit others and of course the mind of Bodhicitta. Of all these attitudes, it is said that the attitude of Bodhicitta is the best, this altruistic intention to benefit others. So this is the attitude we should try and develop and generate now.

Why is this positive attitude so important? It is because it is through these types of positive attitudes that our minds become happy. By focussing on and developing these attitudes, peace and happiness will arise. We need to use our understanding to check if this is true. Like all beings, we want happiness and we don't want suffering. Wanting this alone is not enough, we need to understand what the causes of suffering are so we can abandon them and cultivate the causes for happiness.

When we look closely at happiness we see that there are two types of happiness. There is the stable type and the temporary type. The temporary type of happiness can also be thought of as the happiness of this life or short-term happiness. The more stable and reliable of the two types of happiness is the happiness of liberation and enlightenment. We really need to stop focussing on the short term happiness of this life and focus more on the stable type.

Cultivating short term happiness is not actually that difficult. If one works at it, gets a good job and a good situation, then one can say one has some sort of temporary happiness in this life. It is not really that hard to develop or cultivate, and it is easier to cultivate than the ultimate type of happiness.

When we talk about the happiness of ultimate liberation, what exactly are we wishing to be free from? Our wish here is to be free from samsara and the suffering of karma and delusions. This is the real liberation we are talking about.

So we need to ask ourselves, “Just what is this samsara we are talking about?” It's quite easy to mouth the word ‘samsara’ but we need to actually look at it closely and try to understand it's true nature. How can you think that something is ‘bad’ or unwanted if you don't really know what it is? A question for you- is it the contaminated aggregates (the body and so forth) in some form? Is it the sum of all the external matter in the world, the four elements and so forth?

In Tibetan, the word ‘samsara’ (khor-wa) means recurring cycle. This is taking rebirth under the power of karma and delusion. You are not under your own power. Wherever you are born in the six realms of samsara, rebirth occurs in these appropriated, contaminated aggregates. You are constantly taking rebirth under the sway of karma and delusion. This occurs without end and with no spontaneous chance of freedom. The nature of this cycle of rebirth is the essence of samsara.

When we talk about samsara it is often said it is the state of continuous suffering. Because you are under the control of karma and delusion and not your own power, you constantly have to experience things you don't want to; such as aging, sickness and death. We have no choice about undergoing these unpleasant experiences.

Now, when we look at attaining the state of liberation, we need to look at developing certain mental attitudes in order to do that. We need to develop this mind of renunciation or definite emergence. This mind has the attitude that understands that samsara is continual suffering. This understanding is developed through the first two Noble Truths – that there is suffering and that there is a cause for suffering. When one has this attitude, all the experiences of samsara become like the actions of an extremely irritating person, which you really wish to avoid.

The other aspect to developing the mind of renunciation is the understating of the peace and happiness of liberation. Because of our habituations, it is very difficult for us to generate this understanding. In order to generate this mind of renunciation, we need to accumulate a vast amount of merit. We can make strong efforts to do this through practices such as the seven limbed prayer, taking refuge, generating bodhicitta and so forth. If we continue to do these practices and generate merit, then attitudes such as renunciation will be possible for us to generate.

It is worthwhile to look at the attitude we have when we do the practice of mandala offering. Let's look at the example of Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha who was born as a prince in India. The Buddha had great wealth and many possessions, but he realised that this material wealth was not a true source of happiness. He gave this all up, and through this action was able to generate the mind of renunciation as well as bodhicitta and other qualities. When we offer a mandala, we should think like this, and imagine we are giving away all our material wealth, including our body and everything of value we have. This will help remove attachment to these material things, and it is through removing this kind of attachment that we will be able to develop the more positive mental attitudes.

Developing positive mental attitudes is important because if we harbour mainly negative attitudes such as pride, jealousy and anger- then we can't realistically expect to have any happiness. We will consequently experience suffering. This is the reason why negative states should be abandoned in favour of developing positive attitudes.

It also happens that by changing our attitudes, we change our actions. Positive attitudes will be reflected in positive actions that benefit others. The converse is also true; negative attitudes such as anger and pride will lead to non-virtuous actions that are liable to harm others. It is important to recognise how this process works.

Another reason it is important to develop the attitude of renunciation, is because by doing so we have a basis for liberation. Without this attitude of renunciation, it is actually impossible for us to attain liberation.

In Tibetan, the word for renunciation has two parts. The first is 'nges' which means 'certain' or 'definite,' and the second is 'byung' which means 'to emerge.' Thus it entails 'definite emergence' from the suffering of samsara. If one has the attitude of renunciation, one is totally averse to all the experiences of samsara and all non-virtuous attitudes. It is like trying a very bad tasting food, once you get that bad taste in your mouth you don't keep eating it! You also choose not to eat any in the future because you remember that you really dislike the taste of that food. Similarly, once you understand the suffering of samsara, it leaves a very bad taste in your mouth and you become very averse to it.

Once one attains the state of liberation, one is referred to as an arhat. The Tibetan word for this is 'dGra bcom pa' or 'the one who has conquered his enemies.' Here 'enemies' refers not to external foes, but to karma and delusion. Having conquered the enemies of karma and delusion, one then attains a state of freedom or liberation.

Having attained the state of liberation, however, is not enough. One needs to attain the state of Buddhahood or full enlightenment. Focussing on renunciation still happens on a small scale, i.e. thinking of oneself and one's own liberation from suffering. When one looks at the world situation and sees that not only oneself but all sentient beings are suffering, one develops an attitude of bodhicitta. This is a definite switch from wishing for one's own freedom, to wishing for all sentient beings to be free of the suffering of samsara. This attitude of bodhicitta is the basis for cultivating wisdom and merit, and it is on this basis that we become enlightened.

So in order to be enlightened we need to have both these attitudes of renunciation and bodhicitta-but what is their friend or their chief support? This support is termed 'the view.' The view we are talking about here is 'the view that recognises selflessness.' This is sometimes called 'emptiness.' Together, renunciation, bodhicitta and emptiness are referred to as 'the three principles of the path.' They are also known as 'the three roads' or 'the three primary aspects of the path.'

We also have the three jewels (or objects) of refuge; the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. How shall we relate to these? We relate to the Buddha as the one who gives the advice or teachings, and use the analogy of the doctor. The Dharma, which is what the Buddha taught, is given the analogy of medicine. Thirdly you have the sangha who are the support or virtuous friends. They are given the analogy of helpers or nurses.

Here we should ask why we need to take refuge. The answer is to get support and help on our path. This is similar to the situation where we want to go on a journey but we don't know the way to our destination. We really need people to help, support and guide us along the way. Taking refuge is the same. If you want to travel the path to liberation and enlightenment, then you need to rely on the correct supports. This is why we take refuge in the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha.

In terms of cultivating bodhicitta or the vast attitude, the attitude should be exactly as described- vast- and encompassing all sentient beings. No longer are we just looking for our own, temporary happiness, we are actually thinking in a much bigger way. This is the attitude we need to cultivate.

How exactly do we go about cultivating these positive attitudes? We need to practice the six perfections; generosity, ethics, patience, perseverance, [dhyana] concentration and wisdom. If one does not practice these six perfections, then one will not be able to cultivate the attitude of bodhicitta.

Through cultivating the six perfections and cultivating positive attitudes such as bodhicitta, we will develop peace and happiness in our mind. If one has a non-virtuous attitude, then whatever happens one will not find any happiness. However pleasant the external environment is, if one's mind is filled with disturbing emotions then one will never find happiness.

These positive attitudes are something we need to cultivate over time. They won't appear overnight. We need to gradually cultivate these attitudes by making a real determination to do so. We can't expect them to magically manifest without such a determination and commitment. Remember, cultivating these positive attitudes creates causes not only for temporary happiness, but for our ultimate happiness as well.

So while these positive attitudes secure our temporary and ultimate happiness, the reverse is also true. Negative attitudes result in the temporary situation of having mental disturbances, we won't have many friends and will encounter many difficulties in the present. In the future, when we take rebirth, these negative attitudes will be the cause of our rebirth in the lower realms. Thus the suffering that results affects both our present and future happiness.

Lama Tsongkapa says that if one has these positive attitudes, then one has both the ground and the path. This is a way of saying that we will have positive attitudes such as loving kindness and bodhicitta, our present and future happiness is secured. The Kadampa masters used to say that if you don't have a lot of time, it is not necessary to do a vast amount of practice. If you can cultivate this positive attitude, then whatever you do becomes your practice. Your mind will be happy and you will create causes for positive rebirths.

A Kadampa is a great Buddhist scholar. When you break down the meaning of the word 'Kadampa,' you see that the first syllable 'Ka' is an honorific for speech. The honourable speech that we are referring to is that of the Buddha. This is similar to the derivation of the word 'Kagyü,' which refers to the Buddha's teachings, where 'Ka' means the Buddha's speech, and 'gyü' means to translate. Thus a Kadampa is someone who has a very good understanding of the teachings. Similarly, when we say that someone is liberated, the real meaning is that that person has understood the Buddha's teachings.

If we take the Tibetan word 'dromtonpa,' the word has a literal meaning of conquering enemies. The enemies we refer to when we use this word, however, are internal enemies such as delusion and ignorance. Thus one who has conquered his negative mind is called a dromtonpa.

Take the word 'sang-gya' which is the Tibetan equivalent of 'Buddha.' In Sanskrit 'Buddha' means to be awake. The Tibetan meaning is in two parts; 'sang' means to eradicate, remove or clear away. When we say the Arhats

have conquered their delusions, we mean that they have conquered the first of the two types of obscurations; which are those to liberation, and those to knowing. More literally, these are the obscurations of delusions and of knowing. We can make the distinction that the arhats have conquered the first type of obscuration, whereas the Buddha has conquered both. 'Sang' encompasses having both obscurations cleared away. 'Gya' means to have cultivated or developed. The [Sang-gya] Buddha has fully cultivated all the positive qualities of loving kindness, bodhicitta and compassion.

When we take the word 'dharma' or 'cho' in Tibetan; in the context of the teachings these words mean 'to transform.' So when we speak of the Buddha's teachings we are speaking of transforming the mind from one that is confused and suffering into one that has clarity and happiness. Ultimately, 'dharma' means to transform one's mind in a positive direction.

'Sangha' means community in Sanskrit. The Tibetan word for this is 'gen-dun.' This means 'the virtuous ones.' So when we refer to the sangha or gen-dun, we are not just referring to monks and nuns. It can refer to anyone who practices or cultivates virtue. Anyone who is a positive influence on our path can be seen as part of the sangha or gen-dun community.

Today we have looked at the act of taking refuge, and how to cultivate and practice positive attitudes. We have also covered the three principles of the path; renunciation, bodhicitta and supreme view (wisdom).

We also talked about samsara and continually taking cyclic rebirth in contaminated appropriated aggregates. We can make an analogy between samsara and the life of bees. Bees wander from flower to flower and bring pollen back to their hive where they make honey from it. This is similar to us wandering around creating negative karma and through that contaminated appropriated aggregates, thus creating the causes for endlessly cycling in samsara.

Questions: Speaking of definitions, can you speak a bit about 'ground luminosity.'

Answer: This is referring to the potential unobscured clarity of the mind. It is like the sky unobscured by clouds. We have the potential to attain liberation and enlightenment because our mind has this potential for perfect clarity.

Question: Can you suggest a practice to help with recognising emptiness and selflessness?

Answer: A good meditation to start with is one on impermanence. This will help.

Question: You spoke a few weeks ago about the Dalai Lama being a Buddha. Are some beings who live in samsara not samsaric? I'd like some clarity on the meaning of 'samsaric.'

Answer: We need to understand why someone takes rebirth. Taking rebirth itself is not the definition of samsaric. The definition of samsaric is taking rebirth under the power of karma and delusion. For example, His Holiness is not under the same karma as us. He takes rebirth out of attitudes such as bodhicitta and compassion, for the purpose of benefitting others. He is not under the sway of karma and delusion.

Question: Did Manjushri and Chenrezig come after the Buddha or before?

Answer: Buddha wasn't always Buddha. He was a deluded being such as ourselves who studied and cultivated positive qualities. Chenrezig is recognised as being the Buddha of compassion as this is his primary focus. Manjushri is the wisdom Buddha whose primary focus is developing wisdom. Under Skakyumuni Buddha, who was the fourth Buddha of the fortunate era, Chenrezig and Manjushri were able to attain the state of becoming the Buddhas of compassion and wisdom.

Remember, that when we refer to the fourth Buddha, he is not just the Buddha for this planet, or this world system, but for a larger entity that we might call a galaxy or a universe.

(Translated by Anton Weiersmuller: Transcribed by Paula Moros: Lightly Edited by Jampa Tsekyi)