

The Role of the Center and Study Group in Providing a Dharma Education

By Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Hello all my brothers and sisters, everyone. I'm very happy to meet you and sorry for keeping you waiting for two eons! I am very happy to meet all of you in the new center; this a wonderful place. It is mentioned here that the center is offered to me, however, the center is a center of all sentient beings. Of course I have the recognition of it as an FPMT center, but on the other hand I don't think it's my center. It is to benefit sentient beings, so the center belongs to all sentient beings.

A center plays a very important role in world peace. In a simple way of speaking, that is the most important role. There are many different types of meditation centers such as yoga centers and kungfu centers. Nowadays there are many, many meditation centers, but here this meditation center is not a center just for breathing, for breathing in and out. That should be clear. It's not a center to spend the whole life just watching the breath going in and out or the stomach coming in and going out. Just watching while walking or sitting and breathing does help some negative emotional minds not to arise during that time. When you're meditating on the breath it is possible to distract the mind from reflecting on the object of anger or the object of another painful mind such as jealousy, but you can't spend your life doing just that alone. You can't develop the mind just with that.

First of all, without talking about the whole path to liberation and enlightenment, this center is in this world to educate people, the people in Spain, in Valencia, by giving them an education in compassion and loving kindness. It is to give them an education in how to practice kindness toward others in everyday life, to not only practice kindness toward their friends, but to every sentient being, every human being and every animal, including the enemy who harms and abuses them. With compassion and a loving heart, your action is to practice kindness and respect to others, and tolerance and forgiveness toward those who harm you, so that you are able to forgive them.

This center offers an education in how to develop compassion and loving kindness. This education is not taught in universities, is not taught in colleges, and is not taught in schools. Even though people have learned many other subjects in university, college, and school, starting from kindergarten, even though they have so much other education and have received so many higher degrees, what is it that makes their life full of problems for themselves? Why is it that young people are so violent and become so destructive to the world? For example, a few years ago in the United States, a couple of schoolboys killed many other people with guns; such things happen all the time. So many young people become violent, they are very unhappy with their lives, dissatisfied and opposed to their families. Their lives become so uncontrolled, so violent, bringing so much dissatisfaction, unhappiness, and harm to others and harm to the world.

If there is compassion in the hearts of people, no matter how many guns there are in the world or how many atomic bombs there are in the world, they cannot harm the world. They cannot harm people. If people's minds have generated compassion, a good heart, then weapons don't become dangerous and harmful. But if there is no compassion, even if you don't have a gun your mind becomes very harmful, not only to yourself, destroying your life, but harmful to others. Your ignorance, anger, jealous mind, attachment, all these become very dissatisfying to your mind and you can never get satisfaction. These minds also cause harm to many sentient beings in the world, including yourself. Your own body, speech, and mind give great harm to other sentient beings.

We have seen how one person can manipulate others and give a wrong view, a wrong philosophy, or a wrong way of thinking to many millions of people and make them suffer. From one person who

doesn't have a good heart, but who has influence and whose words are powerful, millions of people get wrong superstitions, a wrong philosophy.

As you well know, terrible things can happen in the world because of the powerful speech of one influential person who lacks Dharma wisdom and compassion, the understanding of what is right to practice and what is wrong to do; what brings problems and suffering in one's own and others' lives now and in the future and what is the right thing that brings only peace and happiness to oneself and others, from life to life. With this lack of wisdom and compassion toward others, the person brainwashes or teaches the wrong way of thinking to many millions of people and, instead of making their lives easy, that wrong philosophy brings so many problems into their lives and causes so much harm to others.

So you see, even if you don't have any weapons, with a lack of compassion and wisdom you harm the world with your mind. There are many examples of this. With that person's ignorance, their wrong way of thinking, a self-centered mind and a lack of good heart, the world is made very dark. There is no light of the good heart and no light of wisdom, so life is filled with the darkness of misconceptions that bring only unhappiness, as well as harm to oneself and others.

Therefore, regarding this center, even though there are many things - the whole path to enlightenment - to teach, the essence is to educate the students in compassion and wisdom, and among these two, the main one is compassion.

It has happened from time to time in the world that one person who lacked compassion caused many millions of people, young and old, to be killed and tortured, not to mention the numberless animals that died in war-time from bombs. Many living beings in this world, who wanted happiness and did not want suffering, suffered because of one person who had influential power and lacked compassion.

Therefore if you, one person, don't develop compassion in this life while you have every opportunity (you have received not only a precious human body but one qualified with the eight freedoms and ten riches, and have met teachers who give complete teachings on how to develop compassion and so forth and teachings that offer all the techniques that Buddha explained), if you don't change your mind even now, in this life and with this body, then lacking compassion, the attitude you'll have will be the self-cherishing thought, and because of that, discriminating thoughts of anger, attachment, and other such things will arise. Then you'll harm directly or indirectly many sentient beings in this life. Then, as your consciousness continues - even though the continuation of your body stops, your consciousness does not - there will also be the continuation of the self-cherishing thought. From life to life there is danger of you, that one person, giving harm to all sentient beings. If you think of life to life, what you do relates to so many sentient beings.

Just as happened historically in this world, one person killing and torturing millions and millions of people, it is also possible that you might also do that; there is that danger. If you think of life to life, there is a danger that you can harm all sentient beings. Therefore, it becomes very, very urgent, an emergency, without delaying even for a second, there is a great need to generate compassion. You cannot wait even for a second, otherwise there is the danger not only that you harm yourself from your own negative thoughts, a self-centered mind, but that you harm numberless other sentient beings who want happiness and do not want suffering, just like yourself. Therefore the urgency or great need to generate and develop compassion is something you can't delay even for a second.

In many countries, for example, Australia and the United States, the young people have become very uncontrolled and violent. Their government and their parents cannot control them; the government doesn't know what to do and the parents don't know what to do. This is because of a lack of education in the schools about a good heart, loving kindness, and compassion. With this education there naturally comes respect for others and an ethical life of abandoning things that harm you and others, such as killing, stealing, and other harmful negative karmas. If the education of a good heart is given in school and put into practice, then one will live an ethical, disciplined life,

protecting one's life from those negative actions which are harmful to oneself and others. Living in moral discipline brings real peace and happiness in your life and you are able to bring much peace and happiness in others' lives. You are not a bad influence on others so you are protecting them from killing and other such harm. This is the most practical way to bring peace and happiness to yourself and others; this is how each person, whether old or young, can bring peace to the world. It becomes your most practical contribution to world peace. So you see, a good heart is very essential. If you don't have this, that's why these problems come that the government and even parents don't know what to do about.

When I was doing retreat in Australia some years ago and listening to the radio at the same time... Not at the same time, sorry. I was doing retreat but listening to the radio in the break times, so I heard all the problems. There was a discussion about how there is something missing in school education; they talked about that for a few days. Then in the United States, when I was in New York, the ministers and senators gave talks over several days about whether or not to have guns. The discussion was shown on TV for a few nights but during the times I was watching I didn't hear one person mention the method to bring peace - the need to change the attitude of young people. Rather than changing outside, changing the attitude into compassion, transforming the thought of harming others, anger and so forth, into a good heart, into compassion. I never heard that word from all those senators who spoke; I never heard the word "compassion."

So that is why I am saying a meditation center such as this, which offers complete teachings on how to develop the mind, plays a most important role in world peace. And not only peace in this world but peace for numberless sentient beings, even those in other universes.

By the way, I would like to mention that I have an idea to help young people by starting a very large organization, in various countries, called Loving Kindness Peaceful Youth. I recently got this idea. The method to educate young people is universal education. We are arranging the subjects now, something that is universal, that anybody can learn without fear or religion. Also, the idea is for young people from different religions, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, and others, to have inter-religious, or interfaith, meetings. Interfaith meetings can also be done with the leaders of religions as an antidote to war, to stop religious wars and such things in the world. Religious wars have been happening for many hundreds, even thousands, of years.

Recently, in America, a group of scientists checked the difference in health between people who live their lives with a good heart and thoughts of benefiting others and those who live their lives with self-cherishing thoughts. In their research, these scientists found out that people who live their lives with the attitude of benefiting others have less risk of a heart attack. They discovered that people who live their lives with the thought of benefiting others have less risk, whereas people who live their lives only thinking about themselves, seeking happiness for themselves with a self-centered mind, have a higher incidence of heart disease.

During the research, the people had to answer three questions. The first was: could you give money to somebody who is in need, such as a beggar? They experimented by checking the person's good heart. If the person said "yes," they made it more difficult to see how much they could give. So the second question was: could you offer that person a place to stay in your house? I don't remember the third question. I don't think it was whether they could give their body, not that one!

So they checked how much good heart the person had, how generous or kind the person was, by making the questions harder and harder. Then they discovered - it was proved through Western science - that people who live with a good heart, the thought of benefiting others, definitely have better health; that definitely it affects their health, in particular their heart situation. It is definite proof.

Then, the question regarding religion of how to develop compassion, they checked with religious people. I think they checked Muslims, Hindus, and Christians, but the various priests had different

ideas. They didn't agree with each other, so they were unable to get a complete answer on how to develop compassion. Then they discovered that Buddhism – I think particularly Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism – is the only one that has the complete answer on how to develop compassion.

Recently they wanted to do some research and I think maybe thirty students signed up as participants. I taught them a two-day course on bodhichitta. Mainly I taught them training the mind in bodhichitta, the seven techniques of cause and effect, while Ribur Rinpoche did the part on exchanging oneself for others. Then they did three months' meditation on that. I don't know how much meditation they did, but two of the people were our students from Switzerland, who had been school teachers. I heard they were hooked up to instruments and checked while they meditated on compassion. They said it was very successful. A Tibetan doctor from Dharamsala, Lobsang Rabgye, and a group from UCLA did this experiment and found it successful.

There is a book written by a doctor and his psychologist wife in which they describe their analysis showing that the positive, or pure, mind is the one that heals cancer. The cause of a person's cancer, where it comes from, is the impure mind, or negative thoughts, and this Western psychologist's book said that cancer is healed by their own pure mind, or positive thoughts. Those doctors explained this through their analysis.

I was also asked for advice on what this center should do. As I was explaining, the essential purpose of a meditation center is to educate other sentient beings in compassion; that is one very essential thing. That is what I think. This center has been offering that education with the help of the invited teacher, the Tibetan lama Geshe Lamsang. An interpreter is also working here, and the center has all the facilities. The center has been giving education on the very essence of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism. Even in general, Buddhism is different from other religions. Buddhism teaches not only compassion for poor people, but also for rich people, because they have so many problems. The more wealth people have, the more problems and dissatisfaction they experience, so we also need compassion for them. Then Buddhism compassion for animals as well; compassion not only for human beings but for all living beings, any being who has an obscured mind and suffering; compassion for all the different types of sentient beings: the hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, and devas.

I think the very essential point of what the center offers is education by giving explanations, but it also offers facilities, a place to meditate, to practice.

Another purpose of a meditation center is to explain how these aggregates are created by their causes, karma and delusion, and because of that are pervaded by suffering. They are in the nature of suffering. Because of the contaminated seed of disturbing thoughts, being pervaded by suffering, the base becomes the container of all the problems of this life and this becomes the foundation of all the future lives' problems. This is why our mind has worry, fear, and dissatisfaction, and all these problems of depression, longing, and so forth. Just the mind itself has so many problems. With all these delusions, such as anger, we have all these problems – disturbing emotional problems, mental problems. On top of that there are all the physical problems we experience, all the sicknesses and other physical problems: AIDS, cancer, and now there is SARS, the most famous sickness in the world. All these sicknesses are of the body. Besides the mind having all its problems, the body experiences all these problems and sicknesses. Sickness is not the only problem. From the time we are reborn, conceived in the mother's womb, there is so much suffering: the suffering of birth, suffering of old age, suffering of death, and so many other problems.

The continuation of all this circles to the next life's samsara. It continues to those samsaric aggregates. Then the continuation of that circles to the next life, and that then goes on to the next life's aggregates, caused by delusion and karma. The contaminated seed of suffering continues that circle. As it continues, or circles, like that, we suffer continuously until we stop it. Until we stop this

continuity we will have to suffer endlessly, on and on, on and on, in one of these six realms, continuously.

So you should introduce your students to how we circle in samsara, how these aggregates are in the nature of suffering, and then explain the objects of refuge: the one who has ceased all the mistakes of mind, gross and subtle, who has completed all the qualities, the omniscient one who reveals the actual refuge, the path; the path to the cessation of suffering and how to achieve that true path; and the Sangha, those who have attained the path, who become inspiring examples for us to practice, or follow, the path. By introducing this, you educate them regarding the circling, what causes the body and mind to experience all this suffering. You explain the causes and then how one can be free from this nature of suffering. How Buddha, Dharma, Sangha have the power to help and to liberate one. By giving them this education you awaken their minds about samsara, how it is in the nature of suffering and how we have to stop the circle; and how Buddha, Dharma, Sangha have power: Buddha, the Omniscient One; Dharma, the path; and Sangha, those who inspire us to generate the path. Giving this education of awakening, we awaken sentient beings' minds to understand refuge.

On the basis of that, you then explain karma, what is the cause of suffering and what is the cause of happiness. Then you inspire them to abandon the causes of suffering and to practice the causes of happiness. You awaken sentient beings' minds that are ignorant of karma. Through their understanding of karma, they engage in the practice of morality. So, by giving them this education and meditation practice, the center causes sentient beings to have, right after the death of this life, a good rebirth, a deva or human rebirth, a higher rebirth. This is the first way in which the center helps; it offers immediate rescue from reincarnating into the most unimaginable suffering of the hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. That's the first level of benefit the center offers sentient beings.

The second benefit sentient beings receive from the center is that it offers education in the higher training of morality, concentration (*shamatha* or *shiné*), and great insight (*vipassana* or *lhagtong*), and in the five paths to achieve liberation. Practicing the path is what ceases the disturbing thoughts, or defilements, including the seeds of these delusions. Completing the five paths – the paths of merit, preparation, right seeing, meditation, and no more learning – brings the cessation of the entire round of suffering and its causes and leads to achieving the sorrowless state of everlasting happiness; it causes that. So that is the ultimate benefit the center offers. The previous one was to receive happiness in future lives, in all the coming lives.

This life is very short, so, although Dharma offers happiness in this life (by practicing Dharma there is no confusion in one's life, only peace and happiness), the most important thing, more important than the happiness and peace of mind of *this* life, is that the center offers happiness in all the coming future lives. That's more important. That's what the center is offering by educating sentient beings in the basic paths to achieve liberation from samsara. Training and educating them in the five paths ceases all their defilements, delusions and karma, including the seeds of the delusions, and that makes them achieve the total cessation of suffering, or everlasting happiness. So the center is offering ultimate happiness to sentient beings. That's the second benefit.

The next benefit the meditation center offers to sentient beings is the greatest one: full enlightenment, the peerless happiness of sentient beings. How? By educating them in bodhichitta, by giving them teachings on how to develop bodhichitta and practice the bodhisattvas' deeds, the six perfections, and the five Mahayana paths to achieve enlightenment. The sutra path – the five paths and the ten *bhumis* – enables them to cease not only the gross but even the subtle defilements and then causes them to achieve full enlightenment, peerless happiness. So that is the greatest, most important benefit the center offers to sentient beings. Then if the tantric teachings are given with the fully categorized four initiations, which plant the definite seeds of the four kayas, the center offers quick enlightenment to sentient beings, which is the most important thing that sentient beings need. Even if they don't understand that, this is what they need.

Here I would like to make one comment. A healer or person who can show miraculous powers, a miracle healer, is very astonishing and very surprising to the world; somebody who can heal your cancer or any other sicknesses in the snap of a finger, a healer who can give you a miracle cure. But even if you recover from cancer, it's only a cancer of this life; it doesn't mean that that you will never experience cancer or sickness in your future lives. Even in this life, if you still have the karma to have cancer, you will get cancer again. It can happen that after an operation in a hospital the cancer cells are destroyed but the person still has karma to experience cancer, that there is the karma for it to come back again in one or two years.

Therefore, the teacher – the Buddha or the one who teaches you Dharma, the means to purify your negative karma, through which you will have happiness in all future lifetimes and no suffering, no cancer, in all your future lifetimes – becomes much more precious than the miracle healers. So even though they are very astonishing for some people, in reality the teacher who teaches your Dharma – healing your mind, purifying all the negative karma, the causes of not only cancer but of all the problems, giving you happiness in all the future lives – is much more precious. This is much more astonishing, so precious.

The teacher who reveals the four noble truths to you – who teaches you true sufferings, the true cause of suffering, the true cessation of suffering (what suffering you should be freed from), and the true path (the path to achieve that) – becomes unbelievably precious. A person who shows you miraculous powers, or the miracle healers that you hear about, cannot purify your negative karma. Although you might recover from some sickness, your negative karma cannot be cured. It doesn't get healed, so in your next life you get sick again. They cannot heal your delusions and karma, bringing you to enlightenment. If you think about that, the teacher who gives you the Mahayana teachings – how to actualize the whole path, how to cease all the gross and subtle defilements, and how to achieve enlightenment – becomes even more precious, the most precious. So even if a Dharma teacher doesn't *show* miracles, this is the real miracle: their showing you the four noble truths brings you to liberation and brings you to enlightenment. Now you can see how this teacher is so precious. You can see the value of this teacher, all the benefits you get from this teacher. This recognition of the teacher's kindness and then respecting the teacher are very important as they lead you to correct devotion to the virtuous friend.

The next thing: to listen to and study Dharma as extensively as possible is very important. That becomes very important because the more you learn, the more you understand, and the deeper you understand, the more you can benefit others – you can give them a deeper understanding of Dharma, deeper and clearer explanations.

That is why, even though many of the old centers have been offering teachings on most of the subjects, in recent years we started the five-year Basic Program and the seven-year Masters Program was established at Lama Tzong Khapa Institute, and we are hoping to do more Masters Programs in other centers. The shorter five-year program, which includes quite a number of sutra subjects and some tantra subjects, is to instill a broader understanding of Dharma in the minds of students. They will have a deeper and wider understanding, which will be very beneficial later to develop realizations in their practice and also to help educate other sentient beings in Dharma. After completing the study we issue a certificate that means the student is recognized in the organization as qualified to teach Dharma. That is the purpose of giving the certificate.

Then a center is to introduce sentient beings to various purification practices, such as the preliminary practices, to purify their negative karma and defilements, and to various practices for collecting extensive merit. It has facilities to offer them a place to meditate and practice, especially to do group practice, meditation and retreat or things like that, to purify the mind and collect merit, and to learn those various methods.

It can also offer consultation to people with problems – mental problems, physical problems, relationship problems, and so forth. It can console, advise, and help them, by, for example, talking to people who are suicidal to show them how their life is not hopeless, how their human body is so precious, how it has the potential to achieve any happiness they want, temporal and ultimate, and how they can then bring the four levels of happiness to all sentient beings: the happiness of this life, the happiness of all future lives, liberation from samsara, and enlightenment. You can inspire the person and make their life very positive, so that then they give up their suicidal thoughts thinking of this life's problems. In this way you are saving a human being's life by giving consultations; you cause those people who are suicidal to have long lives. Normally we liberate animals, but now here you liberate human beings. You can do things like that, helping them with whatever problems or difficulties they have through consultation and so forth. Then, of course, if there's time, there are also pujas to help them. The center can also help others by doing pujas, but mainly by giving advice. That's about the center.

For individuals, I suggest first you study one complete lamrim book, such as *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. Read and study it completely at least one time. After you have the whole idea, then every day, even for just ten or fifteen minutes or longer, focus on guru devotion until you reach stable realization of that.

You can also use a teaching on emptiness, a stanza or something like that, to meditate on emptiness. Or you can do things like the four-point analysis. There are various techniques or ways to meditate on emptiness. You can choose anything that's powerful.

The other thing is, if you are practicing tantra by having received a great initiation, you can do meditation on one of the highest tantra practices, the generation stage. You do this until you achieve realization. That is one way. The other way is to meditate on guru devotion every day until you achieve that realization. Then do mind training in the generation stage.

You do one year mind training in the gradual path of the lower capable being, then the next year you train your mind in the middle path, then the next year you train your mind... Here I'm talking about the main focus of meditation. You divide the subjects. Then you do one year on bodhichitta. Then the next year you mainly focus on emptiness. Then again you do the entire circle. You can do one year for each path, meditating every day.

Or you do guru devotion every day, that's the same, then for six months you train your mind in the lower path, for six months in the middle path, for six months on bodhichitta, and the rest of the months on emptiness as the main focus of meditation. It doesn't mean you can't meditate on the path at other times but it means that is the main focus.

I will mention the idea in just a few words. The first one, guru devotion, you do the same thing every day until you achieve that realization. Then you train your mind in the gradual path of the lower capable being until you achieve that realization. Then you focus on the middle one, renunciation of future samsara. Then after that, bodhichitta, because that's the only way you can achieve bodhichitta. Then emptiness. You do a little bit each day.

Then you should do practices of purification as much as possible and collect merit. Because you don't have much time, you have jobs and many engagements, such as taking care of your family, what you can do is to especially try to make your job a means of collecting extensive merit. You try to transform working for many hours in your job, many hours of sleeping, many hours working at home, taking care children or whatever, into virtue, a means to collect extensive merit. No matter what activity you are doing, eating, sleeping, taking care of your family, cooking, doing your job, such as being a secretary, a director, or whatever, you try to transform that into virtue, so it become a means to collect extensive merit.

How do you do that? If you do everything with the thought of benefiting all sentient beings, with a bodhichitta motivation, it is transformed into virtue. Everything becomes not only a virtuous cause of

happiness but the cause to achieve enlightenment, the cause of great success. Then, liberation from samsara and happiness in future lives, all these come by the way. Live the rest of your life with a bodhichitta motivation, the thought of benefiting other sentient beings, as much as possible by putting all your effort into that. That's the happiest way to live your life, the best way to live your life, the most satisfying and fulfilled way to live your life. Then you will have no regret. Later when you die, you will have no regret. Your heart will only be filled with peace, happiness, and joy.

I think that's it. Thank you very much.

Colophon:

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