

Geshe Jinpa Sonam
The Thirty-Seven Bodhisattva Practices
Lecture 5
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The first few minutes of this recording are missing.

We've gathered here not by somebody's force...it's out of our own choice. Based on that we want happiness and don't want suffering. And, we should think as often as we can about the purpose of why we are practicing...why we have interest in the teaching...and what are the results our study...of our practice? A constant thinking about the Dharma will help you not to feel difficulties in practice and study.

Pabongka Rinpoche mentions in one of his texts that if you truly love yourself then you will make an effort to bring ultimate happiness and this is the time...right now is the time that you should make effort...you should strive to achieve that happiness...ultimate happiness...create positive activities. Otherwise, what we have been doing...pretending to be extremely wise...smart...and then spending all of our efforts of this life just for mundane activities. It's just like kids playing. Nothing brings...nothing has any essence. At most we might live up to 100 years or maybe 90...and then during all those lifetimes what we do is...we used all means even to cheat others, we used negative words, hatred, anger, whatever it takes to make some money...to make your life good...and not thinking about others and the ultimate happiness. Through that means, even if you become a millionaire, that life is like mentioned before...its like kids playing. And, when you die, you can't take any of what you made during all your lifetime. Therefore, even the very small effort you spend to achieve ultimate happiness...to create some positive activities that's what we should be doing right now.

So, when we say kids playing...it's in the context of two meanings. The first is the one we use usually...at a young age...The second is those who lack to think in the long term. Those are the two categories. Although we are adults, we are ordinary human beings. What we tend to do is always think and do about oneself...more kind of ego when you compare to others. Ordinary human beings are always under the influence of ego mind...self cherishing. So, that is considered as also a child or children or a little kid. So here the ordinary difference between an ordinary human being or children and a superior being is based on the intention. Because a superior being...or you can say altruistic mind practitioner or you can say bodhisattvas...they always dedicate whatever they do for the benefit of others not for oneself. On the other side, the ordinary human being or children always do or make an effort or only think of oneself. So, although an ordinary human being or childish character thinks whatever he does...that he's doing good for himself...but that is based on ignorance. He or she doesn't know the true means or methods to achieve what he or she wants.

So we are on [verse] number six:

When placing oneself in the hands of the Guru, we are turning sincerely for guidance to someone
Whose competence both in the scriptures and practice expands like the moon growing full.
We will then solve all our problems, dispel our delusion, if we place our full confidence solely in him –
We must cherish our guru more than our body -
the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

The other translation:

When relying on the excellent spiritual friend, faults decrease and good qualities increase like the waxing of the moon. Therefore, the practice of bodhisattva is to hold the excellent spiritual friend as even more dear than their own bodies.

So here, as mentioned before, seeking spiritual teacher or guru...if you have a spiritual...here it says spiritual friend...if you have a spiritual master, or spiritual friend, or spiritual guru, when relying upon...if your positive qualities are increasing...here it says increasing like the waxing of the moon, and if your faults, the negative parts of your personality is decreasing, then that kind of spiritual person...that kind of spiritual master...that kind of spiritual guru...that kind of spiritual friend...you should be holding that friend as more dear than your own body. You should considering them as more important...taking more care...than your own body, because here it says the good qualities refer to the positive qualities for which the qualities are bodhicitta and altruistic mind and the result is ultimate happiness. So whatever practices that have a cause of altruistic mind and ends up in bringing ultimate happiness...that kind of activity you can see are good qualities or positive qualities.

Verse number seven...now he goes to the refuge. So the refuge here is one of the most important parts of the text. And, also, it's considered as most profound. So when we talk about the refuge, first it's important...of course, the object of the refuge. And, we talk about the object of refuge, what you need is the cause of the refuge...whether you have the cause that arises refuge in you or not. So, if you have a cause, automatically you will have a result. So, first talking about the cause of the refuge...for that it is a mental state where you need two qualifications or two parts or two components. The first component is you have to have a sense of fear of falling down into the three lower realms. And the second is faith and belief...or you can just say faith. So, when you're afraid of falling down into the three lower realms, you will find a solution. How can I be sure that I won't fall down into the three lower realms? And then you find...you look around and what you find is if you have _____ in front of you, then you can look at the three objects of refuge...Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. And, understanding that by relying on the three objects of refuge, I will be able to make myself not fall down into the three lower realms. So, through that what you will gain...what you will achieve...is firm faith in the three objects of refuge. So, when you have a combination of these two...afraid or a sense of fear of falling down into the three lower realms and second, a firm faith. Then you have the cause of refuge.

So here the second part...faith or belief...this should be based on the knowledge, not out of ignorance. Just faith out of ignorance is not enough. So, here you need to know the qualifications of Buddha, the qualifications of Dharma, the qualifications of Sangha, and how they can...or how they have the capabilities to help you to liberate. So, you have to have knowledge...you have to have an understanding of the three objects of refuge. Simply faith out of ignorance is not enough. The example...the metaphor here...is if you have faith based on knowledge an understanding then that is like a nail or something you have inserted in the rocks. It will stay strong; it will hold whatever object hangs on [it]. Otherwise, out of ignorance, faith is just like putting a pole in the mud. You can twist [it] or move [it] wherever you want...which is not stable...you can change at any time. So, once you have these two components of the cause, then as mentioned before, it is definite that you will generate refuge.

It is important to think about the suffering of the three lower realms...and if you don't think about the suffering of the three lower realms, then there is no way you can have a genuine refuge. You are missing one whole section of the refuge cause. Because if you don't understand the suffering of the three lower realms, then you don't have the feeling of not wanting to go there. And, therefore, if you don't have that feeling then you don't have the feeling or sense of liberation...you don't have that. The other way of looking is...if you don't have renunciation...for the renunciation if you don't look at the negative qualities...at the suffering of samsara...if you don't see the suffering of samsara there's no sense of wanting to liberate. And, if you don't have a sense of liberation...want to liberate...then there's no reason to find the object of refuge. You don't see any importance...you don't see any requirement or necessity. When you don't have...when you have no interest in finding the object of refuge, of course, that tells that there's no liberation coming out

of suffering...coming out of samsara. When we talk about this refuge...from the refuge comes all three parts of the three types of person...the three scopes of a person...small, medium, and great scope of person. All parts come from this refuge. Refuge also deals with the whole samsara. And samsara ranges...say the highest is the _____ and the lowest is the lowest stage hell realms. So between that is considered samsara. Especially from the three lower realms...from samsara one needs to know the suffering of the three lower realms. Sufferings of the three lower realms are not like the human sufferings. Period-wise, [they are] extremely long and there's not even a single moment of happiness. The stronger you have knowledge of the three lower realms, the stronger the change you will generate a sense of fear...not wanting to fall down into the three lower realms. And, here, when we talk about suffering...when we learn about the suffering of the three lower realms...samsara...it is not like we are scaring little kids. This part...understanding the suffering of the three lower realms and the suffering of samsara is one of the very important parts of the refuge teaching. Along with that one has to have, as mentioned before, the second component of the refuge cause which is faith. And if you don't have faith, it doesn't matter the ability of Buddha. It is simply just like...if you have a magnet on the one side on the other side you have to have the metal that has the quality of...not exactly the quality of a magnet...but that is not contradictory to the magnet. If you have steel, then there is no way you can use the magnet. So, therefore, on the one side you have the Buddha as the object of refuge with all the qualifications to help, to assist, to liberate...but on the other side if you lack faith, then you're missing the whole thing. So, you have to have faith in order to rely upon the object of refuge.

With the understanding of the cause of the refuge [and the] two components, then that will lead you finding the object of refuge. So now I'm scared of the three lower realms and also I have faith and what should I do next? And for that we go to the seventh verse. First, I'll read the shorter translation that I have.

What worthy god himself also imprisoned in the jail of samsara is able to protect anyone?
Therefore, it is the practice of bodhisattvas to go for refuge in the three jewels which are undeceiving when refuge in someone is sought.

The translation that you have:

The gods of this world are not free yet from sorrow, for caught in samsara, some day they must fall.
If they are bound as we are, how can they protect us?
How can someone in prison free anyone else?
But Buddha, his teachings and those who live by them are free to give comfort - they will not let us down.
Go to the Three Jewels of Refuge for shelter - the Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

So, here, as mentioned in this verse, worldly gods...the gods, who themselves are still in samsara...cyclic existence...they are just like us more or less...[they're in samsara] and still have sufferings. They are not free...they are not completely free...liberated...so how can they help us. We are in the same sort of boat. They are not able to protect themselves, yet. So it's generally under this worldly god comes eight different kinds of gods, like Indra, Pramma...mostly gods of the Hindu faith...gods which are still in samsara. So they don't have the capability to help us to liberate us from samsara. So therefore it is the practice of bodhisattvas to go for refuge in the three jewels. The three jewels are undeceiving refuge...when you rely upon them you will get what you what you want. So therefore the practice of the bodhisattva, as mentioned before, is to go to the three objects of refuge for shelter.

So here when you are suffering...when you have difficulties in samsara...you should be relying upon somebody who is not in the boat...somebody who is free...somebody who is not in samsara. In the same way, if you're in prison you have to rely on somebody who has power. If you rely on your inmates, it doesn't make much difference. You have to rely on somebody who

has power...somebody who can influence...somebody who can do some good for you. So when we talk about the objects of refuge...the three objects of refuge...the three jewels...the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha.

So the first is the Buddha. The Tibetan word is *sangye*. It comes from two words. The first is *san* which means vacant...So here the vacant refers to vacant from two obscurations mainly...two obscurations. And then, the second part is *ripen* and here refers to ripen with all positive qualities. Free from two obscurations with all positive qualities. In order to achieve these two parts, what you need...what you have to have...from the Four Noble Truths, the truth of cessation and the truth of the Path. The truth of cessation refers to the ceasing of all delusions...the ceasing of all defilements...no defilements...or you can say lack of defilements...lack of ignorance...lack of all negative qualities. To achieve this very cessation one has to rely on the path...the truth of the path. And, so, you can see the connection between [them]. In order to achieve this path then...to practice this path...you have to have company...friends...to practice with. And with that comes the third object of refuge...Sangha...or community of monks.

So, the first [is] Buddha...the second, Dharma or scriptures. The first is the Buddha, or teacher. The second, Dharma, comes with the truth of cessation and the truth of the Path. And, then third, the community of monks, or Sangha. The most well known example we use for the object of refuge for the serious patient suffering from different kinds of illness. What is required first is an expert doctor. The doctor is important to identify and know the situation of the patient. And, expertise and knowledge of the doctor is not enough. What he needs...what he has to have is medicine. The medicine is the one that cures the illness or the disease. And that medicine is the scriptures or the teaching itself...the second object of refuge. And then third...especially the serious patient... if he or she is incapable of taking medication then he or she has to have somebody to assist him...nurse. So the community of monks or Sangha members is like nurses to help the patient take medication or look after [him]. Especially here the Sangha members are very important. It is important because Sangha members rely upon each other to achieve what we call...the Tibetan word in lamcot...lamcot means complete white activities. Complete white activities here refers to the positive activities...so the positive activities...complete positive activities...white activities because the cause of the activities is white...is good. And the action itself...you do the action and it is something good and positive. And for the result what you are getting something which is positive which is good. So good at the beginning, good at the middle, and good at the end. Therefore, positive activities here is called complete white activities. And when you have all three of these paths, then, of course, no problem...liberation comes automatically.

Also you can categorize the objects based on conventional and ultimate...these two...the ultimate of refuge...the first one, Buddha...is the ultimate object of refuge. We can say [it's] a person who's already enlightened, or a person or a mind that is at the stage of enlightenment. That is considered as the ultimate Buddha. And then convention Buddha for the object of refuge are all the statues of Buddha made from gold, silver, wood, or whatever quality. Second, the object of refuge, Dharma: For the ultimate dharma is truth of cessation and path are the ultimate dharma. The conventional dharma that we can see is scriptures, books, or sutras...or whatever we can read. Those are considered as conventional dharma. Third, the ultimate Sangha members are the spiritual beings or arhats. But, the conventional Sangha members are the collection of four well-ordained monks...both ordained monks and nuns.

About refuge...then there are instructions or advice for the refuge practice. Generally, there are 3 main categories of advice or instructions based on abandonment...what you should be avoiding. And, then second, is based on accomplishment...what you should be accomplishing. Then, the third one is general. So there are three kinds of categories of advice or instructions.

Just to mention briefly, to accomplish [something] based on the first object of refuge...that is the Buddha...so what you need to accomplish is the Buddha's statue or what quality it is made from. If you have pure faith, genuine faith, then accordingly you will receive that level of blessing.

Regardless of the Buddha's statue or what quality it has, you should have pure faith in the Buddha's statue. That is one of the accomplishments one needs to be doing. And, we go to the second...the scriptures or the dharma...the abandonment and the accomplishment...the accomplishment is the, just like the statue of the Buddha, when you see scriptures, you have to have the consideration or respect as if that is the true object of refuge...the scriptures or dharma...and what you need to abandon here is all...or every level of...every kind of hurting of others. One shouldn't be hurting at all. That is what you should be avoiding if you consider yourself a Buddhist. Because as a Buddhist, the main practice as we know is the practice of compassion. Showing an equal level of compassion to all three kinds of relationships, your family members, your close by, and then people who are neutral, and then enemies. To all three you're supposed to show the same level of compassion. No biased mentally. If you have that...if you hurt the other, then that's a contradiction; so one the basic practices to abandon here is hurting others.

Going to the third one: Sangha members...(It is also...there are more causes...7 different types...and that means to abandon causes like the three different types [very confusing section])...generally what needs to be accomplished here is when you see even the red clothes...the color...that monks and nuns use...you should show some respect. Then, you will see the same level of blessing. And, here, especially if you are hanging with the monks and nuns wearing the robes, you should be more careful because you have more chance of unintentionally not showing respect. These are the small practices. All so important on top of the big practices...whatever it is you are doing.

Advice or instruction to abandon...we mentioned for the first one, the Buddha, when you rely upon the Buddha as your teacher, what you need to abandon here is to not rely on the mundane gods and deities for your ultimate refuge or your ultimate teacher. And the reason, as we mentioned before, they themselves are not free.

Second, for the scriptures or the dharma, the object of abandonment as we mentioned before is to avoid hurting others.

And, then third, abandonment for the community of Sangha members...here it says, not making friendship with non-Buddhists. _____ is the word which loosely translated means non-Buddhists here. So here what he's saying...it's not saying...not in a literal sense...He's not saying don't make friends with non-Buddhists or people of other faiths. But here, it is more important...emphasis is on the philosophy and the practice, because in other faiths, especially at those times, other faiths had the practice of sacrificing animals as a part of their offering. There were a lot of activities that hurt ones self, or hurt others, or non-virtuous activities. So, one should not be getting influenced by these kinds of faiths. Of course, being a human, you have to be with other people and be a friend...but not influenced by negative activities of other faiths.

The reason is...Lama Tsongkapa used the expression, if you relied upon the golden mountain...that means, everything like birds and animals turned into gold. If you rely on a poisonous mountain, then everything turns into poison. So, what he's saying here is that, as mentioned before, we are ordinary human beings and it's very easy to transform ourselves depending upon the factors and conditions. So if we have a good friend, there's a good chance that we'll become a good person, too. Especially close friends, because of the influence of sharing thoughts and activities. But, influence of good friends is actually lower...less chance than influence of bad friends. If you have negative friends, there is much stronger possibility of doing the same...or sharing the common things...more chance of following negative things.

So as ordinary human beings...or you can say as the children...as a little kid...there is a bigger chance that we can transform ourselves based on the influence of friends. So, here friendship is important...following or making friends with people who have the same philosophy or same view or same positive mentally.

Not making friendships here...as mentioned before, doesn't mean in the literal sense. Especially here the non-Buddhists means Hindu practice...Geshe-la has a friend back in Nepal and he considers himself as a very faithful very serious practitioner, and what he does is he sacrifices animals. He kills them...and he believes he sends all those animals to heaven. And, so Geshe-la just kind of picks on him saying to him that the dearest one to him is his mother, he should be taking care of her...so why don't you do that and send your mother first to heaven? Instead of taking care of other family matters...So this is just an example of how the practice involved in other faiths. And there are many more...hurting others and involving violence. One should not be influenced by these actions. And as mentioned before being in a society...a community...we have to be a good friend to people of other faiths.

There are still 6 more advices which come under the category of general advice and we will go on to that in the next class. We will stop here for today.

You shouldn't be satisfied with what you heard in this class today. As mentioned before, refuge is a profound topic. You can learn a lot just in refuge practice. So, one of the good texts is the Pabongka text, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. That text is very easy to read. Usually when you read a Tibetan text you can find one part in one text and then you have to read another text. But, in the Pabongka text it is all ready...Geshe-la says, it's ready to eat. It's very suitable for Western students.

Colophon

Transcribed and typed by JoAnn Bush from audiotapes obtained from IBC. I take full responsibility for all mistakes that have occurred, through hearing and writing incorrectly what was taught, for these I apologize. May any merit from this activity go to the long life and good health of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and my precious teacher Geshe Jinpa Sonam. May all sentient beings quickly attain the state of enlightenment even through these imperfect efforts.