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Meditation & Bodhicitta

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Introduction

It is very important to have the correct motivation while receiving the Dharma teachings. In doing this, it's important that one's mind go toward the Dharma and for one's practice to accord with the path.

In talking about meditation, I discussed the seven points of Vairocana for posture and also the nine stages or levels of resting the mind. Now, in terms of methods for *shamata* ('calm abiding meditation') and in terms of methods for meditation, when talking from the perspective of someone who practices Secret Mantra or Vajrayana, the practices we actually spend most of our time doing are those of the creation and completion stages. When preparing to do these meditations, it's important to fully devote oneself to the Dharma. In order to devote oneself fully to the Dharma, one needs to reflect the four thoughts that inspire one to turn the mind. These four thoughts are contemplating one's precious human birth, impermanence, *karma* ('the infallible law of cause and effect'), and the defects of samsara. Of these four, the one that Lord Buddha taught as being the most important is contemplating impermanence.

We have all attained a precious human birth and may have some obstacles or difficulties, but we have a good situation with a lot of happiness and relative wealth. In this way, we are very fortunate. However, this precious human body is subject to change and can fall apart. Therefore, in terms of the ultimate benefit, we must practice the genuine Dharma. In order to practice the genuine Dharma, we must meditate impermanence.

Meditation on impermanence is necessary in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. In the beginning, it inspires one to turn one's mind toward the Dharma, i.e., it calls one to the Dharma. One sees that everything is subject to change – things are always changing. One sees change happening moment by moment and sees how impermanence affects one. Considering the implications, it brings one to turn one's mind fully toward the Dharma and to engage in Dharma practice whole-heartedly. In the middle, sometimes one has good diligence and puts a lot of effort in practice. But sometimes one's diligence isn't quite like that. If one then meditates on impermanence again and again, it will spur one on to Dharma practice. The good result of meditating impermanence is that first one is called to practice the Dharma; secondly, in the middle, one is encouraged to be diligent in one's practice, and finally, as a result, one attains ultimate fruition. In this way, meditating impermanence is important in the ultimate sense, too.

Among the four thoughts that cause one to turn one's mind away from samsara and toward the Dharma, the second, contemplating impermanence, is the most important one. When beginning to meditate impermanence, one may become a little sad and depressed, because it's not a cheerful topic to think about. However, this sadness is not bad. In fact, it's necessary, because it moves one to be interested in engaging in the Dharma practices. As a result, through being saddened by *samsara* ('continuous suffering'), one reaches the ultimate state and is utterly free of suffering. Therefore, sadness is good. This completes the introductory discussion of the four thoughts that cause one to turn one's mind toward the Dharma.

The Creation & Completion Stages of Meditation

In general, the creation stage of practice is meditating a yidam deity. Among the Three Roots, the yidam is the root of accomplishments. When meditating on a deity in non-Buddhist traditions and in traditions other than Vajrayana, usually one meditates the deity as being outside oneself. One meditates on a specific deity as being in front of oneself and thinks, "I'm separate from the deity. The deity is in front of me. It is going to bring me some benefit because I am supplicating it." However, in Vajrayana, one meditates being one with the deity and thinks, "I am one with the deity." Whether the deity is Chenrezig or another yidam, one is indivisible with its form, with its speech, and with its mind. Occasionally in Vajrayana, one does meditate the yidam as being in front of oneself, but the principal practice is to meditate being one with the deity.

One might have the tendency to think of oneself as being lower, as being some sort of inferior being, as being a poor person who is supplicating the deity. This is not the case in Vajrayana. In this tradition, the yidam represents one's own pure mind. We are all endowed with Buddha nature, which is the nature of our being; the nature of our mind is Buddha nature. We all have the Buddha nature within us and it is the cause for eventually attaining the ultimate state of Buddhahood, for ultimately being free of suffering and for being in great bliss. This essence, the Buddha nature, is our being. The yidam is the nature of a buddha. Since the yidam is the nature of a buddha, the Buddha is not separate from us. Therefore we meditate, "I have the Buddha nature. I am the same essence as the yidam. I am, in fact, this deity." In this way, we generate the confidence of being the yidam.

It's necessary to meditate on the yidam. While we are in samsara, we are confused, deceived by appearances, and see things impurely. However, these appearances are not permanent parts of our nature. And so, based on our Buddha nature, we can attain the ultimate state and purify ourselves of fleeting defilements. If we think of ourselves negatively, for example, "Oh, I'm a bad person. I'm really poor. I can't accomplish anything myself," then there's no possibility

to attain enlightenment due to such thoughts. However, if we meditate, “I am pure. I am not lost in utter confusion. I am able to attain the omniscient state of Buddhahood,” then we will be able to accomplish that goal. The method for doing this is to meditate being indivisible from the yidam: one’s body, speech, and mind are indivisibly one with the body, speech, and mind of the yidam. Based upon seeing oneself as utterly pure, we are able to completely abandon the confused appearances of samsara. So, this is meditating being utterly pure.

When one meditates being utterly pure, it’s necessary meditating others as being pure, too. The method for doing this in the creation stage of meditation is to visualize the mind-essence of the yidam within one’s own heart centre. Now, the mind-essence of the yidam deity is not something that has an actual form, so one meditates the seed syllable of the particular deity. It might be the syllable HUNG or the syllable HRIH. One meditates that the seed syllable is in the very center of one’s heart and that it is the essence of the yidam. It is also the essence of one’s own mind, so one’s mind and the deity’s mind are not different. Further, around the seed syllable we visualize the deity’s mantra garland. This mantra garland generally rotates and as it does, it radiates light in all directions, purifying both the external world and its inhabitants. In terms of the external world, as the light radiates outwards, it purifies all the appearances of the world and everything becomes the mandala of the deity. In terms of all other sentient beings, the inhabitants of the world, in general, they are subject to suffering and to confused appearances, so one meditates that as the light radiates out, it purifies all the confused appearances and pacifies all the suffering of innumerable sentient beings. This is how one meditates on purifying the external world and its inhabitants. In this way, the meditation becomes a method to purify not only oneself but also to purify all external appearances and all living beings in the world.

In the creation stage, there are times one meditates the deity in front in order to accumulate merit. Also, one meditates the deity being in the vase in order to receive the blessings and empowerments. As to the first, one visualizes the deity in front and makes offerings and praises. This is how one accumulates a great deal of merit. However, these are not the main methods of meditating during the creation stage. The main method of meditating during the creation stage is meditating being inseparable with the deity. This enables purification of the impure appearances so that one can attain the results of the meditation. This is the creation stage of yidam meditation, which helps purify appearances and creates pure appearances so that one can meditate the empty aspect of all phenomena. When meditating to receive the blessings and empowerments, one meditates the yidam inside a vase in front. Light radiates out, gathers the blessings from all corners of the universe into the vase, and becomes indivisible with the essence within the vase.

It will never be possible to prove that anything exists inherently, i.e., of its own accord and independently. The method to meditate the completion stage is to meditate that all phenomena - the external palace of the deity, its body, its clothes, ornaments, etc. - dissolve into light and into the mind-essence of the deity. Then the mind-essence of the deity gradually dissolves into emptiness. Clarity-emptiness inseparable becomes apparent. One rests in this clear appearance as long as possible. So, this was the discussion of the creation and completion stages of yidam meditation.

Now, it’s not particularly beneficial to only do these practices once or twice after having receiving precise instructions and the oral transmission from an authentic teacher, but it’s necessary to continually engage in the meditation. As Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye the Great said: “It is not beneficial to practice with great effort just once or twice. Instead, one must practice continually.” For this reason, when one has completed a meditation session and

goes into the post-meditation period, it's important to continue meditating. First one does the creation stage meditation of the purity of appearances, the appearance of oneself and all others. Then one meditates the completion stage of the empty aspect of clarity. When one rises from that meditation, it's important to have the confidence that one's body, speech, and mind are one with the yidam. One meditates the white syllable OM at one's forehead, the red syllable AH in one's throat center, and the blue syllable HUNG in one's heart center so that one's body, speech, and mind are not separated from the yidam's body, speech, and mind. This is a meditation that one keeps up continually after one has risen from meditation. The appearance as a deity is not like an actual thing, rather it is like the appearance of a rainbow in the sky. A rainbow consists of the colors blue, yellow, red, etc., but none of these colors has an actual existence. Although they appear clearly, their nature is emptiness. So the appearance of the yidam is the same – it is appearance-emptiness inseparable, clarity-emptiness inseparable, just like a rainbow.

Through the creation stage practice, one develops a stability of mind, which is the tranquillity aspect; one achieves the same stability as through calm abiding meditation. Further, one sees that all things are clarity-emptiness inseparable, the result of insight meditation. Deity meditation is a way to practice both calm abiding and special insight meditation. For this reason it is the main meditation in Vajrayana.

Meditation Practices to Increase Bodhicitta

With regard to one's actions, there are the teachings on meditating the equality of oneself and others, on exchanging self for others, and on others being superior or more important than oneself.

The first practice, meditating the equality of oneself and others, is contemplating that “Just as I always want to be happy, all other sentient beings want to be happy, too. Whether 100, 10000, a million, or a billion sentient beings, they all want to be happy. We are all the same in that sense. Just as I want to be free of suffering, 100, 1000, a million, and a billion sentient beings all want to be free of suffering.” Thinking like this is giving rise to love and compassion. Wishing to place all living beings in the state of Buddhahood is *Bodhicitta*, ‘the mind of awakening.’ This is what one contemplates in order to realize the equality of self and others.

Next is the meditation on exchanging self for others. One often experiences pride, competitiveness, or jealousy. As a way to counteract this, one meditates exchanging self for others. One puts oneself in the position of a person one brings to mind. Then one meditates on jealousy, pride, and competitiveness in order to counteract these habits that one has. One puts oneself in the shoes of a person one brings to mind who is more or less equal, generates the idea of being competitive, and feels what it is like to experience this. When exchanging oneself with someone higher or superior, one brings such a person to mind, puts oneself in that person's position, meditates being jealous, and looks at the effects it has on one's mind. Then one thinks of someone lower and less fortunate than oneself, meditates being proud, and sees what it feels like to be looked down on. This is how one meditates exchanging self with others in order to overcome the negative emotions of pride, competitiveness, and jealousy.

The third practice to increase Bodhicitta is meditating others as being superior or more important than oneself, which deals with results. As it is, we are wandering in samsara and are subject to fear, negative emotions, and suffering. Looking at the cause of suffering, it mainly comes down to thinking one is superior to others. Thinking, “I am better than others” gives

rise to one's negative emotions and fear. This is how most sentient beings in samsara function: they think they are better and more important than others. Great beings, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas aren't afflicted with negative emotions, suffering, and fear. How can this be? Because they hold others more dearly than themselves and thus accomplish great benefit for themselves as well as for all sentient beings. One engages in the meditation of looking at what it means thinking one is superior to others in order to realize that it creates suffering, helps no one, and isn't virtuous. If one thinks other sentient beings are more important, then this benefits oneself as well as others by making it possible to develop qualities of worth, just as the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have done in the past and continue doing for the well-being of everyone.

The above meditation practices are methods to increase one's qualities of loving kindness and compassion. We will leave it at here now. If you have any questions, please ask.

Questions & Answers

Question: "My understanding is that what distinguishes tantra from other traditions of Buddhism is the fact that you meditate yourself as the divinity. Because of this, you create a special sort of awareness and it creates an environment where you can attain realization more quickly. What I was wondering is, when you look at Mahamudra or Dzogchen, it isn't necessarily the case that you are using the divinity practice, so how does that fit into tantra?"

Rinpoche: In general, the meditations of Mahamudra and Dzogchen are completion stage meditations. Within Mahamudra and Dzogchen, the practice of the creation state is not particularly important, but rather one rests in an awareness of the mind's true nature and of the aspect of emptiness. In tantric meditation, you are clarifying outside appearances during the creation stage and then come to the meditation on emptiness during the completion stage. So, here the situation is that there are many different methods. For some people who have particular qualities or propensities, then it's very good to work with Mahamudra or Dzogchen meditation and to look at the nature of mind. For other individuals, it's good to practice the creation stage. So, here it's a question of having many different methods for different capabilities and students. By having many different methods, one can use them at different times. Due to this, one is able to attain the result more quickly. To give an example: Some people have just a bowl of rice, eat the rice just as it is. One can eat rice this way and nourish the body. But other people like having a second and third dish and they eat a little bit of rice, then a little bit from the second and then from the third dish. In this way, not only is it tastier, but it's also better for the body. In the same way, having many different methods of meditation, one is able to more quickly attain the results.

Next question: "I was wondering about the visualization of the deity, which seemed like just a protection of our mind. How does that help reach a state beyond mind, beyond the thoughts and visions? How does the projection help with that?"

Rinpoche: When meditating the yidam deity, we are working with the sixth mental consciousness and with the generalized meaning. We're not working with the actual meaning of things, but with the generalized conceptual meaning. So, when working and when thinking about the color white, for example, it's a general idea of white rather than a specific instance; the same with red, and so forth. Our sixth consciousness is not very stable, flits back and forth, and goes here and there. When meditating on the deity and seeing one's mind united with the deity's mind, then the stability of the sixth consciousness increases. As awareness becomes more stable, the aspect of clarity becomes more evident, and the visualization of the deity's body, ornaments, and so forth also become much clearer. Through this process, impure

appearances of one's body are purified and one begins to see the pure appearances of the deity's body.

Next question: "The deity isn't real, so we're trying to get to something that is real through something that isn't real."

Rinpoche: It's not like that, because this isn't the case. This is a question of meditating on the clarity aspect of one's mind and gaining confidence in one's own purity, the pure and clear nature of one's mind. So, it's not thinking, "I'm something that I'm not." It's actually knowing, "I am like this," because it is being like this.

Next question: "So, we are actually the deity?"

Rinpoche: Yes. In terms of the ultimate truth, our essence is Buddha nature, which is the essence of all buddhas. Therefore, we are actually the yidam deity.

Next question: "I have all this resistance in the practice when I visualize myself as the deity, because I always have a kind of fear that that could increase pride. Sometimes when I practice Chenrezig, I feel, 'Okay. Now Chenrezig should be outside and spreading light that helps all the minds of all the beings.' But I have a bit of resistance to visualizing myself as Chenrezig, for example. I feel it is perhaps pride that I resist. This aspect isn't very clear to me and there's something difficult for me."

Rinpoche: That's really nothing. In terms of doing the creation stage of meditation, there are three characteristics. The first is that it is clear. The characteristic of clarity is that you rest your mind gently and as you are doing that, the appearances of the visualization become very stable. The second characteristic of the creation stage meditation is remembering pride, which is the thought, "I am actually the yidam deity. I have Buddha nature. And as a result of this, I am the yidam." One develops pride that one actually is the yidam. This is very important. If, on the other hand, you think, "I'm not really the yidam. It's not really me," then the meditation will not really be beneficial. If you think, "I am the yidam," then very quickly all appearances will become purified and you will achieve the results of the meditation. The third characteristic of the creation stage is to remember the purity of appearances. Sometimes when you're doing the meditation, what you visualize will become sort of like rocks; things will become solid things. Or sometimes while looking at a thangka while meditating, your visualization will be flat like the surface of the painting. But actually, the meditation is of pure appearance and you have the full body, the full speech, and the full mind of the appearances. These are the three characteristics of the creation stage of meditation: clarity, remembering pride, and remembering purity. Because of this, the fact that you develop pride is really nothing at all.

Next question: "I would like to know what is the difference between *moksha* in Hinduism and nirvana in Buddhism?"

Rinpoche: There are many Hindu and non-Buddhist explanations of *moksha*, 'freedom or liberation.' In Hinduism, there are the explanations of the Samkya, the Jains, the worshipers of Indra, and so forth. There are many different schools of Hinduism and each has its own explanation, so let's talk a little bit about the Buddhist idea of liberation. In Buddhism, it means 'completely purified and perfected.' In terms of purification, the obscurations of afflictions and of knowledge are completely purified and there are no more difficulties, no more obstructions to knowledge, and no impediments. The pure aspect of a buddha means complete abandonment of all negative habits that keep sentient beings bound in samsara. In terms of perfection, wholesome and beneficial qualities have been fully developed and wisdom of how things are and how all things manifest has been realized.

Next question: “After entering nirvana, is there any status of human being? Can a human being enter nirvana?”

Rinpoche: It’s not like that. It can be compared to a flower that is first a seed, grows into a bud, opens slowly, and gradually fully blooms. So, it’s a gradual process of opening oneself fully to enlightenment. In terms of the ten stages and five paths, one starts on the path of accumulation, reaches the path of juncture, then the path of seeing, then the path of meditation, and finally the path of no-more-learning, which is the final stage. Or one reaches the first stage of a Bodhisattva, then the second, then the third, and so on. In either case, it’s a gradual process of purifying oneself of obscurations and attaining perfect qualities of Buddhahood.

Next question: “Is enlightenment and entering nirvana the same?”

Rinpoche: Yes, they are the same. The qualities of a buddha have been fully developed and all stains and obscurations have been purified, so a buddha has passed beyond misery, i.e., has attained nirvana.

Next question: “Do you mean that we can get nirvana when we have our body, when alive?”

Rinpoche: Yes, it’s possible to become fully enlightened within one lifetime and while in this body, but it takes a lot of effort and diligence on your part.

Next question: “After going to nirvana, you never come back to samsara or can’t connect with that?”

Rinpoche: You don’t return to samsara, but it’s not that you go away to another place. The reason for this is that when you attain Buddhahood, you attain the three bodies of a buddha: the Dharma body, the complete enjoyment body, and the emanation body. The Dharma body is the complete perfection of all qualities and full wisdom of a buddha. Having attained this, one has three characteristics: knowing, love, and power. Knowing means seeing all things clearly. As a result of seeing the suffering of all living beings in samsara, one has great loving kindness and compassion for everyone. Power means being able to effectively work for the benefit of other sentient beings. This is possible because a buddha can emanate perfect bodies. Nirvana doesn’t mean that one goes into some blank state or to another place. So, we will leave it here. Thank you very much.



Photo of Ven. Thrangu Rinpoche taken during the Namo Buddha Seminar in August 1994, held on the grounds of the University of Glasgow, while feeding apples blessed in the Ganachakra feast to sick horses being treated at the university. Photo of blossoms of apple tree taken in 2009 & generously offered by Josef Kerklaue from Münster. Transcript typed & arranged for the websites of Karma Lekshey Ling in Nepal & Karma Sherab Ling in Münster by Gaby Hollmann, responsible for all mistakes. Copyright Ven. Thrangu Rinpoche, 2009. All rights reserved.