



Dhargyey Buddhist Centre

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

Sunday 15 May 2011 *Lam rim*

Please think to yourself that you will listen to this discourse to attain Buddhahood and to serve sentient beings to achieve the same.

We recited a lot of prayers this morning. One of them was the refuge and Bodhicitta prayer with four lines:

I go for refuge until I am enlightened
To the Buddha, Dharma and highest assembly.
From the virtuous merits that I collect by practicing giving and the other perfections
May I attain the state of Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings.

This has been easy to learn and recite and they can be parroted rather than reflect on what was recited. These cover the fundamental practice of refuge and Bodhicitta and we need to recite them with some feeling. Refuge helps us turn away from wrong path whereas Bodhicitta – which means altruistic intention to attain Buddhahood – helps us turn away from inferior path. This morning I will talk about the fundamental Buddhist practice of refuge for spiritual guidance in relation to the third of the six Preliminary practices that we need to do before we begin meditation on the topic at hand. Last Sunday I described to you objects of refuge: we visualise a massive throne or seat raised by eight lions on which there are five smaller thrones on which sit the five sets of gurus who are Buddha, Maitreya, Manjushri, Vajradhara and your own guru. They are in turn surrounded by meditation deities, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Dharmapala and so on. There are eleven tiers or circles of sublime beings to who we turn for refuge. Having clearly visualised these sublime objects of refuge we need to remind ourselves why we want to turn to them for refuge. We turn to them because one supposedly truly understands the vulnerable situation that one and all sentient beings are in within the mundane existence. Knowing that one and all are in the same boat of *samsara* then one is to spend time cultivating compassion for our *samsaric* mates or all sentient beings. We need to have these two.

On top of these two we also need to develop conviction that the sublime beings in front of one in the space not too high or low, not too far or too near have the power to help us out of suffering. What powers do the sublime beings have? They have the power of unconditional compassion for all beings. They have the power of right wisdom about true nature of all things and all sentient beings. They have the power of dynamic energy to help beings out of suffering. They have the power of enlightened body, speech and mind. What power of omniscience wisdom do Buddhas have? All Buddhas have the power of omniscience in knowing the ultimate true nature of reality as well as multiple conventional realities. For example, if you burn a bit of grass and then throw the ash into the ocean, stir it for 100 years. Then pick a small particle of the ash and ask the Buddha, where does it come from? Scriptures say that Buddhas have unobstructed vision of the three times and thus the Buddha would be able to say exactly where it came from and how. This is an example of the power of omniscience to tell and know events of three times, coarse and subtle.

The power of compassion: Buddhas have immense compassion for all beings regardless of where they come from. An example for the greatest love on earth would be the love one has for oneself. Buddhas love for all beings, unconditional love of compassion is 100 000 times greater than a self-centred person would have for themselves. Let me share an anecdotal case of Buddha's power to help beings: when he was alive there was Angulamala who wore a garland of human fingers. He had been instructed by another teacher for his own selfish reason, that if he killed 1000 people then the guru will grant him salvation. Angulamala believed him

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and he went and killed 999 people and the last person that he could think of finding and killing was his own mother. When he was about to brandish his sinful sword to cut off her head, the Buddha appeared and intervened and brought him to his senses and taught him. Not only did he receive teachings but he overcame the deadly sin of so many murders and he made it to a transcendental state.

Regardless of whether one knows how to say refuge prayers or not, the moment you turn mentally to the Buddhas it is instantly registered in the omniscient consciousness of the Buddha and he would instantly appear to help beings. When Buddhas help us out of suffering they do not physically drag us out of *samsara* and place us in the state of liberation. If it were possible then they would have done that long time ago. Despite their omniscience and compassion they are unable to do that. The only way they can do that is by showing us the path to liberation. Buddhas cannot wash the sins of beings like you wash clothes; neither can they plug out the suffering of beings like splinters out of a hand; nor can they transfer their knowledge directly and supplant their realisations into the consciousness of beings. The only way Buddhas can actually help us is by revealing the path of truth. As the Buddha shows us the path, if you walk the path you will arrive at the desired destination.

What do Buddhas do? They guide us by teaching and showing us the Two Truths or Four Truths – the Four Truths are subsumed by the Two Truths. They teach us the nature of 2 truths with 4 truths of practice. If we embrace them and practice the teaching then understanding that one gains becomes the path. Once you develop that knowledge you intensify the knowledge developing it to the state of perfection. This is walking the path. As you walk this path about how things are, then gradually you transform physically and psychologically into a perfect being called a Buddha. You achieve the state of Buddha and spiritual state of Buddha.

In what way have we been suffering? We have been suffering out of basic confusion about the Two Truths. We have not been able to delineate the distinction between the conventional and ultimate truth. Sentient beings have been confused about the true nature of the conventional realities. We are conditioned through long process of confusion into thinking that conventional, relative truth has some intrinsic unchanging nature about it when in fact Buddha has taught nothing throughout space has such an intrinsic reality. That confusion is said to be the root of suffering that we have been experiencing. When we succeed to understand the Two Truths for what they are then our understanding of the ultimate truth helps us develop the cutting edge knowledge of emptiness of intrinsic essential nature of things. When we understand conventional reality it will help us develop powerful compassion and universal love. When things do not exist inherently then there is room for this powerful compassion and love. In this way when we develop the knowledge of the Two Truths, the knowledge of the ultimate truth helps us develop Dharmakaya, knowing all things as they are. The knowledge of conventional truth helps us develop the physical state that helps us manifest in different ways to different beings. The integrated practice and the knowledge of the Two Truths help us attain these two ultimate goals.

True refuge is the persistent practice of the path of liberation shown by the Buddha. Buddha teaches us the path of wisdom and the path of method to help us achieve the two states, physical and psychological enlightened states. He is not the actual saviour or refuge but the Dharma is and it means knowledge, path, and the understanding one gains of the teachings, the knowledge of the Two Truths. As you embrace the teaching and path shown by the Buddha and when your mind becomes this path and knowledge then that knowledge has the power to sever the fundamental confusion about the true nature of Two Truths and subsequently all negative emotions or delusions cease at that point. The negative emotions and subsequent negative karma then become impotent to give rise to any future suffering. This is the state of permanent cessation from confusion, desire and so on. This is the true Dharma and cessation. This knowledge is called the Path. These two, true path and true cessation are the true Dharma and they are the ones that save us and not so much the Buddhas.

The matter of refuge is about mind and we need to identify the Four Truths; the truth of anguish or suffering, the truth of origin of suffering, the truth of path and the truth of resultant cessation. We need to identify these Four Truths within the Two Truths. Then mentally we need to see that our mind becomes the path of wisdom, path of method or ingenious resourcefulness in reaching out to sentient beings. Subsequently walking the path

of wisdom and method if we attain the two enlightened physical states of the Buddha and the two enlightened psychological states of the Buddha we have realised the four kayas, the four enlightened states. When this happens it is the true refuge that will grant protection and help to other beings.

How do we identify the function of the refuge of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha? We consider Buddha as the guide on the path, the teacher who shows us the path and one's conviction in a Buddha or Buddhas having the right knowledge about the path to true freedom is the process of going for refuge to Buddha. Embracing the path, practicing the teaching given by the Buddhas and resultantly attaining of the cutting edge knowledge that removes confusion, is called the true path. Attaining the subsequent state of cessation is called the true cessation. When you develop this you have gone for refuge in Dharma. That is the way. How do we turn to Sangha? Sangha are like-minded spiritual aspirant who are committed to the path to freedom and who are a communal support system on whom you can rely on in times of difficulties. That is the way we go for refuge in Sangha.

This is a general description of refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. For us what is immediately relevant is a cessation of rebirth in one of the three lower realms. A body of teaching that helps us avoid an immediate rebirth in one of the three lower realms is the true Dharma at our state of development. That is the ethics of active restraints of 10 negative actions of body, speech and mind. If we live our lives by these it will save us such a rebirth. Also, if you develop true renunciation and you have a strong yearning for liberation that will also help from experiencing *samsaric* predicaments. At our stage of develop we can't expect the true cutting edge of knowledge and realisations. We need to address the immediate problem.

As I described before we need to visualise the refuge objects before us. It is very important to reduce the gap between them and us, not thinking of them as being external to us but that they and our mind are of the same nature at this stage. In fact in the sutra system this is not commonly talked about but in tantra it is crucial and imperative that the objects visualised before one, the focus of one's practice and one's own mind are non-dual in nature. At this stage, think that these objects of refuge out there are external manifestations of your own mind. What we see out there is coloured by the purity of our mind. At this stage of our development when our mind is not free from delusional pollutants and thus we are not able to see the sublime beings as separate from our mind, we see our gurus as ordinary beings. As one manages to purify the mind of these pollutants the gurus will begin to appear to one not as ordinary human beings but as supreme Nirmanakaya, the form our historical Buddha appeared in as an ordinary being with marks of greatness. As you understand emptiness of true existence of all things the sublime objects of refuge will all appear in the form of Sambogakaya Buddhas, glorious, divine, physical beings. You have become an Arya being and all objects of refuge appear with less defilement on the mind. As you keep purifying the mind by meditating persistently on the true nature of mind etc. you will succeed in removing the last remnants of pollutants on the mind. When the mind is pristine you will see that your mind and the Buddha's omniscient mind are of the same taste of nature. Then you will see Buddhas in true enlightened states and these will be seen in the state of Dharmakaya. How we see these beings depends on our mind.

When we focus on this part of refuge, to see that the sublime refuge beings and our mind are not different, this has far-reaching implications in terms of developing the cutting edge knowledge that all things are merely imputed by mind and nothing pure or impure has any intrinsic objective reality about them. It helps us develop that knowledge. Also, this will also help us develop the powerful tantric knowledge that everything out there, including oneself, Buddhas, ordinary beings, deities etc. are the dramatic plays of our subtle consciousness and the subtle energy which are inseparable aspects of the same reality. If you begin to focus on these then they will help us develop these two important forms of knowledge. Driving by this understanding of the vulnerable state of our being in *samsara* and the power that the Three Jewels have to help us out of the predicament if you turn to the Three Jewels and remain committed to walking the path shown by the Three Jewels that will be the true refuge, otherwise mere recitation would not be that helpful.

Refuge is the doorway to the Buddhist path. If you want to become a citizen to a country you have to take an oath to be a good citizen. In the same way you commit yourself to turning to the Three Jewels and that commitment is the true refuge. After you become a citizen as a law abiding person you only do the lawful and avoid unlawful actions at all times. The commitment of refuge is not to seek your own liberation and enlightenment but that of all sentient beings. Practicing the 6 Perfection is the commitment of refuge which is covered by Bodhicitta aspirations and deeds. Having visualised the objects of refuge and going for refuge properly then you could recite the refuge prayer three times, or five or seven. Three round refuge is going for refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Four-fold element refuge you can add the guru. The five-element refuge will include the meditational deities. Six-element refuge includes all the above and entire cluster of meditational deities. Seven-element refuge includes all above and entire class meditational deities including transcendental Dharma protectors.

There is a practice called Bodhicitta practice of taking your future resultant state on the path now. What that means is as you focus your attention on the Buddha. Then the Buddha sends a replica of himself that dissolves into you, there and then feel that you instantly become Buddha. Once you become Buddha then your aspiration has always been to serve other beings. Now with this visualisation you become Buddha instantly you want to translate your aspiration to work for others into action. Therefore you send out innumerable replicas of yourself as a Buddha, and each sits on the head of all sentient beings. Then you cause these replicas discharging nectar and light rays that purify all sentient beings of their negative karma and delusions. That process is called practice of Bodhicitta whereby you pre-empt your future Buddhahood now and you act to help sentient beings.

This refuge is now followed by practiced by 4 Immeasurables, of love, compassion, joy and equanimity. We practice this and within each there are four elements. When you think of yourself 'how nice it would be if all beings are without suffering' is aspiration of immeasurable compassion. 'May they be free of suffering' is the prayer; 'I will see to it single-handedly that they are free of suffering and causes of suffering' is special resolve and determination. 'May Gurus, Buddhas etc. enable me to do this' is the fervent prayer of immeasurable compassion. The second one is immeasurable love which has a sense of bestowal of happiness, physical and mental. Immeasurable equanimity is the wish that all beings are free of prejudices for and against amongst themselves. Immeasurable joy is the wish that they are in a state of joy.

The sublime objects of refuge can be visualised in three different ways: one is the objects of refuge are up in the space and later on further on in the practice when you visualise merit fields, then the objects of these sublime refuge dissolve into the merit field. The second one the objects of refuge emit yellow or crimson light rays that dissolve into one; the third one is the objects of refuge in the space before one dissolve into their ultimate state of emptiness.