
Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness

འཇམ་དགེ་ལུན་ཕུག་ཀྱི་ཚེན་པོ།

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I am very glad that we are able to meet again together to continue this class. *Tashi Delek!*

The common greeting in Tibetan, '*tashi delek*', is actually a very significant greeting that encompasses wishing the other both temporary success and ultimate well-being. '*Tashi delek*' can be translated as 'may all be auspicious for your well being'. *Tashi* literally means auspiciousness. *Delek* is made up of two syllables and *de* means happiness, with a deeper connotation of wishing the other the happiness of a fortunate rebirth in the next life as well. *Lek*, which literally means goodness, also has a deeper connotation that refers to the ultimate goodness, liberation and enlightenment.

So, wishing someone the auspiciousness of having a good life now and for the future as well as ultimately attaining liberation, is indeed 'good in every aspect'. The greeting *tashi delek*, is usually followed by the words *Pun-sum-tsok*, which means 'good in every aspect'.

When we reflect upon the greater implication of this greeting, it comes to mind that in fact every aspect of our well-being is encompassed within the happiness of samsara and nirvana. The well-being of samsara is for this life and future lives, while the ultimate well-being is liberation and enlightenment. There is no other happiness that cannot be subsumed into these two. We have some experience of well-being in samsara; whether it is a good experience or not is for you to decide.

As Dharma seekers, our attempt is to maintain the happiness of a human being, while striving for the happiness of liberation. That is at least what we should be aiming for. This is true not only for Dharma practitioners but also people who do not consider themselves religious. Ultimately, whether one follows a particular religion, practises the Dharma or not, we all equally seek to be happy. That is something we can all agree with.

On a personal level, as much as it is important that we strive towards well-being in our lives, it is also worthwhile to exert some effort towards accumulating the causes for attaining the ultimate happiness of liberation.

It is important for us to really understand that ultimately the causes of the happiness that we seek lie within our own mind. Although external factors may contribute to our happiness to a certain degree, ultimate happiness is only gained through our mind. To explain it a bit further, external factors may assist us in experiencing some level of happiness, but that happiness does not depend entirely in having those material things. In fact there are many who may have a lot of external things but who are not necessarily really happy. So material things can assist in bringing about some level of happiness, but how they are utilised for gaining happiness depends entirely on one's mental attitude.

The Buddha mentioned in the sutras, 'a subdued mind is a happy mind', and likewise the great Tibetan master, Sakya Pandita said that a happy mind determines one's well-being. We find that it is really true that when the mind is subdued

then the calmness, joy and happiness that is experienced is much more sustaining. The fleeting pleasures of the senses may seem to lead to some joy and happiness, but we all know that it does not last for long. In fact after having experienced some happiness and joy from the sensual pleasures, but when the happiness subsides, it is replaced with a sense of emptiness and unease in the mind. There is the feeling that something is missing, and the mind starts to feel unsettled and agitated. This shows that the happiness and joy that we experienced earlier from the sense objects has not been sustaining. Rather than contributing to real happiness they contribute to feelings of loneliness and a feeling of hollowness. Of course that is also very much related to our sense of discontent. In fact one of the attributes of the sensual pleasures is that they never really satisfy us, and they do not provide us with any sustained sense of contentment.

To assess our overall well-being we need to investigate first of all whether we have any joy or happiness now. If we find that we have a certain level of real joy and happiness, then we must take care to protect and increase it. If we find that we lack an authentic sense of joy and happiness right now then we must contemplate how to obtain that happiness. When we investigate in this way we get to the point of realising that the happiness we seek does not depend entirely on external conditions, but rather depends on internal causes that we need to cultivate within our own mind.

A sense of joy and happiness is very much dependent on cultivating the positive states of mind within ourselves and once we gain a certain level of happiness, then we can attest to the fact that such a state really contributes to our overall sense of well-being. When we are feeling happy and engage in something, say a meal, then the meal tastes good because we are in a happy frame of mind. If we have something good to eat, of course, then that contributes even more to the sense of enjoyment. However even if we do not have a lavish meal, with a happy mind whatever meagre meal we have can be a happy occasion.

Likewise with our financial situation: if we have a happy and joyous mind then whatever our financial situation, we will be able to maintain a certain level of mental stability, a stability that in turn contributes to the feeling of joy and happiness. So whatever our financial state, we will be able to maintain some stability with a happy state of mind. Without some level of happiness in our mind, external factors by themselves definitely don't contribute to our sense of well-being.

We can definitely see the truth of this, as there are many examples of people, even millionaires, who are not really all that happy. If they have not cultivated some sort of inner joy and happiness within themselves, all their wealth and the riches around them don't seem to contribute towards their happiness. It is good to use these examples to remind yourself that becoming a millionaire doesn't necessarily contribute to real happiness, and to think 'when I seek happiness it must not be entirely reliant upon external factors'.

It can also help us develop some sort of wariness about samsaric pleasures and worldly gain, and to develop some sense of renunciation within our mind. If we do not have complete trust in worldly gains, and if we can identify and develop some sort of confidence within ourselves that inner happiness is dependent upon our own minds regardless of

external factors, then that can help us to maintain a sense of stability in life.

By the same token it is also important to know that having riches is also not necessarily the cause of misery. There are people who are rich and wealthy and who have a joyous and happy mind, and because of this combination of a happy mind coupled with riches, they are able to help many others. Then there is a two-way benefit - for themselves and those they are able to help. That is of course a very good situation. The main point is to understand that the causes for happiness lie within ourselves.

If we can maintain some level of happiness and joy in our mind then what happens externally doesn't seem to affect us very much, even losing one's external riches. That is something I can personally attest to. As I have mentioned before, I have endured a lot of physical hardships in my lifetime. When I was studying in the monastery in Tibet there were times when food was so scarce that we had to depend on a few small handfuls of *tsampa* or barley dough to sustain ourselves for many days. In a later part of my life I endured many hardships as well, however when I reflect on those times I can definitely say that my mind was happy and joyous, regardless of those hardships.

Because of that early experience of being happy and maintaining a happy state of mind regardless of external conditions, I feel that it would be really wonderful to live a simple life, wandering and seeking alms and living in simple dwellings as traditionally done in India. That is something that I would aspire to. Of course, practically speaking, because of my age it might not be realistic to live that kind of life style now. However because of my earlier experience, I know that depending on the kindness of others and leading a simple life can be a very joyful experience.

It is really important to try to maintain a level of joy and happiness. In whatever you do, try to remind yourself, 'The most valuable thing that I can possess, the real trustworthy and unailing companion, is a joyous and happy mind'. Working towards cultivating such a state of mind will in turn contribute to your physical well-being. It is medically proven that the physical health of someone who has a joyous, happy mind is also much better, whereas a mind full of worries and anxiety seems to contribute to ill health. Negative states of mind such as anger can really contribute to the deterioration of one's health.

The Tibetan medical system explains that when the mind is unhappy, then because of the strong connection between the mind and the four elements, it causes the four elements to become imbalanced. When the mind is unhappy and full of anxiety it disrupts the natural flow and harmony of the four elements, and when the four elements within our body are out of balance then that contributes to ill health. This is something that is clearly explained and which is experienced.

When we reflect on the temporary and ultimate benefits of having a happy and joyous mind, and reflect back on the causes of a happy mind, then we return to what was explained in the beginning: as the Buddha said, 'the subdued mind is a happy mind'. Working towards subduing the mind means slowly decreasing the negative states of mind such as anger, jealousy and so forth by applying the appropriate antidotes.

A subdued mind leads to a controlled mind and a controlled mind, as explained in the teachings, is a happy mind, while an uncontrolled mind is a disturbed mind. So when we work

towards controlling the mind, then that control will secure and increase our happiness, which is why the teachings mention that we must work towards having a controlled mind. So at this point we see the relevance of the practice of meditation, as meditation is the primary technique that brings about a controlled and subdued mind.

As a result of learning how to meditate and then actually applying the meditation technique in our lives, we can reach a point where the mind becomes subdued, where the delusions such as anger are reduced. If one is prone to anger, then through the practice of meditation, anger can be reduced. Likewise, attachment and pride in one's mind can be reduced; that would be a clear sign of the positive results of meditation.

The life stories of the great meditators or *mahasiddhas* often list their attainments through the practice of meditation. If it is a realisation that contributes to lessening the delusions in one's mind then it is an authentic realisation. If we can reach a level in our practice of meditation where we can confidently claim to ourselves that our anger, attachment and other delusions have been lessened, then that is a clear sign that our practice of meditation has been successful, and that it has been an authentic practice.

Conversely if all one can claim is 'I have meditated for a long time but the delusions within me such as attachment and anger have not been reduced the slightest bit', then that is a sign that the practice of meditation has not been authentic, and that one has not been able to utilise the proper technique.

If we are inclined to engage in the practice of meditation it is important that we seek the proper means and make sure that whatever practice we do actually serves the purpose of the intention, which is ultimately to bring about a subdued mind. In whatever practice we do, it is good to make a really clear distinction between those mental states that are conducive to mental happiness and those that lead to disturbance in the mind. We can immediately recognise and label some mental states as being negative attitudes that harm the harmonious feeling within our mind, and other attitudes as being conducive to a more joyous, peaceful and relaxed state of mind.

If through our inner investigation and analytical wisdom we can make that clear distinction between these two categories of mental states then it becomes a matter of trying to acquaint ourselves more with the states of mind that are conducive for ourselves, such as meditating on love and compassion. If we can spend some time, even just a few moments really trying to generate love and compassion within ourselves, one hundred percent thinking of benefiting other sentient beings, we will definitely experience a calming effect in our mind. Thus we can immediately recognise the benefits of such a positive attitude.

Whereas as soon as negative states of mind such as anger arise, we can see for ourselves that they lead to a disturbed mind. Also if we just allow our mind to go along in its normal pattern then it follows a lot of discursive, conceptual thoughts, such as lot of plans and ideas that do not really relate to our present situation right now, which leads to experiencing more anxiety and worries. Thus, these states of mind are not really conducive for our well-being.

So we really need to make that distinction between the two states of mind, and acquaint ourselves more with the positive and reduce the negative states. On a practical level

if we try to exert ourselves to do this in our daily life then that sort of measure can slowly improve our practice. The main point that I am emphasising is that in order to subdue one's mind the practice of meditation is most essential. Practising meditation contributes to subduing the mind, and controlling the negative states of mind is something that will definitely benefit you as well as your partner, your friends and so forth. If one is constantly troubled and anxious, one cannot expect one's partner to always respond in a positive way. In this way I am emphasising how practising meditation to subdue the mind is a most beneficial practice.

If we allow our minds to be completely agitated and disturbed then after a while we feel the ill effect within our body, even to the point where we start to feel aches and tightness in our shoulders and neck, and we have to have massages. Of course massage may help to reduce some level of tension for a while, but we all know that it doesn't really solve the real problem. Massaging the body can help relieve tension temporarily, but the real release from tension comes from working on, and subduing one's own mind. Besides, if we have to keep going to get massages to try to relieve our tension it can also be a strain on our wallet. Maybe that money is better used in another way?

In a practical sense, of course, it is not possible to subdue one's mind immediately, as we are not sufficiently acquainted with the process of subduing our mind. Nevertheless, acquainting ourselves with that goal and reminding ourselves to apply our practice on a continuous daily basis will definitely help us.

If our goal is financial stability then we really have to exert ourselves from our own side to try to maintain that stability, as it is expected that we take care of ourselves financially. So in every aspect we have to exert ourselves to try to take responsibility for ourselves. There are some who comment that they are actually quite happy but if they had a little bit more money then that would be even better! Others remark 'Because I don't have money others may think that I am not really happy'. However if one is really happy then one shouldn't need to worry too much about what others think of you.

Having extensively explained the benefits of the practice of meditation in our daily life the actual technique is a means to develop single-pointed concentration. How is single-pointed concentration developed? First of all we need to identify what single-pointed concentration is, and then consider how to achieve it. What are the requirements, the prerequisites for developing mental concentration? What are the faults that obstruct the development of concentration? We went through all of this quite extensively in our previous sessions, so it is important that you revise and look into those explanations. If you are really keen to meditate and develop single-pointed concentration, how are you actually going to implement that practice if you are not acquainted with the instructions?

Previously we also went into what posture to adopt which, as explained, is the seven-point posture of Buddha Vairochana. How to adopt those seven points has been explained in detail previously, so it is good to reflect on that as well.

In the text we have now come to the explanation of the actual meditation techniques for developing single-pointed concentration.

As explained in the verses of the root text the object of our meditation is the mind itself. So we use the mind itself as the

object to focus on and familiarise ourselves with developing single-pointed concentration. We will now spend the next five minutes in meditation. *(Pause for meditation)*

You may come out of your samadhi now.

As I indicated earlier one should never underestimate the need and importance of practising meditation. Most of you already have the knowledge of what to meditate on and how to meditate - that is something that you don't lack - but if one lacks putting it into practice, then that would be somewhat unfortunate, and a bit sad. So it is good to match one's knowledge with one's practice.

The reason why I claim that you have some good understanding and knowledge, which actually is a point on which to rejoice, is that many of you commented that you understood most of the points that His Holiness made in his teachings in Sydney last year, as well the Kalachakra teachings in India, and more recently his teachings in Varanasi. You seemed to have followed the teachings very well. Being able to understand and follow the teachings is a clear sign of having gained some prior knowledge and understanding from your own side. It can be a hallmark to encourage yourself to study further and gain deeper knowledge, and also to try to put it in practice.

It is good to remind ourselves periodically that what the practice means is to really look within one's own mind, and investigate and analyse it. That should then be combined with the practice of meditation, otherwise one falls into the situation where the practice is one thing and the mind is left somewhere else, as if there is no real connection between the two. If there is no connection between one's practice of the Dharma and the mind, then it doesn't serve the purpose. Whereas if one uses one's practice to really continuously check and analyse one's mind, it serves to increase the positive states of mind and slowly decrease the negative states.

Now, as mentioned previously, that is not something that comes about easily, but if one can slowly apply that in our daily life then gradually it will become more and more a part of your life and you'll become more acquainted with the practice. It is good to reflect upon the comment in the teachings where it says 'whatever the mind acquaints itself with is what it will adhere to'. Even though we might find that our mind seems to be naturally quite agitated, or sometimes negative or dull, nevertheless we do have the basis of the positive states of mind and if we acquaint ourselves more with this natural quality of the mind then it will adhere to the positive states of mind.

We can stop here for this evening. This evening can be a preparation session to the following sessions of Mahamudra for this year. I would also like to express my appreciation to you for having participated in the discussion and practice nights over the last three weeks. I have heard comments that it went very well, and that some felt that it was a positive and worthwhile experience. That is a clear sign that actually doing discussion and some practice together is really beneficial and helpful, so I would like to express my appreciation for that.

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