

loving ONESELF



To love oneself is not contradictory to what Mahayana Buddhism teaches. The Mahayana teachings are not saying one should not love oneself. Renouncing oneself and cherishing others is not contradictory to loving yourself. In fact, practicing the Mahayana teaching, *bodhichitta*, is the best way to love yourself, to take care of yourself.

Whatever we do with our body, speech, and mind is for happiness. Even the activities of the tiniest insects, like the ants we see running around and keeping so busy, are also to achieve happiness. By looking at ourselves and at other living beings, we can see that it is the same: whatever we do is to achieve happiness.

A “problem” is what we do not want to experience and “happiness” is what we want to achieve. With this mind we can stop the problems, stop all the undesirable experiences, and with this mind we can achieve every happiness. Why is this? Because problems and happiness do not come from outside. The creator of problems and happiness is oneself in past lives. Therefore, with this mind all our problems can be stopped and we can achieve temporal day-to-day happiness and ultimate happiness, full enlightenment.

The problems of both non-religious people, those who do not have any faith, who do not meditate, and of the religious people who externally take the form of the teachings, doing prayers and so forth, even meditating, come from not understanding the meaning of loving oneself. One should give freedom to oneself, love oneself, but what does it mean? If we have a wrong understanding of this, we will always be followed by problems.

In Buddhism, particularly in Mahayana Buddhism, the best way of loving oneself is to pull out the root of all problems, which is right in one’s own heart: the ego, the self-centered mind. So if one lets go of cherishing the I, then it

doesn’t matter what situation one is experiencing, the problem becomes non-existent.

One minute, you have such a serious problem, like gloom, like a mountain. But the minute you let go of the problem that makes you think, “I am going to kill myself, there is no other solution, I can’t move,” then the problem doesn’t exist. Before it was so bad, but the minute you let go of this uptight, self-centered mind, the problem doesn’t exist. The person still doesn’t love you, doesn’t treat you well, treats you badly – this is the same – but since you have let go of the I, you no longer experience it as a problem. And changing your own mind certainly can affect the other person’s mind also, to help bring change, to stop their emotional negative thought.

Without talking about the long-term result of enlightenment, what effect immediately comes into your heart by letting go of the self-centered mind? The result is peace, happiness, satisfaction. With *bodhichitta* you have fulfillment in your heart; you see life as more meaningful. Even if you don’t know lots of Dharma, even if you only know OM MANI PADME HUM and nothing else, if you let go of the root of the problems of life, if you let go of what makes you cry all the time inside your heart like a baby, “I’m not happy, I’m not happy, I’m not happy,” you can find happiness and satisfaction. No matter how much one learns Buddha-dharma, no matter how much your education expands externally with words and meanings, if the mind is always

crying inside the heart, "I'm not happy!" then "I," "I," "I" becomes the main concern in life.

The meaning of loving oneself becomes loving attachment, the emotional mind. Rather than trying to get rid of this mind, one becomes a slave to attachment, to the evil thought of the eight worldly concerns. Then if somebody disturbs this delusion, you see that as a problem. In reality this affliction is the main enemy that does not allow you to open your heart or have realizations. It won't let you achieve ultimate freedom, to become completely liberated from all sufferings, including the cycle of death and rebirth, and their causes, karma and delusions. This affliction doesn't allow you to see the emptiness of the I and blocks the wisdom that cuts the ignorance that is the root of samsara.

Not having meditated enough on the mistakes of this emotional mind, you become its slave. Attachment becomes the guru; you listen and follow whatever it says. Since your definition of loving yourself is doing what attachment wants, then you are always dissatisfied, unhappy.

Even if you have learned the whole entire Dharma and memorized all the hundreds of volumes of sutra and tantra texts, even if you can explain the entire Dharma fluently, effortlessly, still the unhappy mind is the same.

Because of this there is some danger that you can blame the Dharma. There is something wrong, so the blame goes on the Buddha's teachings, and this creates very heavy karma. "Something must be wrong with the Tibetan Mahayana Buddhist tradition, there must be something missing there. Why is this happening?" The reason that one doesn't escape dissatisfaction is because one has not recognized the fundamental practice of Dharma. The fundamental meditations on the lam-rim are left out; one doesn't pay attention to them because the mind always wants to be higher, wants to meditate on beautiful visualizations, not suffering visualizations, not the hell realms. But the meditations on the perfect human rebirth, on impermanence and death, on the results of karma and the suffering of the lower realms become essential.

Of course, we can say nice words like bodhichitta, but without first realizing renunciation of this life and future lives in samsara, there is no way to have the actual realization of

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bodhichitta. One can generally have a good heart, but without renunciation one cannot receive the actual realization of bodhichitta. Even if one has been practicing the completion stage practice of the six yogas of Naropa, without renunciation there is no bodhichitta, which is something very practical that enables us to enter the Mahayana path and go towards enlightenment. Realizations have to happen step by step.

Even if one doesn't know anything intellectually but the mind is free from the emotional mind, one receives so much deep peace in the heart. One doesn't show excitement, one doesn't do disco dancing (I'm joking!) ... however, there is incredible peace. There is no problem with loneliness or depression, because one lets go of the self-centered mind instead of holding it like a baby, like a jewel. One who lets go like this is opening the door to enlightenment, opening the door to the happiness of oneself and for every living being.

This emotional, attached mind is your mind, and this healthy, renounced Dharma mind is also your mind. Satisfaction comes from the Dharma mind. If you follow this mind, the free mind, then when somebody criticizes you, it doesn't bother you, it doesn't hurt your compassion. But when you follow the attachment mind and somebody criticizes you, it bothers you, it hurts you. As you become the friend of attachment, you begin to view this emotional mind as your self, your being; then when someone's criticism hurts your attachment, it appears as if it is hurting you.

If you analyze like this, whether you feel hurt or not is completely in your hands. You can use the situation to make yourself more peaceful, to bring yourself satisfaction and fulfillment, to quickly achieve realizations and to quickly receive the path to enlightenment.

The whole key to transforming everything into beneficial situations, to blocking all the problems, is which mind you follow, whether you follow delusion or Dharma – your own mind the delusions or your own mind the Dharma; the ego or bodhichitta; the attachment mind or the free mind. You *can* have the satisfied mind, which is pure Dharma. It's up to you. ☸

Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave this teaching at Jamyang Buddhist Centre, London, November 1996.