

Handout for Class 3 Transition to Perfection

A talk by Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, given in Albuquerque, N.M., December 1986. Translated by N. Burkhar. Edited by Andrea Price.

Perfection is attainable by all. The necessary means to apply to attain perfection is to begin the practice of basic sitting meditation. Continue with the practice and you will continue on the path to perfection.

If we take a moment to sit down and begin to examine ourselves, we find that we truly have longed and yearned for that which is good, that which brings happiness and well-being. What we have wanted also is to be free from that which is painful, disturbing, frustrating, and harmful. We see that this has been so all along, and we have believed that our motivations, attitudes, and actions have been directed toward these ends. Yet we see that we do not have these accomplishments. Despite all the hard work that we have put in over the years toward fulfilling these goals, we do not have what we have aimed for. At best, things have not worked out well, at the worst, things have been seriously painful, uncomfortable, disturbing. When we examine how this could have come to be, and how our actions have gone counter to our desires, we see that our actions and our attitudes have really come out of our egoistic, self-centered desires, and out of our undisciplined yet mechanistic minds.

Sitting down with ourselves in a new way, through basic sitting meditation, we begin to examine our lives calmly and sanely. We see that our everyday condition finds us full of conflicting emotions, pressures, and ideas. Our chaotic minds push us here and there, back and forth, up and down. We are so full of distracting thoughts that we don't know how and why we act as we do. We need to experience a more stable sense of mind. This may take a long time, because our minds may have gone so far the other way. Yet however long, and whatever effort and energy it takes, we need to do the work. We need to do it in order to experience this certain stability and gentleness of mind.

When we practice sitting meditation, we begin to feel at ease with ourselves in a way we may never have felt before. When we can sit comfortably, and relaxed, we begin to look at our past action with a certain clarity of perception. We see that we have not been in a sensible, reasonable frame of mind before, and have not been able to use our intelligence or common sense to gain a meaningful understanding of ourselves. Because of sitting practicing or shi-ne meditation, we refine our perceptions with a newly found stability and tranquillity of mind, and we begin to fulfill our potential.

When we begin to experience tranquillity and stability of mind and to see ourselves more dearly, we begin to be sensitive not only to ourselves and our desires, but to other human beings and their needs, wants, and desires. We begin to become sensitive to the fact that as much as we wish for freedom from pain and discomfort, and to be free from suffering and confusion, so too do other people, and for the same reasons as ourselves. We begin to relate to other individuals from a human standpoint, as equal human beings. We begin to imagine how nice it would be for others to experience happiness and well-being — a fulfillment of their dreams.

As we begin to realize our identity with others more and more, there is no question that we begin to wish for the happiness and well-being of others as much as we wish it for ourselves. As we continue, the thought becomes a wish, a heartfelt wish, for happiness and well-being in the lives of others. There is no need for any beneficial actions; just seeing others experience happiness and joy in our minds becomes in itself a joyful experience for us. Others' joy becomes our joy; we become happy in the experience of the joy of others. This, in Buddhist terms, is known as loving-kindness, a very great and healthy mental attitude to have, and one that brings immeasurable benefit.

Now, at the same time, not only are we experiencing a more joyous state of mind, we are beginning to work with, and conquer, one of the most serious limitations and sources of pain in our lives. When we genuinely experience happiness in the joy and happiness of others, we are liberating ourselves from the experience of jealousy and envy.

Jealousy and envy are the opposite of loving-kindness. They develop from the egoistic notion that we are better than others, and should have the best and most of everything for ourselves. This leaves us craving and grasping all the time, at the expense and harm of others. Then, if anyone else experiences joy and happiness, it becomes a cause of great discomfort for us. We experience the pain of jealousy, a poisonous emotion through and through. No one whose mind is filled with jealousy can be happy at all. No matter how many possessions one has accumulated and is surrounded by, if one is experiencing the conflicting emotions of jealousy and envy, one cannot possibly be a happy or a dear-minded individual. So if one has the opportunity to begin to work with a clear and discerning mind, through the practice of shine meditation, one must do so. In this way, one has the basis of a mind of stability and can begin to develop a mind of loving-kindness.

By cultivating this quality of mind we experience a great many benefits. Our minds become calm, stable, and sensible. We bring about happiness by becoming sensitive to the needs of others. We reduce the intensity of jealousy, envy, and other negative and conflicting emotions in our lives. By reducing the negative we become more able to manifest beneficial qualities. By cultivating this mind of loving-kindness, we give birth to the experience of compassion, true compassion, the noble heart of compassion.

In Buddhist teaching, compassion comes from seeing with understanding the nature of suffering and the desire of all beings to be free from suffering. When one has reflected long and well upon this, one develops a sensitiveness, a softness and tenderness toward others. As much as one does not wish suffering to be inflicted upon oneself, there is also no desire for any other being to experience suffering. Suffering in the lives of others becomes as painful as it is in one's own life. Therefore, one's genuine wish, with tenderheartedness, is that others become free from suffering, deprivation, conflict, etc., and that is true compassion.

And so we see how one thing leads to another, one benefit leads to another; so, too, does one harmful action or attitude lead to another. It is an important crossroad, an important choice. By practicing sitting meditation, our minds can become calm and dear. We can look at our lives without the dominance of

self-important thoughts. We can see how we are dependent upon our fellow human beings, and how we are very much like each other. This leads to a feeling of loving-kindness toward other people, and a desire for them to have joy in their lives and to be free from harm. As our thoughts of this grow stronger, we begin to feel happiness in our own lives from wishing for the good of others. Through this experience we become liberated from the poisonous feelings of jealousy, envy, and the other negative emotions *they* can lead to, such as hatred and despair. And when our intention to never see harm inflicted on others is very sincere, and our commitment to never inflict harm into the lives of others is very deep, and we want to see only good come to everyone, we have paved the way for the mind of compassion. We have compassion for all beings.

Without this progression of loving-kindness and compassion, the experience of jealousy leads to the expression of aggression, hatred, anger, resentment, and the whole family of negative emotions. The actions and attitudes that accompany such thoughts and emotions cause great harm to others, and tremendous harm to ourselves. All the harm and misery we experience in the world and in our lives is due to the upheaval of conflicting negative emotions. These are so powerful that they manifest in aggressive actions that ruin our family lives and relationships and cause tremendous pain to our loved ones. On a large scale they cause destruction such as the First and Second World Wars. Time and again great Buddhist teachers have said: There is no greater benefit than the altruistic tendencies of loving-kindness and compassion; there is no greater harm than the emotions of aggression and jealousy. No matter how powerful one's external enemy may be, he could not cause as much harm as one's own pattern of aggression and jealousy. Knowing these things, and being warned of the potential for destruction that we have, and being inspired by the potential benefit that we can achieve, we need to sit down with ourselves and, not by intellectualizing or philosophizing, work with ourselves and work things out.

The bodhisattvas who have the perfect enlightened mind have found that the energy to extend enlightened activities for the benefit of others comes about only from having generated the pure mind of loving-kindness and compassion. As one thing leads to another, following from this is the attainment of the awakened heart, or bodhichitta, which leads to the stages of the bodhisattvas, and the experience of buddhahood.

Only when there is a good background of loving-kindness and compassion, a totally impartial loving-kindness and compassion, does the saturating bodhichitta come about and allow one to take the precious vows of the bodhisattvas, the vows of wanting to benefit all beings without exception, and to want to perform whatever actions bring the highest benefit to all beings. Through the awakening of bodhichitta, the egoistic patterns and self-serving motives are taken out of loving-kindness and compassion, and it becomes applied to all without exception.

Only when there is a backdrop of the mind of awakening, and the inseparable loving-kindness and compassion, can one study and progress on the Vajrayana path. Engendering this bodhichitta is the well-known way, and in fact it is the only thorough way, to reach the wisdom one longs for and reach the state of the awakened mind.

Without the mind of loving-kindness and compassion the experience of enlightenment is not possible. Only a mind with the proper bodhichitta can experience the tremendous benefit of the Vajrayana means, such as empowerments and transmissions. One can strive toward the enlightened mind and freedom from confusion and suffering, but without the foundation of bodhichitta it will not happen. It is like a hard rock: no matter how many times you wash it and pour water on it, it will not loosen or soften up. In the same way, no matter what spiritual practice one is doing, if it is devoid of loving-kindness and compassion, one will not achieve any big accomplishment. Instead, one may be in danger of glorifying oneself with all kinds of spiritual materialism, impressing oneself and others with whatever spiritual practices one is doing. It is better to do no spiritual practice. There is nothing more harmful, and additionally confusing, than adorning oneself with spiritual materialism. The fully enlightened have said: Striving toward enlightenment without cultivating the mind of bodhichitta is like sowing seeds in midair; it will never bear fruit.

The means of the Vajrayana path are very profound. When people say that one can experience the primordial wisdom, the mahamudra, the maha ati, it is true. But it is only true when there is bodhichitta, the enlightened mind of loving-kindness and compassion for the benefit of all beings. There couldn't be anything more important, nor a greater vision to have, than aspiring toward the experience of awakened mind, like the bodhisattvas and the buddhas. Reflect upon this and as time goes by, begin in some ways to experience the blooming, the blossoming forth of the mind of loving-kindness and compassion toward all beings.