
Study Group - “Buddhist Tenets”

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For a short time, do your own meditation on whatever topic you wish. Just remember that it is important to establish the proper motivation when you start your meditation.

At the beginning of a teaching or practice, you hear quite often of the need to establish, or correct, your motivation. If you have already cultivated the right motivation, then of course there is no need for you to correct your frame of mind. Otherwise however, you need to establish the right motivation to correct your frame of mind. This means checking to see if there are any faulty states of mind present. Correcting your motivation means replacing those faulty states with the proper motivation. The best motivation is the bodhicitta motivation. It is the true aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Then, whatever your practice, it is to fulfil that aspiration of enlightenment.

As to the teachings, we are going to learn about the schools of Tenets. We are using the text, *The Explanations of the Principles of Tenets*, by the famous master Jetsun Choskyi Gyaltsan, which is a very popular source for studying the Tenets. Choskyi Gyaltsan is a very highly renowned master, who was known to have had direct visions of Manjushri.

Paying Of Homage

This text begins by paying homage to Manjushri, saying “I pay homage to Manjushri who is inseparable from my protector Guru”. The purpose of paying homage at the beginning of a text to a very special deity, or to all the gurus, or as here, to all the Gurus as being inseparable from Manjushri, is to successfully complete the given task. It is also to prevent any obstacles, as well as presenting the special deities, or the object of refuge, which the author sees necessary, or important, for the composition of the particular text.

Generally speaking, by paying homage to special deity, there is the benefit of increasing one’s merit. When merit is increased, then it naturally becomes easier to achieve whatever one is aspiring to achieve. It is said in one text that, “A person with enough merit will fulfil all his or her wishes”.

The root text says, “I pay homage to the Guru, and all my excellent gurus, who are inseparable in nature or entity from the guru protector, Manjushri.” In Tibetan, the term for paying homage is *chag tsal*. There are various meanings for these two words, *chag* and *tsal*. *Chag* refers to all the qualities of the objects of refuge, and *tsal* carries the implication of your wish to possess those qualities (of the objects of refuge). However from the point of view of secret mantra, the syllable *chag* refers to the non-dual union of bliss and emptiness, and *tsal* indicates your desire to achieve that wisdom.

The Tibetan term for guru, is *lama*. A lama is a spiritual teacher who instructs and guides you, for instance, on the four Noble Truths, or on what to practise and on what to abandon.

In Tibetan, Manjushri is *Jampal yang*. *Jam* means gentle, *pal* means endowed with, and *yang* means melodious. So *Jampal yang* means one who is endowed with the qualities of gentleness, and melodiousness. Manjushri has the quality of gentleness, in the sense that he is completely free from the roughness of delusions, or any non-virtues or negativities. Manjushri is called melodious because he possesses the sixty melodious qualities of speech. The *pal* indicates that Manjushri is endowed with the perfect qualities of perfect wisdom. In the root text, the gurus are also given the title *Jetsun*. *Je* which means noble, or excellent or supreme being. *Jetsun*, also has the implication of a navigator who directs one to the state of

liberation.

The text then explains the meaning of the term, Schools of Tenet. In Tibetan the word for tenet is *drup-ta*. It refers to a perfect view which you have established in your mind. Before you establish that view as a perfect final view, you have to expel all the wrong views that you might already have, through some process of conceptual superimposition. Having removed all these superimposed, mistaken views from your mind by applying various reasonings, you establish the correct view in your mind. Therefore you are a proponent of a tenet.

A tenet then, refers to a view that you have established within your mind. A proponent of a tenet, is one who advocates *drup ta*, or a view in the mind as an established conclusion.

The tenet or a *drup ta* which you have established in your mind, and which you now advocate to other people is something that you have developed through the long process of reasoning. You may also depend upon scriptural sources, but the main cause for developing this view is as a result of this long path of reasoning. From your own side, you examine and enter into a lot of examination and analysis and finally, on completion of this examination and analysis, you come to some conclusion. Then you know that you can rely on that conclusion as being one that is perfect. It is the end of your search for the truth.

There can be two types of proponent of a tenet, or *drup ta*: an insider proponent of a tenet, and an outsider proponent of a tenet. In other words, a Buddhist, and a non-Buddhist proponent. Here we are studying the proponents of Buddhist tenets.

1. Definition Of Tenets¹

The first heading refers to the definition. A proponent of a Buddhist tenet can be defined as a person who is a proponent of a tenet, and who accepts the Three Jewels, and nothing else, as the perfect object of refuge.

The Three Jewels, or the three objects of Refuge are the refuge objects of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. A proponent of Buddhist tenets does not accept any other form of object as a perfect object of refuge. A Buddhist is one, who from the depth of their heart, goes for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

Of course, we do not have time enough to discuss the three objects of refuge, but you can learn about them from the lam rim text. Generally speaking the way you, as a Buddhist, go for refuge to the Three Jewels, is that you recognise the Buddha as the perfect spiritual guide showing the perfect path of what to adopt, and what to discard in your spiritual practice. As a Buddhist you recognise the Dharma as the actual means that frees beings from cyclic existence, or the lower realms. Dharma is the actual means of achieving liberation. The Sangha are the companions, who assist one along the path, and who you recognise as a perfect model to follow on the path.

Here it is important to know the difference between a Buddhist and one who is not Buddhist. The distinction between Buddhists and others, is that Buddhists take refuge in the Three Jewels from the depth of their hearts. If one does not take refuge in these Three Jewels, then one is not qualified to be called a Buddhist. Without taking refuge, whatever form of spiritual practice that you do is also not a Buddhist form of practice. In other words, if you are not Buddhist your practice is not associated with your faith in the Lord Buddha as teacher, and in his word and his perfect, reliable and unflinching teachings. Because we take refuge in the Buddha as a perfect teacher, and because his teaching of Dharma is a perfect form of practice, then whatever practice we do relates to the words of the Buddha. For example the Buddha teaches us about moral

¹ Editor: This text has three main sections:

1. Definition
 2. Classification
 3. The Meaning of each Classification.
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ethics, giving, and patience. You follow these teachings out of your faith in them as they are the word of the Buddha. So whatever practice you do, becomes the practice of Buddhism.

The Four Seals

In some texts, it is said that a proponent of Buddhist tenets is one who asserts the four seals of Buddhism. This definition also gives a very good understanding of who can be called a proponent of Buddhist tenets. These four seals are:

1. All products are impermanent.
2. All contaminated phenomena are sufferings in nature
3. All phenomena are empty and selfless.
4. Nirvana is peace.

These four lines show the four fundamental views of Buddhist thought. Therefore there is very good reason to say that one who advocates these four views, or four seals, is a proponent of Buddhist tenets. We shall go through each of these four very briefly.

1. All products are impermanent. This a very deep view, and something we do not normally seriously believe. Normally we lack this view, but if we think carefully, it is a view we need to understand. What impermanent normally means is that things change, moment-by-moment. When we say that all products are impermanent, we are saying that the nature of all products is impermanence. That is their truth. It is a truth of all products that they are impermanent, as they are subject to momentary changes. Although this is a truth we have to recognise and seize upon, it also takes some thought and contemplation about all products in order to reach this conclusion.

2. All contaminated objects are suffering. What are contaminated things? The term basically refers to things which are the products of the karma and delusions of beings. As well as contaminated things, it also refers to those objects which serve as the basis for creating the cause of future suffering and misery. Therefore when we contemplate the fact that all contaminated objects are suffering, we do not necessarily have to think that they are suffering in terms of emotional pain, or something torturing you. Rather, suffering means it has the nature of suffering, in the sense that it can serve as the basis to create the cause of suffering, to cause some painful experience or emotions. It takes a lot of knowledge to fully understand such a view, and realise that all products are impermanent, and all contaminated things are suffering. This knowledge is gained by utilising one's reasoning mind, as well as knowledge of scriptural texts.

3. All phenomena are empty and selfless. To understand why all phenomena are empty of a self takes a lot of analysis about the way things exist. The nature of the final mode of existence of all things is one of the ultimate views of the Buddha.

4. Nirvana is peace. This shows the final state of liberation, which is the result of following the Buddhist path, and fully developing knowledge of the nature of the view of all phenomena.

If you study them, these four seals of Buddhist view incorporate the four Noble Truths. For example the view that contaminated things are suffering implicitly indicates the truth of suffering, and the cause of suffering. Saying nirvana is peace explicitly indicates the truth of cessation, and the truth of the path to cessation.

Special Qualities

The special qualities of the teacher of the Buddhist tenets are that the teacher is one who has completely exhausted all faults, but who is endowed with all the excellent qualities.

The Buddha is the founder of Buddhism. The special quality of his teachings is that they are based on the principles of non-harmfulness, non-violence, and the value of cultivating loving kindness and compassion towards all other living beings.

There are also the special qualities with regard to the philosophical view of Buddhist teachings. It is a view that is

free from the perception of all phenomena as a permanent, singular and independent self. This view of all things as being empty of permanent, singular and independent self, is something which is a view common to all the proponents of Buddhist tenets.

2. Classification

The presentation of the proponents of Buddhist tenets begins with four sub-headings, which are the four schools of tenets. The reason four schools of tenets evolved is because of the interpretations by the later followers of the three wheels of Dharma - the three discourses given by the Lord Buddha.

The Buddha turned the first wheel of Dharma in Varanasi. It was on the four Noble Truths. The first two schools of tenets, the Vaibashika and the Sautrantika, are based on that turning of the wheel. The Buddha's second wheel of teachings took place on Vulture's Peak near Bodgayha. Basing their teaching mainly on this discourse the two Middle Way schools were developed. From the third wheel of teachings, evolved the school of tenets called the Chittamantrin, or the Mind-Only school of tenet.

Before we go any further, it is important to make a distinction between calling someone a proponent of a Buddhist tenet *drup ta*, and a practitioner of a vehicle, which in Tibetan is *theg pa*. There are two vehicles, the lesser vehicle and the greater vehicle, the lesser and greater *theg pa*.

The point of differentiation between the philosophical views presented by the respective schools of tenet is the difference between the views of each. That is, the basis of presentation of the tenets concerns philosophical views.

We divide the vehicles into the lesser vehicle, and the greater vehicle. Furthermore, the greater vehicle can be subdivided into the perfection of wisdom vehicle, and the vehicle of the secret mantra. So the classification of vehicles into different categories is based on the presentations of the deeds or the actions of each vehicle, not philosophical views. We do not differentiate the vehicles in terms of different views that each one presents, as we do with the various schools of tenet.

So to sum up, of the four schools of tenets, the first two schools are the two lesser schools of tenets, and the other two are the two greater schools of Buddhist tenets. The distinction between the lesser and the greater schools is based upon the presentation of the view of selflessness.

The two lesser schools of tenets primarily present the view of selflessness only in terms of the person. Whereas the two higher schools presents the view of selflessness in terms of, and can be distinguished by, their presentation of the selflessness of other phenomena.

Tonight we raised some important preliminary points. From next week we shall go directly onto explaining the meaning of the text on tenets.

Meditating On The First Seal

In terms of spiritual practice, when you contemplate the impermanence of all products, it is good to think about this statement:

- The end result of meeting is departing,
- The end result of accumulating is losing,
- The end result of rising, is falling down,
- The end result of birth is death.

Meditation on this can help our mind to become familiar with this truth, so that when all these things happen in our own life, we can see them as the nature of our life - that it is the nature of life that after meeting someone, we depart from that person. Then we become more able to accept things as they are. In our life there is a lot of the pain and suffering, and we find it very hard to cope with this. If we do a meditation such as this in a right way, it is a practice which is directly related to our life, and what we experience in it. So therefore it has the effect of bringing some change to our life, in terms of bringing more

peace, happiness, and satisfaction to our life.

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