



Dhargyey Buddhist Centre

Teacher:- Venerable Geshe Jampa Tenzin Title:- Sunday Meditation Venue: D.B.C. Dunedin

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lam rim

Please listen to the discourse on the Path to Liberation with the right motivation so that you become fully awakened and you may be of benefit to all living beings.

Here the great Tibetan Lama Je Tsong Khapa highlights the importance and value of this human life calling it a precious human life that is like a wish-granting precious jewel. It is only found every once in a while in our beginning-less time. It has a downside of being highly perishable and ephemeral. Make the most of it while you have it and give more importance to spiritual matters and less to material matters that are worth less than the husks of grains that the farmer throws away. Then celebrate the goodness of human life.

This body can be argued in a positive or negative way. Positively speaking this human life is endowed with incredible wonders and can achieve spiritual heights. But this life is precarious and susceptible to all kinds of vulnerabilities. Generally when someone suffers from illness like cancer or is sentenced to death, it is considered extremely grave and serious. We are very causal about what we have in this life and don't consider what this life is about and that it is much more serious than the above. This very life or the entire mundane life is much more serious than cancer or death sentence. Although that is the case, with this seriousness of this life we have not realised such issues because we have become too accustomed to pursue temporal pleasures as worthwhile while all these pursuits are themselves perishable. We all face the problem of not knowing how to deal with these issues or not having time to deal with this issue although we know about the misplaced importance we attached to other things. However, from Buddhist point of view the best and the most successful strategy to address the issue of on-going suffering life after life is opening our heart to the spiritual message of how we can free our mind from its negative traits and so on.

Learning about the Stages of Path, *lam rim*, is one of the most potent ways of helping us. Of these, three stand out:

1. A sense of aversion or disenchantment to mundane pleasure, or renunciation.
2. The path of universal altruism or responsibility.
3. The path of Right View.

1. A sense of aversion or disenchantment to mundane pleasure, or renunciation.

When we talk about the sense of release of the predicament of suffering we develop an aversion to mundane life and its three types of suffering. The third type is the most difficult to understand: the suffering of pervasive conditioning. It is insidious and we don't know we have it and yet it is the source of all problems in life. We need a strong determination to develop an aversion to this dormant seed to suffering. Our mind which is somewhat immersed in the third type of suffering or conditioned by this suffering, at the moment is like food contaminated by poison. If we allow the mind to follow the pattern of attitude and process of thinking of such a polluted and erroneous mind, then this mind is more likely to draw suffering in the future. Although at the moment it is not in a state of suffering, it is the very reason why future suffering will arise. It is like a powerful magnet that attracts mental and physical distress, changing pleasure into pain.

It is also 50% wrong in mistaking various perceptions. At the moment this mind is strongly conditioned by negative mental factors or unwholesome mental factors such as desire, anger, jealousy, envy and so on. It is also conditioned by the propensities of negative actions and thoughts which were performed so many times in past lives. This mind finds a great ease in unwholesome actions without much effort desire, jealousy and anger arise. Fortunately these downsides and negative traits can be eliminated but we need to make effort. Through

constant effort, when you succeed to free the mind of clouding mental factors, the mind is then totally free and you achieve liberation. According to Buddhist spiritual evolution from suffering to enlightenment and peace by constant meditation and practice you have managed to free the mind of actual negative karma, negative propensities and thoughts and you have achieved Nirvana. Although you may personally be absolutely free of all suffering and underlying seeds of actual suffering and you never have to die a death due to negative actions and thoughts, yet you have not fully evolved to a Buddha. You are only half way between now and enlightenment. Despite this the underlying propensities of negative thoughts and deeds still leave a thin coating on the mind whereby despite your being totally free of suffering you do not have the capacity to know all phenomena as they are. That is to say you don't have the capacity to help sentient beings with what is called obstructions to knowledge or omniscience. You have not fully achieved what you are capable of achieving but only permanent peace. Once there you are of no benefit to anyone only to yourself. Since the mind has the capacity to transcend this state we need to develop greater spiritual heights and that of state of complete Buddha. Only when you become a Buddha you are of immense benefit perennially and all times. You also have no limitations and you are free of physical and psychological limitations. Thus you need to be motivated to transcend the mid-way state of Nirvana and go to the state of complete Buddhahood. To achieve Buddhahood you need cutting edge wisdom and you need to pair it with Bodhicitta, the intention to be enlightened.

2. The path of universal altruism or responsibility.

When you have Bodhicitta, universal altruism and the intention to awaken to the state of a Buddha, then not only can you benefit others but you are also in a state of constant peace. For example, in a neighbourhood someone has public spirit, always helping others, that person not only helps others in a tangible way but as a by-product of being proactive in helping others they have fewer hopes and fears of being attacked or robbed etc. In the same way it happens to someone who has Bodhicitta. An individual with the interest of this planet and its welfare, its people and all sentient beings wants to achieve benefits to the world as a whole, so they are highly resourceful in their thinking and pro-active in their actions, nothing is a problem but seen as a challenge to overcome to the benefit of the greater good. This benefits all sentient beings in the world and they achieve peace for themselves without fear and this is an incidental personal benefit. For such a person it is a foregone conclusion that someone who has the highest benefit of all sentient beings of all world systems on their mind rakes their brains all the time how to eliminate the suffering in the universe and do everything to help others.

One thing they know is the way to help others is for one to overcome all physical limitations. For this they know they need to become a Buddha. They are determined to achieve this state to be free because they want to help all beings to achieve the state of Buddhahood, so they have to reach their highest potential of being fully awakened themselves. Such a person not only helps other beings and accommodates the interest of all beings, they are also constantly at peace with themselves. Once you develop such a mind to achieve the highest good for all sentient beings in the universe, even if you have to remain in *samsara* you will encounter no problems.

It is stated that if you can develop such a thought even for a moment so that your mind becomes that universal altruism and you maintain that altruism not for a few months but only for a few moments, the power of good it does and brings to the individual incidentally is that they will gather immense merits or spiritual energy. This mind has immensely purifying impact on the mind and it becomes a dynamic force and accelerates the journey to Buddhahood. The merits of this mind are inconceivable. First we need to understand what this mind is, then we can develop it and then you can apply it not only for spiritual practice but to your daily job. You can be motivated to doing your job and calling it a service and it becomes real and it will directly benefit. And at the same time you are motivated to do your job as best as you can so you can gather as much merit as possible for your spiritual development. It helps gather immense merit, as many as there are sentient beings there are throughout the universe. This accelerates the journey and you achieve spiritual qualities that you never thought possible, as vast as the universe itself. It is therefore vital and crucial that whenever we do any practice at our individual spaces or when we do practice like now, giving and receiving teaching, we need to ground what we do in this very mind which is Bodhicitta.

3. The path of Right View.

This mind of Bodhicitta also needs to be paired with the right wisdom.

We have gathered here to talk about the Stages of Path to Buddhahood. It is explained under four major sections and I have briefly covered the first two. To recap:

1. The salient features of the author or the greatness of the author of this work, in order to authenticate the work itself. That is to say the teachings we are listening to are all traced back to the Buddha and the transmission have come from one generation of masters to the next who have seriously taken the content of this text to heart and have developed tangible outcomes to show that what we listen to is not some form of entertainment by clever people but that they have serious spiritual content.
2. What are some of features of this teaching called the Stages of the Path. Of this we talk about in the second section. This is (literally) the greatness of the teaching to develop interest in the instruction given in the teaching. Of this there are many points. If you bring them together to the fact that when you expose yourself to this teaching then you get a full understanding of the teaching of the Buddha and you therefore understand the intended meaning of it. As you gain this it helps put an end to all forms of human weaknesses, such as the weakness of removing the thin film that prevents one from attaining Buddhahood.
3. This is how to teach and listen to this teaching which has the first two forms of greatness. This says the teacher and the listeners have to have pure intent in the process. On the part of listener they are required or advised that they listen to the teaching and consider the teaching as a mirror in which they can see their mind and how their mind works. Thus use this reflection of the mind in the mirror of the teaching for a process of elimination of the weaknesses and cultivation of the good points. Also, the listeners need to listen to the teaching and not be influenced by the looks of the lama or teacher, how charismatic or not the person may look. Charisma of the person has nothing to do with the content to the teaching and one is to consider the teaching. The teacher can be viewed as a Buddha which is highly advisable but up to the listener. One should listen as if the teaching were coming directly from the mouth of Buddha. The presenter of the teaching has great responsibility and they must present the teaching with the pure intent of wishing to help listeners to free themselves from negativities and without a tinge of hope that they might be seen as a great teacher. They must not expect anything in return in terms of offering and not even hope that they may be considered famous, but deliver the teaching with a pure heart and wish to help.

The teaching enshrined in this teaching is unlike any other Buddhist teaching and for it to take root and disseminate in Tibet many sacrifices were made by past Tibetan Buddhist masters. Whilst this teaching can be traced to the Buddha, the name of this teaching and the teaching itself was devised as an integrated approach by Atisha who went to Tibet. He sought advice as to whether it was beneficial to go to Tibet, he was told by the female Buddha called Tara that it would be extremely successful but would cost him 20 years of his life. He said, if that is the case, I would rather be successful and productive than live a long life. He went to Tibet and sacrificed 20 years of his life. He also travelled from India to Indonesia for 13 months on high seas in precarious boats to get the teaching and transmission of this teaching. Not only he but the Tibetans sacrificed a lot, e.g. the Western Tibetan king called Geyeshoyo dispatched three groups of Tibetans to learn about Buddhism. In the first batch 13 were sent to invite Atisha and to learn about Buddhism. He dispatched three groups and there was no success. The king never gave up and he continued his project of inviting Atisha to Tibet, he was caught by a hostile king who demanded a ransom. His release could have been achieved by finding gold to the size of his body. This was found by his nephew short of the amount of the head. The nephew visited the imprisoned king and told him that he will be released as he had enough gold except for the amount of the size of the head. The king said to the nephew that if he tried hard he could succeed to free him but even if he were to come out he wouldn't have more than 10 years left to live. Rather than finding the gold to free him, he instructed his nephew to use it to get Atisha to Tibet. In this way the king died in prison. Facing and overcoming many difficulties by Tibetans, Atisha finally came to Tibet, and as prophesised by Tara he was extremely successful and died there. His most important and influential work was *The Lamp on the Path* and it was highly acclaimed by Indian and Tibetan scholars and it became the pivotal scripture with far-reaching influence on Tibetan Buddhism. Atisha went to Tibet round the 9th or 10th century. He appeared many times to Lama Je Tsong Khapa, a 15th century Tibetan master and advised and urged him to write a commentary on his work *The Lamp on the Path*. The lives of practitioners of *lam rim*, Stages of the Path, are simply inspirational and how they have sacrificed so much such as comforts of life. They lived in hardship and never wavered from the path and gained highest realisations.

For example we are here to talk about *lam rim* text called Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand. The author of the text is called Kyabje Phabongka and he was one of the greatest recent masters of Tibet. The author lived in a place called Phenpo Gangpa, an area to the west of Lhasa where he spent 6 years in meditation in a cave that was leaky and dripped with water. He never moved away, his clothes were drenched and it cost him heavily in his health. He ate the meat of dead goats. In Tibet there are some sheep and goats and all kinds of animals never to be killed because someone buys their life and gets a promise that the owner will not kill them and that they will live a natural life. Kyabje Phabongka lived on the meat of such dead goats. Food was hard to get and he spent 12 years getting the teaching and meditating on the teaching from his own guru Dhagpo Jampal Lhundrup.

The reason I am sharing the anecdotes of the lives of these masters is to highlight that serious spiritual practice demands some sacrifice and some hard work on our part. It is not going to be easy and plain sailing simply through exposure and some effort must be put in to drive home this message and for that I have shared with you the life stories of some of these great masters. We need to make the most of this precious life full of potential. At the moment we live through the time when we have met with a real spiritual tradition, a living force coming from one master to another, this *lam rim* teaching. The *lam rim* teaching of Atisha was the root and the commentary of this was written by Lama Je Tsong Khapa. When he wrote this commentary he received additional direct instruction from Manjushri, the Buddhist deity of wisdom. The Exhaustive or Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path is an outstanding classical Tibetan Buddhist writing. The language is still accessible and we need to take our share of what is dedicated to all beings and make the most of this life and it would be a pity to miss this opportunity and not get one's share of this.