



Dhargyey Buddhist Centre

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

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Lam rim

Please participate in this discourse with the highest motivation to attain the highest goal to help all sentient beings who have been your mothers through beginning-less time and to this end listen to this teaching on the Graduated Path to Buddhahood.

As we are all aware we have been reborn as humans this lifetime and the lifespan ranges from uncertainty to average lifespan of about 100 years. We need to think how we have fared in life thus far and what will happen to us after we have lived this given lifespan and are we ready to end this life and more importantly are we going to have a comfortable journey in the life hereafter. When we consider how we have journeyed from previous life to this life and how we will fare from here to the hereafter it is quite clear to see that many things that we have acquired in material possession, friends and relations, ultimately when the crunch time comes, all are to be left behind. Our human experience clearly established that human relations change. If you have a bad relationship with somebody or somebody becomes your enemy you can physically run away and avoid the person. Our relations can be very close or how distant someone may be, all will be equally left behind after one disappears from this life. This body too that we call ourselves and is associated with one's identity is left behind and not one part of the body can be taken with one after the end of this life.

What is taken to the next life is the mind. Our real companion to the next life is our own mind. What can we get from the mind? Nothing from the mind itself, but we can tap into predispositions we have laid onto the mind by doing actions in this life. What can be used as a resource in the next life are the actions and predispositions from this life. Given this then we would have lived our life as humans whose life is said to be far more superior to any animals. We would have lived fully and extracted the whole essence of this life by doing consciously positive actions and positive predisposition and these are the one thing that we can fall back onto in difficult times.

Past lives however wonderful or miserable they might have been, are in the past. What is important is not so much this life but the prospect of future subsequent lifetimes. Therefore, wisdom lies in preparing for the long term prospect and with this we can take recourse to material and spiritual means. For spiritual means we have many choices in the world. It all boils down to personal choice based on personal investigation what will pay real dividends in terms of lasting well-being in the future. It is up to one whether to embrace any spiritual forms or Buddhism or not. One needs to be critical about these choices and needs to make the right decision. In Buddhism there are so many things one can spend time reflecting on, investigating and then gaining lasting understanding. While there is so much three stand out: the three main paths of strong yearning for permanent liberation, altruistic intention to evolve into Buddhahood to help sentient beings and right view. These three are the main areas of personal reflection.

The first is called definite emergence or definite release. It can be translated as permanent release from mundane existence. Buddha's interpretation of this goes beyond the notion of permanent release that other traditions have. Buddha's contemporaries also believed in permanent release which was some deep, blissful, meditative state where they would spend eons. This would be considered permanent release while after the passage of that time they will fall down into the lower realms from Buddha's point of view. This state is in fact truth of suffering and is part *samsaric* existence. It is not just blanket bold statement that blissful states of second and fourth state of Samadhi where one abides obliviously for eons are part of *samsara* and they are on the nature of the truth of suffering. It is proved to be so and there are many logical lines of reasoning to

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establish that. How can we get out of the entirety of suffering of *samsara*. Buddha has taught many paths to get out. Within Buddhism while everybody seeks permanent, genuine release from *samsara*. Some schools of thoughts consider the person who strives for this in a way that sees the person and the goal exist in an inherent and intrinsic way. But they do not exist and have no intrinsic nature. Such statements are quite distinct from any other forms of teachings. Such is the nature and scope of the topic of permanent release.

When it comes to Bodhicitta or altruistic mind, it could only be Buddha who has taught the need to develop seamless altruism with regard to all sentient being and their happiness. Buddha says that when you develop Bodhicitta you include all beings in that practice. When you look at an ant crawling on the ground finding food and so on, a person with the right Bodhicitta wishes to attain the state of Buddhahood for the sake of the ant so that in time one can help the ant transcend that existence and help it onto the path to Buddhahood. Only Buddha has taught the need for such seamless universal altruism that excludes no one and thinks about everyone's well-being.

These were ground-breaking teachings and traditions that Buddha claimed among his contemporaries some 2500 years ago. There were a lot of competing spiritual traditions. Buddha went against the current and boldly claimed and expounded paths that were vastly different to the others. Buddha's path really stands out. Because Buddha expounded new traditions and a unique body of practice the teachers of other traditions and their followers who have critiqued Buddha's teachings then became Buddhists themselves. This happened and not one person has genuinely and successfully come up with faults in the teachings. They failed in invalidating Buddha's path and became captivated by it and became followers themselves. We have a vast resource to spend our life to think about these matters and then when we immerse our mind in this, the teachings will really percolate into the recesses of our consciousness and we become better for it and become winners. Spend time to think about the desire for permanent release, altruism and right view. If not then try to have access to the writing of great Buddhist thinkers where things have been made simpler.

If that is still too hard then you can also just think about one thing the Buddha said, 'accept my statements only after you are satisfied after careful consideration and not because you have regard for me.' This single statement is quite mind blowing, such confidence and mild arrogance. While he was able to make such a statement he was absolutely confident that his path was grounded in reality. Thus what is concurrent with reality cannot be invalidated by anything or any means. Therefore, to hear that statement makes it quite captivating and arouses a great regard for the person making this statement. When you are captivated by these and other reasons you want to turn to such a confident, valid person and the wish to turn to such a person from the core of your being is the true meaning of refuge.

Buddhist practices focus on long-term projects and not so much for this life, miserable or happy it will be lived. What happens next is considered much more critical and much more important. Between self and others, Buddhism focuses more on the matters that affect the vast majority of others and it is given higher priority than matters that affect one self. This life would be lived somehow. You can try it yourself and try to be resourceful. If you are unsuccessful the human society is compassionate and will provide help if one has a difficult time and this way this life will be lived. What matters more is how we are going to fare in the next life and beyond. When people plan for the future of this life they have some idea what will work or not, and based on such information then people plan their resources. In the same way we need some ideas what will work and what will ensure our own and others' happiness and not. The great majority of people in the world believe that spiritual means will provide happiness and one need to be very careful about choosing the right path. We are not Buddhist because we can recite Buddhist prayers or claim to be Buddhist but by taking refuge. Turning to a non-fraudulent guide and when we strive to develop the three paths in our consciousness. When they take root in our consciousness then we are true Buddhists.

These three paths are the path that we can rely on and they will never fail us in our spiritual evolution and our growth from which we can experience lasting happiness for ourselves and we become a perennial resource for others to grow. We can't rely on material possessions as you all know or our health. We may be healthy today and tomorrow we may be diagnosed with terminal illness. We can't rely on anything that is material. In order

to develop these three principles of the path what we need to do is to turn to body of teaching called the Graduated Path To Buddhahood and meditate on it so that this takes root in our consciousness. We need to know about it and we need to listen to the discourse. When we talk about the Graduated Path to Buddhahood, there are four major sections and we are dealing with the section called how to guide spiritual disciples by giving instructions. We are covering how to have a knowledgeable spiritual mentor and then how to develop a rapport with this mentor. Meditation on that is the foundation of growth and there are two things we need to do: what we need to do in the actual meditation session and what we need to do in the post- meditation session. In the meditation session we need to do preliminaries before we meditate on the topic at hand and then we need to end the session. We have been talking about the six preliminaries. We have covered the first three: tidy up the place of meditation and setup the altar; to make offerings to the sublime objects representing Buddha's enlightened body, speech and mind; to do the ground Buddhist practice of refuge in the three Jewels wholeheartedly and one enhances the practice of the Four Immeasurables.

The fourth one is visualising the sublime beings of merit. Gathering merits in relation to the sublime beings of the merit collectively called merit field. Why do we need this? One will not succeed. For example, our mind at the moment is as un-malleable as iron, so hard and set in its shape and form, for one to change a piece of iron into a different shape it needs to be fired and then the iron melts and is more malleable and can be shaped in any way. Our mind is entrenched in tendencies that are not helpful. To refine and make the mind more serviceable and malleable to do positive things we need to heat the mind in the fire of merit. We gather merit from positive energy from positive actions. We need to do all kinds of positive actions like prostrations and so on in relation to one's parents who are thought of as the beings of supreme kindness of this life, spiritual teachers, arhats, and Buddhas. Of all these, one person stands out to be the most potent and fertile field to gather merit: the guru. This way of gathering merits in relation to sharply focused practice of positive actions in relation to the guru is not ordinary. It was a practice considered most important in all Tibetan Buddhism and this tradition as well it is considered extremely potent. Guru is the potent field of merit and should be the focus of one's merit-gathering activity as taught by Dharmavajra (the great Tibetan Mahasiddha Drubchen Chokyi Dorje) and Gyalwa Ensapa who were prominent practitioners in the Gelug tradition who attained Buddhahood in a single lifetime. What allowed them to do that? The difference lay in the focus of practice: the guru.

This merit field is guru yoga merit field visualisations taught by these two beings:

Imagine before you a milky lake from which a bejewelled tree of precious stones which is said to be a wish-fulfilling jewel. Somewhere in the middle top area visualise variegated lotus. Atop this massive lotus visualise as during refuge, a massive raised seat or throne raised by lions. On top of this visualise 11 tier petals of lotus with the central lotus at the top. This is surrounded below by ten tiers of lotus. The central lotus has four petals and on the central part of it visualise a throne raised by eight lions. This throne has three cushions of lotus, moon and sun. The reason for these three is they show or reveal the fact that the person who sits there has fully realised and accomplished the Three Principles of the Path. Lotus, as it emerges from the murky waters a pristine flower, represents the permanent cessation of suffering; the sun represents right view like the sun removes darkness and illuminates all things and right view illuminates your mind; the moon represents Bodhicitta or universal altruism. We visualise Lama Je Tsong Khapa on top of this seat on the four petal lotus.

When you look at it outwardly it is Lama Je Tsong Khapa with one face, two hands. The left hand holds an alms bowl and the right hand is raised to heart level where thumb and index fingers meet and the three fingers are upright, the mudra of teaching. At the heart of Lama Je Tsong Khapa is the historical Buddha Shakyamuni at whose heart is Vajradhara at whose heart is the syllable HUM – this is a concentric formation but they should not be seen as one object in another. Rather they must be seen of the same nature, like the idea of impermanent, functional realities and being product or compounded phenomena, they are all one and the same thing. In the same way the three figures appear differently but they are one and the same. Lama Je Tsong Khapa outwardly appears as Buddha, and Buddha at the heart represents speech and Vajradhara represents mind.

This was the kind of merit field visualised and actions performed by two great beings – see above. Such appearance of Lama Je Tsong Khapa as described above must not be seen as separate from of your living guru.

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Whoever is your foremost root guru is to be seen as inseparable from Lama Je Tsong Khapa. Lama Je Tsong Khapa appears in the human form and not in a Buddha form. Guru and Lama Je Tsong Khapa are indivisible in nature and your mind and your guru's and Lama Je Tsong Khapa's mind must be seen as indivisible. When we visualise Lama Je Tsong Khapa as the central piece like above he has the left hand in meditation in the lap holding an alms bowl. The significance of this is that Lama Je Tsong Khapa is said to be the 11th of the 1000 Buddhas prophesied in this eons. When he appears as the 11th Buddha he will appear like Shakymuni Buddha as a Bikshu with an alms bowl. To make a connection when he appears you practice that by visualising him like that now. Since many people here have not had initiations of highest yoga tantra I would not feel comfortable talking about the more detailed visualisations of the central figure, the sublime being of Lama Je Tsong Khapa. His senses and so on are not ordinary human body parts but rather the various parts of his body are located male and female deities. In other words, he is the 32 deities of Guhyasamaja tantra but I can't go into this.

Next feel that your living guru in the form of Lama Je Tsong Khapa with two more beings at his heart emits four bands of light rays, left, right, front and behind. It should not be just Guru Sumati Munendra Vajradhara (in Tibetan Lama Losang Tubwang Dorej Chang) when he send the light band to the right, at the tip of the band of light slightly up in the air you visualise a cluster of the lineage gurus of Extensive Path at the centre of which is Maitreya. These are gurus of Indian origins. Slightly in front of them visualise Kadampa lamas who emanated from the tradition established by Atisha in Tibet, there are three streams. Below these you visualised relatively recent Tibetan gurus - Lama Je Tsong Khapa and all subsequent holders of *lam rim* right down to your present guru. At the tip slightly up in the air of the band on the left is Manjushri who is surrounded by the Indian gurus of the Profound View, like Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti. In front of them you could duplicate the three streams of Kadampa masters as on the right. As you know, Atisha became the confluence or meeting point of two classic Indian traditions of Extensive and Profound Path, and these became integrated. Yet when we visualise the merit field, we put them into different streams, on the right and the on the left and there are significant reasons.

The third band of light goes behind the Lama Je Tsong Khapa and it supports five column lineage gurus, one above the others. The central column would be stack of Manjushris, above him is Vajradhara and below gurus who are Manjushris and this represent Gelug Mahamudra tradition. To the right of the Manjushri column there is the column with lineage guru of the Guhyasamaja tradition. At the top are Vajradhara and the gurus who maintain this Vajrasamaya practice. To the right of that are the lineage gurus of Yamantaka practice (death vanquishing deity). Emanating from Vajra Bhairawa (Yamantaka) are Wisdom Dakini, Lalitavajra and so on right down to the guru who gave you the initiation of this. To the left of the central Manjushri column, there is the column of lineage gurus of Heruka deities that focuses on Mother tantra. To the left of this, visualise the lineage gurus of 16 drop Kadam tradition, starting with Atisha at the top atop who is Avalokiteshvara, then Atisha, then Dromtonpa. At the tip of the band of light at the central piece visualise your own root guru at the centre surrounded further by all other gurus from whom you have had teachings this life.

A question might arise, I have difficulties to visualise gurus in front and behind they might obstruct each other. In art it is not possible, but in reality when you visualise them the front ones do not block the back ones because they are all transparent. This is how you visualise the first set of sublime beings of the merit fields, and they are called the five sets of gurus, one is the middle and four in the four directions.

Now you visualise meditational deities – recall there was a lotus flower with four petals and one central part which has the central gurus – and on the front petal visualise either Guhyasamaja which means secret, sacred assembly of 32 deities, or Akshobhya. On the right petal visualise Yamantaka, death destroying deity who has a retinue of 13 deities. On the left petal visualise Heruka, the leading deity of mother tantra, with 62 deities. On the petal at the back is Hevajra deity with nine surrounding deities. These four petals are the first tier of the lotus.

On the 2nd tier visualise all other highest yoga tantra deities like Kalachakra, Vajrayogini and so on.

On the 3rd tier of the lotus visualise deities belonging to yoga tantra, Vajrasattva.

On the 3rd and 4th tier visualise tantric deities belonging to the Charyatantra, performance tantra.

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On the 5th one visualise the deities belonging to the lowest tantra called action tantra.

On the 6th tier visualise the Buddhas in the form of 35 Buddhas of Confession practice, 8 Medicine Buddhas etc.

On the 7th tier visualise Bodhisattvas on high levels of achievement like Maitreya and Samantabhadra.

On the 8th visualise all Pratyekabuddhas or Solitary Realisers.

Below that visualise all Shravakas or Hearers, like the 16 Arahats.

Beings on the 8th and 9th tiers are similar except that Pratyekabuddhas have a small protrusion at their crown showing their special achievement.

On the 10th tier visualise tantric heroes and heroines, daka and dakinis.

On the 11th tier visualise transcendental Dharma protectors like 6-armed Mahakala and Dharmaraja.

All these 11 tiers of sublime beings of merit field are on the lotus tier. There are also some non-transcendental or mundane Dharma protectors that do not have a seat on the 11 tiers. If you have them you can visualise them below the 11 tier lotus seat. When I was talking about visualising objects of merits we had similar objects of refuge, like five sets of gurus, eleven tiers of objects of refuge. When you do the preliminaries, if you have not dissolved the objects of refuge but kept them, you could visualise the objects of refuge dissolve into respective beings of merit field that are alike. Each being object of refuge dissolves into their counterparts in the merit fields. All these in the cluster of small galaxy are seen as mental projections in physical or deity forms of the blissful wisdom consciousness of the centre piece guru.