



Dhargyey Buddhist Centre

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

Sunday 21 August 2011

lam rim

Please listen to the discourse with the highest motivation to bring about the highest good for all sentient beings throughout space who have been your mothers throughout beginning-less time. To this end, think to yourself that you will be listening to this discourse as a means to get there.

There are many systems of thought available in the world and one is spiritual system. Of all people in the world 50% are busy pursuing happiness through material means and to achieve happiness for this life. There are also people who believe in lifetimes and because of that they think about matters affecting them in their future life. Among those there are people who engage in some spiritual practice or form to pursue happiness not only for themselves but the good of all beings. They do things to bring about temporary happiness of all beings but also the highest good of all beings. Buddhist approach to things is the last one.

We can also find three types of people who pursue happiness in this lifetime. They live by the day – if they can get something to eat and wear for the day that is what they live for. The second group of people who work for this lifetime are those who do not just think about the day's existence but also their future 15-20 years down the track for themselves and people related to them. The third category of people is those who in the process of pursuing the material welfare do also think of the happiness of the larger community of all beings. The last one is what we need to aim for. The first two processes or ways of thinking are not very different from the way animals care for themselves or think about their happiness. Since we are humans and humans obviously have superior thinking power. We need therefore to use our ability to think far and beyond this lifetime and use it well. We need to capitalise on human potential to achieve great things for self and future and right now rather than putting it off in the future. If you do that it may not happen. Now is the time to make the best use of human capacity for greater heights and achievements because we have met all the conditions to do that. This is a set of conditions that make human life so special which are really hard to come by again and again in the future. If you look at your own mind and health and the facilities available and availability of the teachings to you, all point to the fact that now is the time when we have all the resources necessary to make the best use of human potential.

If you compare the distance from here to Buddhahood and from the three lower realms to back here; let us say a human died and failing to make the most of the human potential fell down into one of the three lower realms. For him or her to come back to human existence where all is advantageous for spiritual growth, the distance for him or her to come back from the lower realms back to the human realm is 90% greater than the distance from here to Buddhahood – in terms of probability. For example, if one had been reborn a bird then it is really hard to bounce back to higher realms of existence. For one to be reborn in higher realms of existence one has to do good things all one's life to start with. Even if that did not happen one needs to take the opportunity with die with a virtuous frame of mind. That is extremely difficult to happen for any animals. You may think that is not fair they have some capacity. And they do but we can infer that it is very difficult for animals. Do we find it easy to recall virtuous thought day in and day out, moment by moment? Although we have been exposed to teachings etc. developing virtuous thoughts it is a difficult task. If we as humans in a better situation to do that find it hard then it is a foregone conclusion for species that are in most unfavourable conditions to generate virtuous thoughts. It is really important for all of us to look within ourselves and do what is needed.

This morning I am going to talk about the 3rd of the Seven Sublime Practices: acknowledgement of one's wrong doings or confession. For one to confess, one needs to have remorse. One would not feel remorse for

All Rights Reserved. Published on www.dhargyey.org.nz. For personal private use only.

anything unless there is a moral conscience about one's behaviour. This is generated by understanding karma. If one had good understanding of cause and effect relationship in all virtuous and non-virtuous actions, and thus one does a non-virtuous action what are the implications for one in the future? Recalling the implication would be extremely helpful for one to become more circumspect and this will lead to a sense of dread for one's actions and thus remorse.

Buddhist scriptures state that when one's negative actions of body, speech and mind are performed then of four effects each virtuous and non-virtuous action has, the first is called ripening effect. They state that any ripening effect of non-virtuous action is a rebirth in one of the three lower realms. Of the three realms of existence the realm of animals is quite clear to relate to for we know how the animals live their lives and the difficulties they have for survival and hardships and so on. As for the next two lower realms, the realm of hungry ghost and the realm of hot and cold hells, there rebirth occurs through miraculous entry. This means they are simply born there and they don't need a long process of being born. Do hells exist? There are a lot debates among different groups of people, scientists and religious people and so on. Let us forget the discussion whether they exist or not. If there are hells what would possibly bring about a hell rebirth for anything that exists must have a cause. What are the possible causes? Life or rebirth in the three lower realms is a ripening effect of negative actions. Since there are three lower realms the hell realm, hungry ghost and animals, which of negative actions would be for the respective lower realms? As for negative actions, there is a degree of severity: strong, moderate and weak. We can all appreciate intensity of negative actions. If the negative actions are strong the ripening effect of rebirth in the lower realm is either in hot or cold hell.

Hell Realms – Hot and Cold

The hot hells – according to the descriptions - there are eight: Don't regard this description as a narrative as something that happened to somebody else. Think about this in a personal way. Take this in a personal way and then take personal responsibility for what one does. We have the human potential and using it we can certainly avert a possible rebirth in one of the three lower realms. However, if one lives a very carefree life and does not care about one's actions and does not take responsibility then when the time comes then such a rebirth may befall one. One may be reborn in one, when that happens then the karma will take its course. It is so strong that the united force of all the Buddhas in the ten directions cannot change a thing.

1. Frequent reviving hell - who creates this hell? Karma that one performs leads to such a realm of existence. Frequent reviving hell has burning hot iron and the whole environment is ablaze with fire. Beings born here by nature are highly temperamental, hot tempered, the sight of others provokes anger. When they see each other – according to the description - they cut and chop each other. They use all kinds of weapons, axes, swords and so on, and they kill each other 100 times a day but they never die a permanent death because they have the karmic sentence to keep repeating this existence. Can we imagine going through daily execution at the hands of one another using deadly sharp weapons? At this stage even a needle prick is difficult because our body is extremely fragile and sensitive. If we find that hard, just imagine due to one's own action and karma one has to experience such a tortuous daily existence. How long does one spend there? Incredibly long when converted into human years: 50 human years are half a day for beings in the celestial realm. A full day in the celestial realm is thus 100 human years. If you then calculate that 30 days in the celestial realm (equivalent to 3000 human years) would be a month in the celestial realms, 12 months would be a year (equivalent to 36000 human years). 500 years in the celestial realm (equivalent to 18 million human years) would be a day for the beings in the frequent revival hell.
2. The second hot hell is called Black Lines. As we go further down the more suffering intensity increases. Here there are hell guards or sentries. Who are they? They are nothing more than creations of one's own karma. They will draw black lines using burning swords and then draw charred lines one one's body and then they will saw the body into pieces.
3. The third hot hell is called Crushing Hell. Those there have the experience of being crushed by two mountains rushing towards one and one is pulverised between them in an instance. Can we imagine the suffering of beings in these two hells? It is unimaginable. Their suffering is so intense that if the suffering was just cutting off a limb here and there it would have been considered a state of great well-being. Such is the degree of suffering in these realms.

4. The fourth hot hell is called Shrieking.
5. The fifth hot hell is called Great Shrieking. The difference between these two is in the 4th hot hells beings feel that they are within the superstructure of burning iron that is red hot as well as the superstructure is ablaze with intense fire. One sees no way out and therefore one finds it really depressing. All that one can hope to do is to cry. In the great shrieking hell there is not one layer but double layers of superstructure where one's body is ablaze with flames but seeing outer and inner rings of this superstructure causes psychological distress and therefore it is called the greater shrieking hell. Not only the body is in excruciating pain but there are psychological distresses. I may succeed to get out of the first one but there are another one and another one and that adds to the distress.
6. The 6th hot hell is called Scorching Hell. Here not only is one's body ablaze in such a harsh intensely hot environment but one is impaled through one's body by another extremely hot burning rod and therefore one's interior is now totally consumed.
7. The 7th hot hell is Intensely or Extremely Scorching Hell. Here one is not only impaled vertically as well as laterally from one side of the body to the other. Yet, karma would have it that one does not die instantly.
8. The 8th hot hell is called Hell Without Respite. Here is the most torturous of all the hells and there is not a moment of respite because one is caught in flames in the eleven directions: four cardinal directions, four sub-cardinal directions, top and bottom and one inside. There is nothing but intense fire and flames and yet inside one can hear someone crying and shrieking.
9. If one is a tantric practitioner with a lot of commitments – if you do well it is an accelerated path to Buddhahood but if one fails it is an accelerated path into hell. If one breaks these vows one will be reborn in the Varja Hot Hell which is below the 8th hell.

Are we immune from being reborn in one of these? We cannot be sure as we have an assortment of karmic baggage that we have ourselves created in the past. If they remain unaddressed through purification based on remorse for one's past actions then it does not take any time for one to be reborn in one of these terrible hot environments. Suppose one has a set of causes to be reborn in one of these would die today how long would it take to be reborn there? It does not take any time but only an instant. Karma is therefore unsparing, cruel, yet we have ourselves performed these.

These are brief descriptions of the most unbearable and hot environments which one's own karma creates for one. A lot of people would find this very depressing. In fact I have been told before I left India, 'be very careful not to talk about suffering, hells and so on to western people. They don't like to listen to those things, talk about good news and happy things.' If I did not describe what the teachings talk about the consequences of actions I would not have done justice to my calling and it would be unfair, I would not have been honest with you and myself and the teaching. But if you find it difficult and don't want to listen, then that is ok, too.

There are eight cold hells. Collectively the environment is frigid where the whole physical environment is ice and frozen water. There are constant blizzards blowing, it is dark and one cannot see anything. One is caught in such a dark, freezing environment. Beings who are born there in the beginning they would produce shivering noises and then your body becomes bluish and it becomes so bad the body breaks like the petals of the lotus, and things ooze out. Initially one's body goes pink and then bluish and so cold that it begins to crack. Then fluids of the body ooze out. They would be devoured by creepy crawlies and each drop of one's body would experience the same pain. One stays there and one gets stuck in an unimaginable harsh and unfriendly environment for many millions of years.

Hungry Ghost Realm

The second species in the lower realms are called hungry ghosts. These are beings that look like ghosts. They are extremely hungry and thirsty looking for food and yet not finding any. Even if they find it they can't use them. Then again 100s of 1000s years go by and they will not dying of starvation or thirst.

Whilst these descriptions of the suffering in the three lower realms may be hard to accept at this stage, but reflection on these is critical for one's spiritual growth. Understanding of the suffering of the three lower

realms as well as suffering of species in higher realms induces a sense of aversion to mundane existence and thus it helps turn one's mind away from the causes, the negative actions, that lead to this rebirth and then direct one's mind towards virtue. Reflection is extremely helpful to develop renunciation, the desire to turn one's back on negative actions. Reflection on suffering of beings in the three lower realms who have been one's mothers in beginning-less existence also induces a sense of empathy and compassion leading to universal altruism or Bodhicitta. Reflections on these suffering are not useless. In fact they are required if one means to be a serious practitioner. It is the light of the basic suffering that Buddha when he taught for the first time taught the Four Noble Truths. The first ever statement Buddha formally made of the teaching was, 'This is the Truth of Suffering seen by Aryas'. For us to get out of mundane existence we need a strong drive to leave it behind and not get attached to it. There is nothing good about mundane existence. Basically life in the three lower realms filled with intense suffering, life in mundane existence is entirely fraught with suffering. We need to develop a sense of aversion to the suffering of actual pain.

Then we need to move to the next stage to develop aversion or disenchantment to the suffering of change of seeming pleasure and comfort to pain. Where do they come from? They come from the third suffering, the suffering of pervasive conditioning. When we don't check and evaluate where one is, despite of this horrible portrayal of the three lower realms, and one may feel 'I am ok' and one may feel comfortable now and that is when one has not carefully and honestly examined actions that one has performed in the past. Imagine that one was a bird in last life, how did we survive? We survived by eating worms. How many? We ate hundreds. In the entire life of being a bird one has lived off others without knowing. How many times have we been reborn as birds? There is no count. Now we can deduce that we do have negative karma. If we had been reborn a human often we were fishermen, butchers and people who slaughtered animals. How many times was one reborn as a fisherman where in one scoop they take so many fish? How many fish would one have caught in one lifetime? How many fish would one have caught in innumerable lifetimes as a fisherman? From there one could easily deduce that one does have a big store of negative karma.

Let us think about today's life so far. This morning until now how many items of virtuous thoughts have we been successful in having. How many negative thoughts have we had? Even if one were not butchering, fishing and eating worms and even as a human with a precious human rebirth, how easily do we find successful positive minds and maintain them. It is admirable that people have taken vows and have these and the vows are such a potent force to help them on the path to liberation and Buddhahood. If we have broken vows the downside of fractioning vows is also quite grave. How many infractions have occurred? When we consider what we do in one day as a human with the full information of cause and effect and when we consider what we might have done without this information and yet lived a life in mundane existence, even then no iota of remorse grows in one's heart or mind. One does not become awakened and circumspect and a bit more remorseful – if nothing happens in spite of all this, it is as if one's heart and mind has become steel and hardened and nothing happens to it. It is hardened by the repetitive performance of this. However, one would be said to have quality remorse if one feels as dreadful and bad as the third of three people who have murdered or assassinated someone. Imagine three men have killed someone and the police have caught the first one. He is imprisoned and sentenced to death. The second person has also been caught and is in the van being taken to the police station and has the same fate. One is still not caught but sooner or later the law will catch one. How would the third person feel? Seeing his two mates in the hands of the law only to be executed a sense of fear and dread the third person would have. We are like that. If we had the same sense of dread and fear as the 3rd person in the analogy has then we are ready to do a quality confession practice to cleanse and wipe away the stock pile of negative imprints from previous actions. Like the three men in the analogy we too have performed with other people many serious first grade negative actions. As a result some of our mates with whom we have performed them have been reborn in hell realm where they are roasting in fire or frozen and yet not dead. Some of our mates have just died and they are on the way to such a rebirth. And we are still living but if our mates who could not rid themselves of these actions through purification before they died and we too, had a hand in the same negative actions still have not managed to purify ourselves of the negative propensities we are bound to follow suit.

Once one does realise the precarious existence of one and where one is almost on the verge to following suit, if one's heart is filled with a sense of deep terrifying remorse then it is no good to be frozen by it. Before it is too late is there a way out to undo and therefore avert such terrible consequences. Buddha has taught that it is absolutely possible to undo through confession the wittingly or unwittingly performed negative actions one has performed. This is the mitigating aspect of negative karma that they can be undone. Just as they have been performed effectively they can be undone effectively through purification. I won't be able to talk about confession today so I will do it next time.

Confession practice should not be overlooked. It is for one's own good to do it. If you don't do it is going to be that someone else is going to suffer. One's own interest is the issue here and we need to do it as soon as possible. It is very common for common people to envy the rich and famous and the celebrities, the powerful and the leaders. In fact there is nothing to envy about their lifestyle. A lot of them have sets of potent causes in their mind stream. They are carried away by the popularity and name and they do not get time to become awakened to deeper issues affecting them in coming lifetimes. Rather than feeling envious of their position and riches one should pity them and feel sad for them. When I see someone with a dog I can't help but think that the man leading the dog will be the dog and the dog will be a man. Everything in *samsara* is in a state of flux and there is no certainty. In this context the Buddha said a really powerful statement: 'You are your own lord and enemy, to the karma that you do you are the witness and no one else can witness it.' Buddha did not say that unless you listen to me you are not going to have a good future. He said that our future cannot be determined by the Buddha. It has to be determined by ourselves through our own actions. If you do good things you are a benign lord and if you do bad things we become our own enemies. The Buddhist approach to refuge is to turn to Buddha: 'Oh Buddha I would like to follow a course of actions for a better future. I want you to help me.' In other traditions you trust an omnipotent person, 'I totally trust you and my welfare is in your care.' One is by implications one is not taking responsibility for one's own actions. I will talk about how to engage in the process of undoing the stockpile of negative actions next week. In the meantime do keep in mind some of the things we have heard this morning and then do as well as you can.