

The Treasury of Blessings

Transcription Series

Teachings given by Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche



Part 8: The Main Part Free from Reference Point

[00:00:47.07] Once we have entered the gate of the Dharma, then there are certain things we ought to do as Dharma practitioners, things that now become our path and our training. We have talked about how practice begins with taking refuge. When we have a practice session, regardless of what type of practice we do, it always begins with going for refuge and acknowledging this as the root of liberation.

All three vehicles were transmitted to and spread throughout Tibet. Because of this, one first receives vows for individual liberation. There's a certain commitment that comes with becoming a Buddhist, and this can be in terms of the basic vows for individual liberation where one may become an ordained monk or nun. Or one can also become a lay practitioner who then observes the commitments associated with that. Then follows the bodhisattva training which is considered tremendously important. Developing the mind of enlightenment and entering into the activities of the bodhisattvas for the welfare of sentient beings is something that was very central to the Buddhist practices that were transmitted and upheld in Tibet. And then, of course, on top of that the Vajrayana teachings were transmitted and came to flourish in Tibet.

[00:03:08.03] When we become Buddhist practitioners receiving the vows for individual liberation, then basically what we do is go for refuge. We take refuge in the three jewels. Among the three jewels, the one we come to relate to in an immediate and direct way, the one that we really feel the qualities of from the beginning, is the jewel of the Dharma, the teachings. Having

become Buddhists, having committed ourselves to the path of the Buddha, we then listen to the teachings of the Buddha, try to understand clearly, and then apply them. This is our central practice after we enter the gate of the Dharma. Then in terms of the vows and commitments that we maintain, we seek to pursue what is virtuous and avoid what is evil and negative. This is in terms of conduct and activity of body, speech and mind, and is necessary for any Buddhist at any level of the teachings. It's always our obligation to avoid the ten negative actions and to do what we can to cultivate the ten positive and virtuous actions. In this way we keep our commitments in all contexts of practice. In terms of the fundamental teachings, we emphasize making sure that we do not harm others: that what we think of, what we say, and what we do physically with our body is not harmful and painful for others. This is our obligation, this is our commitment. Then on top of that, we try to do all that we can to help and benefit others. This is the central commitment that comes with the Mahayana path of the bodhisattva. Of course, we try all we can to make sure that we don't harm anyone, but now this is no longer sufficient. On top of that we need to do all that we possibly can to help assist and benefit others. So here comes the development of the mind of enlightenment. This is bodhisattva training, cultivating the enlightened perspective, wishing for everyone to be free from suffering and to achieve liberation and enlightenment, and then doing all that one can to see that this happens. This entails the six paramitas, of being disciplined and generous and so on. And it entails the four means of magnetizing, as it is described in the teachings of the bodhisattvas.

[00:06:55.09] This is a brief explanation of the commitment of the Shravaka teaching, as well as the Mahayana and the bodhisattva commitment. In Tibet all three vehicles were transmitted, upheld and combined in terms of the practice. It is the foundation of Buddhist practice that we maintain these commitments.

In Tibet, the main emphasis of the actual meditation practice is on the Tantric teachings. When it comes to studies, learning and reflection, it is the general Sutrayana which is studied, discussed and so forth. But when it comes to practice, then it is more in the direction of the Vajrayana that we find the emphasis. This is for a good reason. Vajrayana practice is profound and extremely effective. Evidence of this is found in the innumerable many who were able to attain true accomplishment through Vajrayana practice. Not over a long sequence of lifetimes, but in just a single life, by means of just one body, they were able to achieve the full result. So the extraordinary, amazing power of the Vajrayana teachings is the reason why there is this emphasis when it comes to practice. When we take a look at the practice that we do here in the Treasury of Blessings, we can see that the main part of the practice makes use of the elements of Vajrayana practice. Here we have development and visualization, we have recitation, and then we have the completion stage as well.

[00:09:18.10] So we begin with the excellent preparation, which is refuge and developing the enlightened mind. Then follows the main part of practice, which is called the excellent main part, free from reference point. It encompasses all that is associated with development stage, recitation and completion. We can also say, as we did yesterday, that the main part of practice

is the cultivation and experience of insight and compassion, the undivided nature of insight and compassion. This is the main part free from reference.

[00:10:00.20] Once we have completed the main part, then the conclusion is in terms of dedication and making aspirations. Dedication can be done by means of wakefulness, by means of insight, and through a good heart. But this goodness needs to be given direction, we need to make the virtue inexhaustible through dedication, so we have the excellent conclusion, which is dedication. This is the basic framework for any authentic practice.

[00:10:57.08] When we meditate, our posture, what we do with our body, is important. This is important in all contexts of Buddhist meditation practice, but in particular in the Vajrayana. What happens to the body and how we treat the body is so important here. So when we sit in the meditation session, we need to assume a particular posture. There is a particular posture that is conducive to the experience of shamatha and vipashyana. We should make use of these helpers, these conducive circumstances that come with the way that we treat the body. In this context we should sit upright. And at the same time that we sit with a straight back, we should also be very comfortable and relaxed. This is a key point because it facilitates the flow of the subtle energies in the subtle body. When this happens, there is a particular effect on the mind. The mind settles and becomes more clear and buoyant. Therefore, we should make sure that we rely on these key points of the body, particularly in the Vajrayana teachings. The way that one regards the body is very different in the Vajrayana context. In the general teachings the body is seen as an aggregate that supports suffering. But in the Vajrayana it is very different. Here it is called the vajra arrangement. The vajra assembly refers to the body and in this body are channels. In these channels flow energies and their essences as well. These are called nadi, prana and bindu.

The way that the subtle body appears and functions is described in great detail. It is taught in the tantras, in the Hevajra Tantra, the Kalachakra and so on, and it is elaborated on and explained in great detail. For example, in the great treatise called "The Profound Inner Meaning," the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, explains with great detail the framework and functions of the subtle body. In a sense the subtle body is not something special because there is a pure and an impure aspect to it. So in the context of an ordinary sentient being, the subtle body is actually the support for the three negative emotions: craving, aggression and ignorance. They are supported by channels, energies and essences. But in the pure aspect they become the three kayas, the three bodies of enlightenment. This is the same with the three meditation experiences that occur when we train: we may feel bliss, we may feel very clear, or we may feel non-thought, non-conceptuality. There's nothing particularly special about them, because in their impure aspect, they are just the seeds of the three negative emotions, but once we recognize their pure aspect, they manifest as the support for the three kayas.

[00:15:32.10] In the tantric context, we try to make good use of the body and make sure that we let the body be in a way that is conducive to practice. The way that we make use of this vajra

arrangement, the body, is by sitting upright, with a straight back but very loose and comfortable.

[00:17:14.09] When we have a meditation session, we may have other experiences.

[00:17:42.01] Just as is the case with the subtle body, these meditation experiences in their ordinary, impure condition are just a support for the three poisons. But the pure aspect is nothing other than the display of the three kayas. This is the real key point here. If there is an impure aspect, then impure channels, winds and essences, and experiences will unfold in an impure way as well. But there's also the possibility of complete purity, and once this is acknowledged, then these otherwise quite neutral elements can manifest as the three kayas.

So in the Vajrayana, the body is important. The great wisdom abides in the body. As it is said, it is not of the body, but it is there, present in the body.

[00:19:22.28] These are a set of clarifications that surround a statement made by the great siddha of India. They are instructions that come in the lineage of the siddhas, a transmission of the wisdom of the siddhas that we receive here in the form of instruction. Saraha says, "Completely abandoning the thinker and what is thought of, remain like a thought-free child. If you apply yourself to the guru's words and endeavor, the co-emergent will dawn without a doubt." This statement of Saraha's is the core of the instructions that Mipham Rinpoche then passes on here. They entail instruction for opening the eggshell of ignorance, and instruction for cutting through the web of existence. The teaching is: "When your attention is allowed to settle naturally, without thinking of anything, and you maintain constant mindfulness in that state, you experience a neutral and indifferent state of mind that is vacant and blank." It continues, "As long as an insight of decisive knowing is not present, this is exactly what masters call unknowing."

So when we sit in this sort of equipoise, we arrive in a state that is nothing really whatsoever. It cannot be determined in any way, it cannot be called anything that would really capture what this is. It's just this open and completely unoccupied state of mind. This vacuous, unoccupied state of empty mind is, according to some masters, nothing other than ignorance. That's what this state is. Nonetheless, this is our method. Our method is to let be in that way. Our method is to simply let be in what we call a flow of naturalness.

This is according to the special instructions. Here when we talk about shamatha or the abidance of the mind, dhyana, we are referring to the dhyana of the flow of naturalness. This is somewhat different from how we usually talk about shamatha. This is because we are not keeping a focus in mind as we engage in shamatha, we're not keeping a certain focal point that we need to be attentive of. Nor are we practicing shamatha which is free from all reference points. In both of these cases we are somehow directing the mind – either we keep a reference, or we let the mind be free of reference points. But here we don't do anything, we just let the mind flow. We don't keep anything in mind. We don't occupy the mind. We just let it be. Again,

remember Saraha's words: "Be like a little baby. Just like a mindless baby, completely abandoning the thinker and what is thought of. Remain like a thought-free child." This is the method, it's nothing else than a method.

[00:23:22.00] Whenever we say something is a method, we are saying that there's something we need to achieve by applying the method. Methods are for something, and this is also the case here. We do this, we apply the method, in order to achieve something. In this way there's always a dependency between the method and the outcome of the method. We find this in so many contexts of the teachings: the relative truth and the ultimate truth, means and knowledge, and so forth. We should rely on the two aspects of means and knowledge. We should be able to make use of methods skillfully and without separating them entirely from the insight that they are meant to produce. Making skillful use of the combination of means and knowledge goes throughout the Buddhist teachings; this is what we seek to achieve. We acknowledge the methods we have at our disposal, make use of them, and then we gain the result.

There are lots of methods to choose from. So, of course, it becomes an objective then to find the most effective method. And what is the most effective method? It's the one that can give us a really profound result without too much hardship. One that can be applied easily, quickly, and that has a tremendous result. This would be the definition of an excellent method.

Here we receive the method according to the king of siddhas, Saraha. This is the advice of the lineage of siddhas. Hundred siddhas came together and this is what they want to tell us – If you want to recognize the natural state of the mind, do it this way, this is the way to do it. And how is this done? Well, let be like a little mindless child. Forget about something to think of and forget about yourself. Just let be like a little child. This is the method.

And then Sahara continues, he doesn't stop there. He says, "Completely, the thinker and what is thought of, remain like a thought-free child. If you apply yourself to the guru's words and endeavor, the co-emergent will dawn without a doubt." So you apply this method, he is saying, and then you rely on the lineage transmission: it could be the mind-transmission, it could be the symbolic transmission, or it could be the transmission through instruction. Before we have talked about how the nature of mind can be recognized simply through the master directing his or her attention towards the disciple who is ready to receive the blessing, that's all that's required. At other times it's a symbol, a sign that is given, and this brings about the recognition. Or otherwise it's through these simple, profound instructions. But what Saraha says is, whichever of these it may be, if you make use of this method, and then rely on the lineage, there's no doubt whatsoever that the co-emergent will dawn.