



Dhargyey Buddhist Centre

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

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Please listen to this talk and discourse with the right motivation of attaining the state of a Buddha for the sake of helping other beings.

Of many foundation practices two that stand out are development of faith or interest, and development of right view or right wisdom. Faith and interest is considered the ground and the right view is considered perfect sight to see things. It is my personal observation that in countries like ancient China and Tibet the people had a lot of faith and interest in Buddhism but very little knowledge about what really matters. Conversely in the West where Buddhism is starting to take root and where the number of people interested in it is growing, people with their education have superior knowledge and intelligence. What is lacking in them is really interest. Both categories of Buddhist are lacking one or the others. The two are vitally important, and we need to develop strong interest and faith grounded in wisdom. That means you understand the crux of Buddhist philosophy and practice and that ignites a desire in you to want to pursue Buddhism. In that way if you can have the two that is extremely beneficial.

What do I mean by faith grounded in wisdom? First you study Buddhist discourses, the original teaching of the Buddha, particularly the Four Truths or the Two Truths. Study these at length and examine their validity and relevance in your own and others' lives. If you can find any fallacies then see how you can resolve the problem. After careful consideration you think the teaching make sense for you and others, then you are convinced of the validity of the person who gave the teaching. As a result you develop regard and faith in the Buddha. That is called wisdom grounded faith. This is particularly relevant and required in the 21st century when people are much more informed about various issues. People cannot hold on to Buddhism because it was the religion of their forefather. They need to be able to explain Buddhism with regard to everyday life and see the relevance and correspondence. In today's world Buddhist teachers cannot talk about celestial being in extra-terrestrial realms and there are subterranean beings underground like ngagas. If you don't perform well in terms of ethical behaviour you will go down to hell. Then people will say, 'where are those things? Can you prove that?' and Buddhism will not be able to give concrete demonstration about these things. How many people in the world, what percentage who subscribe to Buddhism would really believe in this? Maybe only 50% and the other 50% have reservation and difficulties. Yet, Buddhism talks about different realms and different experiences based on a raft of activities and actions performed. These need to be explained based on deduction and logic and for that we need wisdom and intelligence.

It is a different matter if people listen to Buddhist talks to see what Buddhism has to say about different things out of curiosity and if they make sense they take them on board. If they do not make sense the teachings can easily be rejected. There is no harm in it and it is the right thing to do. If one professes to be a Buddhist then one needs to follow a Buddhist way of life. I would say it would take years of study and training to understand Buddhism after a fashion. People who spend 20 or 30 years of intensive study and debate, if you ask them, the how much do they understand, they say they have a fraction of understanding of Buddhism. Buddhism is quite complex and thus quite difficult to come to terms with.

Someone ask me to give them refuge vow and I said, take time and let me know and I would give them the vows. Now the person is not here to participate. This kind of behaviour does not go well. This attitude does not help the person at all. Another time I was talking about the three poisons of mind, the negative consequences of desire, ignorance and hate. Desire or attachment is distorted awareness. I highlighted giving explanation why

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attachment is distorted. Then someone asked Buddhism seems to undermine love between men and women, why? Buddhism does not undermine love between people and between men and women. I was talking about the drawbacks of attachment-based love. The person misunderstood the intent of this discourse and has stopped showing up and that is another example of not critiquing Buddhism and to understand the underlying intentions behind statements. What is beneficial is to approach Buddhism with an open and critical mind without actually embracing Buddhism as a way of life. Then keep participating for quite some time. If one participates in Buddhist discourse with such an open mind, some things will be agreeable to their way of thinking, and they will not be over the moon. If it would go against their way of thinking it won't be so incisive and hurtful and they will remain open. In the future it will give them opportunity to be more exposed to the teaching in depth. One must approach Buddhism for one's spiritual growth and development. Indeed, we need spiritual nourishment. It would be wrong to approach Buddhism thinking that I am doing some favour to Buddhism by joining Buddhist classes and thus support Buddhist cause. Buddhism does not need any favour from any quarters. People must practice Buddhism for their own good.

Now if people believe themselves to be Buddhist and indeed they have taken different vows, refuge vow, Bodhisattva vows and tantric vows and one has to be serious in observing these vows and living life according to these. It is also vital to participate in Buddhist discourses with the right behaviour and attitude, one of regard, reverence reflected in the physical and verbal expression. If one does not do this in terms of how one conducts oneself, it would be bad for one. It is my responsibility to say that and if I did not I would have failed in my duties. This centre has been in existence for over 20 years and a lot of people have received teaching from different lamas. What is important is not to show a sense of complacency at all thinking that I have heard enough teaching and I don't need any more when despite having had teaching there is not much to show for in terms of improvements and so on. I should not be complacent myself, and people likewise must adopt proper attitudes. I have spoken my mind this morning. I am given to speaking my mind. Secondly, I felt a need for that, we all need to be serious to get the benefit of Buddhist things, or it is better there is no teaching at all. Having cleared my chest with these feelings, now I like to go back to what I want to talk about.

Last week I talked about Bodhisattva ideals, vows and how to keep them. Today I want to talk about refuge vows and the foundation of Buddhism. When someone wants to become Buddhist they turn to what is called the Three Jewels. They are the object to whom they turn. You turn to Buddha, Dharma (Teaching) and Sangha (Spiritual community). How do we approach them for guidance on the path? First of all, turn your mind to the teaching and understand the crux of the teaching. With the proper appreciation for the teaching then naturally you will turn to the Buddha. In turning to the Three Jewels we must have a sense of desperation. In order to feel that one is being tormented and tortured with agonising suffering of body and mind, at the moment as humans we are pretty well off. Imagine though being a being in one of the three lower realms (hell, hungry ghost or animal) and picture yourself in that situation and you will feel the desperation. Then a reservation may crop in the mind, what is this all about? I have no pain in body and mind, no excruciating suffering. Maybe right now and for some time this may be so, but this life is short-lived and now we remain vulnerable and susceptible to falling down and then really experiencing the pain and suffering as we have the complete set of causes from past lives to experience this in the future. Secondly, life is short-lived and highly ephemeral. Following this you need to take the third step: indeed I am susceptible this suffering given the many sets of causes embedded in my consciousness. Is there a way out? If you look for the solution for the future problem, then you are informed that the Three Jewels can provide you with help. Two things are needed to want to turn to the Three Jewels:

1. They are called a sense of desperation, out of fear and vulnerability awaiting one.
2. Secondly, confidence and conviction in the mind that the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha have the ability to help you.

Without sense of fear for the looming suffering and confidence in the Three Jewels then you will not be able to take proper qualified refuge. Without refuge then even if one were to spend one's entire life among Buddhists, one would not become a Buddhist. It is for everyone to check whether one is a Buddhist. Those that have been Buddhist for some time, see if you have refuge with a sense of desperation and confidence in the Three Jewels. Those of you who want to be Buddhist check why you do, and are you driven by these two reasons or not?

In what way can we be saved and our susceptibility averted? Why do we experience suffering in the first place? Why do people who undergo immense suffering? Where does their suffering arise from? According to the Buddha all suffering arises from negative thoughts of desire, hate and jealousy and actions performed under the influence of these. To put an end to suffering we need a set of antidotes or counteracting forces. The actual antidote to this disease of the mind is the Dharma, the teaching. It refers to the right wisdom understanding the true nature of reality of oneself, all other people and phenomena. The right wisdom is the path and this is the third of Four Truths. When you develop a right spiritual antidotes which are correct wisdom then you are able to apply the path to delusion and they will be severed and never to return and you achieve a sense of permanent cessation. This is the fourth of the Four Truths. These two, cessation – the result, and the path – the means to result - are the actually Dharma.

Who actually can explain the process of the journey on the path and the result of the journey? In Buddhism it is only the Buddha who can show the path and then help you reach the state of cessation and as a result through Dharma you gain special regard for the Buddha. For one to follow the path which is the Jewel of Dharma shown by the Buddha, we need support system, peer-support, just as in school people learn better and more effectively when they learn with their class mates. In the same way for us to practice the path we need someone to fall back on and that role is played by fellow Buddhist and they are called Sangha. We can explain the turning to the Three Jewels using the education system. The teacher is like the Buddha, the curriculum is the Dharma, and the classmates with whom you learn and grow are like the Sangha. The Three Jewels are objects or sources you turn to. When you turn to them you do so with the attitude of seeing Buddha as the guide. We turn to the Dharma with the attitude of considering it is the actual refuge or saviour. We turn to Sangha with an attitude of considering them as a support system. If one intends to be a fully-fledged Buddhist then one must go through the refuge process as well as live one's life by simple precepts of refuge.

Once you become a Buddhist there are precepts, three of them are prohibitive:

1. Once you turn to the Buddha after thorough examination, then this precept prohibits you to take any other humans as refuge or as someone to show you the path, any celestial being or teachers of other traditions as your refuge. However one could seek temporary help from powerful celestial beings as you would get help from a doctor to get help. That is only to address temporary problem. If one took the doctor as the ultimate refuge then your refuge vow will come to an end in your mind.
2. By taking refuge in the Dharma one is prohibited from inflicting any physical, mental or verbal violence to any sentient being. This is the key precept of refuge, total restraint from malice, aggression of body and mind. Why Buddhism, as are other traditions is grounded in compassion, altruistic, for all beings seeking happiness.
3. By turning to Sangha, the like-minded people who give you much-needed support, one is prohibited from associating with non-Buddhist, also called misleading friends. Who are they? They are those who prevail on your thinking, who are critical of Buddhism and thus who somehow succeed in drawing you away from your Buddhism core values. These are misleading friends, one's association with them is prohibited for one's own good. This is not an expression of malice and hate towards these people. It is primarily to safe-guard your own refuge in particular when you are a new Buddhist and your vows are not very grounded. If you chat with such people they may sound convincing and what they have to say changes you in terms of your refuge in the Three Jewels. It is a personal loss.

There are pro-active precepts, things to do.

1. Taking refuge in Buddha for guidance one is required to show reverence to him as well as physical images of him.
2. Turning to Dharma for guidance, although the actual Dharma is the true path and cessation, but the message is conveyed by written script. Therefore any script in any language that conveys messages of Dharma we need to show reverence and value to because they incorporate the message of Dharma. The reason for considering letters, words and texts as Dharma, is that at the moment we don't have the real Jewel of Dharma of path and cessation but they are a means of reaching such a state in time.

3. By taking refuge in Sangha we need to have a great sense of admiration and regard for fellow Buddhist and see them always in a positive light. Also, to take this to an extreme, you would show regard to a patch of maroon or saffron cloth as they are the colours of the ordained who have the vows of ordination in their consciousness. Why? At the moment we do not have the opportunity to mingle with arya beings, spiritual transcendent beings. We are much lower level of development. However, Sangha members like the ordained, who are absolutely committed to Buddhist values and are on the path of reaching the state of arya being, it is with their help in terms of support and guidance that one is lead on the journey to the state of arya beings. Thus we need to show utmost regard for the ordained and the fellow Buddhists.

In refuge vow there are two sets of three do and don'ts. Don't take them as injunctions infringing on your freedoms. These are for one's own good and the Three Jewels themselves do not need any kind of favouritism or support from any quarters. We have heard a lot of teachings about altruist compassion, the need to develop it as well as love and universal altruism and for that matter the need to develop renunciation and so on. People think these are for others as if one's own concerns are not addressed. In fact one's own concerns and issues are implicitly addressed. These three dos and don'ts, one each for Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, are called precepts for individual refuge.

Collectively there are 6 precepts.

1. To do refuge practice frequently by recollecting the many benefits and advantages of refuge. What are the benefits and advantages of turning to them? It would go a long time to go through these, so go and study them in the *lam rim* texts.
2. Offering the first untouched portion of whatever you eat and drink and say grace to the Three Jewels recollecting their kindness on the path. Indeed, the Three Jewels are extremely kind and helpful, whatever we have been able to do spiritually, e.g. today we have gathered today and you have heard me say different things about Buddhist teachings, whatever I am able to give and you are able to understand is entirely due to the fact that Buddha appeared in the world and gave the teaching. Had the Buddha not come to the world this would not have been possible. We are given to eating and drinking a lot. As a person who has taken refuge then one is required to be proactive in offering whatever one eats and drinks to the Three Jewels. It is the precepts of refuge, and those with higher vows of tantra etc. it is even more crucial.
3. To help others to refuge, to give refuge vows to those who want to take refuge. This does not mean you become pro-actively evangelical and knocking on people's doors saying, 'I am here to give you refuge, are you ready?' Not that kind of conversion. It means if someone who has given serious thought to their lasting happiness and overcome their temporary and ultimate problem and who have realised that the best way to address these problems and to achieve one's goal is to seek the help of the Three Jewels. If such a person turns to one, it is incumbent to you to help them take refuge. That means help them take refuge.
4. To take refuge six times in 24 hours, three times during the day and three times at night. What can we do that one does not go against this precept? You can recite the four line stanza of refuge and Bodhicitta (I go for refuge until I am enlightened, to the Buddha, Dharma and Highest Assembly. From the virtuous merits I perform by practicing giving and the other perfections, may I attain Buddhahood for the sake of all beings.) If you can recite this six times a day then you would be within the precepts. If one did not, particularly those with tantric vows, it is a serious issue.
5. To turn for help to Three Jewels in whatever you do, first you think of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and ask for help mentally for the success in your project and various undertakings. It is always beneficial and the success of undertakings is more ensured if one sought help in Three Jewels. Let us check what we do. If you are confronted with person problem such as health, business etc. you first thinks about seeing doctor, or a specialist. Buddha does not easily come to mind or Dharma. What does this mean? They come second. It speaks volumes about one's attitude to the Three Jewels. Again, I must make myself clear when I say what happens to one when one has health problem and the doctor comes to mind first and Buddha second. By that I don't mean that you don't go and see the doctor. You have to. But you seek his help as necessary aide to put an end to the temporary problem but in your

heart of hearts you still turn to the Buddha for an answer to this on-going problem of suffering and so on.

6. Not to say the name of the Buddha and Dharma flippantly to arouse laughter and crack a joke. Literally translated it says not forsake the Three Jewels in a flippant or jovial manner. What it means is it would be wrong and going against the precepts to make fun of the Three Jewels, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha so that you would be seen as a humorous person in the company of flippant people. As a true Buddhist, refuge in the Three Jewels provides a lasting solution of the on-going suffering of body and mind life after life. Therefore, refuge is worth even sacrificing one's own life.

These are some things about refuge, the prohibitive precepts, proactive precepts which are individual to the each of the Three Jewels, and then there are the common precepts. Now it is time to self-evaluate one's performance as a Buddhist. Whether one does act within the framework of these precepts and does not take refuge in the Three Jewels are driven by two reasons. Firstly, a heart-felt sense of desperation otherwise what is awaiting one is excruciating suffering of the three lower realms. Secondly, does one have the conviction in the ability of the Three Jewels to help one? One needs to self-evaluate. Does one consider oneself a Buddhist just because one can parrot refuge prayers? Or does one take refuge in Three Jewels because of these two serious issues. Then make necessary changes. It is no good to keep brushing aside these important issues, always trying to present a nice appearance, it is no good. I needed to speak my mind and I have. It is vital to check whether one has these precepts or not. If you have these, then you are a true Buddhist. Otherwise, by simply having an image of the Buddha on the altar and making some offering before that, without these precepts one is not a Buddhist, one is misleading oneself and kidding oneself.

Last week and the week before that I spent time talking about Bodhicitta views and precepts. This morning I talked about the all-important refuge vow, the foundation of Buddhism. Next week I will go back to the Seven Sublime Practices of which I will talk about the acknowledgement of one's wrong deeds, purifying oneself and confession practice.