

Lama Jampa Thaye
Week 4, *Parting with the Four Attachments*
March 24, 2014
“Attachment to Misconceptions About Reality”

Okay, so welcome back to our Tricycle Online Retreat. It's the final week. It's week four. So now we are going to pick up the teaching from where we left off last week. If you will remember, we dealt with the teachings which remedy the first three of the four attachments that Manjushri referred to in his core verse of his teaching. And we have been able to use the teachings to develop a kind of sense of spaciousness in our practice—genuine engagement in the dharma; a sense that the dharma is for freedom and not merely for improving ourselves in samsara.

And then we very decisively sensed that the dharma practice that we engage in is not something to be restricted for our own benefit; it's something that we need to utilize for the benefit of all in others. We've understood how the logic of the dharma leads to the bodhisattva path, the path of service to others, the path of becoming a Buddha in fact, of emulating the Buddha himself. So what's the problem now? Well the problem is this: that actually, even though we may be aspiring for Buddhahood authentically, we can't do it. We can't do it as Manjushri points out because there's something wrong with our views of the world. Manjushri said to Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, "If clinging arises, you haven't the view."

The view, what does "the view" mean first of all in this strangely enigmatic sentence? Well, there's all kinds of views, all kinds of ways of reading the world. But the view we are referring to here—Manjushri is referring to here—is the correct way of seeing the world the way that Buddha himself discovered, the view that made Buddha enlightened. It's everything that is not wrong view. It's of the view of reality as it truly is. Not merely an intellectual formulation of that, but a direct finally non-conceptual seeing of reality, of coming face-to-face with reality. It's that which strips away, finally, the most subtle of remains of attachment: the attachment to wrong views, which is of course ignorance and ignorance is a crucial problem for dharma.

Because of our tradition it's not disobedience of a God—or anything like that—that is the cause of suffering, the cause of our imprisonment in samsara. It's, actually, fundamentally ignorance. We don't see things as they are. And consequently we've elaborated a fictitious view of the world, a view of the world in which totally fictional entities dominate our thinking and our emotions and there's fictional entities, selves, objects, and so on are precisely that. They are bubbles. They don't have any actual inherent reality but we are so hypnotized by them—by our attachment to them—they are removed from life to life, driven by ignorance and ignorance; which then gives rise to disturbing emotions which gives rise to actions, which gives rise to all the samsaric situations that we've considered. We're imprisoned here and the real jailer is our own ignorance of the nature of the world. The form this ignorance takes is what we see in all the different philosophies that make up wrong views.

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From dharma's point of view they come in two major camps. Those views of eternalism and views of annihilationism. What does this mean? Eternalism means any view of the world which clings to the notion that there are entities whether physical or mental, whether one or many, which possess unceasing existence; whether it be a God, whether it be individual selves or the world itself. Anything that any view, any religious or philosophical system that proposes such a thing is for us the projection of ignorance, the misreading of the world.

But equally it's converse—views of annihilationism—views that reject any connection between cause and effect, which therefore deny past and future lives. These are merely the converse, merely the opposite side of that same deluded coin. They are wrong views also. The Buddhist view is the middle way. Not halfway between them, notice, but a middle way that actually transcends all these wrong views which are the projections of our own ignorance and ignorance about reality. So (inaudible), this last and most subtle of attachments to root out the last traces of ignorance of the world, of you can say reality even of who we are, we need to meditate and that's what we are going to do as we are going to discuss in this last session of our online retreat.

So in the parting from attachment system of practice that was taught by those early great Sakya masters like Jetsun Drakpa, Sakya Pandita, and Ngorchon Kunga Zangpo. At this point one teaches the meditations, specifically the meditations of calm abiding and insight. Why not just insight alone? After all, insight sounds like it's to do with wisdom and wisdom is what we need, to overcome wrong views? Sure, that's true but we must always be practical. We must always use methods that work. And right now our mind is way too disturbed for genuine authentic insight into natural phenomenon—let alone the nature of mind to arise—because we "dwell between the fangs of the disturbing emotions," as Shantideva so vividly put it. And knowing that insight is the only way to overcome those disturbing emotions we need first of all to cease that to meditate on calm abiding. In other words we need to focus our mind, before we can use it to examine reality.

That is the logic of practicing first calm abiding then—on the basis of an achieved calm abiding—to meditate on insight, and finally to join these together in one-pointedness, a one-pointedness that allows our mind to merge with reality itself; to see it nakedly, directly for the first time and overcome ignorance. So we're going to go through those meditations in sequence. Of course each one can be taught in extraordinarily detailed ways, but here I just want to point out kind of the core of these meditations; so that we can begin to put them into practice alongside the other meditations of this system. Calm abiding in Buddhism means one-pointed resting in the nature of mind itself. Because here's the point: until now our mind is being dominated by wave after wave of disturbing emotions and conceptualization. So even if we try to focus we cannot.

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So first we have to achieve this one-pointedness. How to achieve that is what shamatha calm abiding techniques, do. Now there are many different techniques of calm abiding. But all of them have the essential purpose of bringing our mind back into the present moment, bringing our mind back into alignment with what is here and now. So you can try this. In traditional text it teaches that we can use visual objects for instance like blue flower or a Buddha image and we can gaze one pointedly at them, bring our mind back again and again when it wanders until the mind finds a kind of settling, easy settling on the object itself. Or you could try to follow your breaths. For many people that is very helpful, particularly the concentration of breath, it's said, is a great practice to use when one is agitated by many thoughts. So perhaps try that.

Perhaps begin your practice of calm abiding by simply counting the breaths—the flow of the breaths—mentally of course. That is to say first sit in a comfortable position, make sure your environment is conducive to meditation, and of course begin the session with refuge in *bodhichitta*. So let's do that. To the Buddha, dharma, sangha I go for refuge into enlightenment by the merit of giving and sewing may I achieve Buddhahood for the benefit of others.

Now settle yourself. If you can sit cross-legged, that's wonderful. If not, sit upright but in a relaxed yet attentive way in a chair. Then place your mind lightly on your breathing. With each out breath count until you've reached 21, then begin the sequence again. When your mind wanders—it inevitably will do as a beginner—simply continue with the count. If you forget what number you are up to, simply return to one. It's not that you want to be good at this. Forget ideas of control and regulating. You are simply aligning your mind with the present moment through this introductory practice.

As your mind becomes more used to this, you'll find even that simply attentiveness to the flow of the breath is a sufficient reference point. Eventually even that won't be necessary, except when your mind is particularly disturbed by maybe something that's happening around you or whatever. So the object you use is merely a means. It's not to be maintained forever. And as I said earlier, if you prefer to meditate on a Buddha image or a blue flower use those as your reference points. Place one in front of you where you can see it comfortably and rather than bringing the mind back to the breath as with the counting the following practice, just bring your mind back to the Buddha whenever it wanders, bring it back.

Gradually, gradually a sense of spaciousness between the seemingly unceasing flow of thoughts will happen. It's like a difference between a stream when it's been descended from the high mountains where it's been falling over waterfalls and then fast flow ravines, to when it becomes more settled in the lower reaches. Gradually our mind becomes like that. It's not that you should

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try to obliterate thoughts all together. It's rather that you should learn to relax in the spaciousness between thoughts.

When that reaches a point where whatever thought arises, it is merely woven into your sense of being present—and the mind is no longer agitated or disturbed by thoughts or conceptualizations, but rests one pointedly with whatever arises and is evenly settled—you have some good kind of experience of *shamatha*. Certainly the shamatha that is necessary for the next step, which is proceeding to Vipassana or insight meditation. The shamatha is a shamatha that means that whatever arises in the moment—if a thought or emotion arises in our mind—it's not that it is suppressed or pushed out. It's rather that it's woven into that sense of attentiveness and oneness with the present moment and others we have one-pointedness and even settling. And it's the one-pointedness and even settling that extends outside of our practice, too, into everyday life. There's a sense of spaciousness, of fluidity, of flexibility in our encounters with things with people.

And it's not something that's confined just to the meditation cushion, so we need to practice. And that practice needs to be both light and gentle, not too intense, not too strong, but also focused; and otherwise practice a lot but practice for short sessions. If you practice too long—try to practice shamatha for too long—there's a kind of a tightness and a staleness and a dryness that comes about. So keep your sessions quite short but make them frequent. That way you'll certainly have success with shamatha.

Well that's great. From shamatha comes so many good qualities: feelings of blissfulness, of clarity, and so on. But it isn't a stripping away of that last attachment. And in fact if we fixate on shamatha, all we're going to do is find our way into one of those high samsaric realms that we talked about earlier. No, there needs to be the sword of wisdom present in our practice—so to speak—the Manjushri sword of wisdom that will cut through our wrong views. How does this arise? How do we acquire that sword? Well that's the purpose of Vipassana or insight meditation. And this system, as you can see, is Mahayana Buddhism. Vipassana follows shamatha. And that's, as I mentioned earlier, because without that focusing—that one-pointedness—attempts to practice Vipassana will be no more than just playing with concepts.

Buddhist concepts for sure, but there's a world of difference between the direct seeing—the naked seeing that real Vipassana brings about—and merely painting more ideas on reality rather than seeing it for what it is. So how to practice Vipassana? Let's do that now in our second session in this fourth encounter activities, fourth attachment. Let your mind relax again—recalling the qualities of shamatha for a moment or two—until your mind feels flexible, spacious, but grounded. Then, in that kind of openness, we start to look and what do we look at?

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We look first at external phenomena themselves. Until now without any examination, without an analysis, we've assumed that they really exist. And as a result we've clung to them as objects, of desire or aggression or just indifference. That's the way we see the world. That's something that our self is to conquer, to master, to grasp at; but it's something separate from our mind. That's what we believe, but is that true? So the first stage of Vipassana is to examine the relationship between appearances and mind itself.

As our mind relaxes, ask the question: “Is what I'm seeing, is what I'm hearing, is what I'm smelling, is this really an external object that is separate from my mind?” Which my mind is somehow going outside and finding an object, which existed just in that way, always separate from any perception? Or is it that this is just a mental appearance, a projection of my mind, an aspect of the mind itself? If I think no, it surely must be real, then I should think “but what is the difference between this and the images I beheld in my dreams last night?” I thought they were real. I reacted to them with perhaps passion or perhaps aggression or indifference or fear or fascination, because I felt they were real; but on waking I realized they weren't. They were just part of the texture in my mind. How is this experience I'm having now? How are these appearances any different?

In fact the way I am perceiving them, actually, is dependent on my mental states. Right now certain imprints of past experiences are ripening my mind and they produce the kind of textures of the world that I am experiencing. Change those imprints, maybe some of the imprints have ripened, and my whole sense of the world and of appearances completely changes. In fact it's as the scriptures say, finally, it's like a glass of water. A glass of water perceived in totally different ways by beings with different imprints. Hell beings seeing molten iron, ghosts seeing nectar, humans—with our kind of particular similar karmas that we share, and therefore born as humans—seeing it as water. But all these appearances are utterly dependent on the mind that gives rise to them. There is no truly valid external existing object. There are just mental appearances.

We may say, “but your analogy of a dream, the dream is short.” Our experience of things now seems solid and real. It seems solid and real but that's just because of the imprints. The habits that give rise to it are stronger than those very fleeting habits that give rise to most dream experiences. But the imprints that produce it is stronger don't give it any more reality; or else the more tenacious and long-lasting the delusion was, the closer it would become to being reality and we know that's not true. So, in this way by asking myself repeatedly again and again in relaxed meditation sessions, “Are these objects external or are they mind?” The great divorce, the great split between mind and the world dissolves. And we're part of the way to removing this attachment, attachment to wrong views. Because dualism, the sense of the split between self and other, between subject and object, between mind and the world is healed in this way.

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Am I there? Have I stripped out the attachment entirely? No. Because at this point we could—as the mind-only school of tenets, philosophers argued—be believing that while there's no external objects, there's no world out there, so to speak, there is a truly existent mind. What's wrong with that? Well by positing the truly existent mind, we still have something to cling to. There is still some reference for clinging. So we need to look now inwards, with mind look at mind itself and ask questions of mind, thoroughly interrogate the mind in relaxed meditative analysis that is the proper practice of Vipassana. What would a truly existent mind be? Well like everything else that I might imagine to be truly existent, it would be—it would have characteristics of something inherently existent.

Not dependent on mind, but existing from its own side. It would have location. It would have extension that is to say in space. It would have a time-bound existence. We could find its arising, its duration, its passing away. It would have a location because so-called truly existent things possess all these characteristics. Well, does mind? Actually I can't find any place where mind arose from; if mind arose from something from nonexistence, it would still be nonexistent because nothing can arise from nothing. If it arose from something existent it would be the reduplication of that.

So I cannot find a point where mind comes from. It can't come from anything whatsoever. Well proxy doesn't come from anything but it exists right now, does it? If it exists right now, where is it? Is it in my body? Is it external to my body? Is it between? But again I cannot find it in any of these places. Inside my body means it would have no experience of the external world. External to my body it would have no connection to these experiences which I say are me. And in between, well that's just compounding a double error. So I can't find any location. I imagine there is one. I'm emotionally attached to it, but it doesn't mean it's real. If mind had the characteristics for something truly existent it would have a shape, an extension in space.

Let's interrogate that. Is it square? Is it oblong? Is it triangular? Is it circular? To ask these questions, of course, is actually to realize our absurdity but that's not the point. Merely realizing this intellectually is not really the point here. It's that emotionally we are attached to the idea of mind to really exist, why? Because it's the last refuge before the self, that fabricated entity—permanent, singular, and autonomous—which we've been attached to since the beginningless time and is the root of all our sufferings. So mind has neither color, nor shape, nor location. It has not arisen; it doesn't endure. And if it doesn't arise and we can't find it in this present moment, we also could know it doesn't cease.

So mind is beyond any of those categories or qualities of an existent entity—neither arising, enduring, nor ceasing. We may then conclude mind is something nonexistent. It's nothing at all.

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That's not the right view. In that way we veer towards the wrong view of annihilationism, just as clinging to mind as something truly existent is to veer towards the extreme of eternalism. Why is mind not something simply nonexistent? Because of course, there are all these appearances: appearances of beings, appearances of samsara, of happiness, of suffering, of samsara nirvana. All these appearances are endlessly arising. They are the mind's manifestation.

So the mind, although it is empty of the characteristics of true existence, is equally empty, equally free from, equally devoid of the characteristics of nonexistence. It turns out that these two categories into which we try to force reality—existence on the one hand, nonexistence on the other—are merely mistaken fabrications of our clinging mind. Reality's nature eludes all our conceptual fabrications and all our linguistic designations. It is neither truly existent, nor truly nonexistent. I operate in that way because of my ignorance, because of my habitual ignorance. And as long as I operate within that framework, I cannot touch, taste, be one with ultimate reality. But in the space that opens up when I see through these fabrications, my mind is ready to merge with its own ultimate reality and the ultimate reality of all things—emptiness.

When we cut through these, all these characteristics that we're clinging to—of mind as having some true existence or true nonexistence—we are free. We are free from fabrications of reality, the false colors that we've painted onto reality; the mistaken reading of reality. And our mind relaxes. It relaxes because it doesn't try to argue with reality, pit itself against reality. It's supremely accepting and relaxed of reality, relaxed with reality.

And that leads to the third of our sequence of meditations to overcome—wrong view—which is the union of shamatha, calm abiding, and insight. Actually in a way that's not a technique, that's not really something to be striven for. It is more the resulting phase of the two preceding phases of practice. It is when mind and phenomenon, mind and reality, mind and its own nature are simply blended together like the water poured from two glasses mixed inextricably together. Whatever is experienced, is experienced in its true nature which is emptiness. And emptiness beyond all opinions, beyond all designations, beyond—as we put it—all elaborations of being this or being that; being existent, being nonexistent, being external, being internal. Here is true freedom. Here is the last trace of our clinging to wrong views, finally dissolved.

So that is the sequence of meditations that we should follow to arrive at the correct view. Philosophically speaking we call this view the Madhyamaka, the middle way, but as I cautioned earlier, Madhyamaka doesn't mean a compromise between two wrong views. It's middle way because it's beyond all partiality and all extreme views. It is in this way reality is seen by a fully awakened being. One who is awakened from the hypnotic spell of wrong views. One who is utterly free. This is also ultimate bodhichitta, the other aspect of the thought of enlightenment,

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the mind of a Buddha. Through compassion we dissolve self-centeredness. But through wisdom we remove every last refuge of that self-centeredness. There is no further place where self-centeredness and self-clinging can find any refuge. Now our mind is utterly free. This is the culmination of the sequence of practices of parting from the four attachments.

So that concludes our online retreat for this week and actually it concludes the whole sequence that we've been following here, the sequence of these wonderful teachings: "The Parting From the Four Attachments." It is about 40 years ago that I first heard of this teaching from Karma Thinley Rinpoche and His Holiness Sakya Trizin and it's been something I've received a number of times through my life, and it's been one of the foundation stones of my practice because—without this the so-called advanced meditations of the Vajrayana and the great study of the philosophical systems— they held no meaning unless this kind of teaching has first of all taken root in our heart. So I'm really happy I've been able to share it with you, and I hope it will be of some benefit to your ongoing path. So I wish all of you a very wonderful practice and yes, great success. Thank you.