



## **The Essential Teachings of the Buddhadharma**

**by**

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During this lecture I wish to discuss the view, meditation and action in the Buddhist tradition in general.

The Buddhist teachings are very vast and profound. In order to be able to integrate the teachings properly, one must proceed by learning the view, by meditating on the instructions and by acting accordingly, all three aspects must be present.

There are 84,000 general teachings of the Buddha. All teachings are directed towards becoming free from the three mind poisons of ignorance, attachment and aversion. As such, there are what is known as the three baskets of teachings showing how to become free of these poisons. These three baskets of teachings are presented in the three vehicles of learning: discipline, meditation and wisdom. These three are employed in order to develop the three wisdoms won from hearing, from contemplating and from meditating, and to engender the correct view, meditation and action. The three vehicles of learning are explained in the three baskets of teachings, summarized in the two truths: the relative and ultimate truths.

The relative truth describes the way the world appears to an apprehending mind, in general. The ultimate truth does not negate the way beings perceive the relative truth as it appears to them, rather, it means seeing the true nature of appearances. Specifically, the Mahayana practice means seeing that there is no contradiction between the relative and ultimate truths, in other words, there is no difference between the methods of practice and superior knowledge.

The Buddhist view is a view free from false notions concerning the two extreme assumptions: believing things exist forever or of their own accord, and believing that things do not exist at all; eternalism and nihilism. This does not mean that a system of belief is the foundation for Buddhism, rather, freedom from the extreme views means seeing things as they are. Freedom from nihilism doesn't mean believing in eternal existents and freedom from eternalism doesn't mean believing nothing exists whatsoever. Our view is free of both false assumptions. The correct view must apply and accord with practice, where no contradiction is ascertained.

We understand the ultimate truth as a description of the true nature of all things, which lack eternal existence and are therefore not everlasting. Lacking eternal existence doesn't mean things are devoid of existence. Things appear clearly and function. The true view means seeing the display of the relative and ultimate truths; seeing that things appear in clarity because they lack inherent existence. The ultimate nature of all appearances does not obstruct things from appearing relatively.

Many of you have probably received these teachings and have heard these instructions many times. But some of you may be hearing these teachings for the first time, so I thought it maybe helpful to introduce you to the two truths. I see the big fan you gave me as big and so do you. There is a truth to this, which is relative. We agree that this is a "big fan." Tibetans call a fan "lung-yab," lung meaning "air" and "yab" meaning "to swing." When one investigates the fan and what it consists of, one will never see air swinging or be able to prove that it exists as a "swinging air." "Lung-yab" is a label describing the functioning object and nothing more. Nothing in a fan proves to be a "lung-yab," the ultimate truth that there is no truly existing "swinging air" but only a coming together of many things described conventionally. The fan lacks true existence and cannot uphold the term we describe it with. But the ultimate truth does not negate the relative truth. This fan serves the purpose of being a "lung-yab" and of swinging the air. It was very hot in this room and now it is cooler when I use the fan, so there is a relative truth to the fan. Both the relative and ultimate co-exist.

What I have said about the "lung-yab" is valid for any other object too. It is also true for the mind. The two truths coexist.

This explanation should help you understand the Buddhist view, which is freedom from assumptions about eternalism and nihilism. In some sense we shouldn't even speak about "the Buddhist view." We only say "Buddhist view" because the Buddhists talk about it. The view itself isn't Buddhist, it is simply the way things are. It isn't anybody's personal view, but the expression of insight about how things are.

What I wish to relate is that there are beliefs in eternalism and nihilism and that the Buddhist view is beyond such wrong views. The idea of freedom beyond the wrong views should not become a belief one merely accepts, rather it must be understood properly. I am not speaking about something you must believe in without applying personal circumspection. One must know and find out the proper view for oneself. Then one is in an easier position to apply the practice in one's life in accordance with the view of, for example, the inseparability of the methods of practice and superior knowledge, the inseparability of the two truths, or the inseparability of how things appear and how they are.

The view free from the two extremes must pervade the journey of the ground, path and fruition of the Buddhadharmā,<sup>1</sup> the reason why a correct understanding is very important. Understanding that the two truths are not contradictory, but are inseparable, is of utmost importance. Otherwise, when one begins studying Lord Buddha's many teachings in the sutras, etc., one may become very confused. It may then seem that there are contradictions in the teachings. With the proper view, practice along the path is easier and less confusing.

There is a saying in Buddhism that anyone who has not properly heard and understood the teachings and then practices is like a person who tries to climb a cliff without hands. This is someone who practices meditation without the proper view. Further, anybody who has a correct understanding of the view and does not practice is like a person who has reached a treasure island and returns empty-handed. Therefore, in order to traverse the path properly the view is very important.

### Questions

**Question:** Your Eminence, from the point of view of relative truth, when one is hot one swings the fan and cools off. From the point of view of ultimate truth, when one is hot, one swings the fan and cools off. So a lazy man may ask why bother looking for ultimate truth? What's the difference?

**Rinpoche:** Probably there is a little confusion in that I was talking about the "lung-yab" as an example, not about who or why it was being used. As far as the nature of the fan is concerned, yes, relatively there is a clinging to the idea that it is a fan which swings and brings air. When you use it, yes. But when you examine it carefully though, ultimately there is no such thing as a unique entity "fan." And, if you understand and realize ultimate truth, there is no such thing as heat that you can identify as an independent existent. That is the ultimate nature of heat; it lacks true existence. Then there is no need for a "lung-yab," an "air swinger."

**Question:** Your Eminence, I would like to pursue that question further. It seemed to me that the thrust of it was: How does the perception of ultimate truth alter one's experience? Does it mean that when you experience the discomfort of the heat it takes away your attachment to comfort? One fans oneself because one is hot and would rather be cool. Does the perception of the ultimate truth change that? Is there still some attachment to feeling a certain way? Obviously this isn't something just purely intellectual but has some impact on how we experience the world.

**Rinpoche:** That is the basic difference between the experience of relative and ultimate truth. If you experience the world relatively, there is fixation, clinging, and a strong dualistic clinging to attachment and aversion. If one intuitively begins to realize the ultimate truth, and

not just an intellectual understanding, then one has lesser clinging to the point where one realizes it fully to experience no clinging whatsoever.

**Question:** Can one experience the ultimate and relative at the same time?

**Rinpoche:** Yes, that is the whole point. Without abolishing or obstructing the relative truth, the ultimate is realized – this is what is the ultimate truth. For instance, if you read the life story of Buddha Shakyamuni you would see the relative truth was so alive in his history; at least in the eyes of others he demonstrated the relative truth and experienced it deeply. He didn't experience it because he clung to it, rather to show that the relative truth does not contradict or stand in the way of the ultimate truth. Concerning the ultimate truth, he is the best example of someone who has realized the ultimate truth.

**Question:** Your Eminence, when I was a child I would walk in a meadow and the relative truth would disappear. There would be a bright white light. What made me come back to relative truth?

**Rinpoche:** Probably it might be a way of seeing the relative truth differently because the ultimate truth doesn't appear as a white light. Sometimes we like to see the relative truth differently.

**Question:** Rinpoche, if the ultimate point of view isn't the ultimate, how is it that we ever fall into a state of mind that is ignorant of this ultimate truth?

**Rinpoche:** It sounds like a discouraging beginning and an encouraging end. Shakyamuni Buddha spoke about beginningless, yet there is an end. It's a very exciting subject. Ignorance isn't that bad. If we are not in *samsara* we couldn't experience *enlightenment*. So you shouldn't be too negative about ignorance because it is a matter of the truth of interdependent origination.<sup>ii</sup> Do you understand?

**Student:** To some extent.

**Question:** Your Eminence, if ultimate truth has to be experienced in the relative world, then it sounds like we are still sort of stuck in *samsara*. Is it just that we don't experience it as *samsara*? If we can perceive ultimate truth from what I have understood, it has to be in the relative world.

**Rinpoche:** Without having to abandon relative truth, without having to obstruct or stop relative reality, you can experience the ultimate truth. If you try to experience ultimate truth by fully stopping relative reality, then it is not ultimate and cannot have anything to do with the ultimate. Rather, it is an incomplete approach. If you try to experience the ultimate by ignoring and stopping the relative it is possible to fall into one of the two extremes.

**Question:** Your Eminence, since we do live in a relative world and deal with relative truth all the time, how would we know if we were face-to-face with ultimate truth? And, how do we

get there?

**Rinpoche:** The ultimate truth is like a good old friend, traditionally described as the mother meeting the lost son. There is a very definite recognition. You needn't worry when you face ultimate truth at all. It will be very obvious because you finally know yourself after all pretensions have fallen away. When you face yourself, knowing is the easiest thing. The work is getting to that point.

**Question:** What is the quickest and most sure way?

**Rinpoche:** Along with your practice, do a hop and a jump once in a while.

**Student:** Thank you very much.

**Rinpoche:** Please be careful, I don't want to be responsible if you break your leg.

**Question:** Your Eminence, would it be correct to say that the experience of ultimate truth is the experience of relative truth without the relativity.

**Rinpoche:** I wouldn't mind going with that. It sounds good.

**Question:** I wonder about perceiving. Do we in fact ever perceive ultimate truth as ultimate truth? The further point is: It seems to me that we perceive ultimate truth all the time.

**Rinpoche:** Yes, it is possible. In a sutra the Buddha said that he never taught anything, but beings perceive. Ultimately he never taught but beings perceive the teachings. He perceived what he didn't teach.

**Question:** If there arises the idea that I have perceived ultimate truth, it becomes a commentary, an experience. Do you have any advice how to deal with that other than just letting go of the commentary?

**Rinpoche:** It is not like perceiving it suddenly or out of the blue. It is a gradual process, a blending of situations towards subtler levels. As such, it is not a situation that you are suddenly confronted with realization and do not know which language to use. Working with a teacher is very important when it comes to practice and experience. There is a subtlety about it. In the different vehicles we speak about the *five paths*. One is the path of seeing, which doesn't refer to experience in practice. One begins to see ultimate truth. The process of seeing is like learning to know a person one sees for the first time. But before this person knows you and you know them, you must learn about each other. It is a process.

**Question:** Would you say something about death and grieving as it relates to our clinging, especially of loved ones?

**Rinpoche:** Any clinging is pretty much the same. Going into a state of grief isn't particularly helpful for anybody. Realistically, it is a custom that you are expected to grieve, but practically it doesn't help anyone, either the deceased or the living. This doesn't mean one

should celebrate, but there is no point grieving. Does this answer your question?

**Student:** In the Western world, we do have a custom of grieving quite a bit and I was just wondering if there would be a way in the practice of meditation to lessen this grief. Sometimes it is quite overwhelming.

**Rinpoche:** Yes, grief is common to all people, not only to Westerners. As human beings, we experience the emotions of sadness, unhappiness and disappointment when someone close to us dies. This is common in the world. From the Buddhist point of view it is not a matter of not caring, but from a practical and realistic point of view one tries to see that grieving is not beneficial for those who have deceased nor for the living. As such, in the Buddhist tradition one awakens more to the truth of impermanence, knowing that once one is born death is inevitable. The experience of inevitability is intensified through experiencing the death of others. The only meaningful attitude for the deceased and living is developing and expanding a compassionate mind, called *bodhichitta*<sup>iii</sup> in Sanskrit, the enlightened mind of compassion and loving kindness.

**Question:** Your Eminence, you said in the talk that when one does more practice things get simpler. Is it that the relative and ultimate truths distill into nothing or that they distill into something? Or is it that one's attachment to something or nothing simply goes away?

**Rinpoche:** When one has the proper view that there is no contradiction between the two truths, then the practice accords with the view and has the quality of the inseparability of *skillful means* and wisdom, "upaya" and "prajna" in Sanskrit. The wisdom of prajna is the ultimate truth and the skillful means of upaya is the quality of the relative truth. If you advance in practice then skillful means is wisdom and the wisdom is skillful means; the relative is ultimate and the ultimate is relative. By following the path of practice one begins to experience a finer balance of relative and ultimate bodhichitta.

### **Meditation in the Hinayana**

I have briefly spoken about the basic principle of the Buddhist view and that practice must be applied with the proper view. Now I will speak about practice in relation to the view.

The Tibetan term for "Buddhist" or those who follow the Buddhadharma is "nang-pa." "Nang" means, "home," inside in contrast to outside. So, "nang-pa" means "the insider." The view describes the essence and nature of phenomena and a follower of the Buddhadharma learns that the phenomenal world in its various forms of manifestation lack true existence. Understanding and insight depend upon the fact that the apprehending mind lacks true existence. The nature of the perceiving mind is therefore an important issue. In the Buddhist tradition, instead of just having the view of how things are or should be, and instead of merely being interested in appearances, one turns one's attention inwards to find out how things exist

in relationship to the apprehending mind which experiences the world. So, in the Buddhist tradition it is quite important to look inwards and work with one's own mind.

*Nan g-pa* doesn't mean that one is an introvert, rather an extrovert oriented inwards. While one knows that all things lack true existence, this understanding and view must be integrated in practice and experienced by the mind. The great yogi and one of the greatest meditators of the Karma Kagyu lineage is Milarepa, who said that he did not know the dharmas of taming and of being tamed, but he knew the taming of the mind. He didn't say that the Buddha didn't teach how to tame and experience the gentle mind, rather that everything points to taming the mind and if that doesn't happen, talking about this without practicing is of no use. Shakyamuni Buddha had said that all dharmas concern the mind and that an appreciation depends upon one's personal propensities. In connection to what was said in the previous lecture, because the two truths pervade the mind, the perceiver, we see the two truths as inseparable with appearances. This means that the way we perceive the world depends upon the mental capacities and the state of experience we are going through.

In order to assure ourselves that we are following the correct journey and in order to remain inspired along the path, we must have the proper view. What is most important is to apply the view during the practice of meditation. Therefore, meditation practice becomes the second most important point; meditation based upon the proper view. The Tibetan term for meditation is "gom," which has been explained by the great masters to their pupils in accordance with their capacities. Meditation does not mean that there is something to meditate upon. The Tibetan word means, "becoming accustomed to," "developing the proper habit" so that the situation slowly becomes one's second nature.

Traditionally meditation is presented in the vehicle of proper means so that one develops the healthy habit. The meditation practices are *Shamatha* (Tib. *shinay*), the cause, and *Vipashyana* (Tib. *lhaktong*), the result.<sup>iv</sup>

For instance, we are bound in and experience samsara. This does not mean that we were trapped in a cage at a certain point and cannot get out. This also does not mean that some vicious cycle hit us unaware and spins us around without personal control in a circle. That isn't samsara, otherwise it would be easy to get out. Being caught in samsara means that we have developed a particular habit again and again, which has become so strong that we remain victims of our own habits.

The habit we experience as samsara is a mistaken habit because it is that of dualistic clinging, and is very strong. It isn't that easy to become free of this habit. So samsara isn't something one can easily sweep away or leave, and *nirvana* isn't something one attains or reaches. This being the case, we need to learn to relate to wholesome habits through the practice of

Shamatha meditation. The antidote for one habit is another habit, and here we reverse unhealthy habits with healthy ones. A Japanese saying is that when eliminating one smell you replace it with another; you break through one habit by having another habit, the purpose of meditation practice. I want you to know that developing one particular habit is a remedy for eliminating another habit; one habit can be replaced by another habit.

The difference between proper and improper habits is that the former is free from expectations, doubts, hopes and fears. Shamatha meditation relates to the relative truth of reality. The purpose of Shamatha is to develop mental stability and a single-pointed concentration. Vipashyana relates to the ultimate truth. It is out of a single-pointed mental stability that one begins to see the non-conceptual and non-referential nature of the mind. It is very important to note that without having cultivated a very healthy ground of a stable mind, it is rather difficult to experience Vipashyana, or "special insight." Just as the two truths are in essence inseparable, there should be no separation between Shamatha and Vipashyana.

The Tibetan term for Vipashyana is *lhaktong* and means "seeing more and what is greater"; one sees a greater meaning, one wins a more correct picture of things as they appear and are. In order to see things more vividly one must first have a calm and stable mind, which sharpens one's perception and makes one open. In other words, I am looking at the brocade cloth in front of me, which is very precise and fine. Upon first glimpse I only see it as a coarse cloth, but looking carefully, I begin seeing the details more vividly. With insight there is no distinction between coarse and subtle seeing, everything becomes alive. Again, it is important to understand and appreciate that Shamatha and Vipashyana are inseparable.

### **Questions**

**Question:** Your Eminence, I would like to question you further about the inseparability of Vipashyana and Shamatha to the extent that as a practice experience it is not uncommon to have your mind seem to rest without particular concentration and not to be one-pointed, so much so that the mind goes out and hangs out. That can go on for an extended period of time and it does not mean that it is an undisciplined practice. It seems to be co-extensive and goes along with discipline. In my understanding, that experience of going out and hanging out, or just resting the mind there, Vipashyana and Shamatha seem to just suspend for a while. What am I talking about?

**Rinpoche:** That seems to be fine – hanging out without a reference point and without being distracted. It wouldn't be particularly wrong to call it Vipashyana, but it would be more proper to call it "path-Vipashyana," because Vipashyana is discussed from the point of view of fruition. What we really mean by Vipashyana ultimately is the experience of selflessness.

**Student:** I would like to return to the original question in just this sense. Does this not

imply then a separation of a Vipashyana experience to a Shamatha experience? In that sense, do they coexist?

**Rinpoche:** In path-Vipashyana there is still an inseparability taking place in the mind since there is no place to rest the mind, yet there is no distraction, which is the aspect of Shamatha.

**Student:** Would you extend that to the fruition?

**Rinpoche:** The nature of all situations is the inseparability of means and wisdom. At fruition we speak about skillful means and wisdom. Shamatha is the skillful means and Vipashyana is wisdom, the inseparability of both.

**Student:** Selflessness and the ability to handle yourself and the world?

**Rinpoche:** You could describe it that way when you discuss the inseparability of *luminosity* and emptiness. Do you want to pursue your question further?

**Student:** Actually I would, but...

**Rinpoche:** What is the particular problem? You don't want them to be inseparable?

**Student:** The experience of luminosity and emptiness has not been available to me, consequently to use it as a reference point is not ...

**Rinpoche:** I knew there was a big problem. I don't want to make things too uncomfortable for you. Right now it would be good enough to have some faith in the inseparability. As the practice progresses, the realization of the inseparability will begin to become more obvious for you. The practice seems to be going very good. Resting but not fixating on a point. Being non-distracted.

**Student:** This is not an everyday occurrence. It seems to grow.

**Rinpoche:** As you practice more, it will extend.

**Question:** Your Eminence, could you talk a little bit about exactly what is meant by one-pointedness, what the one point is?

**Rinpoche:** Basically it means having no distractions. However, simply being free of distractions is not enough, it is not sufficient, you have to also be free from clinging to the experience of non-distraction,

**Student:** What I was wondering is that it seems to me that a lot of people think that one-pointedness means kind of making your mind go like this, spatially making your mind into a dot. I was wondering whether one-pointedness didn't have more to do with nowness, just being here now – this?

**Rinpoche:** It depends upon what particular stage of practice as well as upon the individual's capacity. In Shamatha there is the progression through the grosser to the subtler levels of practice. There is also Shamatha with a reference and without a reference or object. Essentially, yes, one-pointedness has to do with your understanding. It is free of the ornamentations of the four limitations and eight complexities.<sup>v</sup>

**Student:** Could you say that the relationship between Shamatha and Vipashyana ... what comes to mind is dropping a stone into a pool of water. There is a place where it hits and there are the ripples that go out, so that the center seems to be there and being there it is

awareness that can expand. So, it includes that presence, but then it isn't enough. There has to be the expansion. So Vipashyana is bigger than Shamatha but starts from it like that.

**Rinpoche:** When one experiences one-pointedness of mind through Shamatha, it is the experience of a mind free of distraction. Out of that one experiences Vipashyana, insight or selflessness. From the *shravaka pratyekabuddha yana* point of view it is selflessness and from the Mahayana point of view the truth of *dharmata*. If someone takes what you said as an expansion, then one couldn't say it that way because when you experience emptiness it is free of any notions or conceptions of expanding or lacking expansion.

**Question:** Your Eminence, you spoke of developing the habit of meditation as an antidote to samsaric habits. A lot of us develop the habit of Shamatha meditation and then we develop new habits of *Ngondro* and *sadhana* practices. And we get out of the habit of Shamatha meditation. Do you think this is a problem?

**Rinpoche:** No, there is not only no problem, but it is exactly that which brings about the balance. If we understand the journey properly – that our view and journey must be free from the two extremes – then through Shamatha practice one begins to become free of the view of eternalism. Again, because of one's past history of habits, one might develop similar qualities of habits in Shamatha. That could take us to the other extreme of falling into the belief of nihilism. It is through the practice of Mahayana and the practice of Ngondro that one becomes free of falling into the belief of nihilism. Thus one is on the middle path.

**Question:** Do you think that doing too much Shamatha practice could be dangerous?

**Rinpoche:** If you cling to it, yes.

**Student:** What about nostalgia for it?

**Rinpoche:** That is clinging. You must have a great time with Shamatha. Frankly, it is a fact that we follow the Mahayana path. Just doing Shamatha will not be dangerous for falling into an extreme, but nevertheless, as a Mahayana practitioner we have to keep the journey in mind and that it must be free of the two extremes. It is important to keep this in mind.

Also, any practice you do includes Shamatha. Visualization is Shamatha. If you don't do the visualizations and don't pay attention, then the Ngondro practice is faulty.

**Question:** Your Eminence, I wonder if there is ever an appropriate time when one would return to Shamatha and subsequently the *tonglen* practice we also do as some kind of ground practice for a while? If you are doing Ngondro, for example, and it seems that you feel bogged down and not moving forward – it is hard to explain – if it would be appropriate to return to Shamatha as a base practice temporarily?

**Rinpoche:** You don't particularly need to return to Shamatha. I think you would always be doing Shamatha practice. When you do the Ngondro, which follows Shamatha, there wouldn't be a time when you put Shamatha aside. As one progresses into the practice of *Mahamudra*, there is an element or practice of Shamatha called Mahamudra-Shamatha.

**Student:** I guess I meant more that in doing Ngondro one does not drop Shamatha altogether at all. It is true that it surrounds the Ngondro that we do. What I meant more was at some point we place the emphasis on doing Ngondro and the amount of Shamatha we do diminishes considerably when we do other practices. What I meant was: Is it ever appropriate to actually put the emphasis where you are actually doing more Shamatha than Ngondro practice?

**Rinpoche:** What would be advisable is to give pretty much the equal amount of time to both rather than doing either one or the other.

**Question:** Your Eminence, there are Vajrayana teachers who initiate their Western students immediately into Vajrayana practices without a prior foundation in Shamatha and discipline. Do you feel that this is appropriate?

**Rinpoche:** I personally cannot say whether that is appropriate or not. It would depend upon the teacher. If one is in a position to uphold the teachings properly, and if one is in a position to lead students into the practice properly, then yes, it would be fine. So, it really depends upon the teacher, different styles work for different people and different teachers have their unique styles too. So, it depends upon the situation. But I cannot say whether this is appropriate or not.

**Question:** Your Eminence, when you speak of seeing and Vipashyana, it is clear that you mean by that something beyond the visual sense of seeing. And I wonder if you could say more about what is being seen and who or what faculties are seeing? In what sense does the seeing occur?

**Rinpoche:** Actually, it is an interesting use of words. Lhaktong literally means, "exceptional seeing," but really means "seeing what isn't seen." As such, there isn't anything to see or anybody seeing anything.

**Question:** In relation to the question about one-pointedness, you said it means having no distractions. I am wondering, distraction from what?

**Rinpoche:** It would touch the root to say freedom from expectations and doubts. Any distraction takes place due to hopes and fears. For instance, there is clinging to the anticipation that things truly exist.

**Student:** So, if I am sitting and become distracted by the trees outside, that is because I ... it seems like...

**Rinpoche:** Yes, the tree does not come to you to distract you, but you have the hope that it is a tree and therefore you aren't comfortable.

**Student:** Discomfort. But I like looking at the tree.

**Rinpoche:** Then you should leave the sitting practice. You do not think that the two go together very well.

**Question:** Your Eminence, I had a question about the use of the term "insider" in terms of a dharma practitioner. Let me give a scenario: If one practices Shamatha and Vipashyana arises as an experience, there is a particular brightness of color, a particular poignancy of sound, in fact, phenomena speak to one as if they were one's teacher somehow without distraction. It isn't a question then of "inside" or "outside," or is it?

**Rinpoche:** All displays of the phenomenal world are a manifestation of the mind. The outer play of manifestations is the manifestation of the inner mind, which communicates through speech. Inside there are certain belief systems believing that external phenomena are real, that they exist of their own, etc. That is the main point the mind focuses upon. We pay attention to what creates the situations for manifestations. There are different glimpses that are appropriate, others are sidetracks. Things take place due to interdependent origination; the interaction of outer situations and the inner mind produces the result, which is neither outside nor inside.

**Question:** I have a question about the statement about habits, how one habit is replaced by another. Is it possible to be in a state of no-habit?

**Rinpoche:** Yes. First there must be a balance. Right now there is no balance and one side is much heavier than the other, so you develop a specific habit to outweigh the grossly confused habit with a wholesome habit. You must reach a point of balance. Then you can advance into the possibility of becoming free of habits.

**Student:** From then on means when the wholesome becomes heavier than the negative?

**Rinpoche:** Not greater, but balanced. Generally, when we talk about having accumulated greater virtue, the wholesome is stronger than the negative habits. The real meaning is that the two should be balanced. Then there is the possibility of experiencing freedom from habits.

**Question:** What about the process of selecting your bad habits?

**Rinpoche:** There must be a misunderstanding. There aren't any bad habits you can push aside. Rather, balance refers to the fact that you don't favor either negative or positive habits.

**Student:** Let's say you get into the habit of having a drink after you work everyday. Then you get into the habit of meditating instead of having a drink. Now, are you saying that the proper balance is to some days...

**Rinpoche:** No. Let's say that drinking is a bad habit and meditating is a good habit. What I mean is that you do not rely on the meditation to get rid of the habit of drinking for the rest of your life because then there isn't much point in relying upon your meditation to stop drinking. In this case you are fighting with the habits. What I mean is that you do not rely upon meditation and at some point you realize that it isn't a big deal to drink.

**Student:** It is a matter of indifference?

**Rinpoche:** Free of good and bad habits is freedom from habits.

## Meditation in the Mahayana

In the previous lecture I spoke about meditation practice from the Hinayana point of view. Now I wish to speak about meditation practice from the Mahayana point of view.

When we follow the journey of the Buddhadharma along the path it is important to keep in mind that we do not become side-tracked or fall into the extremes of samsara or into contentedness, some experience of personal peace. Instead the practice should be free of both. This is particularly important in Mahayana.

According to the Hinayana, in Shamatha meditation one cultivates a gentle mind. It is by taming the mind that gentleness is possible. But, one must not completely fall into the state of a stable and tranquil mind. Even within Hinayana, there is the importance of practicing Shamatha and Vipashyana. In Mahayana, the skillful means of bodhichitta is the practice that prevents us from falling into any extremes.

When speaking about cultivating bodhichitta, relatively it means developing the mind of loving kindness and compassion, the true intention to benefit others. Bodhichitta is the means to develop genuine and altruistic openness, the inseparability of friendliness, loving kindness and compassion. Ultimately it means the inseparability of the wisdom of emptiness and the skillful means of compassion. Ultimately one must give rise to ultimate bodhichitta. The means to experience ultimate bodhichitta is through relative bodhichitta, which has two aspects, the aspiration and the application. When we speak about ultimate bodhichitta, we refer to the description given in the sutras. In the *tantras* it is described as co-emergent wisdom, there are different names for the same meaning. The awakening to ultimate bodhichitta takes place through aspiration bodhichitta and application bodhichitta. The analogies for both are "wishing to go" for aspiration and "the process of going" for application. In this way one generates the two aspects of bodhichitta. One particular practice done in the tradition to cultivate aspiration bodhichitta is contemplating the four immeasurables: immeasurable loving kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity. The aspiration is the all encompassing intention to benefit all beings without exception. The application is following the *bodhisattva's* way of life in accordance with the intention. As one follows the bodhisattva's conduct, in other words, the way of the victorious sons and daughters, one engages in the six perfections of generosity, moral discipline, patience, perseverance, meditation, and wisdom.

Following the path of the bodhisattvas and practicing the six perfections deals with engaging in the actions of a bodhisattva, called "*Parol-du-Chin-pa*" in Tibetan. "*Parol-du*" is "across" and "*Chin-pa*" is "gone," so it means "gone beyond." Therefore the six perfections do not point to the usual qualities we speak about. Although a particular individual may practice great generosity by doing an immeasurable amount of good this has nothing to do with "perfection."

Of course, the more generosity one performs the better it is. Yet the perfection of going beyond means beyond the mundane, beyond the dualistic notion of generosity. The giving of generosity must be free from the concept of the three reference points of subject, object and the act of giving. Perfection of generosity occurs with the understanding and realization of emptiness, defined as “freedom from the three circles” in Tibetan, “kor-sum-mi-tog-pa.”

In the Mahayana, the view is supreme emptiness and the practice is relative and ultimate bodhichitta. The result is conducting the actions of a bodhisattva, which are the six perfections. Students who follow the Mahayana path must know that the path must be complete by conjoining the proper view, meditation and action.

Cultivating bodhichitta, the enlightened mind, is the root of all practices. Within the Hinayana there might not be a great emphasis on bodhichitta nevertheless it takes place. The experience of selflessness cannot arise without bodhichitta. It is therefore needless to say that it is all the more alive in the Mahayana. For practitioners of the skillful means of Vajrayana, it is bodhichitta that gives the meaning. So, no matter how profound the methods of practice may be, without bodhichitta, Vajrayana practice is of little use. Whatever practice one does, while following the journey, the development of bodhichitta is the key since it is the king of all practices.

## Questions

**Question:** Your Eminence, if you would correct my understanding, in any given situation or as phenomena appear to arise, we can have essentially one or two relationships, one being open and friendly as you say, and the other being closed. It seems to me that as we were discussing non-distraction in Shamatha that the non-distraction is a commitment to that openness and that is in a sense “shila” (the second perfection of moral discipline or ethics). That is the one-pointedness, the allegiance, rather than particular actions. From there that openness gives birth to prajna. Rather than a creation of those things, one thing tends to give birth to the next. So, from prajna there is the space for equanimity and equanimity gives the richness for generosity and generosity gives the impulse for action. The question is, am I mistaken in some place there?

**Rinpoche:** I didn't know that I had made it so complicated. Basically it sounds like there are things you can put together in that the proper practice of Shamatha has a very generous quality about it. When you have a gentle and tranquil mind, the stability is an expression of discipline, “shila.” That is true. When you have proper discipline with a stable and gentle mind, then the greater simplicity of mind makes prajna possible. There is definitely a relationship, and we can develop wisdom through the meditation of Shamatha. With prajna it is possible to practice generosity more intelligently, but it is not necessarily the case that prajna gives birth

to generosity. You have to practice generosity, but, with a certain amount of clarity, you practice generosity more appropriately.

**Question:** Your Eminence, many of us are first generation practitioners of the Buddhadharma here in North America. You have students in the East and in the West. Could you tell us if there are any particular difficulties that are characteristic of Western students that you might be aware of?

**Rinpoche:** From my personal experience, students of the Buddhadharma in the East and West have a certain amount of sincerity and aspire to pursue the path to the best of their ability. I am very happy with all practitioners. As long as we are in the world and have neurotic patterns, it doesn't matter who or where you are, which cultural background you rely upon, or whichever style you express your neurosis with. As long as you are neurotic, the expression is the same. I have seen that there are certain shortcomings – in the East a greater amount of people base their practice upon blind faith; in the West there is a constant doubt to the extent that they become cyclic. I think that if the two would merge and exchange experiences, it would be very good.

**Student:** Hopefully we can do that here Thank you.

**Rinpoche:** I am very impressed with the older dharma students in the West. I like working with them very much.

**Question:** On the level of relative bodhichitta, it seems that aspiration is easier than application. That actually one can have the genuine aspiration to be generous, but one still gets involved with personal likes and dislikes, irritations and impatience of all kinds. Apart from the contemplation of the four immeasurables, are there any other practical tips you can give us on how to work further with application?

**Rinpoche:** Cultivating a genuine aspiration is what is necessary; yes there is a procedure to aspire and apply. Whether you can properly practice application bodhichitta depends upon how genuine and sincere your aspiration is. As the example I gave of a definite and decisive intention to go leads you to go and nothing will stop you because you have the definite intention. Usually the mind is the leader and the body is the servant of the commands of the mind. So, the mind initiates, desires intensely, and the body just follows. In the same manner, here it is important to develop a sincere habit by cultivating genuine aspiration in order to smoothly apply bodhichitta. Of course, a practical means enabling one to be open and easefully apply bodhichitta is the practice of tonglen. This practice is application-bodhichitta.

**Question:** Would you please say something about the relationship of high-energy states that can arise from sitting practice, especially as these might relate to what are called mental illness or psychosis? I have this problem myself in my sitting practice, rather than taming my mind I seem to lose control of my mind.

**Rinpoche:** What do you mean by losing your mind? Do you lose your memory, or can't

you think?

**Student:** My personal experience is that what happens to me is the diagnosis of manic. In some respects what happens is that I have experienced perceptions, which seemed to be of a very spiritual nature, an insightful nature. I have been going through this for about twenty-three years, it also arouses aggressiveness and destructiveness.

**Rinpoche:** The practice of sitting meditation, Shamatha, is abiding in calmness and developing calmness and stability. As such, it means that the body is relaxed and there is a sense of ease and openness. The body isn't tense or rigid. There is a certain amount of openness and gentleness of the mind and no narrowing down to a particular thing, or over-emphasizing the need to concentrate. There is ease and openness of body and mind, which are synchronized in the practice. Another point, when you practice sitting meditation with that understanding, then while the sitting practice is important, it should not be treated like something exceptional from daily activities. In fact, you could do the practice just like you do any other chores in life. You don't say, "This is what I am going to do and it just has to be like this or that." You do not put any ornaments upon the practice with expectations, you simply do it. One thing is to be free of expectations and doubts, hopes and fears. In order to experience a healthy mind, body and life in the world, it is one of the responsibilities you must take upon yourself. When you do this, you will experience the benefit. So, you practice in order to fulfill a specific responsibility without being apprehensive about it or expecting anything. Just practice casually, like anything else you do in life.

**Question:** I also have a question about aspiration. You said that the means for that was contemplation upon the four immeasurables. I was wondering if you could say a little more about contemplating loving kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity. What do you actually do?

**Rinpoche:** Aspiration is "mon-pa" in Tibetan. "Mon" means to "intend or long for something to happen." In the chant of the four immeasurables, we pray, "May all beings enjoy happiness and have whatever causes happiness," which is the prayer to develop loving kindness. The limitless aspect is covered because you do not pray, "May I have happiness and its causes." You pray for all beings without exception. When the aspiration is free of any reference points it is even more immeasurable. We further pray, "May they be free from suffering and whatever causes suffering," which is the prayer to develop compassion since you include all beings without exception. The words express the meaning, what you intently wish when praying, "mon-pa." If your aspiration is genuine, then you are more open to do what needs to be done when you see it, which is application.

**Question:** Following up with the other question about all the doubts we have, sometimes from my own experience when acting out of what seems to be generosity, I later realize there is a subtle self-interest in doing something that I thought was quite generous at the time. I am wondering whether that is simply the way you learn or whether you can catch that earlier, at

the point before you act?

**Rinpoche:** It sounds like you are doing well. Certainly you learn from your mistakes and refine your actions more and more. You have done what benefits others and practiced generosity, helping others, probably. You see that there might be self-interest. If the self-interest benefited you as well as others, you can see it as self-interest, which sounds fine. If you are aware of a definite self-interest, you can correct it and refine it.

**Question:** You spoke about good and bad habits balancing each other. My question is about the six perfections. Are they good habits that balance bad habits? You shouldn't have too much of some or is there something more?

**Rinpoche:** There must be some confusion due to certain circumstances. If you continue practicing generosity by giving benefit to others with the correct intention, it is generosity. If you keep practicing generosity on and on there is an accumulation of virtue taking place. But generosity alone will not bring on the experience of enlightenment. For instance, when discussing the bodhisattva *bhumis*, generosity corresponds with the first bodhisattva bhumi. So, it is not enough to only practice generosity, rather it must have the quality of the inseparability of compassion and emptiness. It must be free of the concepts of the three reference points (subject, object and the act of giving), which is freedom from habit. If you only practice generosity without being free of the three fixations, you have another habit, which resembles unwholesome habits.

**Question:** I am wondering about the process of discovering restful mind. In some other traditions I tried there was a lot of emphasis on concentration as a way of using concentration as a catalyst which provides some kind of awareness. I am wondering why in this tradition concentration seems to be down played?

**Rinpoche:** Yes, there is a need for concentration in the way of paying attention and of being mindful. You can say that a certain amount of concentration is necessary in order to pay attention and be mindful. Merely paying attention and being concentrated can narrow you down though. If you concentrate too much, the concentration spins things around, like an umbrella; things become more twisted. So here, when you pay attention, you do not hold on to something and consequently there is spaciousness, openness.

**Question:** Your Eminence, when we take the *bodhisattva vows*, we seek to aspire to be like the *Sugatas* of old. I have never fully understood the relationship between being a Sugata and a bodhisattva. What is the difference?

**Rinpoche:** Sugatas are the Buddhas, the ones who enjoy well-being and have gone beyond. In the bodhisattva vows, you pray, "Just as the Buddhas and bodhisattvas."

**Student:** The vow goes, "Just as the Sugatas of former times realized bodhichitta and established themselves on the path of training of a bodhisattva." So they aren't bodhisattvas?

**Rinpoche:** Yes.

**Student:** Oh, backwards! In other words, it is like their history going back. I see.

**Rinpoche:** “De-wa-sheg-pa” is the Tibetan term for Sugata, which are the Buddhas who have gone beyond and reached the state of freedom from pain and suffering. They are the ones who traversed the path of the bodhisattvas and established the bodhisattva mind.

**Student:** So, they are successful bodhisattvas.

**Question:** Your Eminence, do you think that as lay-people there is an obstacle for us in developing ultimate bodhichitta because we will always tend to want more of the four immeasurables for our children or loved ones. Or do you think, in fact, that it teaches us ultimate bodhichitta?

**Rinpoche:** Yes, it is not necessarily so. If one is following the life of renunciation by giving up a householder’s life and generates bodhichitta properly, then this life would be easier and one would have more time and energy to put into the practice. Then the practice could be more effective. This is why there is the Vinaya, why the Buddha placed a great deal of emphasis on the sangha of the ordained. But the main thing is bodhichitta of the heart. Just because you are an ordained member of the sangha, it doesn’t mean you are generating greater bodhichitta. It depends upon the individual. Some people have problems being a householder, others don’t.

**Question:** Your Eminence, in the Mahayana it seems that we welcome aggression, which helps us develop bodhichitta in our tonglen practice. Passion, the same way, helps us. But, what is the antidote for ignorance and how do we work with that in Mahayana?

**Rinpoche:** The antidote for ignorance is prajna, what I discussed already. If you are really generating bodhichitta it shows that you have wisdom. When faced with aggression, responding with bodhichitta is an example showing that this comes from prajna.

**Question:** Your Eminence, you have used the expression of accumulating merit or virtue and I have seen it a lot of times in the chants. But I don’t really understand it and I don’t know why I would accumulate merit, or what I would do with it.

**Rinpoche:** The accumulation of merit doesn’t mean that you accumulate something you stack into a heap so that in the end you have difficulties finding enough room to store it. If this were the case we would have so many difficulties finding enough room to stack all the defilements. Rather, accumulation of merit habit, means, that one gives up habitual actions destructive to oneself and others. Along with this one develops the mundane and spiritual habits of truly benefiting oneself and others. We speak about the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. The accumulation of merit is generosity that lacks highest wisdom. This lessens one’s harmful habits. However, at this point, one hasn’t transcended habit. The accumulation of wisdom is beneficial actions that are done with the experience of emptiness. Healthy and virtuous habits are the accumulation of merit.

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- <sup>i</sup> Buddhadharma is the Buddha's teachings; dharma means "phenomena" or "mental objects" (cf. the ten etymological meanings of dharma in note 2).
- <sup>ii</sup> Interdependent origination (Tib. *tendrel*) has been translated as interdependence and dependent origination. This is a very important concept since it explains how things happen without the existence of a god or creator. The Buddha explained simply that everything in the world is related to everything else and when something happens it is due to the relationship between cause and effect. There are actually twelve steps (called the Nidana chains): ignorance, mental formations, consciousness, name and form, the six sense fields, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, existence, birth, aging and death. Ignorance, craving and grasping are the afflictive mental states, mental formation and existence are karma, and the remaining seven are suffering. For a detailed explanation of this see Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Twelve Links of Interdependent Origination*, available from Zhyisil Chokyi Ghatsal Publications.
- <sup>iii</sup> The English term for this might be "transcendental compassion" meaning compassion not just for a few persons, but for all sentient beings. In the Sanskrit "bodhi" means "awakened" or "enlightened" and "citta" means "mind," so bodhichitta means awakened mind. Many translators prefer "awakened" over "enlightened" because the word enlightened is a non-Buddhist term that was first used when Buddhism was introduced. In Tibetan this "awakened mind" was translated as "chang chup kyi sem" in which "chang chup" means "awakened" and "kyi" is a conjunction and "sem" is mind. So the Tibetan translators translated the Sanskrit quite literally into Tibetan
- The generation of bodhichitta is based on the altruistic wish to bring about the welfare, and ultimately the total liberation, of all sentient beings from all forms of suffering. What distinguishes bodhichitta from the ordinary compassionate aspirations to benefit others shared by all people of good will is the recognition that one cannot ultimately fulfil these aspirations until one has attained the state of mental purification and liberation of Buddhahood, which is the source of all positive qualities, including the omniscience that can see, individual by individual, the causes of suffering and the causes and path of liberation from suffering. This understanding gives rise at some point to the initial generation of the aspiration to attain the state of Buddhahood in order to liberate all sentient beings from suffering and to establish them all in states of happiness. This is called aspiration bodhichitta, which must be followed by what is called the bodhichitta of entering or application bodhichitta, which is the training in loving kindness, compassion, the six paramitas or transcendent perfections, etc., which lead to the attainment of Buddhahood. Aspiration bodhichitta and application bodhichitta are both included in the term relative bodhichitta. Ultimate bodhichitta is direct insight into the ultimate nature. This state of primordial awareness *is* compassion and loving kindness and gives rise spontaneously and without preconception to compassionate activity. – *Lama Tashi Namgyal*
- <sup>iv</sup> All meditation can be divided into the two categories of tranquillity meditation (Shamatha) and insight meditation (Vipashyana). Vipashyana in turn can be divided into the Vipashyana of the sutra tradition and the Vipashyana of the Mahamudra tradition. In the sutra tradition there is analytical Vipashyana and placement meditation. In the Mahamudra or tantric tradition, Vipashyana is based on the direct pointing out of the nature of mind and the nature of things by a fully qualified and experienced holder of the Mahamudra lineage.
- <sup>v</sup> The four extreme mental limitations are: believing things essentially exist, do not exist, both exist and do not exist, and neither exist nor do not exist. The eight mental constructs or complexities are mental formulations that phenomena have such attributes as arising and ceasing, being singular or plural, coming and going, and being the same or being different.