



Dhargyey Buddhist Centre

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

Sunday 31 July 2011

Please go through the process of generating highest motivation to want to achieve the state of Buddhahood for the sake of all being whose number is as vast as space and who have been our mothers. To this end please think that you will listen to the teaching on the Stages on the Path to Buddhahood.

This life we have been reborn as humans and as humans our life is said to be characterised by those 18 rare qualities called 18 freedoms and endowments. That is Buddhist way of identifying this life as special. What all these mean is that our life is very special because we are bestowed with special abilities. What we have got is called human intellect and psychological abilities. This can be put to good use and it can achieve amazing outcomes. It can also be put to bad use as many people do. Then unwholesome outcomes arise for one and for others. We have this life and it has special intellect only for a short time. Obviously we look different from other species and physical difference does not make us special. What makes us special is the mind enshrined in the human body. It is up to one to think about how best one can use one's discerning abilities and psychological competence. As mentioned a minute ago a lot of people think that they will be around for a long time. It is never like that. Human existence with its special abilities is highly vulnerable and uncertain. This is because of three things:

1. Sooner or later death will come to one and all.
2. That certainty will come and when will remain uncertain.
3. When it does come in time all one has achieved materially will come to nothing.

Suppose we have a given lifespan of 100 years and it is being used up incessantly day and night and yet we cannot replenish or add additional supplementary years to the given lifespan. We can know this from what we have experienced. Look at the Buddha. Despite having attained Buddhahood he passed away. In the same way many great beings manifested death and passed away. Members of your family, great-grandfather, grandfather, father etc. how many are still around? Not many are still here. We are bound to follow suit in a matter of 40 odd years from now. We say we have 40 odd years assuming that we really do so. As pointed out before not many people live their given lifespan but experience death sooner or later. Today here and gone tomorrow, someone was with us in the morning and in the afternoon they are gone. That clearly shows that the time of death is highly uncertain. Whilst we think we will be around people do their best to keep mind and body together. However, the degree of tenancy of body and mind together or there is no difference between the tenancy of the human life and the ephemeral connection between body and mind of an insect. In spite of all that still we think 'although I do know that death will come sooner or later, but not that soon.' In fact it can strike us down with the slightest break down in the flow of blood in the body.

Suppose one feels unwell and sees one's doctor who refers one to the expert. They examine you and give you bad news of an incurable sickness. The moment you hear that, the life's journey towards death becomes accelerated. As one of the Panchen Lamas in the past has said, 'there comes a time when doctors whisper something to your relations and give up on you. People may do ritual but they will come to nothing. Whatever you do you are always on the move towards the inevitable end.' Even if one is a believer and one's relations may do everything for you, medication and rituals and so on, but the sickness becomes worse and worse. Your relations will not be forthcoming and speak to you in encouraging ways that things will look up. But behind your back they talk differently. It is a very sad situation. That is a time when one realises that all material successes, fame, resources and wealth and so on that one has worked for will be left behind and will be used by

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others. Something that one could fall back on would be some spiritual resources in the form of practices. But one did not have time for that because one attached too much importance to material things. One sees that one's hands are empty when one goes to the next life. It is a very demoralising time. One also sees that the bed one is lying on will be the bed for a corpse and one can see that for oneself. Just before one is dying one clings to one's precious life, particularly to the body and call it 'my' body. In fact that body will become a corpse. The clothes will become shrouds. One knows that one has just an hour left before breathing one's last. Knowing that the end is imminent and nothing comes to one's mind except leaving some parting words or signing modified wills. These are the thoughts that crisscross the mind. When the end is really near you can find yourself having difficulties breathing in and out, and one reaches out to the hand of beloved ones with the hope of clinging to them. When you do that you will see that people around you look at you with tears in their eyes and they will be reciting some prayers or names of the Buddha. That will even aggravate the already sad situation. In Tibetan society one's beloved ones will then try to mix precious pills of lamas and so on, and spoon some of it into the mouth, half will go into the system and half will remain in the mouth of the corpse. Things can take a turn for the worst particularly when people that you leave behind are attached to your wealth. Before you breathe your last you hear them talking about who will get what and the division of your resources. When the final time comes you will breathe your last and then you will be called the deceased. All that you have got is gone. All that might be left behind is your name. That too will be forgotten soon.

This is bound to happen in different ways and manifestations. Therefore, what a loss of great opportunity it is not to have time to do something so that you can draw comfort at such difficult times. Whatever remaining lifespan we have we could say it is never too late. There are things one can still do and one can achieve great purpose, what is the great purpose? It would be to eradicate suffering all together so that they will never return and achieve the state of ever-lasting happiness. These are the two things one can work towards. Such ultimate goals of ever-lasting or ever-enduring state of well-being are highly positive. Therefore such an outcome must emanate from a corresponding type of causes. It is in the nature of cause and effect that the effect follows in the nature of the cause. In the case of most people they instinctively long for the highest good. But what they end up doing is the wrong thing. It is as if they are trying to extract butter by churning water. In the case of most people their minds are so profoundly conditioned by desire, hate, jealousy and arrogance and so on. For example, for desire to crop up it takes no effort but it appears spontaneously. This mind still seeks the highest good. Therefore, it is unimaginable that such a mind can have that result. Psychological traits that most ordinary minds have such as desire and hate which are deeply embedded are wrong. What does one need to achieve is the highest good like Buddhahood. The means to that highest good is other-caring or other-cherishing mind or a degree of altruism. True altruism is the only solution that will bring temporary and ultimate happiness. Such spiritual issues like love, compassion, tolerance and so on, not only is there is no contention about them among any group of people or sentient beings or even among followers of various Buddhist schools of thought who otherwise argue so much about other things. All accept these as universal values. When it comes to talking about philosophical issues all kinds of people argue about this. Atheists argue and religious people do. Among Buddhist there are four schools of thought and each is very vocal about their adherence to their philosophical point of view and they argue.

The highest outcome of ever-enduring state of well-being must result from corresponding causes. As regards to that there are different degrees. For example, if you help one sentient being in whatever way, helps you incidentally gather an item of positive goodness. If you help even one being in terms of placing them on the path to that highest good of Buddhahood then it goes a long way. If you could develop a mind-set and actually help as many sentient beings as there are throughout space then it is simply fore-gone conclusion that you would incidentally achieve a corresponding degree of goodness. There are different types of attitude of service to others or caring for others, but Bodhicitta is the supreme attitude of caring for others. Of this Bodhicitta or universal altruism to place all beings in the state of highest good is accompanied by the right view of understanding nature, one is fully equipped with the necessary means to achieve the highest good. If one really wants to make the most of this human existence particularly the remaining span of this life we have then it is highly worthwhile to work to develop Bodhicitta reflecting on the discourses and the steps that will really

channel your mind or transform it to become Bodhicitta itself. Once you develop Bodhicitta it will be highly worthwhile to take an oath in the presence of Buddha and Bodhisattva of 10 directions that you will uphold this precious mind and will never part with it. On top of that you will do extremely well if you take what is called the next step of taking engaging Bodhisattva vows. That means that you will not give up Bodhicitta but you will also translate that Bodhicitta into enlightening Bodhisattva Deeds, 6 or 10 Perfection, the four-fold means of helping sentient beings. If you can do these things in terms of Bodhicitta you would have done extremely well.

I like to reiterate the order of this.

1. Initially you learn the steps and instructions that help you develop Bodhicitta.
2. You then develop it, that means your heart or mind becomes Bodhicitta.
3. You take a solemn vow before Buddha and Bodhisattvas in the 10 direction that you will never forsake this mind.
4. You will take the next step of venturing on the Bodhisattva path by way of practicing 6 Perfections and four-fold means of helping others.

There is nothing as wholesome as taking Bodhicitta vows because when you take them you do so primarily in order to bring the highest good to all sentient beings. Therefore this is the only way you can ultimately and unflinchingly achieve the highest good for all sentient beings. Incidentally you will also achieve your own highest good. If you develop Bodhicitta and it becomes the driving force of your human activities and you are guided by Bodhicitta then that is the highest kind of offering to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Last week I talked about Bodhicitta and how to take wishing Bodhicitta vows and what one can do to safe-guard Bodhicitta in this life and the subsequent lifetimes.

Today, I like to talk about engaging Bodhicitta vows. We take wishing Bodhicitta vows. Although the word used is vow, it is not really a vow but a pledge or just a promise that you will not forsake it. When it comes to engaging Bodhicitta it is a vow. It is also called Bodhisattva vows and they are incorporated into 3 types of Bodhisattva vows.

1. Active refrain from negativities.
2. Proactive service to sentient beings; the ethics of working pro-actively for the good of others.
3. The ethics of incorporating all virtues within Bodhicitta.

What is the first type of Bodhisattva vow? It is the ethics of refraining from negative and unwholesome actions. When the ordained, fully ordained and novice monk and nuns with vows of celibacy etc. take engaging Bodhisattva vows their vows of celibacy turns into the first vow. For the lay their ethics of refraining from the 10 negative deeds becomes the first ethics of Bodhisattva vows. The 3rd ethics is the ethics of incorporating all virtues. This is explained in terms of the practice of the 6 Perfections or 10 Perfections that help bring your own mind to spiritual maturity. That mind then becomes highly developed and is put to use to help others. The ethics of working for sentient beings or pro-active service is constituted of by the four-fold means of helping others. If one has taken a solemn vow to practice these three types of ethics of Bodhisattvas then incessantly, no matter what you are doing, like walking or working or eating or resting or you might be asleep, it does not matter. As long as you breathe a huge stock of virtues is gathered.

These three ethics are so precious but they could be lost if one of the 18 root infractions occur which if you subdivide them there could be 34 of them. There are 18 root vows that are incorporated within the 3 types of ethics that would be lost if they were broken by meeting their counterparts. Of the 18, 16 need four criteria for the root infraction to take place. Two don't even need the four criteria, forsaking the mind and developing nihilistic view that karma does not exist. When you think, 'I really find working for all sentient beings is just incredible, impossible', and you suffer a sense of defeatism and you think, 'I can't do this', there and then the first root infraction takes place. In the same way if you think that karma does not make sense and you develop disbelief in the operation of cause and effect, this perverse view would amount to breaking the root vow.

The remaining 16 will need to fulfil four conditions for each of them to become a root infraction of Bodhisattva vow. The four conditions are namely:

1. To consider breaking of the vows as not being a drawback.
2. Not reversing perpetuation. If you keep doing it time and again that is the second conditions.
3. To engage happily in any of the 16 activities that will go against Bodhisattva vows, to happily do something that will break Bodhisattva vows.
4. Lack of sense of embarrassment and shame in doing things that would break Bodhisattva vows, no checks and balances.

For these 16 transgressions, all four criteria must be met for them to become root transgressions. If not all but only some are met then it is not a root transgression.

The 16 transgressions are as follows – and they meet the four criteria:

1. If someone with Bodhisattva vows were to praise themselves so that they look good in the eyes of others out of attachment of financial and position reward, if they promoted themselves by highlighting their goodness that would amounts to breaking the Bodhisattva vow. It is called praising self. For this to become a root transgression it must meet the four conditions. Firstly, a person who does this does not regard this as a downfall. Secondly, the person does not put a check on this behaviour which means the person is not turning away from it. Thirdly, they willingly do it and think it is ok and praise themselves in front of others. Fourthly, when they are doing it they never feel bad in terms of embarrassment and shame, and celebrate themselves in front of others. In doing all these, the four criteria are met. This transgression will then become a root transgression. Of these four the first is the most dangerous and is the worst.
2. Not giving teaching out of miserliness to those who have no protectors, to the destitute who seek nourishment. If you practice spiritual miserliness and not teach.
3. Not accepting apology from others. Suppose somebody apologises sincerely for the wrong they have done against you. If you don't accept this and still hold a distance and remain aloof and so on.
4. Abandoning Mahayana, to say and to believe that the body of Mahayana teaching was not something the Buddha has taught at all and then forsake Mahayana.
5. Stealing and misappropriation of offerings made to the Three Jewels, you steal it yourself or have it done for you.
6. Abandoning Dharma of the three baskets of teachings of the three vehicles.
7. Robbing the saffron. If you rob the ordained of their saffron robe for whatever reason, or if you have someone lose their vows of celibacy.
8. Committing any one of the five heinous crimes. These are killing mother, father or arahat, creating conflict within the Sangha and drawing the blood of a Buddha, and they are collectively counted as one. When we expand the division then each of these five are counted separately.
9. Developing distorted view or nihilism which does not require any of the four criteria.
10. Mass scale destruction of human dwellings like town and villages by yourself employing various means.
11. Revealing emptiness or teaching it to the un-trained. This means if you don't watch out to whom you teach and not teach emptiness and if you do so to someone who is very susceptible to nihilism they will get the wrong end of the teaching.
12. Turn away from complete Buddhahood. That means if someone is doing their best on the Mahayana path and you go to that person and discourage them saying that attaining complete Buddhahood is the most daunting prospect to anyone, therefore it would be preferable in your case to work for your own liberation.
13. Rejecting the vow of celibacy or vow of individual emancipation. That refers specifically to going to someone with celibacy vows and vows of individual emancipation and saying to them that it would be better to take Bodhisattva vows and give up the monk/nun vows. They then they do it, that is a transgression.

14. Denigrating Hinayana or Sharvaga vehicle and saying ‘it is impossible to eradicate psychological obstacles or delusive obscuration, Hinayana path is not effective.’
15. Telling the profound lie. This is to insinuate that you have achieved the perfect view of emptiness when you have not at all in order to look good.
16. Accepting possessions of the Three Jewels. This means some powerful people like ministers or kings, rob spiritual community of their possessions for whatever reason, and you are given these possessions and you keep them that constitutes this transgression.
17. Formulating wrong rules or instituting them among members of a spiritual community. Among them are those who pursue academic excellence through reading, writing and debating. And there are others that devote their time to meditation. If you institute a law whereby the offerings received from the lay community for the meditators are taken and give them to those who only study – and vice versa – you impose a bad law. This amounts to breaking a Bodhisattva vow.
18. Forsaking Bodhicitta, suffering from defeatism saying ‘I can’t do this’ and then letting Bodhicitta go. Bodhicitta is extremely beneficial and wholesome on all accounts and if you can retain it, it becomes even more precious. There are 18 actions that may challenge your Bodhisattva vows and if you suffer any one of the root transgression, let alone a root transgression even a minor transgression, that will be 100 000 times more serious than breaking the vows of monks and nuns. If you wonder why I started to talk about Bodhisattva vows because we in our course of our *lam rim* programme we were talking about the seven sublime practices. The context we are talking about the 3rd sublime practice is confession, and it is not just ordinary vows but many have taken Bodhisattva vow and what breaks them. That is why I have started talking about these. It is ok to talk about Bodhisattva vows even before taking them for one to make an informed choice later. Unlike the vows of celibacy and tantric vows, these can’t be talked about prior to taking the vows.

Next Sunday I will talk more about some issues on Bodhisattva vows like contaminations, middle and small, and some other minor transgression and how to rectify the Bodhisattva vow transgressions.