



## And my first question is...

The penetrating questions and the lively discussions that blossom on the Discovering Buddhism at Home e-group are always fascinating. Here we present an interchange between a newcomer and a teacher:

Tubten Pende

“Hello,” says Katherine, “These are questions for any teachers out there who would be willing to lend some of their precious time and wisdom in answering them. I hope that this discussion will benefit all living beings and bring all of us closer to liberation.

“I wish to commit to a spiritual tradition and am leaning towards Tibetan Buddhism, and I am unclear about a few things which seem of fundamental importance:

1. What is dzogchen? How does one practice it?
2. I’ve heard of a food dedication ceremony that involves offering meat and alcoholic beverages. Can I abstain from these ceremonies if I’m a Tibetan Buddhist? Why does one offer meat and intoxicants?
3. Where do we come from and where are we ultimately going according to Lord Buddha’s teachings?

4. Who/what am I and why am I here?
5. I’ve read that enlightenment is the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice. What then? One then works for the enlightenment of all living beings and reincarnates until all beings are enlightened? And when they are ...?
6. Does Lord Buddha discuss and/or do Buddhists acknowledge a Supreme Personality of Godhead (to borrow one of His titles from Bhakti yoga)?

“Thank you so much for your time and energy.”

“Dear Katherine,” responds Tubten Pende:

“The Discovering Buddhism course will provide you with answers to your questions much better than a reply to this email. However, briefly:

1. Dzogchen is a method of practice taught principally by the Nyingma tradition. Consult Nyingma masters for an understanding of what it is and how to practice it.
2. Meat and alcohol are used as offerings in maha-anuttara tantra rituals. This is one form of practice among many. There are many forms of Buddhist practice, including Buddhist tantras that do not include the offering or consumption of meat and alcohol.
3. We, as human beings, are a combination of mind and body. Our bodies came from our parents. Our mind came from a previous moment of mind. Mind is composed of individual moments of awareness that make up a continuum that is beginningless and endless. All of us want happiness and do not want to suffer. We act to accomplish this

two-fold goal. Ignorance of what to do to achieve that goal results in failing to achieve ultimate happiness. Wisdom eliminates that ignorance. By cultivating wisdom we will reach ultimate happiness. We are therefore on a path to cultivate wisdom and attendant qualities by which we will achieve ultimate happiness.

4. You are a person conceived of depending on the combination of a body and mind. You are here because your past actions led you to take rebirth in the womb of your mother. This is the ordinary view of who you are. You have the potential to become a fully awakened being with perfect knowledge and other qualities that afford you to be a perfect cause of happiness for all living beings.

5. When you eliminate all your faults and perfect all your qualities then you are a buddha. The goal of buddhahood is aspired to for two reasons: 1) it is the realization of our optimal potential and therefore our peak experience of happiness; and 2) it provides the capability

of leading other living beings from suffering to happiness. When all living beings are free of suffering and experience perfect happiness our work as buddhas is complete. Then we can go on holiday!

6. Brahma was considered the supreme creator god at the time of the Buddha. The Buddha said Brahma was not the creator of everything. He said Brahma was created by his own actions in previous lives. There is more to this story, but in essence the Buddha taught that the only creator is our own minds. Our minds create happiness or suffering depending upon the mental factors employed in any creative act of body, speech or mind.”

*Tubten Pende (James Dougherty) was an early student of Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. He was a monk for twenty years and has had many responsibilities within FPMT. He is now married, living in California, and is a senior auditor for the University of California.*

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