

Gen Rinpoche teaches Bodhicitta, the Mind of Enlightenment

Teaching given by the Most Venerable Geshe

Ngawang Dhargyey at the Dhargyey Buddhist Centre, Dunedin, Sunday 18th December 1994. It has been edited by Ven. Ani Sönam Chökyi from the oral translation by Losang Dawa. copyright Dhargyey Buddhist Centre.

Today is the last teaching of 1994 so it is time to review what you have done during the year. If you discover that your year has been positive, that you have done lots of practices, learned a lot and meditated a lot, now is the time to appreciate yourself and congratulate yourself on being so successful in spiritual terms, and it is also the time to rededicate yourself to practice, study and meditation in the coming year. On the other hand, if you find that you have been irregular in doing practices and coming to classes, and that you have not actually done anything much that you have more-or-less wasted a year of this precious human life now is the time to feel regret and sadness about it. But being sad about it is not enough this sadness must also become a force impelling you to do better. So now is the time to determine that you will change for the better in the coming year.

Bodhicitta is like the supreme gold-making elixir,  
For it transforms the unclean body we have taken  
Into the priceless jewel of a Buddha-Form.  
Therefore firmly seize this Awakening Mind.

We need to practise, and practise all the time. The practice we most need to undertake is the most wholesome practice of all the practice in which we work wholeheartedly to develop bodhicitta, the state of mind that sincerely and fervently wants to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Nothing is as wholesome as concentrating on this mind. It is said that if all the Buddhas of the three times were to put their heads together and discuss what would be most beneficial for suffering beings, giving them happiness in the short-term and in the long-term, they would not find anything more magical than the mind of enlightenment, bodhicitta, for it is the panacea of all ills.

This mind of bodhicitta is of crucial importance, for it is this mind which determines whether or not our practice carries us to the state of enlightenment. For instance if a person were to go away to the mountains, find a suitable cave for meditation and completely seal themselves inside the cave with the strong determination not to come out or see anyone, but to dedicate their entire life to concerted practice, if this person did not have bodhicitta, no matter what practice he or she might do inside the sealed cave, nothing much would come of it in terms of achieving enlightenment.

Thus we must realize the importance of this precious mind of enlightenment. Our efforts to achieve the state of enlightenment must be constant and steady, therefore we need the precious mind of enlightenment continuously. Although you are going to have a month-and-a-half's break for the summer holidays, never have a break from generating bodhicitta.

As Jamgön Lama Tsongkapa says, if one has the alchemists' elixir one can transmute base metal into gold; in the same way, if

you have this precious mind of enlightenment, this bodhicitta, this jewel of all minds, it will transmute all your small and seemingly insignificant good deeds into a means by which you will reach the state of enlightenment.

The great Indian Buddhist master Shantideva says something very similar: If we have this mind of enlightenment, although at the moment we have a human body that originally came into being from the sperm and egg of our parents and is thus basically undesirable, impure and unattractive in itself, the elixir of the mind of enlightenment will transform this human body of gross, impure human material into the glorious, magnificent, enlightened body of a Buddha.

If even the thought to relieve  
Living creatures of merely a headache  
Is a beneficial intention  
Endowed with infinite goodness,

What need is there to mention  
The wish to dispel their inconceivable misery,  
Wishing every single one of them  
To realize boundless good qualities?

The Tibetan master Dzogchen Patrul Rinpoche says, I have been to many lamas of all four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, I have studied the many tenets and views of Buddhist philosophy and practice. None of the lamas or the texts say that there is a mind that is superior to the precious mind of enlightenment. They all have the same view with regard to the supreme significance of this mind.

Normally we understand the esoteric Buddhist practice of tantra as a very powerful and speedy way of achieving enlightenment so powerful and so speedy that through its means certain people are able to achieve the state of enlightenment in one lifetime even though normally it takes millions of eons to travel the path. However without bodhicitta, even the practice of tantra, so powerful and speedy, will not help a person reach the state of enlightenment in one lifetime.

If you really want to know how to engage in extensive merit-gathering practice in a simple way, the secret is bodhicitta. If you manage to develop bodhicitta, then even if you do no more than offer one butter-lamp, one candle, that simple practice of offering one light will gather an enormous amount of merit a universe full of merit so that however much merit is used up the store of merit will never run out. However if you were to engage in extensive offerings without bodhicitta offering ten thousand butter lamps for instance the merits would not be as great as in the first case the merit would only be as great as the number of lamps offered.

During Buddha's own time there was an Indian king called Prasenajit. On many occasions he invited the Buddha and his followers, offering them meals for weeks together. On one of these occasions the Buddha asked the king, To whom should we dedicate the merits? The king requested the Buddha to say the prayers of dedication to whoever had the greatest merits. Assuming that he himself would have the greatest merits because he was offering so much food, the King thought that the Buddha would dedicate the merits to him. However the king didn't have the most merit. Also present was a beggarly monk called Surata who felt so good about the

king's generosity in offering food to the Buddha and his followers for weeks and weeks, that he rejoiced sincerely in the king's generosity and thus, through his pure heart, gathered more merits than the king who had incurred a great deal of expense.

For the one who has perfectly seized this mind  
With the thought never to turn away  
From totally liberating  
The infinite forms of life,

From that time hence,  
Even while asleep or unconcerned,  
A force of merit equal to the sky  
Will perpetually ensue.

For two or three weeks the king didn't get any dedications at the end of the meals he was offering to the Buddha and his many followers. Because it was the custom to say prayers at the end of the meal, and the Buddha and the Sangha didn't dedicate the merits to him, the king felt unhappy and had a very long face. One of his ministers asked him, Lord, is something bothering you? The king answered, Buddha has been here for weeks now. I have been offering food all this time and all this time the beggar Surata has received the dedication. So the minister resorted to a dirty trick. Because the beggar continued to rejoice with a pure heart in the king's generosity, thus unwittingly gathering more merits, the minister decided to have someone chase the beggar so that he would have no chance to feel good about the king's generosity. Because poor Surata had to run for his life, he didn't have time to rejoice, and that day it was found that the king had more merits. Thus that day he got the dedication he wanted!

There is another small anecdote about this poor beggar, Surata. Though he was a beggar in material terms, in spiritual terms he was already quite developed. He is said to have offered one butter lamp with bodhicitta motivation, praying, With this butter lamp may I achieve the state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and it is said that the butter lamp was so brilliant that when someone tried to put it out they were unable to do so.

So with the precious mind of enlightenment, even if you burn only one incense stick and offer the fragrance to the holy objects and so on, the merit you will gather will be enormous. If, before you light the incense stick and offer the fragrance, you say to yourself, Today I offer this incense stick to the gurus and the Buddhas may I achieve the state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, saying it not in a jaded, mechanical way but with full sincerity, you will gather as many merits by burning this one incense stick as there are sentient beings throughout the universe.

This intention to benefit all beings,  
Which does not arise in others even for their own sake,  
Is an extraordinary jewel of the mind,  
And its birth is an unprecedented wonder.

Now that I have told you about the need for and importance of bodhicitta, about the magical power of bodhicitta, please dwell in bodhicitta. Remember this: Bodhicitta is the supreme object of meditation, bodhicitta is the supreme object of any practice ... Bodhicitta is supreme for it includes the

interests of all sentient beings, which is the greatest of all practices. Bodhicitta is called rinchen sem chog, meaning the precious jewel of all minds. It is the core practice the central practice of all bodhisattvas. Ask any bodhisattva, What do you mainly practise? and you will hear nothing other than, I have tried to practise bodhicitta. They will be unanimous in their answer.

I could keep on reciting the many teachings about bodhicitta given by the Buddha himself in the Sutras, as well as by Indian masters and scholar practitioners. In his great work Bodhicharyavatara (A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life) Shantideva says that if someone simply has the good heart to want to relieve another person of a headache, the merit from that good intention cannot be estimated. There is a true story about this. It is the story of Dza.kh&auml;n Pumo (literally Potter's Daughter, though the person was a man). Dza.kh&auml;n Pumo had been forbidden by his mother from going to distant islands in the high seas to fetch jewels for his father's trade. Because her husband had lost his life at sea, Dza.kh&auml;n Pumo's mother didn't want her son to follow in his father's footsteps since she didn't want to lose the only male remaining in the family. In order to stop him, his mother could do nothing more than lie down on the threshold of their house, hoping that out of respect for her he would not jump over her. However he lost his temper and not only walked over his mother's body but also kicked her head.

Dza.kh&auml;n Pumo sailed for a long time in the company of others. Eventually, as his mother had feared, the boat capsized. They were washed up on the beach of an island and as he walked along the beach trying to find his way, he came upon an iron house and went in. Inside the house he saw a terrible sight: a person whose head was being drilled by a wheel so that brains and blood were oozing out. He was suffering tremendously. Dza.kh&auml;n Pumo asked him, What is the reason that you have this terrible suffering? He answered, I think it must be because of the dreadful way I behaved towards my mother, walking over her and treating her cruelly. Dza.kh&auml;n Pumo thought to himself, I am in the same situation, driven by karma to suffer the same consequences of the same actions. The moment he realized that he was there due to the force of karma, a voice from above said, May one who is bound be liberated and one who is free be bound, and he found that the wheel had left the other man's head and was busily drilling into his own. However even while he was suffering the agony of being drilled by the wheel, he was able to feel sympathy for others who might be undergoing the same suffering, thinking to himself, May all other people who are suffering the same consequence through disobedience and walking over their mothers' heads, be free of their suffering: may the sufferings I undergo be sufficient for them too. As soon as he had generated this good-hearted empathy for others, the wheel jumped off his head.

I bow down to the body of the one  
In whom the sacred precious mind is born.  
I seek refuge in that source of joy  
Who brings to happiness even those who harm him.

Dza.kh&auml;n Pumo, this Potter's Daughter, was in fact the historical Buddha Shakyamuni in one of his earlier lives, as a bodhisattva on the way to enlightenment. The reason he was called Potter's Daughter was that before his birth, his mother had had many boys but they had all died. Then the parents thought, If we have a

boy next time, let's try giving him a girl's name. They did so, and it worked!

One of the ways of generating universal altruism, bodhicitta, is equalizing and exchanging self for others. In equalizing, one recognizes that oneself and others are the same; in exchanging self for others one mentally exchanges one's own position for that of others. This very powerful practice of equalizing and exchanging can be traced back to the experience of the Buddha as the bodhisattva Dza.kh&auml;n Pumo.

If, like Dza.kh&auml;n Pumo, you have bodhicitta, although you might be temporarily reborn in a bad state of existence due to some unfortunate past action, you won't be there for as long as is usually the case you will pay for your bad karma briefly.

As Shantideva says, if somebody has the kindness and good heart to want to help relieve someone else's headache, and if that kindness and goodness of heart gathers great merit, is there any need to say that if someone generates the good heart wanting to liberate and to work for the ultimate enlightenment of all sentient beings, that that person will gather much greater merits?

Today, please meditate on bodhicitta by way of understanding that you yourself and others are the same, and then trying to exchange your cherishing of self for cherishing of others. In other words, your sense of self-cherishing must be displaced by a strong, selfless sense of cherishing others. Let such an attitude develop in your mind. This is one of the ways of generating bodhicitta, universal altruism.

Notes:

The verses quoted above are from Chapter One of Shantideva's Bodhicharyavatara as translated by Stephen Batchelor in A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life. Gen Rinpoche quoted phrases and lines from Bodhicharyavatara many times during the teaching.

The Sanskrit word bodhicitta, (in Tibetan jang.chub.kyi sem), means literally awakening mind and mind of enlighten-ment. It is sometimes presented in English as altruistic attitude or universal altruism. It has been described as a mind infused with the aspiration to attain the state of Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. This is the entrance to and the motivation behind the Bodhisattva's way of life. (Stephen Batchelor, A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, page 178.)

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The Dharma Wheel, Dharmachakra, or Wheel of Dharma, is one of the many sacred teachings of Buddhism and other Indian religions, such as Hinduism and Jainism. It is one of the most important and sacred symbols in the Buddhist faith as it represents Buddha's teachings. The Meaning of the Dharma Wheel. The Dharmachakra comes from the Dharma, which is the path to attaining enlightenment and reaching Nirvana (the highest state of being a person can achieve). It also means the Wheel of Law. While there are many variations of the Dharma Wheel, they are usually depicted with eight spokes and are gold in color. Three shapes are depicted within the center of the wheel, typically a Yin Yang shape, wheel or circle. The Three Turnings of the Wheel (of Dharma) refers to a framework for understanding the sutra stream of the teachings of the Buddhism originally devised by the Yogachara school. It later became prevalent in modified form in Tibetan Buddhism and related traditions. The distinction is, on the one hand, a historic or quasi-historic scheme by which the Buddha's first sermons, as recorded in the Pali Canon and the tripitakas of other early schools, constitute the First Turning, and the later Mahayana... TURNING THE WHEEL October-December 2008 By James Blumenthal Buddha's very first teaching at Deer Park to the first five disciples. The three turnings of the wheel of the dharma mark three historical points at which new developments in Buddhist thought. Items displayed in the shop are made available for Dharma practice and educational purposes, and never for the purpose of profiting from their sale. Please read FPMT Foundation Store Policy Regarding Dharma Items for more information. The Foundation Store. Thus have I heard. At one time, the Buddha was dwelling in Vārāṅśī, at the Deer Park of Śāḷīvatana. At that time, the Bhagavān addressed a group of five bhikkhus, saying: [1] Thus is the Noble Truth of Suffering, a dharma that has never been heard before, and which is to be contemplated. When doing so, it gives birth to vision, wisdom, understanding, and Bodhi. [2] Thus are the noble truths of the accumulation of suffering, [3] the cessation of suffering, and [4] the path that leads to the cessation... Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma (Skt. tridharmaçakra; Tib. chos khor rim pa sum, Wyl. chos 'khor rim pa gsum) the three major series of teachings given by the Buddha, according to the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition and as found in the Samdhinirmochana Sutra. To 'turn the wheel of Dharma' means to teach the Dharma. The first turning took place in the Deer Park at Sarnath, Varanasi, where Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths.