



The Jewel Ornament of Liberation

by

His Holiness the 17th Karmapa

At the request of many international dharma students at the 2004 Kagyu Monlam Chenmo in Bodhgaya, His Holiness the XVIIth Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, gave six teachings on Je Gampopa's classic text *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. The following is an edited transcript of the fifth and sixth of those talks.

Talk 5

Given that everything is impermanent in every moment, the fact that we have the chance to see each other again is quite miraculous. In the spirit of this miracle, I once again extend my warm greetings to you all. But I have brought myself a gift back from Delhi – a cold! And am concerned that I might be extending that to you too!

As I said previously, the intention behind these teachings is to benefit you in direct and indirect ways, so I would like to encourage you to refresh your mind with the proper motivation for listening to the teachings. With this motivation we will begin.

THE PRECIOUS HUMAN REBIRTH

THE WORKING BASIS

The second topic in

The Jewel Ornament of Liberation

In earlier teachings we discussed, through example and logic, how all beings have Buddha-nature [the first topic on the primary cause in *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*] and can therefore attain enlightenment. All sentient beings, even beings in hell, have the Buddha-nature and the potential to attain enlightenment. Even though all beings are endowed with the potential for enlightenment, they do not all have the opportunity to recognise and develop this potential. Animals, for example, have the potential for enlightenment but no possibility of realising it and the same is true for beings in other realms.

We can be born into what are generally categorised as lower and higher realms. Those born in lower realms are continually tormented by all kinds of suffering. As their suffering is

continuous and intense, they do not have the time or the capacity to even think of liberation. The higher realms are the human and god realms. The gods, because of their karma, have excessive divine enjoyments and a tremendous attachment to them. Absorbed in this attachment, there is no opportunity for them to contemplate the possibility of liberation either. These different situations show we not only need the potential for liberation but also the right vehicle. Birth in these other realms does not give you the right vehicle for liberation.

In general, the appropriate vehicle for practicing dharma and revealing the potential for enlightenment is the human body, but merely being human is not enough. The teachings state clearly that a human body must be endowed with certain prerequisites and favourable conditions to practice the path of liberation. When Milarepa met the hunter Gonpa Dorje, for example, he said that even though human lives are usually considered rare and precious, there was nothing rare or precious about lives spent like Gonpa Dorje's. To be rare and precious a human life should also have certain favourable conditions, the eight leisures and ten endowments.

The eight leisures or opportunities¹ are different conditions that give us "time to practice dharma." Essentially that is what "leisure" means here. There are eight things that could deprive us of leisure and without them we have eight ways in which we are free to practice dharma – eight leisures. These days, perhaps particularly in the West, people are always busy so there is less freedom, less time. This lack of time is not what we are talking about here. Even though you may be constantly busy you are not completely powerless. The mundane things you pursue may dictate how you spend your time but you still have the opportunity to examine what is really important in life.

The other important conditions are the ten endowments, or favourable circumstances. Five of these depend on you, the individual, and five depend on external situations. These ten favourable circumstances give us the opportunity to practice dharma, they are the necessary conditions for dharma practice.

Just as the human body, in order to be an appropriate vehicle for the practice of dharma, must have these leisures and favourable circumstances, the mind also needs certain qualities, namely the three kinds of faith. The three kinds of faith are certain faith, yearning faith and clear or lucid faith. Certain faith means for example having certainty that virtuous actions result in happiness and non-virtuous actions result in suffering – the truth of cause and effect. Unshakeable, unwavering confidence in this truth is certain faith. Likewise, knowing definitely that mental afflictions – the origin of suffering – cause suffering is certain faith. In general, having confidence in the certainty of the Buddha's teachings is certain faith. Yearning faith is, for example, hearing the qualities of liberation and realising how wonderful it would be to attain such a state. Lucid or clear faith is for example the uplifting or refreshing affect visiting

a sacred place, a monastery or somewhere like that, may have on us. In order for us to transverse the path of liberation, physically we must have leisures and opportunities and mentally we must have these three kinds of faith.

THE SPIRITUAL FRIEND

THE CONDITION

The third topic in

The Jewel Ornament of Liberation

The next point is the need for the necessary condition, the spiritual friend. We may be endowed with the cause of liberation, Buddha-nature, and a human rebirth with all the necessary leisures and conditions but it is still possible to just hang around and do nothing with this potential. We may have no intention to tread the path of liberation, to make real use of our resources. Or we may recognise our basic potential, and yearn for liberation but lack knowledge of the path – what it is actually like and how we might tread it. The directions and guidance of a spiritual friend are indispensable in facilitating our journey toward liberation. So the third point here is the need for the condition of a spiritual friend and the role the spiritual friend plays.

There are many reasons why we should rely on a spiritual friend; in particular we can look to both scriptures and logic for reasons. In the Prajnaparamita Sutras, the Bhagavan Buddha said that a spiritual friend is like a guide who can show us an unknown path or a boatman who can help us cross the water. Common sense tells us that a spiritual friend, the same as a guide on a journey, should know more than we do. If someone knows less than us we can't ask them things we need to know and they can't tell us anything we don't already know. Because of this a spiritual friend cannot be someone who knows less than you. It cannot be someone who knows as much as you either, in this case we would probably know what they know and he or she would know what we knew and our knowledge would not improve because of them. The individual we need as a spiritual friend obviously has to know more than us, then we can gain knowledge from them.

Take the example of a journey, let's say you were traveling between Varanassi and Bodhgaya. The journey from Varanassi to Bodhgaya is about 4 - 500 kilometres, or whatever it is. If you knew Bodhgaya was a very sacred place, a special place of pilgrimage but you didn't know where it was exactly, how to get there and how long it took, there would be no point asking someone who also didn't know. Neither would there be a point to ask if you already knew. If you didn't know and somebody else did, however, obviously it makes sense to ask them. And if you can't find someone to direct you, you might as well try it yourself.

Among spiritual teachers there are different types: exalted, Arya spiritual friends and spiritual teachers who are ordinary beings. From these two, the most important for us are the spiritual teachers who are ordinary beings. This is because we are beginners and as beginners our view is clouded by the veils of ignorance. We are unable to perceive and interact with exalted teachers, in the form of deities and the like. Because of this the type of teacher most beneficial to us, the type of teacher that can show us the path to liberation most clearly, is the spiritual teacher who takes the form of an ordinary being.

Having realised that we need a human, ordinary being as our teacher, we then need to know the characteristics an authentic teacher should have. In a few words these characteristics are that they should keep any vows they have well, for example the refuge vows, and understand the different presentations of the path. As well as being able to teach the path they should have, if not realizations, then some experience of the path. In imparting the teachings to students they should have genuine kindness and compassion for them and be free of deception. And if someone makes disparaging remarks towards them, instead of ill intentioned thoughts of revenge, they should have compassion and patience.

These characteristics must also be sustained; they shouldn't only be present on formal occasions, in retreat or in a monastery. It is not enough to say that a person had all these positive qualities in the past, when they were in retreat, but now because of their current circumstances, their qualities have diminished and that doesn't matter. Of course it matters. If they are authentic qualities they will remain, no matter what. If we want to talk about the past, we should talk about Milarepa and Marpa, what they were like, but since they are not here, speaking of their characteristics doesn't help us right now. We need those whose characteristics hold true now. It is not good enough to say, "When he or she was in retreat their qualities were in tact, in the monastery when they were ordained their qualities were in tact, don't worry if it doesn't look like they are in tact now, they are." People have to depend on them now, and they relate more to what appears than what might be. In this way it doesn't help to say it's only an appearance, the characteristics of a teacher must be there in tact. If you have the characteristics of a spiritual friend you have to show them now, it is not enough to say you had them once when you were in solitude. You might even be the object of scorn and when this happens you need to make sure you don't get caught up in attachment and aversion.

Any of us might also do well in a solitary retreat, with no one annoying us, sitting looking virtuous, what else would we be doing? If people who stay in retreat then come down and have to interact with people, objects etc, their qualities need to remain in tact. This is something we should keep in mind. Who doesn't face challenges? Who doesn't face difficulties? I have to deal with difficulties. Sometimes you wonder what to do and say. Or you could think a certain problem must have a big purpose behind it, so it is worth dealing with.

That is enough for tonight. We have time for a question.

Question: What is the difference between carrying the cause of the path and carrying the fruition of the path and what are the consequences of this?

H.H. Karmapa: In a general way we already carry the fruition of the path – happiness that is a result and suffering that is a result. This is what we are experiencing. We wish for happiness and freedom from suffering so we try to obtain happiness and get rid of suffering. We experience the results of our actions, positive actions cause happiness and negative actions cause suffering. We try and work with these but this is not solving the problem because we should be focusing on the causes of suffering and the causes of happiness. If we want to experience happiness we need to create more causes of happiness. Mental afflictions and negative activities, which we are unable to eliminate, cause suffering. Virtuous actions and a wholesome view, which we fail to engender, cause happiness.

The Vajrayana is also referred to as the fruition path because through practicing the Sutrayana exclusively we cannot achieve complete enlightenment. Only through incorporating Vajrayana methods can we achieve complete Buddhahood. Therefore in certain contexts the Vajrayana is referred to as the path of fruition.

Talk 6

Previously we talked about the role, particular characteristics and different categories of spiritual teachers. The way we rely on a spiritual teacher, our respectful devotion to them, is also important.

A spiritual friend or teacher has both outer and inner aspects. The *outer* teacher is the person who gives us instructions on what to practice and abandon. The *inner* spiritual teacher internalizes and practices these instructions, making sure they are carried out. When we carry out these instructions not only do we become an appropriate, true student but we also appreciate the role of our external teacher. Through this a genuine student-teacher relationship develops.

THE TEACHINGS
OF A SPIRITUAL FRIEND
THE METHOD
The fourth topic in

The Jewel Ornament of Liberation

Along with the role of the spiritual teacher the method of practice is also important. The teacher instructs in the method. There are many different paths and means in the instructions on method, for example, on impermanence, the futility of worldly existence and so on. Without going into great details I will share with you the essence of these instructions.

It is common sense that hurting others causes suffering, yet we still tend to do it. For some harming others is even considered fun, like the way humans treat animals. This shows a lack of understanding and in order to develop understanding we need to see ourselves in others' situations. How would we feel if someone had the idea that harming us was fun? Even if we do not have a personal experience of this we can still imagine the pain and discomfort this situation would bring and therefore change our view on it.

There may be a distinct difference between the way a human and an animal experiences suffering, compared to animals humans are much more sensitive, their experiences more intense, still animals yearn for happiness. If we watch them we see the way they busily search for food, and become happy when they find some. They are also constantly searching for happiness and freedom from suffering. Humans may have more intense feelings than animals, and animals may have less intense feelings than humans, but they still have feelings and they still want happiness. When we, because of our self interest and greed, harm animals we are depriving them of their freedom and their possibility of happiness.

The practice of loving kindness and compassion focuses on samsaric beings, sentient beings, those with a mind and therefore the ability to experience happiness and suffering. I personally feel however that in the same way we develop loving kindness and compassion for sentient beings we should also develop it for the environment. There are signs that the earth is also suffering. It may not be expressing this through conversations or writing things down but its gestures are clear. As we use the environment, the earth, it is our responsibility to protect it with loving kindness and compassion. The earth and the environment are important to beings now and they will be in the future. The destruction of and harm to the environment is not happening because we are powerless, nor is the environment abusing itself. We are doing the damage so we need to change and start practicing loving kindness and compassion towards the environment.

There are many different instructions in this section of the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* on method – for example the six paramitas, or perfections, and the four thoughts that turn the mind towards dharma – but there isn't enough time to talk about these things in detail. And besides, if I say too much about suffering you'll think Buddha's dharma is "the miserable dharma." We are in Bodhgaya, I want you to enjoy yourselves, so let's throw out suffering.

THE RESULT AND ACTIVITIES
The fifth & sixth topics in
The Jewel Ornament of Liberation

So if we have the cause for enlightenment, the Buddha-nature, the base of the precious human rebirth, the condition of the spiritual friend, and we put into practice the virtuous method, the result is Buddhahood.

This is Buddhist dharma, so usually when we mention “Buddha,” we tend to think of the man who became “the Buddha.” This is okay, but actually the word “Buddha” does not describe only one being, it describes the possession of all positive qualities; the complete elimination of negativities and the perfection of potential. If we were then to ask, “Who achieved this?” It would be Buddha. After we attain Buddhahood, non-conceptual enlightened activities come about spontaneously. Because these activities happen spontaneously we may ask if they are causeless, if they come into being without causes and conditions, but this is not so. On the path towards Buddhahood, the Buddhas through their compassion dedicated their virtuous actions to benefiting others. After they achieve Buddhahood their activities manifest in dependence on these prayers.

So that’s it finished! It is a big book, but it seems to have gotten shorter and shorter! What you got out of the teachings, I have no idea. You came all the way to Bodhgaya so I thought this could be like a present, but whether it is or not, I don’t know. I have said everything with the hope that it helps anyway. Sometimes when you smiled I thought it might be helping, and that makes me feel good. Apart from that I only want to say thank you for listening. By you listening to me talking, by us being here, we have made a connection and hopefully it will be beneficial in the future.

Question: Your Holiness, since it was a very short teaching on *Gampopa’s Jewel Ornament* I have a question about the six realms, the hell realms. As I understand it, the beings in the hell realms experience them as real as we experience this realm right now. The suffering they experience is real to them. How does one develop compassion for this amount of suffering?

His Holiness: The Buddha’s teachings talk about different hot and cold hell realms. The hot hell realms are said to be located in the centre of the Earth, where there is a crater of lava. Wherever it is, in this situation beings experience intense suffering, so intense we can’t conceive of it. As humans we could not stand this kind of suffering, we would be destroyed instantly. Beings in hell, however, can abide in this situation for a very long time because they have a greater ability to withstand this kind of suffering than we do. They have this ability

because they are experiencing the results of intense negative actions and therefore can experience intense suffering for a long time. Thinking about the intense sufferings these beings experience and what it would be like for us to have that experience, I think we can cultivate intense compassion for them.

Question: What Your Holiness do you see as the greatest general obstacle for a practitioner from the West and any suggestions in regard for dealing with that?

His Holiness: I am an Easterner, not a Westerner! I haven't been to the West, and it is difficult to see what something is like when you haven't been there! Still, just as an idea, western countries are supposed to be the most developed countries, which means there are always new inventions that could be distracting, that you could become attached to. You may not be distracted by the first invention, but there seems to always be new things coming out and eventually you might get distracted. That is what I think now, but when I come to the West, I will investigate and let you know.

Question: Your Holiness, is it true that all beings will become enlightened?

His Holiness: The important thing is that all beings have the potential to become enlightened, they all have the ability to become enlightened, they don't necessarily have to become enlightened. If all beings became enlightened there would be no objects for the Buddhas compassion. In some Vajrayana teachings it even says that when all beings become enlightened new beings will appear. It depends on the motivation you wish to develop and the dedications you want to use. If you want to focus on all sentient beings becoming enlightened than that is what you should pray for.

Question: If you are practicing the yogas of the development of subtle channels would eating meat create obstacles to it?

His Holiness: Meat is actually a composite of different materials and some of these different materials may be harmful to certain tantric practices. So if you are doing these practices it is best not to eat meat.

Question: According to Gampopa there are ten bodhisattva levels yet I have read in other texts of thirteen?

His Holiness: The sutra tradition speaks of the ten bodhisattva bhumis and Buddhahood, the eleventh state. In the Vajrayana explanation there are thirteen stages. The difference between these descriptions is based on activities, not realizations. There is no difference between the realization of Buddhahood achieved through these different paths. Buddhahood is

complete enlightenment; there is no distinction between Buddhahoods. In order to guide different beings on the path, however, different explanations of the states attained are given. When Buddhas explain things to sentient beings they explain things to some beings one way and to others beings another way, depending on their level and their understanding. Their explanations vary, but the realizations they are leading to do not.

Question: Do you have some advice for us on how to develop bodhicitta?

His Holiness: The development of bodhicitta depends on loving-kindness and compassion. First of all, when we think about the suffering that beings are experiencing we develop the wish that they could experience only true happiness instead, this is loving-kindness. In the same way, when we think about the suffering they experience we develop the wish that they could be completely free from suffering, this is compassion. From these thoughts we develop the idea that we ourselves are going to achieve enlightenment in order to bring this about, this is the mind of enlightenment – bodhicitta.

Question: If there is no self when we achieve Buddhahood, how can there be happiness if there is no self to experience it? If there is no self to experience an experience, what is there?

His Holiness: In general we have this idea of self and that is okay. The problem is that we tend to think of self and all other phenomena as inherently existent, independent things. This isn't true, there is no truly existing independent self, we perceive something to be there that isn't, and we don't perceive the way things are. If this thing called "Self" existed before us, we would have to accept that it existed, but this "Self" only exists after we do. It only comes into existence when we conceptualize the idea "I, I, I," so therefore we can see that it is a label we affix, not something that exists inherently.

When a person experiences selflessness, happiness and well being occur spontaneously. Our present conceptual, dualistic mind cannot conceive of what that is like. So even asking how you can experience selflessness is difficult, we have no reference point for it. When we have this understanding of selflessness, we will see that happiness doesn't depend on the concept of self, that in fact, our fixation on self had stopped us from experiencing true happiness. But because we have not experienced this realization, the lack of self, we are just speculating on what that happiness might be like.

When we have this realization of selflessness, that the self is not an independent, truly existent thing, it is not as though the individual ceases to exist, there is still an individual who has realized selflessness, they don't disappear into nothingness. Thank you.

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