

Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness

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Introduction

In the mahayana tradition (1) we experience a sense of gentleness toward ourselves, and a sense of friendliness to others begins to arise. That friendliness or compassion is known in Tibetan as *nyingje*, which literally means "noble heart." We are willing to commit ourselves to working with all sentient beings. But before we actually launch into that project, we first need a lot of training.

The obstacle to becoming a mahayanist is not having enough sympathy for others and for oneself--that is the basic point. And that problem can be dealt with by practical training, which is known as *lojong* practice, "training the mind." That training gives us a path, a way to work with our crude and literal and raw and rugged styles, a way to become good mahayanists. Ignorant or stupid students of the mahayana sometimes think that they have to glorify themselves; they want to become leaders or guides. We have a technique or practice for overcoming that problem. That practice is the development of humility, which is connected with training the mind.

The basic mahayana vision is to work for the benefit of others and create a situation that will benefit others. Therefore, you take the attitude that you are willing to dedicate yourself to others. When you take that attitude, you begin to realize that others are more important than yourself. Because of that vision of mahayana, because you adopt that attitude, and because you actually find that others are more important--with all three of those together, you develop the mahayana practice of training the mind.

Hinayana discipline is fundamentally one of taming the mind. By working with the various forms of unmindfulness, we begin to become thorough and precise, and our discipline becomes good. When we are thoroughly tamed by the practice of *shamatha* discipline, or mindfulness practice, as well as trained by *vipashyana*, or awareness, in how to hear the teachings, we begin to develop a complete understanding of the *dharma*. After that, we also begin to develop a complete understanding of how, in our particular state of being tamed, we can relate with others.

In the mahayana we talk more in terms of training the mind. That is the next step. The mind is already tamed, therefore it can be trained. In other words, we have been able to domesticate our mind by practicing hinayana discipline according to the principles of the *buddhadharma*. Having domesticated our mind, then we can use it further. It's like the story of capturing a wild cow in the old days. Having captured the cow, having domesticated it, you find that the cow becomes completely willing to relate with its tamers. In fact, the cow likes being domesticated. So at this point the cow is part of our household. Once upon a time it wasn't that way--I'm sure cows were wild and ferocious before we domesticated them.

Training the mind is known as *lojong* in Tibetan: *lo* means "intelligence," "mind," "that which can perceive things"; *jong* means "training" or "processing." The teachings of *lojong* consist of several

steps or points of mahayana discipline. The basic discipline of mind training or lojong is a sevenfold cleaning or processing of one's mind.

This book is based on the basic Kadampa text, The Root Text of the Seven Points of Training the Mind, and on the commentary by Jamgon Kongtrul. In Tibetan the commentary is called Changchup Shunglam. Shung is the word used for "government" and also for "main body." So shung means "main governing body." For instance, we could call the Tibetan government po shung--po meaning "Tibet," shung meaning "government." The government that is supposed to run a country is a wide administration rather than a narrow administration: it takes care of the country, the economics, politics, and domestic situations. Shung is actually the working basis, the main working stream. Lam means "path." So shunglam is a general highway, so to speak, a basic process of working toward enlightenment. In other words, it is the mahayana approach. It is the highway that everybody goes on, a wide way, extraordinarily wide and extraordinarily open. Chanchup means "enlightenment," shung means "wide" or "basic," and lam means "path." So the title of the commentary is The Basic Path Toward Enlightenment.

The main text is based on Atisha's teachings on lojong and comes from the Kadam school of Tibetan Buddhism, which developed around the time of Marpa and Milarepa, when Tibetan monasticism had begun to take place and become deep-rooted. The Kagyupas received these instructions on the proper practice of mahayana Buddhism through Gampopa, who studied with Milarepa as well as with Kadam teachers. There is what is known as the contemplative Kadam school and the intellectual Kadam school. What we are doing here is related to the Kadam school's contemplative tradition. The Gelukpas specialized in dialectics and took a more philosophical approach to understanding the Kadam tradition.

The word kadam has an interesting meaning for us. Ka means "command," as when a general gives a pep talk to his or her troops or a king gives a command to his ministers. Or we could say "Logos," or "word," as in the Christian tradition: "In the beginning was the Word." That kind of Word is a fundamental sacred command, the first that was uttered at all! In this case, ka refers to a sense of absolute truth and a sense of practicality or workability from the individual's point of view. Dam is "oral teaching," "personal teaching," that is, a manual on how to handle our life properly. So ka and dam mixed together means that all the ka, all the commands or messages, are regarded as practical and workable oral teachings. They are regarded as a practical working basis for students who are involved with contemplative disciplines. That is the basic meaning of kadam.

The few lists presented here are very simple ones, nothing particularly philosophical. It is purely what one of the great Kagyu teachers regarded as a "grandmother's fingertip." When a grandmother says, "This is the place where I used to go and pick corn, collect wild vegetables," she usually uses her finger rather than writing on paper or using a map. So it is a grandmother's approach at this point.

In my own case, having studied philosophy a lot, the first time Jamgon Kongtrul suggested that I read and study this book, Changchup Shunglam, I was relieved that Buddhism was so simple and that you could actually do something about it. You can actually practice. You can just follow the book and do as it says, which is extraordinarily powerful and such a relief. And that sense of simplicity still continues. It is so precious and so direct. I do not know what kind of words to use to describe it. It is somewhat rugged, but at the same time it is so soothing to read such writing. That is one of the characteristics of Jamgon Kongtrul--he can change his tone completely, as if he were a different author altogether. Whenever he writes on a particular subject,

he changes his approach accordingly, and his basic awareness to relate with the audience becomes entirely different.

Jamgon Kongtrul's commentary on the Kadampa slogans is one of the best books I studied in the early stages of my monastic kick. I was going to become a simple little monk. I was going to study these things and become a good little Buddhist and a contemplative-type person. Such a thread still holds throughout my life. In spite of complications in my life and organizational problems, I still feel that I am basically a simple, romantic Buddhist who has immense feeling toward the teachers and the teaching.

What has been said is a drop of golden liquid. Each time you read such a book it confirms again and again that there is something about it which makes everything very simple and direct. That makes me immensely happy. I sleep well, too. There is a hard-edged quality of cutting down preconceptions and other ego battles that might be involved in presenting the teaching. But at the same time there is always a soft spot of devotion and simplicity in mahayana Buddhism which you can never forget. That is very important. I am not particularly trying to be dramatic. If it comes through that way, it's too bad. But I really do feel extraordinarily positive about Jamgon Kongtrul and his approach to this teaching.

Point One

The Preliminaries, Which Are a Basis for Dharma Practice

1 First, train in the preliminaries.

In practicing the slogans and in your daily life, you should maintain an awareness of [1] the preciousness of human life and the particular good fortune of life in an environment in which you can hear the teachings of buddhadharma; [2] the reality of death, that it comes suddenly and without warning; [3] the entrapment of karma--that whatever you do, whether virtuous or not, only further entraps you in the chain of cause and effect; and [4] the intensity and inevitability of suffering for yourself and for all sentient beings. This is called "taking an attitude of the four reminders."

With that attitude as a base, you should call upon your guru with devotion, inviting into yourself the atmosphere of sanity inspired by his or her example, and vowing to cut the roots of further ignorance and suffering. This ties in very closely with the notion of maitri, or loving-kindness. In the traditional analogy of one's spiritual path, the only pure loving object seems to be somebody who can show you the path. You could have a loving relationship with your parents, relatives, and so forth, but there are still problems with that: your neurosis goes along with it. A pure love affair can only take place with one's teacher. So that ideal sympathetic object is used as a starting point, a way of developing a relationship beyond your own neurosis. Particularly in the mahayana, you relate to the teacher as someone who cheers you up from depression and brings you down from excitement, a kind of moderator principle. The teacher is regarded as important from that point of view.

This slogan establishes the contrast between samsara--the epitome of pain, imprisonment, and insanity--and the root guru--the embodiment of openness, freedom, and sanity--as the fundamental basis for all practice. As such, it is heavily influenced by the vajrayana tradition.

Point Two

The Main Practice, Which is Training in Bodhichitta

Ultimate and Relative Bodhichitta

Ultimate Bodhichitta and the Paramita of Generosity

The ultimate or absolute bodhichitta principle is based on developing the paramita of generosity, which is symbolized by a wish-fulfilling jewel. The Tibetan word for generosity, jinpa, means "giving," "opening," or "parting." So the notion of generosity means not holding back but giving constantly. Generosity is self-existing openness, complete openness. You are no longer subject to cultivating your own scheme or project. And the best way to open yourself up is to make friends with yourself and with others.

Traditionally, there are three types of generosity. The first one is ordinary generosity, giving material goods or providing comfortable situations for others. The second one is the gift of fearlessness. You reassure others and teach them that they don't have to feel completely tormented and freaked out about their existence. You help them to see that there is basic goodness and spiritual practice, that there is a way for them to sustain their lives. That is the gift of fearlessness. The third type of generosity is the gift of dharma. You show others that there is a path that consists of discipline, meditation, and intellect or knowledge. Through all three types of generosity, you can open up other people's minds. In that way their closedness, wretchedness, and small thinking can be turned into a larger vision.

That is the basic vision of mahayana altogether: to let people think bigger, think greater. We can afford to open ourselves and join the rest of the world with a sense of tremendous generosity, tremendous goodness, and tremendous richness. The more we give, the more we gain--although what we might gain should not be our reason for giving. Rather, the more we give, the more we are inspired to give constantly. And the gaining process happens naturally, automatically, always.

The opposite of generosity is stinginess, holding back--having a poverty mentality, basically speaking. The basic principle of the ultimate bodhichitta slogans is to rest in the eighth consciousness, or alaya, and not follow our discursive thoughts. Alaya is a Sanskrit word meaning "basis," or sometimes "abode" or "home," as in Himalaya, "abode of snow." So it has that idea of a vast range. It is the fundamental state of consciousness, before it is divided into "I" and "other," or into the various emotions. It is the basic ground where things are processed, where things exist. In order to rest in the nature of alaya, you need to go beyond your poverty attitude and realize that your alaya is as good as anyone else's alaya. You have a sense of richness and self-sufficiency. You can do it, and you can afford to give out as well. And the ultimate bodhichitta slogans [slogans 2-6] are the basic points of reference through which we are going to familiarize ourselves with ultimate bodhichitta.

Ultimate bodhichitta is similar to the absolute shunyata principle. And whenever there is the absolute shunyata principle, we have to have a basic understanding of absolute compassion at the same time. Shunyata literally means "openness" or "emptiness." Shunyata is basically understanding nonexistence. When you begin realizing nonexistence, then you can afford to be more compassionate, more giving. A problem is that usually we would like to hold on to our territory and fixate on that particular ground. Once we begin to fixate on that ground, we have no way

to give. Understanding shunyata means that we begin to realize that there is no ground to get, that we are ultimately free, nonaggressive, open. We realize that we are actually nonexistent ourselves. We are not--no, rather. (1) Then we can give. We have lots to gain and nothing to lose at that point. It is very basic.

Compassion is based on some sense of "soft spot" in us. It is as if we had a pimple on our body that was very sore--so sore that we do not want to rub it or scratch it. During our shower we do not want to rub too much soap over it because it hurts. There is a sore point or soft spot which happens to be painful to rub, painful to put hot or cold water over.

That sore spot on our body is an analogy for compassion. Why? Because even in the midst of immense aggression, insensitivity in our life, or laziness, we always have a soft spot, some point we can cultivate--or at least not bruise. Every human being has that kind of basic sore spot, including animals. Whether we are crazy, dull, aggressive, ego-tripping, whatever we might be, there is still that sore spot taking place in us. An open wound, which might be a more vivid analogy, is always there. That open wound is usually very inconvenient and problematic. We don't like it. We would like to be tough. We would like to fight, to come out strong, so we do not have to defend any aspect of ourselves. We would like to attack our enemy on the spot, single-handedly. We would like to lay our trips on everybody completely and properly, so that we have nothing to hide. That way, if somebody decides to hit us back, we are not wounded. And hopefully, nobody will hit us on that sore spot, that wound that exists in us. Our basic makeup, the basic constituents of our mind, are based on passion and compassion at the same time. But however confused we might be, however much of a cosmic monster we might be, still there is an open wound or sore spot in us always. There always will be a sore spot.

Sometimes people translate that sore spot or open wound as "religious conviction" or "mystical experience." But let us give that up. It has nothing to do with Buddhism, nothing to do with Christianity, and moreover, nothing to do with anything else at all. It is just an open wound, a very simple open wound. That is very nice--at least we are accessible somewhere. We are not completely covered with a suit of armor all the time. We have a sore spot somewhere. Such a relief! Thank earth!

Because of that particular sore spot, even if we are a cosmic monster--Mussolini, Mao Tse-tung, or Hitler--we can still fall in love. We can still appreciate beauty, art, poetry, or music. The rest of us could be covered with iron cast shields, but some sore spot always exists in us, which is fantastic. That sore spot is known as embryonic compassion, potential compassion. At least we have some kind of gap, some discrepancy in our state of being which allows basic sanity to shine through.

Our level of sanity could be very primitive. Our sore spot could be just purely the love of tortillas or the love of curries. But that's good enough. We have some kind of opening. It doesn't matter what it is love of as long as there is a sore spot, an open wound. That's good. That is where all the germs could get in and begin to impregnate and take possession of us and influence our system. And that is precisely how the compassionate attitude supposedly takes place.

Not only that, but there is also an inner wound, which is called tathagatagarbha, or buddha nature. Tathagatagarbha is like a heart that is sliced and bruised by wisdom and compassion. When the external wound and the internal wound begin to meet and communicate, then we begin to

realize that our whole being is made out of one complete sore spot altogether, which is called "bodhisattva fever." That vulnerability is compassion. We really have no way to defend ourselves anymore at all. A gigantic cosmic wound is all over the place--an inward wound and an external wound at the same time. Both are sensitive to cold air, hot air, and little disturbances of atmosphere which begin to affect us both inwardly and outwardly. It is the living flame of love, if you would like to call it that. But we should be very careful what we say about love. What is love? Do we know love? It is a vague word. In this case we are not even calling it love. Nobody before puberty would have any sense of sexuality or of love affairs. Likewise, since we haven't broken through to understand what our soft spot is all about, we cannot talk about love, we can only talk about passion. It sounds fantastic, but it actually doesn't say as much as love, which is very heavy. Compassion is a kind of passion, com-passion, which is easy to work with.

There is a slit in our skin, a wound. It's very harsh treatment, in some sense; but on the other hand, it's very gentle. The intention is gentle, but the practice is very harsh. By combining the intention and the practice, you are being "harshed," and also you are being "gentled," so to speak--both together. That makes you into a bodhisattva. You have to go through that kind of process. You have to jump into the blender. It is necessary for you to do that. Just jump into the blender and work with it. Then you will begin to feel that you are swimming in the blender. You might even enjoy it a little bit, after you have been processed. So an actual understanding of ultimate bodhichitta only comes from compassion. In other words, a purely logical, professional, or scientific conclusion doesn't bring you to that. The five ultimate bodhichitta slogans are steps toward a compassionate approach.

A lot of you seemingly, very shockingly, are not particularly compassionate. You are not saving your grandma from drowning and you are not saving your pet dog from getting killed. Therefore, we have to go through this subject of compassion. Compassion is a very, very large subject, an extraordinarily large subject, which includes how to be compassionate. And actually, ultimate bodhichitta is preparation for relative bodhichitta. Before we cultivate compassion, we first need to understand how to be properly. How to love your grandma or how to love your flea or your mosquito--that comes later. The relative aspect of compassion comes much later. If we do not have an understanding of ultimate bodhichitta, then we do not have any understanding of the actual working basis of being compassionate and kind to somebody. We might just join the Red Cross and make nuisances of ourselves and create further garbage.

According to the mahayana tradition, we are told that we can actually arouse twofold bodhichitta: relative bodhichitta and ultimate bodhichitta. We could arouse both of them. Then, having aroused bodhichitta, we can continue further and practice according to the bodhisattva's example. We can be active bodhisattvas.

In order to arouse absolute or ultimate bodhichitta, we have to join shamatha and vipashyana together. Having developed the basic precision of shamatha and the total awareness of vipashyana, we put them together so that they cover the whole of our existence--our behavior patterns and our daily life--everything. In that way, in both meditation and postmeditation practice, mindfulness and awareness are happening simultaneously, all the time. Whether we are sleeping or awake, eating or wandering, precision and awareness are taking place all the time. That is quite a delightful experience.

Beyond that delight, we also tend to develop a sense of friendliness to everything. The early level of irritation and aggression has been

processed through, so to speak, by mindfulness and awareness. There is instead a notion of basic goodness, which is described in the Kadam texts as the natural virtue of alaya. This is an important point for us to understand. Alaya is the fundamental state of existence, or consciousness, before it is divided into "I" and "other," or into the various emotions. It is the basic ground where things are processed, where things exist. And its basic state, or natural style, is goodness. It is very benevolent. There is a basic state of existence that is fundamentally good and that we can rely on. There is room to relax, room to open ourselves up. We can make friends with ourselves and with others. That is fundamental virtue or basic goodness, and it is the basis of the possibility of absolute bodhichitta.

Once we have been inspired by the precision of shamatha and the wakefulness of vipashyana, we find that there is room, which gives us the possibility of total naivete, in the positive sense. The Tibetan for naivete is pak-yang, which means "carefree" or "let loose." We can be carefree with our basic goodness. We do not have to scrutinize or investigate wholeheartedly to make sure that there are no mosquitoes or eggs inside our alaya. The basic goodness of alaya can be cultivated and connected with quite naturally, in a pak-yang way. We can develop a sense of relaxation and release from torment--from this-and-that altogether.

Relative Bodhichitta and the Paramita of Discipline

That brings us to the next stage. Again, instead of remaining at a theoretical, conceptual level alone, we return to the most practical level. In the mahayana our main concern is how to awaken ourselves. We begin to realize that we are not as dangerous as we had thought. We develop some notion of kindness, or maitri, and having developed maitri we begin to switch into karuna, or compassion.

The development of relative bodhichitta is connected with the paramita of discipline. It has been said that if you don't have discipline, it is like trying to walk without any legs. You cannot attain liberation without discipline. Discipline in Tibetan is tsultrim: tsul means "proper," and trim means "discipline" or "obeying the rules," literally speaking. So trim could be translated as "rule" or "justice." The basic notion of tsultrim goes beyond giving alone; it means having good conduct. It also means having some sense of passionlessness and nonterritoriality. All of that is very much connected with relative bodhichitta.

Relative bodhichitta comes from the simple and basic experience of realizing that you could have a tender heart in any situation. Even the most vicious animals have a tender heart in taking care of their young, or for that matter, in taking care of themselves. From our basic training in shamatha-vipashyana, we begin to realize our basic goodness and to let go with that. We begin to rest in the nature of alaya--not caring and being very naive and ordinary, casual, in some sense. When we let ourselves go, we begin to have a feeling of good existence in ourselves. That could be regarded as the very ordinary and trivial concept of having a good time. Nonetheless, when we have good intentions toward ourselves, it is not because we are trying to achieve anything--we are just trying to be ourselves. As they say, we could come as we are. At that point we have a natural sense that we can afford to give ourselves freedom. We can afford to relax. We can afford to treat ourselves better, trust ourselves more, and let ourselves feel good. The basic goodness of alaya is always there. It is that sense of healthiness and cheerfulness and naivete that brings us to the realization of relative bodhichitta.

Relative bodhichitta is related with how we start to learn to love each other and ourselves. That seems to be the basic point. It's very difficult for us to learn to love. It would be possible for us to love if an object of fascination were presented to us or if there were some kind of dream or promise presented. Maybe then we could learn to love. But it is very hard for us to learn to love if it means purely giving love without expecting anything in return. It is very difficult to do that. When we decide to love somebody, we usually expect that person to fulfill our desires and conform to our hero worship. If our expectations can be fulfilled, we can fall in love, ideally. So in most of our love affairs, what usually happens is that our love is absolutely conditional. It is more of a business deal than actual love. We have no idea how to communicate a sense of warmth. When we do begin to communicate a sense of warmth to somebody, it makes us very uptight. And when the object of our love tries to cheer us up, it becomes an insult.

This is a very aggression-oriented approach. In the mahayana, particularly in the contemplative tradition, love and affection are largely based on free love, open love which does not ask anything in return. It is a mutual dance. Even if during the dance you step on each other's toes, it is not regarded as problematic or an insult. We do not have to get on our high horse or be touchy about that. To learn to love, to learn to open, is one of the hardest things for all of us. Yet we are conditioned by passion all the time. Since we are in the human realm, our main focus or characteristic is passion and lust, all the time. So what the mahayana teachings are based on is the idea of communication, openness, and being without expectations.

When we begin to realize that the nature of phenomena is free from concept, empty by itself, that the chairs and tables and rugs and curtains are no longer in the way, then we can expand our notion of love infinitely. There is nothing in the way. The very purpose of discussing the nature of shunyata is to provide us that emptiness, so that we could fill the whole of space with a sense of affection--love without expectation, without demand, without possession. That is one of the most powerful things that the mahayana has to contribute.

In contrast, hinayana practitioners are very keen on the path of individual salvation, not causing harm to others. They are reasonable and good-thinking and very polite people. But how can you be really polite and keep smiling twenty-four hours a day on the basis of individual salvation alone, without doing anything for others? You are doing everything for yourself all the time, even if you are being kind and nice and polite. That's very hard to do. At the mahayana level, the sense of affection and love has a lot of room--immense room, openness, and daring. There is no time to come out clean, particularly, as long as you generate affection.

The relationship between a mother and child is the foremost analogy used in developing relative bodhichitta practice. According to the medieval Indian and Tibetan traditions, the traditional way of cultivating relative bodhichitta is to choose your mother as the first example of someone you feel soft toward. Traditionally, you feel warm and kind toward your mother. In modern society, there might be a problem with that. However, you could go back to the medieval idea of the mother principle. You could appreciate her way of sacrificing her own comfort for you. You could remember how she used to wake up in the middle of the night if you cried, how she used to feed you and change your diapers, and all the rest of it. You could remember how you acted as the ruler of your little household, how your mother became your slave. Whenever you cried, she would jump up whether she liked it or not in order to see what was going on with you. Your mother actually did that. And when you were older, she was very concerned about your security and your education and

so forth. So in order to welcome relative bodhichitta, relative wakeful gentleness, we use our mother as an example, as our pilot light, so to speak. We think about her and how much she sacrificed for us. Her kindness is the perfect example of making others more important than yourself.

Reflecting on your own mother is the preliminary to relative bodhichitta practice. You should regard that as your starting point. You might be a completely angry person and have a grudge against the entire universe. You might be a completely frustrated person. But you could still reflect back on your childhood and think of how nice your mother was to you. You could think of that, in spite of your aggression and your resentment. You could remember that there was a time when somebody sacrificed her life for your life, and brought you up to be the person you are now.

The idea of relative bodhichitta in this case is very primitive, in some sense. On the other hand, it is also very enlightening, as bodhichitta should be. Although you might be a completely angry person, you cannot say that in your entire life nobody helped you. Somebody has been kind to you and sacrificed himself or herself for you. Otherwise, if somebody hadn't brought you up, you wouldn't be here as an adult. You could realize that it wasn't just out of obligation but out of her genuineness that your mother brought you up and took care of you when you were helpless. And because of that you are here. That kind of compassion is very literal and very straightforward.

With that understanding, we can begin to extend our sense of nonaggression and nonfrustration and nonanger and nonresentment beyond simply appreciating our mother. This is connected with the paramita of discipline, which is free from passion and has to do with giving in. Traditionally, we use our mother as an example, and then we extend beyond that to our friends and to other people generally. Finally, we even try to feel better toward our enemies, toward people we don't like. So we try to extend that sense of gentleness, softness, and gratitude. We are not particularly talking about the Christian concept of charity, we are talking about how to make ourselves soft and reasonable. We are talking about how we can experience a sense of gratitude toward anybody at all, starting with our mother and going beyond that to include our father as well--and so forth until we include the rest of the world. So in the end we can begin to feel sympathy even toward our bedbugs and mosquitoes.

The starting point of relative bodhichitta practice is realizing that others could actually be more important than ourselves. Other people might provide us with constant problems, but we could still be kind to them. According to the logic of relative bodhichitta, we should feel that we are less important and others are more important--any others are more important! Doing so, we begin to feel as though a tremendous burden has been taken off our shoulders. Finally, we realize that there is room to give love and affection elsewhere, to more than just this thing called "me" all the time. "I am this, I am that, I am hungry, I am tired, I am blah-blah-blah." We could consider others. From that point of view, the relative bodhichitta principle is quite simple and ordinary. We could take care of others. We could actually be patient enough to develop selfless service to others. And the relative bodhichitta slogans [slogans 7-10] are directions as to how to develop relative bodhichitta in a very simple manner, a grandmother's approach to reality, so to speak.

Ultimate Bodhichitta Slogans

2 Regard all dharmas as dreams.

This slogan is an expression of compassion and openness. It means that whatever you experience in your life--pain, pleasure, happiness, sadness, grossness, refinement, sophistication, crudeness, heat, cold, or whatever--is purely memory. The actual discipline or practice of the bodhisattva tradition is to regard whatever occurs as a phantom. Nothing ever happens. But because nothing happens, everything happens. But in this case, although everything is just a thought in your mind, a lot of underlying percolation takes place. That "nothing happening" is the experience of openness, and that percolation is the experience of compassion.

You can experience that dreamlike quality by relating with sitting meditation practice. When you are reflecting on your breath, suddenly discursive thoughts begin to arise: you begin to see things, to hear things, and to feel things. But all those perceptions are none other than your own mental creation. In the same way, you can see that your hate for your enemy, your love for your friends, and your attitudes toward money, food, and wealth are all a part of discursive thought.

Regarding things as dreams does not mean that you become fuzzy and woolly, that everything has an edge of sleepiness about it. You might actually have a good dream, vivid and graphic. Regarding dharmas as dreams means that although you might think that things are very solid, the way you perceive them is soft and dreamlike. For instance, if you have participated in group meditation practice, your memory of your meditation cushion and the person who sat in front of you is very vivid, as is your memory of your food and the sound of the gong and the bed that you sleep in. But none of those situations is regarded as completely invincible and solid and tough. Everything is shifty.

Things have a dreamlike quality. But at the same time the production of your mind is quite vivid. If you didn't have a mind, you wouldn't be able to perceive anything at all. Because you have a mind, you perceive things. Therefore, what you perceive is a product of your mind, using your sense organs as channels for the sense perceptions.

3 Examine the nature of unborn awareness.

Look at your basic mind, just simple awareness which is not divided into sections, the thinking process that exists within you. Just look at that, see that. Examining does not mean analyzing. It is just viewing things as they are, in the ordinary sense.

The reason our mind is known as unborn awareness is that we have no idea of its history. We have no idea where this mind, our crazy mind, began in the beginning. It has no shape, no color, no particular portrait or characteristics. It usually flickers on and off, off and on, all the time. Sometimes it is hibernating, sometimes it is all over the place. Look at your mind. That is a part of ultimate bodhichitta training or discipline. Our mind fluctuates constantly, back and forth, forth and back. Look at that, just look at that!

You could get caught up in the fascination of regarding all dharmas as dreams and perpetuate unnecessary visions and fantasies of all kinds. Therefore it is very important to get to this next slogan, "Examine the nature of unborn awareness." When you look beyond the perceptual level alone, when you look at your own mind (which you cannot actually do, but you pretend to do), you find that there is nothing there. You begin to realize that there is nothing to hold on to. Mind is unborn. But at the same time, it is awareness, because you still perceive things. Therefore, you should contemplate that by seeing who is actually perceiving dharmas

as dreams.

If you look further and further, at your mind's root, its base, you will find that it has no color and no shape. Your mind is, basically speaking, somewhat blank. There is nothing to it. We are beginning to cultivate a kind of shunyata possibility; although in this case that possibility is quite primitive, in the sense of simplicity and workability. When we look at the root, when we try to find out why we see things, why we hear sounds, why we feel, and why we smell--if we look beyond that and beyond that--we find a kind of blankness.

That blankness is connected with mindfulness. To begin with, you are mindful of some thing: you are mindful of yourself, you are mindful of your atmosphere, and you are mindful of your breath. But if you look at why you are mindful, beyond what you are mindful of, you begin to find that there is no root. Everything begins to dissolve. That is the idea of examining the nature of unborn awareness.

4 Self-liberate even the antidote.

Looking at our basic mind, we begin to develop a twist of logic. We say, "Well, if nothing has any root, why bother? What's the point of doing this at all? Why don't we just believe that there's no root behind the whole thing?" At that point the next slogan, "Self-liberate even the antidote," is very helpful. The antidote is the realization that our discursive thoughts have no origin. That realization helps a lot; it becomes an antidote or a helpful suggestion. But we need to go beyond that antidote. We should not hang on to the so-whatness of it, the naivete of it.

The idea of [that] antidote is that everything is empty, so that you have nothing to care about. You have an occasional glimpse in your mind that nothing is existent. And because of the nature of that shunyata experience, whether anything great or small comes up, nothing really matters very much. It is like a backslapping joke in which everything is going to be hoo-ha, yuk-yuk-yuk. Nothing is going to matter very much, so let it go. All is shunyata, so who cares? You can murder, you can meditate, you can perform art, you can do all kinds of things--everything is meditation, whatever you do. But there is something very tricky about the whole approach. That dwelling on emptiness is a misinterpretation, called the "poison of shunyata."

Some people say that they do not have to sit and meditate, because they have always "understood." But that is very tricky. I have been trying very hard to fight such people. I never trust them at all--unless they actually sit and practice. You cannot split hairs by saying that you might be fishing in a Rocky Mountain spring and still meditating away; you might be driving your Porsche and meditating away; you might be washing dishes (which is more legitimate in some sense) and meditating away. That may be a genuine way of doing things, but it still feels very suspicious.

Antidotes are any notion that we can do what we want and that as long as we are meditative, everything is going to be fine. The text says to self-liberate even the antidote, the seeming antidote. We may regard going to the movies every minute, every day, every evening as our meditation, or watching television, or grooming our horse, feeding our dog, taking a long walk in the woods. There are endless possibilities like that in the Occidental tradition, or for that matter in the theistic tradition.

The theistic tradition talks about meditation and contemplation as a fantastic thing to do. The popular notion of God is that he created the world: the woods were made by God, the castle ruins were created by God, and the ocean was made by God. So we could swim and meditate or we could lie on the beach made by God and have a fantastic time. Such theistic nature worship has become a problem. We have so many holiday makers, nature worshipers, so many hunters.

In Scotland, at the Samye Ling meditation center, where I was teaching, there was a very friendly neighbor from Birmingham, an industrial town, who always came up there on weekends to have a nice time. Occasionally he would drop into our meditation hall and sit with us, and he would say, "Well, it's nice you people are meditating, but I feel much better if I walk out in the woods with my gun and shoot animals. I feel very meditative walking through the woods and listening to the sharp, subtle sounds of animals jumping forth, and I can shoot at them. I feel I am doing something worthwhile at the same time. I can bring back venison, cook it, and feed my family. I feel good about that."

The whole point of this slogan is that antidotes of any kind, or for that matter occupational therapies of any kind, are not regarded as appropriate things to do. We are not particularly seeking enlightenment or the simple experience of tranquility--we are trying to get over our deception.

Notes

Introduction

1. Hinayana, mahayana, and vajrayana refer to the three stages of an individual's practice according to Tibetan Buddhism, not to the different schools of Buddhist practice.

Point Two

1. The word not is a conditional one, as it is usually linked with an object--not this or not that; the word no is unconditional: simply, No!