

The Treasury of Blessings

Transcription Series

Teachings given by Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche



Part 2: The Mindset of the Great Vehicle

[00:00:38.10] Tibetan Buddhist practice makes use of all three vehicles of Buddhism: the general vehicle, the paramita vehicle and the vehicle of secret mantra. Not only does Tibetan Buddhism make use of all the vehicle teachings, but they also combine them so that in a single session one trains in all three. How is this done? In the Shravakayana, the vehicle of the Listeners, taking refuge is the central and essential practice. So this is how we begin our session, we take refuge.

Next are the practices of the Great Vehicle. Here everything can be included in the Six Paramitas, the Six Transcendences: transcendent generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, concentration and insight. We need to become a follower of the Great Vehicle. We need to become a master of generosity, and of abiding by genuine spiritual discipline. We then train in being tremendously accommodating and tolerant, diligent, and able to let the mind rest at ease and peace. Then on the basis of this we can discover insight into the nature of things.

[00:02:17.11] This is what the Mahayana path is about and this is how the bodhisattvas train. This also is how we begin our practice session. We begin by saying "In the Buddha, the Dharma and the Supreme Assembly I seek refuge until enlightenment. By the merit of generosity and so forth may I attain Buddhahood for the welfare of others." When we say "generosity and so forth" this refers to the Six Paramitas. We commit ourselves to gathering merit by being generous, disciplined and so forth.

We begin the practice by bringing to mind the qualities that are fundamental and central to the Shravakayana. Going for refuge is of deep importance. The Shravakas chant this verse for refuge: "Buddham saranam gacchami..." After having gone for refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, a subject we have studied in depth, we bring to mind the importance of the key practices of the Mahayana. Here we wish to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings, for the infinity of sentient life. We want to liberate everyone and bring them to perfect enlightenment. This is our commitment as followers of the Great Vehicle.

[00:04:12.10] And it's this commitment that we revive when we say the next two lines, "May I be generous, disciplined and so on and may this result in enlightenment for absolutely everyone." It becomes obvious that this isn't just a chant, it's not just something we need to say in order to be Buddhists. It's something we need to do in order to be followers of the path. When we say "may I by the merit of generosity and so on achieve enlightenment," then it is very clear that we need to become tremendously generous, perfectly capable of true spiritual discipline, extremely open and accommodating, patient, and diligent in terms of the practice of shamatha and vipashyana. We are gathering all of the accumulations that are necessary for the achievement of enlightenment. We need to be able to let the mind rest at ease and in peace and so gain insight. We need to follow through with this. It's not just a matter of chanting – otherwise it would be very strange and also very easy, right? But it's not like that. It's actually about what happens to ourselves and to our minds that matters.

[00:05:41.01] So we begin the session by bringing to mind the essential practices of the Mahayana which also include the Four Immeasurables, which we mentioned earlier. They are called immeasurables because they are qualities that we are meant to cultivate until they become infinite. We need to gain an infinite mastery. This training of the Mahayana vehicle focuses on developing compassion, love, joy and equanimity, but not in limited qualities. We already know to a certain extent what these qualities are like. But it's not just a matter of loving some, and it's not just a matter of having compassion for some, we need to develop these qualities for everyone – for our friends, for those who are complete strangers to us, and for those who are our enemies. We should feel genuine love, compassion, and joy when they are happy. We should also give rise to equanimity, which we can understand in terms of both shamatha and vipashyana. We need to give rise to all these qualities until there's no end to them, until they become completely limitless. This is the mastery of the Mahayana and this is how we should practice. The Buddha is our teacher in this way because the Buddha has achieved all of these qualities in a limitless, infinite way. The Buddha is the great friend of all sentient beings who need to be appeased. The Buddha is equally compassionate no matter how we behave, whether we become devoted followers of the Buddha or whether we hate the Buddha. There is no difference in this genuine presence of love and compassion for all sentient beings – that's how the enlightened state is, that's how the Buddha is. [00:07:55.05] So when it comes to mastering infinite love, compassion, joy and equanimity, it is then from our teacher that we receive the instructions.

We train in shamatha and vipashyana which are associated with infinite equanimity. Shamatha and vipashyana are related to the paramita of concentration and of insight. We can say that

concentration means the accomplishment of shamatha and insight means the accomplishment of vipashyana, the special vision, the liberating vision. We take up this practice because of having understood that we are in delusion. We know that the way we experience, the way we feel and think are all off, all out of touch with the way things actually are. This, of course, is what the Buddha tells us, that all sentient beings are deluded. We hear this again and again in the teachings: sentient beings suffer from delusion.

[00:09:21.01] But is this something that we should just take the Buddha's word for? No it's not. We shouldn't just accept that we are in delusion as some sort of revealed truth. Rather it's something that we can understand very well. Through the practice of vipashyana, we can learn to recognize the way things really are. And how are things? Things appear to us but there is no reality whatsoever to these appearances. Things appear, and yet they have no real nature. Form is emptiness, as the Buddha has taught, and emptiness also is form. Form is no other than emptiness, emptiness is no other than form. This is the teaching that we hear in the Heart Sutra, Avalokiteshvara's declaration. And this teaching of the Buddha is the truth, it's how things are. And this is something we can come to understand without too much hardship. We can do this by just being a little bit intelligent about our own experience, by just investigating a little bit beyond what seems to be the case, by just asking a few questions. This is enough to show us that our tendency is to believe in the reality of appearances, our tendency is to believe that these things are not only real, but that they are also lasting and permanent. We begin to realize that these beliefs have nothing to do with the way things are. And indeed things are really just as the Buddha declared. In other words, our vision, our experience, our perception are all completely wrong. We can quite easily come to acknowledge this truth and yet again and again we find ourselves in the midst of all of these delusions, believing them to be so real and so true, believing in whatever happens and goes on, believing that everything is characterized as permanent solid reality.

[00:11:43.29] When this kind of understanding begins to dawn in our mind, then we begin to see that we are in delusion. It's no longer just something that the Buddha is talking about or something that the teachings are trying to convince us about. We sentient beings are in delusion and this is now something that we ourselves have understood. Indeed we are in delusion. This is perhaps a very odd situation to be in: to know that what we believe, what we think, what we feel is wrong, is fundamentally mistaken. When we try to express this to others who don't share our same spiritual orientation, they may think this sounds really off and strange. They might say: "You believe that all that you think is wrong, that your delusion is so bad. You may be wrong about some things of course but could it really be that bad?" So when we talk to others about this delusion, they may begin to question our basic sanity. They may feel pity when they hear us Buddhists speaking in this way. On the other hand, we may feel pity when meeting with this kind of response, this denial of the way things really are. So everyone feels pity; this is the situation that we may find ourselves in.

[00:14:10.19] There are a lot of pitfalls here so we need to really understand the situation. We can come to understand that our minds are deluded, profoundly deluded. We also come to

understand that there are very few who acquire this knowledge. The vast majority of people think that they are not in any kind of delusion. And those who have the idea that they are completely deluded, that it is this bad, are very few in number. Among those who are able to think in this way, among those who are able to understand this, it's even fewer who are then able to then follow through, who are able to take this insight to heart and make it the basis for awakening. It's so very few who are able to become genuine practitioners.

There is a pitfall that can happen when you begin to understand with great clarity that these beliefs are fundamentally off, that our way of looking at things is completely out of touch with the way things are. When this insight occurs, it's possible to somehow turn everything around and think "So all of them, they really are in delusion and I feel pity. What a shame that they don't know what I know. I have seen the falsity of all this – I know it. For me it's not really a problem. I really pity them, they have a problem. But I see, I know, I got it." This kind of thinking has failed to take the teachings to heart. It's just some sort of intellectual conclusion that we have arrived at which may be very sharp and precise, but it's not one that has any good implications for ourselves. In fact it just becomes a source of arrogance. It becomes a way of looking down at everyone else. Here we fail to gain the true benefits of insight. This, of course, is an instance of things having gone really wrong.

[00:16:46.26] There are two situations that we must really steer clear of. One is becoming a dry intellectual. Here our minds become the dry mind of a scholar who has no actual experience. The second is becoming jaded with Dharma, or in Dharma. These are very unfortunate situations that we should avoid by all means. Sry scholars have no real sense of what they are talking about. We can be experts with impressive mastery of the teachings and great capability to talk about any issue of the teachings, but all this is without the depth that comes through personal experience. There is nothing we can't talk about because we know all the issues, we have thought about them a whole lot and worked with them intellectually. The problem, though, is whatever we came to understand was never really allowed to have an influence on our actual experience, on our immediate perspective. And so none of the qualities of ripening and liberation have occurred. We've become very knowledgeable, but this knowledge is extremely superficial.

[00:18:33.06] That's one pitfall. The other one is to become jaded. This is related to meditation instructions, such as the profound introduction to the core practice, the recognition of the natural state of the mind. If we receive this practice but are not really ready for it, then it can happen that we not only miss the essential point, but it can also prevent us from ever getting this point. That's why the teachings and the teachers often warn against this kind of profound instruction being given too early. They say that it's very important that anyone who receives this kind of instruction should be ready for it. What can happen is that we hear the instruction and though we feel we understand the words, we are not in the proper frame of mind and so we don't receive the teachings at a deep level. We do hear something and perhaps it's exciting the first time, but we are just not ready to receive the instruction on the deep level that will enable us to recognize what we need to recognize and then let that be the basis for our practice.

We may think we have understood what the practice is about, we may think that we know what the teacher was telling us, but when we practice it doesn't seem fulfilling to us. This is because we didn't get it, we didn't understand the teaching in the first place. So when we practice, there's no real sense of result or progress and quite quickly we give up because we feel there isn't much benefit. This is an extremely unfortunate situation. We didn't really understand the instructions the first time because we weren't ready to receive them. We just weren't really committed to the teaching, we weren't really open to this path and committed to following it. We simply thought that we heard whatever there was to be said about the issue and then we kind of moved on to something else. It is in this way that the door to liberation through these profound instructions closes. This is how we can become jaded Dharma practitioners, by feeling that we've heard it all before: "I've been to such and such teaching by such and such master who taught me about the essence of the mind. I know what it's all about. I can tell you if you want to hear it." But all the while it never really hits home. Becoming jaded with the teachings in this way is a real pitfall. So there are two situations that we need to avoid: becoming that kind of superficial scholar who's an expert in words but not about the meaning, and then someone who misses the whole point and then becomes jaded with the Dharma.

[00:22:10.11] In short, the Dharma and our own minds need to become the same. When that happens there's no question – we achieve liberation and complete enlightenment.

[00:23:30.02] So when we receive the teachings, it's important that we are ready for them. The teachings may be profound, indeed they can be very profound, but if we are not profound when we receive them, there's no reception. We and the Dharma need to mingle and become the same. Otherwise things can become really, really difficult. Extremely difficult. And that's why the Buddha taught the paramitas. The Buddha has shown us what this issue is about. He said the view of self, meaning grasping at self, is the basis for samsara and the basis of delusion. "The view of self may be as solid as the central mountain of the universe, and yet that is not a problem. However if you assume the view of emptiness then I say there is no cure. It is like a person who has taken medicine, and the medicine itself has turned into poison." This is how the Buddha teaches it. It is a profound point he is making. Think about it. If we believe in self, it's not a big problem because the Buddha can show us very easily that we are wrong. A few lines of scripture and a few steps of reasoning can show us that this is a mistake. But if we think that we've got it and we don't, if we think that the teaching of emptiness is something that we really know and can talk about and keep in mind, if we think that this is the nature of things, then this is a problem. Because we think this, no matter how much we're taught about emptiness, we will just say "well you know I know, I got it already, don't bother me with this." In this way there will be no end to suffering. It is like medicine that turns into poison. This is what happens when we become jaded with the Dharma; we think we know everything when in fact we know nothing.

[00:26:22.20] The example which is often used is that of a stone lying in a riverbed. The river flows over and around it all the time but the stone remains dry. It has no moisture whatsoever because it's just a stone. We can spend our life in an atmosphere of Dharma practice and

teachings and so on and receive none of the qualities. We remain just as dry and dead as that stone lying in the river. This is what happens when we become jaded with the Dharma, when we think we got it and we didn't.

[00:27:32.17] It's also said that the great sinner can be saved by the Dharma but there's no salvation for the one who's become jaded. We may have spent our whole life doing the most horrible things. Then at a certain point it dawns on us just what we've been doing, and we realize that now is the time to take a different direction. Our acknowledgement of our negativity can become a tremendous motivation: we can begin to develop a wonderful fortitude of mind which then moves us to seek a qualified teacher. We then receive teachings from our teacher and this becomes the basis for a very powerful practice. Through this process, we can then ultimately gain liberation and awakening. But the other situation, where we think we know it all already, here the very basis for improvement, the motivation, is just not there. It's just not there as long as we think like that. So the one who is jaded will not be saved by the Dharma, but that's not the case for the great sinner. The great sinner can become a siddha.

[00:31:07.11] So the teachings and the teachers who give these instructions which are meant to bring us face to face with the natural state, often speak about this issue of not being ready. They say to make sure the instruction is not given too early. In order to make sure of this, it becomes necessary for the disciple, for us, to go through some preparatory training. It's very important for us to acquaint our minds with some basic issues of the teachings. We do this by training in the four mind changings: precious human life, impermanence and so on. We should think of these, give some sincere thought to them, and allow them to affect our minds and our way of thinking. We need to gain some experience with spiritual practice through the preliminary practices in order to make sure that when the profound teachings are given that we are in a frame of mind that is mature enough to receive them. Otherwise things can just go so wrong. The teachings tell us this. It's for these reasons that we have just talked about, this is why there is again and again this admonishment: make sure that teachings are not given too early to someone who is not ready. Make sure that the one who receives these teachings is someone who is in the proper frame of mind, someone who is mature enough. Then, of course, there can be amazing effects. Otherwise, it's more than just missing the point. There is a huge opportunity that is lost here.

[00:33:36.28] The issue here is quite simple. It's just a matter of taking things to heart. It's just a matter of meeting the teachings in a very genuine and open way. If we do this then we can't go wrong. We can measure how much this is happening in terms of how able we are to acknowledge impermanence. How freely does this thought come to mind and how able are we to let this be the inspiration for our practice? In many ways this is what distinguishes practitioners from mundane people. A mundane person is someone who never thinks about impermanence, who tries to ignore it as much as possible. A Dharma practitioner lives by the truth of impermanence. It's a continuous recognition and a continuous inspiration. We know that everything we see and experience are all just reminders that nothing here in samsara is reliable, there is nothing here that we can put our trust in except for the practice of the path.

And how long will we have this opportunity, how long will we be able to have the choice that we have now? We don't know how long this life will last. We do know that it's going to end at some point, and most likely this will occur not all that far in the future. So what we do now is so very important, this present moment is so precious. These are the kinds of thoughts that come into the mind of a Dharma practitioner. So in a way we can boil the entire issue down to how we are able to deal with the truth of impermanence.

[00:35:47.29] CNR English: Thinking of impermanence has a lot of power! How can we explain the difference between practitioners and non-practitioners? Those who never, ever think of impermanence are non-practitioners. Those who often think about impermanence are practitioners. It's important to think seriously about impermanence. Everyone who is born, dies. How many years have gone by now; how many more years will we be here? The one thing we can know for sure is that we will die. What causes us to be unsure about this? Worse than this, it's unpredictable when we will die. Completely unpredictable. Yet we often think that we will live for a long time. If somebody says we will live for 80 years, even still we don't like it, we want to hear that we will live countless years, no limit. So thinking of impermanence has a lot of power. It really reduces pride, jealousy, greed, and attachment. Thinking of impermanence is extremely important. Buddha Shakyamuni taught about the importance of thinking of impermanence. An early Tibetan scholar lived in Theravada areas, near Sri Lanka and other places. There, when the sleeping monks would awaken they would be reminded of the facts of impermanence because the preceptors would be chanting: like a dewdrop, like a flash of lightning in the sky, like a candle burning, like a rainbow that fades, and so forth, the eight traditional examples. The chanting of these beautiful examples shows the transient, fleeting nature of everything.

Then the master says: know that all conditioned phenomena are just like that, just like the burning candle, just like the drop of dew in the morning on a blade of grass – it's there now and gone in the next moment, just like a flash of lightning in the sky. This is how all that is the product of causes and conditions is. So this understanding is then a great inspiration – a wake-up call to practitioners. It's something that really inspires and fuels our practice. We follow through with whatever we are practicing. It energizes us and gives us the direction to see the path through to its completion. So Rinpoche wanted to share this with us here because we are all followers of the Buddha, and because we all wish very genuinely to experience the qualities that the Buddha describes. If we want to become successful practitioners, then please remember these issues.

[00:40:05.06] CNR English: Thank you. Time is short. So today I will re-read the hearing transmission of Buddha Shakyamuni.

Rinpoche gives hearing transmission....