

The Treasury of Blessings

Transcription Series

Teachings given by Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche



Part 3: The Mind of Enlightenment – The Root of Omniscience 1

00:01:50.11] Yesterday we began talking about how meditation should be approached within the framework of the three excellences: the excellent preparation, the excellent main part and the excellent conclusion. If we can approach our meditation practice and carry it out by means of these three excellences, then the power of the practice will be very clear and genuine.

So how do we do the practice by means of the three excellences? The excellent preparation involves going for refuge and developing the enlightened mind. We have already talked about going for refuge, which is said to be the root of liberation. It is by taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha that we are enabled to set out on the path that leads to complete liberation. This is how we begin. Our ability to achieve liberation depends on our going for refuge. We come to recognize that we are suffering from delusion, that we are confined to a mode of existence which entails suffering, and we realize that this mode of existence is one that we cannot break free from as we are now. We know we need help from somewhere; we know we need guidance from someone. This is why we go for refuge. This is why going for refuge is the root of liberation.

Going for refuge is followed by developing the enlightened mind: the altruistic attitude, the outlook of universal love and compassion. This enlightened mind which we cultivate is the second part of the excellent preparation. It is said to be the root of omniscience. And how are we to understand this? Actually it's quite easy to understand. It is pointed out in many places

how this is so. For example, in "Entering the Middle Way" Chandrakirti says that the enlightened mind is the cause of the Buddha. This enlightened mind refers to our inherent capacity for awakening. We can all attain enlightenment -- we meaning everyone. All sentient beings have this capacity, our basic constitution is perfectly ready for complete enlightenment. How is this so? Everyone who is a sentient being is also by nature a "knowing being." Having a mind means being cognizant in some way. And having a mind also means being able to feel, not just for oneself, but for others too. All sentient beings experience some kind of affection every once in a while. These qualities of cognition and affection are natural to us. They are intrinsic and we can never lose them, they're part of who we are. When we come to understand this, we begin to understand the implications: we inherently have this Buddha nature, this profound potential, within us.

[00:06:18.22] We come to understand that this is natural to us, that we can never lose these inherent qualities, and that they are qualities that can be developed. They will express themselves more and more if we allow them to do so. This is how we give rise to the mind of enlightenment, the bodhicitta outlook of loving-kindness and compassion. This is a vast view that regards all sentient beings with love and compassion and wishes to free them and establish them all at the level of complete enlightenment. This then is our method for awakening these qualities, sustaining them, and letting them come to fully flourish within the state of enlightenment.

[00:07:20.15] So we have the preparatory aspect which begins with going for refuge, the root of liberation. Then we develop the enlightened mind, we acknowledge our potential and commit ourselves to developing it.

[00:08:07.23] In the Buddhist tradition, there are many great teachings and discourses given by the Buddha and his followers. Still it was never intended that we were to accept these as the truth just because of being scripture or the word of the Buddha. Instead we are encouraged to investigate, inquire, and examine the value of that which is presented. If we do this we will feel a great sense of appreciation from seeing for ourselves the authenticity of the teachings. We can also do this here, when we talk about the qualities of the enlightened mind and how it can be developed and so forth. Upon examination, we can quite easily acknowledge that we do know that this is very natural to us. These qualities of the enlightened mind are not abilities that we need to acquire, they're not something that we first lack and then have to obtain. We couldn't be what we are if we didn't have this "knowing" capability. It's an intrinsic part of us. In the same way, we simply wouldn't be sentient beings, if we were not able to feel for others, if this was something we had to acquire. It's impossible to think of a mind that doesn't include that ability to register others and feel for them and with them.

[00:09:54.21] Looking at things in this way, we can very easily acknowledge that these qualities of insight and of affection, love and compassion are all qualities that are fundamental to us, that are simply part of our basic makeup. The bodhisattvas cultivate these qualities of great insight and great compassion which for them have become completely noble and universal. Whenever anyone works at becoming loving and compassionate and gradually increases these qualities,

this is something that is generally appreciated. Everyone agrees that this is a good way to be. But we need to cultivate these qualities on a larger scale. The bodhisattvas acknowledge that these qualities of love and compassion are truly noble qualities that can and should be developed to be completely universal. We all know what it is to love and to feel compassion, but it's usually very confined. Our capacity for loving and feeling for others is very narrow and rigid, we care for some and not for others. The same is true for our insight, our cognition is very restricted, narrow and confined.

[00:11:36.22] The bodhisattva understands how important it is to allow compassion to grow, to let it become less restricted. If we can increase our ability to meet and relate to everyone with love and compassion, then this will set us on the path that leads toward a flourishing of these qualities. These qualities of love, compassion and wisdom, which are truly perfect, lead to the level of complete enlightenment, the attainment of a Buddha. Buddhahood is limitless wisdom and limitless love and compassion. So letting these qualities unfold is the path to enlightenment. This is what the bodhisattva understands, and in this way mahadhyana and mahakaruna are the heart of the bodhisattva teachings. Recognize the importance of these qualities, of wisdom and compassion, and then let them flourish.

[00:13:02.22] Right now we are very rigid and very narrow in our way of being. We restrict these qualities of wisdom and compassion tremendously. When we care for someone and want to take care of them, there's still a very selfish motivation somewhere in our mind as well. There's always a sense of what should be the case and what shouldn't from our selfish perspective. We have certain reasons for loving, there's something we think or feel that makes it such that we love a particular person and not another. This isn't how it is for a bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas are naturally loving and compassionate toward everyone, no matter how a person is or how a person behaves. It makes no difference because what is worthwhile to a bodhisattva is to see others flourish. The question of their own happiness, progress, well-being and so on has become completely irrelevant. The bodhisattva flourishes with the flourishing of others. This is so different from our own narrow perspective where what really matters first and foremost is how it's going for us. Then based on that we can be nice to others. This is not how it is for a bodhisattva. The whole perspective is very dramatically different. For us, if someone treats us well, we will want to treat them well in return. When we treat someone well, they become affected and register this love and affection that we have given. It usually makes them feel good and there's the possibility that they will become a more loving and compassionate individual themselves.

[00:15:27.01] So whenever there is love and compassion there is the potential for tremendous impact. When we relate to others with this frame of mind, they become affected, they become more loving and compassionate themselves. Then they in turn act in this kind of way towards others. There's the possibility of setting into motion an ultimately infinite chain of events just by this one little gesture.

But so often when we relate to others in this way, we have very clear ideas about why this particular situation calls for a sense of love and compassion. Perhaps it's some religious ideas that we have in mind; we think that if others have treated us well, then we too should be kind. Religion teaches us that we should be aware of cause and effect, and if we respond by not being kind and pleasant then we wouldn't be paying attention to the workings of cause and effect. We think we should be different, we should be better than that. So here we have given ourselves over to some sort of religious reason for being loving and compassionate in a particular situation. Or perhaps our reason for applying loving-kindness is because of our observation of the world, because of our knowing that if we don't, then this person will be disappointed or perhaps even get angry. Maybe this person has done something for us and if we don't show our appreciation, then they might get angry. Why is this? Well, that's how I am myself. If I do something for others, I expect at least that they'll say thank you. And if they don't, I get disappointed, if not angry. Therefore, to make sure that everything runs smoothly, I choose to be loving, I choose to be caring, and so on.

[00:17:35.15] So often there's this kind of scheming present in our mind when we are expressing these qualities of love and compassion. This means that our ability to love and to care is tremendously narrow and confined. We can easily see that this is quite contrary to the kind of love that bodhisattvas feel and the kind of compassion that they act on. For them there's no virtue greater than love and no evil greater than anger. Love and compassion have this capacity for becoming completely all-embracing and will lead right to the level of complete enlightenment. For a bodhisattva, of course, there's no justification or effort required for being loving and compassionate, it's just comes naturally. This is what a bodhisattva is made of: love and compassion. This is what brings enlightenment.

[00:19:02.12] As we practice the teachings, these qualities of insight, love and compassion are the qualities that we rely on and allow to flourish. This is what Buddhist practice is about, of course. The studies that we go through as Buddhists are very focused on these teachings, and they should be. As we learn and reflect we need to make sure that we understand very well about these important qualities of insight, wisdom, love and compassion. We need to understand, for example, that there are three categories of compassion. Compassion that focuses on persons, compassion that focuses on phenomena, and finally compassion that focuses beyond reference point. Insight is also three-fold. There's insight that arises through listening, insight that arises through reflecting, and insight that arises through meditation practice. We need to concern ourselves with these different categories of compassion and wisdom, we should study the implications and issues. We should understand why these principles have been enumerated. What is distinctive about them, how do they relate to each other and so on? This is what we should focus our studies on, because this is what is essential for our practice.

[00:20:49.10] When we learn about insight, love and compassion, we are studying, reflecting on and practicing something which is universally acknowledged as good and noble. This is true for people who follow a religious path, a spiritual teaching, but it's also for people who have no

particular religious or spiritual conviction. In the world in general it's widely acknowledged that these qualities of insight and love are good and worthwhile qualities. Rinpoche mentioned before that our love and compassion are very narrow and confined, in that it's only for some people that we show love and compassion and all the while we keep a selfish motivation. On the other hand it's interesting to see that when someone becomes less selfish, less keen on seeing themselves prevail, then everyone appreciates them. We all want so much acknowledgement. We want so much to be respected and treated well, and to get the things that we want to get. These things are more likely to happen, if we would just become less interested in ourselves, if we could become more intent on the well-being of others, more genuinely loving and compassionate, no matter who we are with. This is something that everyone notices, and not only do they notice, they also respond. They treat this kind of perfect person with a lot of respect. The world holds such people in very high esteem. This is just an interesting fact to keep in mind as well.

[00:23:36.21] So as we learn about love, compassion and insight, we are, as we said before, studying something which everyone is interested in and everyone agrees is good. This is something that everyone also feels comfortable talking about and having an opinion about. But what do we mean exactly when we say love and compassion and what do we mean when we say insight or wisdom? In religious traditions these words are heard over and over. But what is meant by them? It may differ quite widely. So it's important that we come to understand what they mean in Buddhism. So, what is love and compassion in Buddhism? We have already said there are three basic categories of love and compassion: taking sentient beings as the reference point, taking mere phenomena as the reference point, and then taking no reference point and still there is love and compassion. This third quality, compassion beyond reference point, is considered something tremendously valuable. It is the culmination of love and compassion in Buddhism, yet it holds no reference point. It's questionable if you will find this teaching anywhere but in the Buddha-dharma: compassion comes to culminate in a state that is truly and perfectly compassionate, and yet holds no reference point. This is what is explained in the Buddhist teachings. And it is explained continuously and with great elaboration. If compassion hasn't become genuine and universal, then it's not perfect compassion, according to Buddhism. If compassion is only compassion for some, and not for everyone, then it's not Buddhist compassion. Genuine compassion has to be universal and it must not be confined to only some.

[00:25:53.03] Insight and wisdom are also words that philosophies, religious traditions and people in general like to talk about, and think of as something worthy and good. But Buddhism has a distinctive meaning and understanding when we talk about insight and wisdom. It's often emphasized that true wisdom also has no reference point, that it's non-conceptual. With no thought in the mind, everything is known perfectly, clearly and distinctly. Everything is seen and understood without any thought forming in the mind. This is the non-conceptual wisdom that the Buddha teaches. This is the culmination of insight, the culmination of wisdom. It's again questionable if you will find this teaching anywhere other than in the Buddha-dharma. Whenever we find things that are unique to the Buddhist teachings, then we have found the

special features of the Buddha-dharma. Whenever we can understand that here there's something that is unique and not found elsewhere, we should make note of them.

[00:27:19.29] We are speaking about love and compassion here in the context of the excellent preparation in terms of our practice session. We have three excellences: the excellent preparation, the main part and the conclusion. The excellent preparation has these two aspects: going for refuge and then developing the mind of enlightenment. Developing the mind of enlightenment is basically giving rise to a compassionate outlook which also involves insight, because the more compassionate the mind becomes, the more ready it is to know. The mind opens with compassion and as a result it becomes more brilliant. That's why the great master of India, Chandrakirti, begins his discourse on the Middle Way by paying homage to compassion. The great Middle Way really comes down to the study of these great qualities. It culminates with an understanding of the intrinsic nature beyond all conceptual constructs. This profound emptiness is non-conceptual wisdom. It's the same way as when we receive instructions and practice on the path of Mahamudra and the Great Perfection, it's this same quality that is highlighted.

[00:29:04.01] Now in Chandrakirti's teaching on the Middle Way, he pays homage to compassion. Of all the things and beings that he could choose to pay homage to, he chooses to bow to compassion first of all. Why is this? He says it's because compassion is the mother of the Buddha. The Buddha is born from compassion. This compassionate, non-dual mind of bodhicitta is where the Buddha manifests, and so I, Chandrakirti, choose, of all things that I could possibly pay homage to, first of all pay homage to compassion. That is a very reasonable way to begin, because this is where