

SAKYA MONASTERY OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM

Religious Practice

H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Sakya Rinpoche

Translated by Jeffrey Schoening, Ph.D.

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We have come here to the monastery to do our religious practice. H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Rinpoche would like to talk briefly about the principle items. As you know, there are two types of clinging to the self. There is clinging to the self with regard to the individual, the person, and there is clinging to the self with regard to phenomena or dharmas. So briefly, Rinpoche would like to talk about the first type - that of clinging to the notion of self with regard to the individual.

So, we exist in what is known as samsara or cyclic existence, and in this state we have causes and conditions. We are born. We have a precious human body, which of course is connected to the human mind because these two are related. These act like a cause for our existence here. This is the cause: this precious human body. Being human we have our mental afflictions or worries. We have our physical illnesses. We have these different types of problems. It is part of being just human.

The problems that we have are connected with our clinging to the notion of self with regard to us as individuals. So, what can we do? We have three objects of refuge we can go to. We have the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha as the objects of refuge. By going directly to them this helps us to deal with this clinging to the notion of self. Who goes to refuge? We the individuals go to refuge. There is the individual and there are the objects to whom we go to refuge.

Whether or not we go to refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha is our choice. It is not something we must do. It's a choice that we have. We do this according to our own wish. If we do it according to our own wish then it's possible for us to do the practice and have good results. But if we do not do this according to our own wish

it is very difficult to do the practice. So it's really our own choice to take refuge. So with regard to the mental afflictions we have or physical problems we have, and those issues - then there is just the nature of happiness and suffering. Where there is happiness there is going to be suffering as well. Where there is suffering there is going to be happiness too. These two are connected. So that we can understand how this works - the sufferings that we have - the connection between happiness and suffering - it is very important and beneficial to understand the way that we cling to the notion of a self with regard to the individual.

According to the scriptures such as the Ratnavali [this text is by Nagarjuna] there are sayings about how humans are made up of five aggregates. So we have these constituent parts that make up a human being. Sometimes there are described as the five aggregates and sometimes as the twelve sense bases. Sometimes as the eighteen constituent elements, but they are basically the same thing. So these can act as a cause - just the fact that we have them and the basic nature of the body and mind of a human. This acts as a cause, so then we get the results.

There are verses saying that where the five aggregates are present there is going to be a clinging to the notion of self. This is the root text. Rinpoche will explain just a little bit, but he is not going to be giving a commentary at this time.

We are born as humans so it is important to understand that it is a precious birth. It is a real, great opportunity. One can look at it in terms of numbers - there are different realms of beings - such as hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, gods, jealous gods, and humans. And of these different classes or types of beings, the human is considered the most precious. So this is a great opportunity - having this human birth. So, having acquired this human body and human birth - then Rinpoche went to the clinging to the notion of self with regard to phenomena - with regard to dharmas. We have this going on too.

H.H. Dagchen Rinpoche refers to this other type of clinging - this clinging to the notion of self with regard to phenomena or dharmas. It is important to recognize that being made up of body, speech, and mind that we have obscurations of body, speech, and mind.

So, with regard to these obscurations there is also a saying that there is the accumulation of merit, which acts as a cause and there is the accumulation of wisdom, which acts as the result. These are the two accumulations that make up our path to enlightenment - the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. These work to remove another set of obscurations - those of defilement and those of knowledge. Rinpoche quoted again the Uttara Tantra [a text by Maitreya] about how we have these two types of obscurations - the obscuration of defilement, which is made up of something such as stinginess and grasping, and the obscuration of knowledge is

where we don't understand reality, which means we don't understand the nature of emptiness.

There is a saying that we accumulate merit and wisdom, which are the two accumulations. We gather the two accumulations and these then purify or eliminate the obscurations. So gathering these accumulations eliminates the obscurations. This is a saying that is common in all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

The preliminary practices or foundation practices in Tibetan Buddhism and these are designed specially for the accumulation of merit in order to eliminate these obscurations. For example, one of them is the performance of prostrations. And when doing these preliminary practices it is recommended that one do 100,000 repetitions. So we do 100,000 of these prostrations and this helps to, since we are doing it with our body, this helps to eliminate the physical obscurations. Some lamas will recommend especially doing the refuge recitation; doing the refuge meditation is good for removing all sorts of obscurations. Again, within all the schools of Tibetan Buddhism all the lamas recommend doing these preliminary practices also known as foundation practices. Again, it's for accumulating merit and eliminating the obscurations.

The preliminary practices are going for refuge, and arousing the thought (mind) of enlightenment. Again, one does these 100,000 repetitions. There is also the Vajrasattva meditation, which is with the one-hundred-syllable mantra. This is beneficial again for removing obscurations including the physical obscurations. There is the mandala offering, especially for accumulating merit, and then there are the prostrations mentioned before, and finally there is the guru yoga. The final practice is the guru yoga. So, these are the practices that make up the foundation practices or the preliminary practices.

Doing these practices helps to eliminate these obscurations. And when one is successful eliminating obscurations, then one is able to do one's practice much better. One is able to do the visualization of the deities and one can even have success in beholding the face of the deity. So, these are very powerful practices and if they are done successfully, then they can have these very powerful results.

There are teachings such as on the six perfections, which are generosity, morality, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom (discriminating insight). So, all of these six perfections are included in the preliminary practices. When one does the preliminary practices, one is also doing the practice of the six perfections.

There is clinging to the notion of our self in regard to the person. This brings on all sorts of sufferings for us and this is the very nature of our involvement in samsara (in cyclic existence). This is the root cause of our involvement in samsara - this clinging to the notion of self with regard to the individual. And also with regard to clinging to the notion of self with regard to phenomena or dharmas - it connects this with doing the preliminary

practices, doing the prostrations and taking refuge, and so on. When one does these practices well, then one eliminates one's obscurations. One gets to, instead of not recognizing the nature of reality and not understanding how happiness and suffering are related - through doing these practices one can see how they are related and how they are connected. One does get this sort of attainment.

This is very important - it is taught in the four schools - the Sakya, Kagy, Nyingma, Gelug - all of them do these practices. Books have been written about them describing these practices and telling you how to do these practices. You can read these books - they are available. By doing them one can work to eliminate one's obscurations and get to better understand how happiness and suffering are connected and how they are related. So, this is just a very important practice.

May the radiant flower of
Tibetan Tradition
be preserved for the
benefit of all beings.