

Actualizing Realizations of the Path

Special group of retreatants:

First of all, I want to say that the FPMT has been developing now for many years and over that time people have been studying and practicing the Dharma according to their ability. Generally when I look at the FPMT organization, what I see is that the students have developed more compassion and good heart. This is extremely worthwhile because compassion for all sentient beings is the very heart of Buddhism; it is the most important Dharma practice for the happiness of the individual students, for their families, for society, for the country, for the world and for the six realms' sentient beings.

There has been a lot of study and the study is going well, there is Discovering Buddhism, the Basic Program and the Masters Program. Particularly in the Gelugpa tradition there is a lot of teaching and learning philosophy and in the FPMT organization we have been doing that. Buddhist philosophy is now being studied in almost every center, especially where there is a resident geshe, and we even have Western students who have completed the Master's Program and can teach philosophy where there is no geshe, or even where there is a geshe. There are more centers teaching the Masters Program and some centers have already taught the Basic Program several times. People have been learning about Buddhism, and especially the lam-rim, for quite some time now in the FPMT and there are some who are also trying to meditate and practice the lam-rim.

Now what is needed is people who will sacrifice their lives, as they did in India, Tibet and Nepal, not just to study the Dharma like at a college or university but to actualize the teachings in a monastery or isolated places. In Tibet the mountains are full of caves like ants' nests, where people would go to practice without distraction. When I came from Solu Khumbu to Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Tsang and then on to Pagri there were many caves along the road where meditators would practice with hardship and the realizations of Guru devotion, renunciation, bodhicitta, right view and the two stages of tantra would all come. Wow, wow, wow. It's unbelievable! That's why the country of Tibet is so blessed and so precious because there are many, many caves where meditators, like Milarepa for example, achieved different realizations, such as the rainbow body.

This is how Buddhism really comes alive when it is not just words, not just scholars, but really living Buddhism. When study and realization come together Buddhism will really last. Wow, then like an ocean in the heart and the mind it will spread and be preserved. Otherwise if it is just like learning in a college, it won't last long. That's like throwing tsampa on water, it stays on top and doesn't sink; it is shallow. For Buddhism to really be preserved in the West as it was in Tibet and India, we need people who will sacrifice their lives to completely actualize in the heart what was explained by the Buddha in more than 100 volumes in the *Kangyur* and by the second Buddha Nagarjuna, Asanga, the six ornaments, two supreme disciples and many other pandits and yogis in their commentaries on sutra and tantra in the *Tengyur*, as well as by Lama Tsongkhapa and the great lamas of Lama Tsongkhapa's tradition and the other sects. We need to realize all of this in our hearts in the West.

Of course, individuals can practice as much as possible integrating the lam-rim into their lives by following the daily meditation guidebook the *Essential Nectar* or the lam-rim outlines in the *Great Stages of the Path*, *Middling Stages of the Path* or *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* on the basis of their understanding of the commentaries. However, now what I am thinking to do is to organize a special group of people who really want to dedicate their lives to lam-rim meditation and to

actualize in their minds—and not just leave in the books—the realizations of guru devotion, the three principal aspects—renunciation, bodhicitta, right view—and the two stages.

This would be done on the basis of the lam-rim and shi-nä. Not just shi-nä alone, because we have achieved shi-nä numberless times in the past but due to our lack of renunciation, bodhicitta and emptiness we are still in samsara. Shi-nä without lam-rim is what the Hindus achieve. We have achieved this numberless times and been born in the form and formless realms numberless times, but because of not having renunciation of the tip of samsara, the last one, when that karma finished we were again reborn in the lower realms, desire realms and so forth. This is the reality. Therefore we need to actualize shi-nä on the basis of lam-rim and doing so will make it easier to gain sutra and tantra realizations because once shi-nä is achieved it is very easy to achieve all the other realizations.

We will organize a retreat place for people who want to completely sacrifice their lives to actualize the lam-rim realizations and also shi-nä. Khadro-la says Washington State would be best so I'm thinking to build a few rooms and start there. At the moment, the young Khadro-la from Dharamsala (there are two Khadro-las) would help to guide this group from her experience, and particularly for shi-nä, so the people doing this will be very lucky. I'm also looking for meditators who have realization of shi-nä and can teach but they are difficult to find because they mostly go into isolation in the mountains in Tibet. They don't mix with people, working in hospitals or in the subways in New York, in restaurants as waiters or in the circus as acrobats or walking on tightropes!

Recently I requested Kyabje Chöden Rinpoche to teach. Rinpoche was in a hermitage for twenty years during the most difficult times in Tibet—Mao Tse Tung's time—and never came out. Rinpoche told me that he had nothing more special to teach than what is in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. My root Guru, Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, [who edited this book of teachings from his Guru Pabongka Rinpoche] made the comment that the sections on training the mind in bodhicitta and on shi-nä in *Liberation* are very, very special and like your teacher. Those two teachings are really fantastic and detailed. Chöden Rinpoche told me that he had nothing extra to teach other than what is in *Liberation* and this year His Holiness the Dalai Lama will give the oral transmission of *Liberation* during the lam-rim teachings at Sera so Rinpoche will receive the lineage.

So I am planning to put together this group of people to meditate and gain realizations and this is what is needed for the FPMT organization to develop for the benefit of sentient beings. It is a very, very, very important project because the extensive study of philosophy is something that is done not only in the FPMT but also in other organizations but meditating and actualizing the lam-rim in retreat *that* is something else. We really need the lam-rim realizations in the heart. It's not easy to attain shi-nä, even for those who completely dedicate their lives to this. There are so many problems, like lung disease and sickness. Not everyone who tries to achieve shi-nä can do so it requires a lot of merit to attain the fully characterized shi-nä. If one person achieves shi-nä then all the other realizations, renunciation, bodhicitta, the direct perception, as well as the tantric realizations, will easily be achieved. Therefore even if there are one or two people who succeed that will help a lot in this world. It will help in the West and in the East because they will be able to achieve enlightenment for sentient beings and also they will be able to teach from their experience to the students and to the public. That is my wish.

Centers and students engaging in year-long schedules of lam-rim meditation

I was asked at a meeting of volunteers for Amitabha Buddhist Center in Singapore whether I had any special advice for the students. Of course, at ABC they are already studying philosophy extensively and 150 people are studying the Basic Program. No other center has this many people studying the Basic Program. What came in my mind is that it would be most interesting and beneficial for the students and for numberless hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, suras, asuras and intermediate state beings would be to meditate on the lam-rim and to have realizations. Since the students of ABC have already been studying philosophy, lam-rim and thought transformation, now, instead of just leaving these things in the books, the next thing is to actualize the realizations of Guru devotion, renunciation, bodhicitta, emptiness, and the generation and completion stages of tantra in the heart.

So I told them that it is up to them, but my suggestion would be to divide the twelve months of the year into lam-rim meditations and then meditate on each subject for one month or two weeks to finish the whole lam-rim in one year. That doesn't mean achieving the realizations in one year because that would be incredibly fortunate, but to bring the mind closer to the lam-rim. Begin by training in the outlines for Guru Devotion for maybe two months, then the perfect human rebirth—how precious it is, how useful it is and how difficult to find it again—then impermanence, the suffering of the lower realms, refuge and karma, the renunciation of this life. Then meditate on the renunciation of future lives, the general sufferings of samsara, the particular sufferings of each realm, the evolution of samsara, the twelve links of dependent arising. After that, train in the two techniques for bodhicitta and emptiness. It is up to the individual how much time is spent meditating because some people are very busy with their families and have many things to do and others have more time. The amount of time for meditation is up to the individual but the general advice is to finish the lam-rim in one year. After that they can add the generation and completion stages of their own deity, or maybe just leave it for now and mainly train the mind in the lam-rim, the three principal aspects of the path and guru devotion for some years; then do tantra later. To meditate like this each year, wow, wow, wow! That would be great. Your life would be so rich and you would be getting closer to realization and closer to enlightenment.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama would appreciate this and it would please him so much because no other organization or center has a program like this. I heard from a Geshe in Taichung that after the last big Mind-Life scientific conference that was held in Drepung Monastery this year, His Holiness met with all the abbots and emphasized that the monks must meditate. His Holiness said that when the monks gather for prayers and debate they should do fifteen minutes of silent meditation on the lam-rim. This is the first time there has been such an announcement since leaving Tibet. The main emphasis of these monasteries is to ensure the deepest, most extensive study of Buddhist philosophy, but even the monasteries are being asked that the monks meditate.

When the first Masters Program finished I asked the students to do a one-year retreat on the lam-rim after studying for eight years. Geshe Jampa Gyatso didn't have much interest in meditation because in the monasteries they don't usually do this. However, the students that followed my advice and went to Ö Sel Ling in Spain to do retreat for nine months found it very beneficial and they said everyone *must* do retreat. They really agreed that the retreat was beneficial.

So this is my suggestion but it's up to you whether to do it or not. It's your choice. I'm giving an idea but it may not work for everybody. This is how to really bring your mind closer to realization. Even if you don't get the actual realization now but by meditating year by year you are coming

closer to the realization and also subduing the mind. Every single teaching of the Buddha, every word is to subdue the mind. Then you don't have to worry about wasting your life. At the time of death you can be happy and satisfied that you spent enough of your life practicing Dharma.

People who have more merit, more imprints and who have practiced Guru devotion well in past lives and this life will have more success. The whole thing depends on Guru devotion. If the practice of Guru devotion is done well there will be less outer and inner obstacles to practicing Dharma. Outer obstacles mean being under the control of kings, friends, or other people and not having any freedom because you have to work for them. Inner obstacles are delusions and sicknesses. How quickly you gain lam-rim realizations will depend upon how much you understand and how well you are able to devote yourself to the Guru. Success depends on your Guru devotion so this is a very important subject.

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