



Dhargyey Buddhist Centre

Teacher:- Venerable Geshe Jampa Tenzin

Title:- Sunday Meditation

Venue: D.B.C. Dunedin

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As it has been pointed out time and again how important it is to have the right motivation to grow spiritually and turn into a Buddha to help beings whose number are as vast as space. Last Sunday as well as on Monday I talked about the reasons for pursuit of spiritual practice and embracing Dharma and it is up to the individual person to choose the spiritual practice and see if it pays dividends in terms of creating real happiness. To reiterate, while we do Dharma practice, despite the fact that we have education, good social structure and advances in science and technology, deep down people are unfulfilled and dissatisfied and this pattern will repeat at each rebirth. Seen from Buddha's point of view material resources are not enough to achieve happiness.

Assuming everyone here is a Buddhist, then it is important for me to state how important this life is. This life offers a rare opportunity to break free from the vicious cycle of rebirths as this life has rare endowments. This Buddhist topic of identifying and appreciating human life is a critical moment of spiritual life. This life is precious and this depends on how long it lasts, up to 100 years or maybe only one day- lifespan is uncertain. It is quite obvious that no other life form is as suitable for pursuing spiritual means which are the only means to help gather causes for future happiness in future lives. Spiritual practice is not for happiness for this material life. It is done for happiness for future lives up to the state of enlightenment.

The world at the moment has tremendous material resources at its disposal like for example the computer which can do unimaginable things and they are indispensable now in everyday human operation and in society. Despite their amazing capacity for efficiency and their ability to get a lot of things done, computers will not have the capacity to give us happiness in the future life.

Last Sunday I talked about the seamless continuum of consciousness and that this life is finite. At the most it will last about 100 years, after that we die our death. Then what happens to us? The body is left behind on this planet. The mind goes on to take on a next rebirth. How do we know we keep on getting reborn. We know it when we trace the continuity of our consciousness in the past and I explained that this continuity is the reason why we have no choice but to be reborn. Once we are reborn involuntarily in *samsara* (cyclic existence) there are two places to be born, in the upper or lower tiers of existence.

One has to bring one's distracted, excited mind inside, become more introspective and ask oneself 'what will happen to me when I breathe my last? Where will I go? Am I ready to face death and the prospects of next lifetime? Have I got the necessary means at my disposal?' If one feels comfortable about it, then one can pat oneself on the back. If one is not comfortable facing death and beyond, then it is time to change. As I have just said before, we can be reborn in upper tiers like the human realm and so on, or in the lower tiers like the hell, hungry ghost and animal realm.

Let us consider the prospect of being reborn an animal. For animals, by nature, life is extremely hard and it is survival of the fittest. They are at a disadvantage spiritually compared with what humans can do. Faced by the hard realities faced by animals, put oneself in their shoes and ask if would you be able to face such a life? Our life at the moment is a life in the upper tier of mundane existence, relatively better off than lower creatures. Yet we cannot rest. Our existence is precarious as we don't have a guarantee that we move from strength to strength. It is possible that next year one is reborn as an animal that is now in the cage with other animals to the slaughter house. Suffering of animals is intense, being made a meal of by each other, heat, cold, hunger and so on. Then the suffering of the lower levels of hungry ghosts and beings in hell realm, are just unimaginable. The suffering in these realms undergone by beings is not made up. They are described as a matter of fact to educate ourselves to make a difference. In the mundane existence, the Buddha says, life is fraught basically with all kinds of suffering. Life in the upper tiers is not beyond suffering. Human life is also suffering. The moment we are born, the birth is excruciating pain. After birth everything is so harsh. Next suffering is that of constant ageing. The moment we were born we grow up, grow older and the onset of old age starts at birth. In between there are physical and mental health problems. After finally having lived a given lifespan, we lose it involuntarily as death comes and takes us away.

There are all these kinds of suffering, life in the mundane existence is beset with suffering. What can we do about it? Do we have to live with them or is there a way out? There is a way out of suffering and that is Dharma, according to the Buddha. Only the practice of Dharma is the answer to put an end to all this suffering. What kind of Dharma can we practice? This starts with the understanding of the 4 Truths about life and means to get out of cyclic existence. There are 4 Truths about life: the first ever teaching given by the Buddha.

1. The truth of suffering.

Although people don't like to talk about suffering, it is important to think about suffering of life and develop a keen sense of desire to be free of suffering. There are three types:

the actual physical suffering

the suffering of change

and suffering of pervasive conditions.

The mere fact of having this afflicted body with aggregates (this body and this mind that we have), is because it has been propelled into existence by negative causes. The mere fact that we have this body is a powerful magnet that attracts causes of actual suffering. Buddha says that realising suffering must be mainly about how to put an end to this involuntary process of being reborn. Identifying the truth of suffering, pertains to identifying and knowing how the seeming harmless physical and mental aggregates are the reasons why all other kinds of suffering ensue. To put an end to suffering means to put an end to the insidious suffering that comes about through desire, hate, ignorance, jealousy, and all the other kinds of unhealthy attitudes and delusions. Desire for example comes from a basic misconception about self, as to who one is. We are said to have ignorance as we grasp at our self as if we had an intrinsic, independent self and this is the basic cause of suffering. This is unique to Buddhism, how the intrinsic self gives rise to the insidious rise of pervasive conditioning.

Grasping at self of a person, or misconception of self or person, is to feel 'I' with a strong sense of it. In what way does it exist? It has two aspects. The 'I' that exists and the 'I' does not exist. We need to identify the existing part.

When we suffer pain, psychological or physical, or pleasure, who is it that experiences this? What is that 'I' that experiences this. We need to be able to pinpoint how it exists. Does the existent part of us that is grasping at 'I' exist? Yes it does, but how? The second part is the non-existent part of 'I'. That is the basic problem. We grasp at something that does not exist, an 'I' of oneself that has never existed at all. It is this that has been addressed by the Buddha in all volumes of scriptures of the Perfection of Wisdom Gone Beyond and Nagarjuna and his disciples and the many Tibetan masters. There are many works that address how grasping at self that has never existed is the root of all misconceptions and all subsequent delusions.

We need to be able to identify the two parts of the 'I'. When we analyse how the non-existent part does not exist, emptiness of person or true existence of person, then that can be misconstrued to conclude that 'I' do not exist at all. Therefore who cares what I do and one can become quite pessimistic, irresponsible in one's behaviour and one develops nihilistic view thinking one can do whatever one wants. This is an extremely dangerous mind set. If one believes the existent part exists and in an inherent intrinsic way then one attributes qualities to this 'I' beyond its nominal nature and intrinsic nature and this leads to development of desire, anger, jealousy and the lot. 'I' neither exists in an inherent way nor does it not exist at all- there is a middle way. It is through study of the middle way of philosophy an 'I' that is free of nihilistic or eternalistic views emerges.

We need to listen to the teaching by knowing who listens to the teaching. In other words, we need to listen within the understanding of emptiness of intrinsic existence of 'I'. If one does not listen with this, the process of giving and receiving teaching will not help to break through the boundary of *samsara*. Each time we do Dharma practice, it must be based within the understanding of emptiness and with Bodhicitta. This means an expanded mind of oneself that seeks the state of Buddha to come back to the world with the know-how to help sentient beings. How can we not help sentient beings when we owe our existence to sentient beings. In the annals of beginning-less existence we were reborn so many times and each time we required parents. The role of parents was played by other sentient beings who were extremely kind. There is no sentient being who has not been one's mother countless times. Secondly, everything that we have, enjoy, our spiritual development comes from other sentient beings. Without them nothing is possible. Reflecting on this we develop love and affection for them and if you really mean to help others then we need to base our practice on this as well.

How can we embrace this idea or thought or information that all sentient beings have been one's mother, how have they been our mothers? Our existence has no limit in the past. Each time we were born we were not born without depending on other living beings, in the womb or egg or whatever. We always needed, and given the length of our past existence, we have always needed other sentient beings for our existence. Each lifetime another sentient being takes the role of the mother of oneself. It does not have to be a human mother. Each time that being has a natural instinct of caring for its young, even to sacrifice herself to ensure the survival of the young as well as all the things she does to care for the children.

There is an anecdotal case of this. A merchant traveling somewhere with his pregnant mare and the merchant stabbed it out of rage and the baby came out. Whilst the mother was struggling to breathe, it nevertheless stretched to lick the baby. Seeing this really changed the mind set of the merchant. This is just an anecdote which shows how mothers have such powerful instincts to care even when they are about to breathe their last.

For example in my own case, when I was 14 or 15 years old I had to leave to work some place else. My mother missed me so much that she came to see me, even walking through the snow. On her way she saw an aeroplane above her so she went down on her knees and pleaded to the pilot to bring her son back. She kept walking in the

snow and went blind. Then she suffered from cancer, she was unable to eat and was bed ridden and very weak. When she heard steps she always imagined that it was me and would sit up with and asked her carers if that was me. This is an example of a being whose mind was completely influenced by a sense of care for children or her young. All mothers can't help caring for other beings and do everything possible for their children.

As you have heard in the past, and as I have just described also - other sentient being in a given life span are not one's mother, not everyone can be one's mother in a given life, only one can. We owe our existence, our success and spiritual growth, everything we have to other sentient beings. Without what we receive from other living being in an unwitting way, all we have invariably comes from other sources- other beings. How can we not consider those who give so much as kind, helpful and beneficial?

When we consider these two areas where sentient beings have been indescribably helpful and kind we cannot help develop a sense of closeness, sympathy, empathy and we become naturally bonded. Our emotions become bonded with other sentient beings and so you won't want to harm them. How could you when they have everything possible to help us? There is no way we would find strength to harm them. Given this basic reality then, as a responsible person, you want to repay their kindness and this is through helping them to be free themselves of suffering and causes of suffering.

To help them free them we need to know exactly where sentient beings are in terms of spiritual development. What kind of teaching are suitable, and how can they be given. We need to know their attitude and aptitude and we need to pitch our assistance at the right level. To know that we need to be a Buddha who has such precise knowledge. Bodhicitta is indispensable in order to help other sentient beings, it is also personally indispensable in order to equip oneself with the right knowledge. To read the mind of each sentient being and to be effective in one's service we need to know what we can do and how to do it. Our mind needs to be free from the veil of mental obstructions. For that reason the desire to achieve Buddhahood is indispensable from one's point of view.

Next time we meet I would not have time to remind you of the importance of motivation and how it needs to be grounded in three things: the Three Principle Paths, the path of strong desire lingering to turn back to the world of suffering and to be free from suffering. Secondly, the path of wisdom is understanding how self as a person and all other phenomena do not exist in the way they seem to exist. Appearances are deceptive. We are empty of the kind of existence our misperceptions make us believe. The third path is the sense of universal altruism to work for all sentient beings given the long history of intimate beneficial relationship we have had with them. I am not going to talk about these time and again. Each time we do any practice, giving and receiving teaching or personal practice we need to have this motivation or otherwise it is some kind of gimmick and it would not have any substance. From next Sunday I am going to teach *lam rim* called Liberation of the Palm Of Your Hand. When I teach that it will be taught in 4 main sections:

1. The author of *lam rim* in order to highlight the greatness of author
2. The significance of *lam rim* in order to develop interest in *lam rim*
3. The process of giving and listening to *lam rim* teaching
4. How to lead spiritual students or disciples on the *lam rim* stages through actual instructions.

This is the manner of starting the *lam rim*, laying out the steps. Monday I will be talking about the Buddhist tenets; systems of philosophy which are crucial in developing the right wisdom. There are four Buddhist schools. The systems of lower schools are seen as important stepping stones to develop the right view of emptiness propounded by the highest school. Developing wisdom is vital, for that we need to have the right view and for that we need to know how the thoughts have developed through the four schools. Thursdays I will be alternating between Mind and Awareness and Mind Training. The first is the Buddhist theory of knowledge; how we understand things, the process of cognition or Buddhist epistemology, how we move from totally erroneous view point, to doubt, to scepticism to right view. This is seen to be critical in seeing how things are. Mind training is all about developing Bodhicitta.