



Advantages of Meditation II

transcript of a teaching given October 3, 1997

Geshe la: I would like to continue the subject I talked about the last time we met: The advantages of meditation in Tibetan Buddhism.

Primarily there are two types of meditation: 1) Shamatha, and 2) Vipassana. Every Buddhist practice can be integrated with these two meditation practices.

Shamatha meditation is the foundation for all other meditation. The purpose of Shamatha meditation is to bring mind under perfect discipline through gaining the two qualities of mind: Perfect mental stability and mental clarity. Through gaining the highest degrees of concentration our meditation becomes effortless and mind comes under its natural state. From this point on, the individual is ready to embark upon Vipassana meditation, meaning, the analytical mental exercise. The very purposes of these two meditation practices is to reach the deepest levels of understanding and the sharp wisdom that dissolves the negative imprints in our mind. These negative imprints, something like images on film which has not yet been developed, keep causing all sorts of delusions, and suffering. We call it latent.

Vipassana means clear seeing or special insight. This meditation practice can be developed by taking impermanence and emptiness as its object. We may have certain degrees of understandings of emptiness and impermanence which we gain through study and relying on teachings. With the help of Vipassana meditation we are able to gain the deepest levels of understanding of emptiness. We will have a spontaneous awareness, or understanding of emptiness which does not rely upon words or logical reasoning.

In order to gain this spontaneous awareness of emptiness we must practice Vipassana meditation complimented with Shamatha meditation.

It is simple to practice Vipassana meditation if one has perfected the Shamatha meditation. When we practice Vipassana meditation, we use some degrees of the thinking process. In search of the final quality of things, such as emptiness, we will reach the conclusion of our analysis, which is something akin to mere absence. After reaching this conclusion, we then single pointedly fix, or infuse our mind upon that mere absence. We allow it to appear, or to arise, with increasing clarity, without using any thinking process in our mind. By doing this, we will be able to gain direct experience of emptiness, which is totally beyond intellectual understandings and inferential cognitions.

The union practice of Shamatha and Vipassana can be carried until we reach Buddhahood, or enlightenment. When we gain the spontaneous awareness of emptiness as a result of Vipassana meditation, we are able to see that things are mere images or manifestations of emptiness, and emptiness as their final quality.

I think emptiness is like zero, but in the same way, it is full. Every number is the manifestation of zero. Because of zero, there are numbers, and numbers aren't possible without zero as a starting point.

I would like to stop here, and welcome questions from you.

Student: Is emptiness the same as being?

Geshe la: I think, one could say the same as being, because emptiness is always in the present.

Student: When you combine the two forms of meditation, do you mean, as an example, concentrating on the breath until you realize emptiness?

Geshe la: Yes, we could concentrate on the breath until we realize emptiness. But mainly it is more effective to concentrate on one's 'I' in an attempt to search the nature of 'I': How it arises, how it appears to our mind as an independent self-entity. Then, once we reach the understanding that there is no such 'I' that possesses independent self-entity, or image, but mere absence of it, we simply fix our mind upon that mere absence. When, at the initial stage, we meditate in this manner, we reject the idea of 'I'. We are unable to hold the concept of "I" when we realize mere absence of self-entity. This problem will be naturally solved, as we continue to cultivate this same practice on our 'I'.

Student: Geshe la, for some, emptiness is a frightening idea. What is the antidote to this barrier?

Geshe la: Yes, you are right, the idea of emptiness is frightening. But it is not the fault of emptiness, it is the fault of oneself. From beginningless time to today, we are doubtlessly living with the idea that everything has inherent existence, including oneself. We think that there is a solid base, or ground, for things, which is unchangeable and concrete, that does not depend upon other factors. Since this is our bad habit, the idea of emptiness is frightening to us, causes us fear of losing our 'I'.

Student: Geshe la, would you call the holding onto 'I' a type of tension or stress?

Geshe la: No. It would be more related to attachment, a sense of self interest, fear of losing 'I', and giving protection to 'I'.

Student: Do we enter this life with negative imprints/karma and the sense of 'I'?

Geshe la: Yes, very much so. Regarding karma, its functions are slightly complicated and also the fruits, or the results, of the karma are also complicated. According to Buddhism, once karma is created, or already within us, it is up to us whether we should bring it to fruition or to purify it. Perhaps we could also talk about karma next session.

Student: What reincarnates?

Geshe la: The continuity of mind that flows like a river carrying the seeds of karma is what takes reincarnation. Reincarnation means entering new body by the force of karma, without any individual choice.

