

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
San Antonio, Texas

“Essence of Superfine Gold”

A Guide on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment by the Third Dalai Lama

Commentary by Geshe Lobsang Nima

Sunday, November 20, 2022

Geshe Nima was born in Kham, Tibet. He started his Buddhist studies and practices at Gaden Dhondup Ling monastery when he was thirteen years old. In 1992, he and a small group of monks escaped on foot over the Himalayas from Chinese-occupied Tibet and joined Drepung Loseling Monastery in India to pursue his Buddhist studies. In 2010, he joined Gelugpa University and underwent all examinations to achieve his Geshe Lharampa doctoral degree in Buddhist philosophy. He was awarded his Geshe Lharampa degree in front of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the Drepung Monastic University in 2015 and attended tantric studies at Gyuto Tantric College in Dharamsala, India.

In addition, Geshe Nima has served the monastic community in a variety of positions. He taught both undergraduate and graduate students at Drepung Loseling Monastic University and as Principal of the Academic School. Prior to his appointment to Disciplinarian he also served as secretary of Drepung Loseling Educational Fund and was Editor of the Drepung Loseling Monastic University Journal.

Geshe Nima began his two month teaching residency at the TBCWP on Sunday, November 20, 2022.

Introductory remarks

Good morning, everyone. I'm very happy to be back with you today and to have this special opportunity to share my experience, thoughts, and teaching with you once again. This is the third time I've been here, and I'm very happy, and thank everyone joining this session. Today I would like to share just a general theory of Buddhism and to share some of my own thoughts with you. Then, at the end of my talk I would like to give the oral transmission of Lama Tsongkhapa's "A Song of Experience" and the Third Dalai Lama's "Essence of Superfine Gold". In the coming seven or eight weeks my talks will be based on these two books.

During our previous times together, we first studied the "Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment" by Atisha, then second, the good qualities of Lama Tsongkhapa and the commentary of Lama Tsongkhapa's Lamrim. This is the third time we are studying the Lamrim—this time the commentary of the the Third Dalai Lama.

When I explain the Lamrim teaching this time, I'll try to go deeper into the Four Noble Truths and the different explanations made by each of the four schools of thought according to the perspective of Buddhist philosophy. And secondly, we'll talk about emptiness—I want to go deeper this time. And then, third, we'll go deeper into the Six Paramitas, or the Six Perfections. This is my plan.

Each week, we'll have three classes: Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday. Sunday is our meditation class. Before we start, I want to talk about the Six Preparatory Practices. So based on that, we'll talk in more detail this time. Before, we talked about meditation, but very few words (laughs). This time I want to talk in detail about each and every part according to the Lamrim tradition, or according to Buddhism. I'll try to share a whole and complete explanation. Every Sunday morning we're going to teach about meditation.

Tuesday and Thursday we're going to teach about the Lamrim. First about the Four Noble Truths, then emptiness, and then the Six Paramitas—like that.

General theory of Buddhism

I think we are very, very lucky. Covid-19 has been all over the world. So many problems, so much challenge. Many people have died because of this problem. We are still alive and are getting this precious time to study Buddhism. In our life there are many, many things we could do, but practicing the Dharma is very, very special. Because if we examine our day-to-day life—what we are doing, what we are speaking,

what we are thinking—we always feel something is lacking in our mind. This shows there is something wrong with the path we have been engaging in so far, I feel. Everybody wants happiness and doesn't want suffering. From morning to evening, we are always working to get some kind of happiness. But instead, we're not getting enough. We are not getting full or complete happiness because we are not engaging in the path which brings us ultimate happiness, or full happiness, or complete satisfaction. This is one point.

Actually we think each and every day how to get happiness, how to achieve success, but we are not getting it. We still are feeling there is something missing in our life because we are engaged in a path that leads another way. And when we have some problem, we always point out only one single cause: "*This* creates my problem. *This* makes me unhappy." Each problem involves many conditions, many causes which bring this kind of problem. But in our mind we are only seeing a single cause. The Buddha says this is wrong. So if we are ready and prepared to think each single event involves different causes and conditions to create it, then when we have some problem in our life, we have an opportunity to think more about that. And if that kind of problem happens in our life, it doesn't impact too negatively on us. I think this is an important point.

When we think about our day-to-day life, whatever we do in our life is for happiness. According to the Buddhist perspective there are many levels of happiness: the physical level, the mental level. For example, at the physical level, every sentient being, according to the Buddhist perspective, has special potential or special ability. We call this "buddha nature". Everyone can be successful, everyone can be happy, everyone can be peaceful. If we make the effort we can achieve liberation and full enlightenment within this lifetime. But we focus only on the happiness of our stomach or something like that (laughs), although we have the full ability or full potential to achieve all the levels of happiness, all the levels of peacefulness in our life.

For example, we can describe the peacefulness which we get from physical things, the peacefulness or happiness we get from the material level. We have the potential and the ability to achieve each and every level, if we make the effort. Especially human beings. Human beings possess a special capacity to achieve each and every level of this kind of happiness or this kind of peacefulness. For example, we look outside and there are many, many wild animals. They are sentient beings. Sentient beings are usually described as beings who possess consciousness. These kinds of beings actually have Buddha nature, but they are born in the form of an animal. They don't use the tools or techniques that can manifest this kind of potential in their life, due to their ignorance.

We human beings have special brain power, special intelligence. So if we make effort in our day-to-day life, we can achieve each and every level of happiness and peacefulness. First of all we recognize the tools and techniques which support the manifestation of this kind of happiness and peacefulness in our life.

If we describe the happiness or peacefulness sentient beings get at the physical level, animals get their happiness or peacefulness from food, good shelter, and during the winter having a place to sleep and protection from the cold. And they feel very happy, they don't need more than this. This is okay. But for human beings this is not enough, because of our human intelligence, our human mind. The human mind is the basis of all the different kinds of misconceptions, different kinds of thoughts.

Most of the problems and unhappiness we human beings suffer occur at the mental level. If we wish to solve the mental level of unhappiness or suffering, then we must adopt another training, another means for solving this kind of problem. So I think we study Buddhist philosophy and theory because we don't want suffering and we want happiness. We can achieve the physical level of happiness through our day-to-day life—like going to a job and getting money, and then buying food and these kinds of things. But the mental level of happiness we must get through the training of our mind. So we study Buddhist philosophy: how to meditate, what causes mental suffering and misconception, how misconception arises in our mind—all these kinds of things. We study again and again and again. Then we identify the causes of mental unhappiness, mental agitation, and these kinds of things. We study the inner world. There are many, many Buddhist teachings, for the most part about training the mind. This is why we study Buddhist philosophy.

Just talking about the mind is not sufficient. We try to understand the nature of the mind. Within the mind, Buddhism actually describes six types of minds (consciousnesses). Within these six types of minds, each day we develop or generate many kinds of minds, along with their many mental factors. When one mind is generated, along with that mind there are many mental factors. Some mental factors are negative, some mental factors are positive. This kind of teaching helps us recognize, “this is a negative mind, this is a positive mind,” “this is a negative emotion, this is a positive emotion.” A positive mind is a mind which brings you happiness or peacefulness for a long time, for the long term. This we describe as a positive mind, or happy mind, or good mind. Emotion which brings us negative results or negative consequences—not only immediately but for the long term—this kind of mental factor or mental state we call a negative emotion or negative mental factor. So we study about each mental factor: its definition, its function, and its cause.

When we study Buddhist psychology, we talk about five major subjects. When we study the Perfection of Wisdom, in that course of study they talk about lots of minds, the nature of the mind, and the different definitions of the nature of the mind. Also in the Buddhist cognitive sciences we mainly discuss these kinds of things. So this is very important. If we wish to be proficient in Buddhist philosophy, we must learn these kinds of minds and mental factors—how they work in our day-to-day life.

Through this kind of learning, when we feel angry, then we recognize what the cause of the anger is. If you feel angry, then you just choose the antidote which helps you reduce the anger. Like that. Actually, the ultimate cause of the anger is ignorance, but there is also the temporary cause of the anger. So this is how the Buddhist examines or investigates when they study about these kinds of things. This is very important when we’re looking for peace or looking for happiness in our life. First of all, we just try to understand the level of happiness which we get physically, you know?

Within mental happiness, some mental states are dependent on the physical state. If we go deeper within the mental world, finally there is the kind of mind which doesn’t depend on physical things. Actually, we manifest that kind of mind in our dream state or some other occasion where we can manifest it. If we don’t recognize this as the deepest level of mind, we cannot use this kind of mind at that occasion. Then it is of no use (laughs).

So, according to the Buddhist perspective, everyone manifests the clear light mind—or our deepest level of mind—during our death state. As a monk, this is a very, very precious or sacred opportunity when the death state is starting. Some monks are very happy who know this kind of occasion is coming, so they bring this subtlest level of mental state into the path. And if you can bring this kind of mind into the path, this impacts not only this life but the afterlife.

Most of our mind is related with hearing, seeing, touching—like that (the senses). Actually the mind is not the sensory mind. Mind is within the category of the mental level, but it depends too much on the physical influence. With this kind of mind in our day-to-day life, most of our wisdom or knowledge is very superficial. We need to meditate more and more—just hearing is not enough. For example, today you are coming here, I explain some pages and you think, “Oh, this is wonderful!” Then you leave and go back to your home and think of other things. This does not impact your subtle level of mind. Once we die, then that mind also dissolves within the element dissolution process. The physical element dissolves, then that kind of mind also dissolves, and there is not much benefit. So this is very, very important.

For example when people explain to you about the benefit of compassion, you can be very touched or moved by this kind of explanation. But if you don’t think, “What is this kind of mind (compassion)?—how do I meditate on it?” then you won’t think very much about it, and you won’t meditate upon this kind of mind again, and again, and again. And there won’t be much benefit in your life—not only this life, but the afterlife.

That’s why Buddhists say there are three types of wisdom. The first is the wisdom which we get through hearing. This kind of wisdom is just borrowed wisdom, not your own wisdom. If someone explains very logically, very intelligently, you can get a kind of understanding, but you cannot use it in your day-to-day life when you have some problem. For example, if you meditate on bodhicitta or you meditate on

emptiness, the great experiential teachers say—the texts say, it will never have much impact on negative consequences and influences to yourself when a problem comes your way.

Usually when you are happy you say, “I understand emptiness,” “I understand bodhicitta,” like that, you know? But when a problem comes your way, then it’s no use. Saying you understand emptiness, you understand bodhicitta, is just superficial. This is the kind of wisdom we get through hearing. You say, “I understand emptiness” only because the teacher talks about it. In your mind you don’t take the time to think about this kind of thing more and more and more, then meditate on it, and finally make it a part of your mind. Then external things will never impact your inner peace of mind. You always can stay peaceful whether the outer world is disturbing or not. You don’t care—you’re still happy. In our day-to-day life right now, when we don’t have money, when we don’t have enough food to eat, immediately we feel unhappy or dissatisfied. So we depend too much on the external world. Through studying Buddhism we try to stay peaceful and happy without depending on the external world. If you reach this level, then you can say you are a real Dharma practitioner. Otherwise there’s not much difference (between you and a non-practitioner). This is why we study Buddhist philosophy.

We must try to get wisdom through thinking and meditating. If we have this kind of wisdom, then it helps us a lot. Otherwise, just hearing is not that beneficial. I think this kind of explanation (wisdom through hearing) is similar to the student in the university, or like that. We’re talking about the kind of wisdom which we get through hearing. That means going to class and hearing the teacher’s teaching or talk or lecture, and then just leaving without comparing it to another book, or referring to another book, and then thinking for yourself, and finally deciding for yourself. If you don’t do that, the wisdom is just borrowed from your professor. There’s not much benefit. On top of your professor’s lecture, or his or her explanation, then you think on your own. This is homework—you refer to many kinds of books on your own, use intelligence, and then compare. And finally you conclude, “Oh, this is this, this is that.” This is the certain wisdom which we get through thinking.

And according to the Buddhist perspective, for modern education, the first level of wisdom (hearing) and the second level of wisdom (thinking) is okay. But for Buddhist practice, we need the third level of wisdom. That is the wisdom we get through meditating. When we get this kind of wisdom we get the real experience of familiarizing ourselves with the subject or object of what we are learning. This is very, very, very important. So this is just a general theory of Buddhism. I wanted to share all this, and in our upcoming classes we’ll talk in detail, and you can ask questions.

Oral transmission of *The Essence of Superfine Gold*

So today, I would like to complete the oral transmission of *The Essence of Superfine Gold*. Before that, please everyone, visualize the seven Nalanda masters. All this teaching is transmitted through these masters. First through Buddha Shakyamuni, and then Nagarjuna, Asanga, then all the others, and through His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I received the transmission of this teaching from His Holiness. Visualize a big seat on which Buddha Shakyamuni is seated. At his heart is Lama Tsongkhapa. Please everyone, meditate on that. So I’ll just read this text.

(Geshe Nima then gave a partial oral transmission of *The Essence of Superfine Gold* in the original Tibetan)

So today I think we’ll stop here. There are still many pages. Do you have some questions?

Q: Geshe-la, could you explain to the people who are here what an oral transmission is?

A: This Lamrim tradition, as I mentioned earlier, was transmitted from Buddha Shakyamuni to our gurus. So if you receive the oral transmission you get the blessing of that teaching. Otherwise, it’s just like a story—you get the meaning of the teaching, but you don’t get the blessing—the lineage blessing. There are many transmissions in terms of oral transmissions, explanation transmissions, experience transmissions,

like that—many kinds of transmissions.

When the Third Dalai Lama was writing *The Essence of Superfine Gold*, he based it on the Lamrim teaching. The lineage of the Lamrim teaching is connected to this text—from Buddha Shakyamuni to the Third Dalai Lama. And the Third Dalai Lama taught this teaching and gave the oral transmission of this teaching to his students, and so on until His Holiness the Dalai Lama received it. Then I received this oral transmission and explanation transmitted through His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

So if we hear this kind of oral transmission, we connect with these lineage lamas. We get the blessing. Otherwise, we're just learning the subject, not making the connection. For example, if a king orders his subjects, his subjects say to one another one by one, "The king said that. This is the king's order." This is like saying, "This is Buddha's own intent, the Buddha's own teaching." If the king orders one person and that person brings the message to other people, the other people have not heard the message directly from the king (but the message carries the power of the king). So we say Buddha Shakyamuni was like this. One by one we get the blessing along with each lama in the lineage when they give this kind of transmission.

We can't say that anytime there is a teaching we are getting an oral transmission. Sometimes when a lama or the Dalai Lama teaches there is no transmission. But it is very important to have this kind of oral transmission. If you have this kind of transmission, you get the blessing of the transmission. This makes a difference when you're practicing.

A Selective Introduction to Emptiness and other gifts for students

(Geshe-la then handed out copies of *A Selective Introduction to Emptiness and The Soothing Rays of Moonlight: Loving-Kindness and Compassion*, written by his guru, Ven. Geshe Palden Drakpa Rinpoche)

Geshe Nima: This book is by Geshe Palden Drakpa. Geshe Palden Drakpa is from Drepung Monastery. He is a very old teacher, a great scholar—even in Tibet. In 1959 he came to India, and then became very, very close to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Right now he is 93 years old. Before I came here I went to see my teacher and my teacher happily gave these to me and said, "Please bring these, because this book is half in Tibetan and half in English, so please give these to your students."

(Geshe-la also presented blessed barley seeds and small amulets as gifts to the students who were present at the teaching)