

Phakchok Rinpoche
Week 2, *Mental Strength in the 21st Century*
December 8, 2014
“Tame Your Mind”
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I’m back again for all of you. I hope that you are looking at my humble face. I’m pretty sure you are enjoying this. Honestly speaking, I’m quite tired because I’m going through the middle of things here. I didn’t put on any make-up or polish. I hope I look good on camera for you guys.

Now, in the doctrine, you can say that the principle teaching is refuge. They actually explain a lot about refuge. In the last session, I talked about the mind and how important the mind is. After you understand that, you can really see yourself and say, “Oh, yeah, I can see that my mind has potential. I can see the power. I can see the qualities that give me suffering.” When you see that, it comes in very automatically. You say, “Oh, I really want to learn something now. I really want to learn. I can see my mind. I can do things with that. I can improve my mind. I can practice the Dharma.”

First of all, who taught genuine meditation? Who taught all the different methods and skills to transform our mind? Our teacher, Buddha. So how do we know he taught? Until now, we have collected his teachings, his scriptures—translated from Sanskrit—into over a hundred and two volumes. These are conversations by Buddha, our teacher. They were either taught by him or are discussions between his students and other friends. So now, what do I want to talk about? Through the teachings we know that Buddha talked about the importance of the mind. He said, “A tame mind brings happiness.” He said, “Taming the mind brings happiness.” Some people ask me, “What is the Buddhadharma?” People ask me other questions too, like “What is the spiritual path of Buddhadharma? What does Buddhism mean?” Honestly, I usually answer in a very simple way. I say what Buddha said. He said, “Do not do evil actions that are harmful to others and yourself. Don’t do these evil actions. Try to do good actions that benefit others and yourself.” The Buddha also said, “Tame your mind.” That is the Buddhadharma. It’s very simple and very profound.

The first thing he says that can make you more disciplined—don’t do evil things—means being conscious of your actions, whether they are physical, verbal or mental. On top of that, we practice compassion to benefit others. On top of that, we tame and transform the mind. That is genuine refuge. Who taught that? Our Buddha. That’s also why many people misunderstand. When we say, “take

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refuge,” we’re going to see people doing prostrations. Sometimes in the Thai or Sri Lankan traditions, they only do prostrations halfway. You going to see Chinese Ch’an or Japanese Zen practitioners doing certain prostration as well. With these motions, the hand opens up like this. In the Vajrayāna tradition, or the Tibetan Buddhism tradition, they put hand like this or use their whole body for prostrations. You may wonder why they do prostrations. People say they’re worshipping, but no, that’s a misunderstanding. You see, when we have an automatic mind, we have identity. Identity means me or I. The majority of the time, people are very proud or very prideful. They think, “I am the right person. I am the best. I am this, I am this, I am this.” All day we talk about I. Listen for yourself—you’ll hear “Me, me, I, I, me, me, I, I” all the time. Whether you are a Buddhist or not, it doesn’t matter. “I” does not have a religion. “I” is neither spiritual nor not spiritual. It doesn’t matter. I, I, I, I, me, me, me, me, I, I, I, me, me.

We also complain here and there. We need to learn how to reduce that pride. We use the phrase “skillful means.” That’s really why we bow. We place the head on the ground to bring our pride down. That’s why we put the palms together like a lotus flower on the heart, saying that we could actually pray from bottom of our hearts. My body, my speech and my mind were created by the five negative emotions—pride, anger, attachment, jealousy and stinginess. These are five negative poisons that we can see in our minds. We touch the forehead down on the ground and say, “May Buddha, Dharma and Sangha please bless me to purify my five negative emotions. Bless my body, bless my speech.”

People ask me what the blessing is, so I’ll explain it to you. Think of a very lovely person. It can be your father, mother, uncle, grand-uncle, or grandmother. It should be someone who really loves you. That person is very gentle and is so important for you. Then think about your loved one—that particular mother, father, whoever it is—whenever you feel lonely. Think about this person—your grandmother, for example. Say, “Oh, my gentle grandmother. She’s so kind to me.” Just think about her and feel her presence. Recall the things she did for you. Think, “She’s so lovely. She makes me day.” Then you feel warm. You feel happy. This is the blessing of a genuine love. Now the Buddha actually practiced that lovingkindness, but in a more developed way. He practiced it with his compassion—a quality that exists whether you are religious or not, a believer or not, or evil or good, or whatever. No, there are no differences. All beings have

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Buddha’s compassion. The Buddha said, “All beings have equal wishes to be happy and not to suffer. They also have equal amounts of negative emotion, pride and ignorance.” Even if you are religious person, it doesn’t matter. Everybody is equal. We might be a little bit different here and a little bit different there and have different conditions, but everybody is equal.

The Buddha says, “We’re all equal and compassion is wanting to see all beings free. I learned this meditation. I practice. I know how to get out from the three poisons, myself. I taught this to others, my wife and my children.” Buddha’s wife and children are in his kingdom as his students. He said, “They succeeded. I wish to teach this to all beings to benefit others.” He had that love and kindness. That’s why we put Buddha’s statue up. We don’t worship the statue like a role model. In America you have a role models, like actors. You have these magazines that talk about who marries, who divorces and all those kind of things. You have these big, big magazines, yeah? You also like to put your family members’ photos on your wall and your refrigerator, in dining rooms, sitting rooms and bedrooms. Are you worshipping? Are you image worshippers? No. You want to put these photos up because you know that you have family members and you want to remember your lovely family members. Isn’t it exactly the same thing?

Two-thousand, six hundred years ago, our beloved teacher gave us the teachings that I can see right now. I can see the changes in my life. That’s why I remember him. What does he do? He doesn’t show an angry face. Our Buddha’s face is the same all the time. First, his right hand is down and his left hand is up. His shoulders are wide. He’s very handsome. His eyes are open all the time. You don’t see so many statues with open eyes. His eyes are very peaceful. Next time you see a Buddha statue, try to see how his eyes are very peaceful. His mouth is not smiling very broadly, but just a little bit. It’s a deep, subtle smile. His shoulders are very broad. He shows dignity and confidence. He also shows strength and his gentle eyes are full of deep joy. His earlobes are very long because he likes to listen to everyone’s complaints. No, I’m just kidding. It’s most important to recognize the open eyes, the broad shoulders. Every statue is like this because we want to keep this image of Buddha as our role model. In this statue we can see calmness, confidence, dignity and deep joy. That is our role model, our teacher.

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We want to follow this teacher. Every morning we bow, “Oh my Buddha, teacher Buddha, please think of me. I’m thinking of you. You bless me. I want to become like you.” How do we become like him? The Dharma. Every day, learn the teachings and keep practicing. That is the Dharma. Look at your discipline. How are you behaving? Who’s really practicing? The Sangha. The monks, the nuns, the lay practitioners—they all are sanghas and spiritual friends. When you have friends, they’re going to tell you to do practice. You see? If you don’t have any friends, you’re slowly going to forget to practice. That is the basic idea of refuge.

Now you understand your mind and how troubled it is. Now you know that you can trust Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Dharma teaches you how to practice. Through the Buddha’s compassion, you received the Buddha’s blessings and have become a role model. You also have the Sangha that reminds us to practice and, from time to time, teaches us how to practice. When you combine Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, you can say, “Oh, I take refuge in you. I learned how to meditate and how to change myself.” See, do you understand now? Refuge becomes meaningful when you understand your mind. You see? When you don’t understand your mind, refuge does not really make sense. Prostrations do not make sense. However, when you know about your mind, prostrations make sense. Refuge makes sense, statues make sense and sitting on the front of the statue makes sense. Everything makes sense.

So now, how do you practice refuge? Every morning when you wake up you are a spiritual follower. You are a Buddhist person, a practitioner. You must have an altar. Your altar should be very beautiful. Why? It’s not because Buddha wants your altar to be beautiful. This is for you. Do you love Buddha? Do you love the happiness that you receive from practice? Who taught this? Buddha taught this—our beloved teacher, Buddha. Include a nice statue or a photo. Include nice offerings like flowers or incense. Then, each morning you wake up, put your palms together like a lotus flower and pray. Then you do the prostrations. After slowly prostrating two or three times, sit down to do a little practice of lovingkindness and compassion. Then go to meditation. You can try the practice of creating space or whatever type of meditation that you practice. That is called refuge. This simple practice in the morning is refuge.

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Whenever you feel difficulty, think of the Dharma. Whenever you have difficulty, think of that. I’ll give you one short example. Four years ago I went to the dentist. After the dentist, I went to the coffee shop. I was in a very bad mood and my mind had become crazy. I felt I had no meaning in life and I completely lost hope. I lost my interest in my Dharma and everything. Gone within a second! A big voice in my head was telling me, “Prraaaactice meditaaaaation.” It sounded a little bit like my teacher. In the coffee shop, I could easily meditate. I just sat very simply and held a magazine. I was acting like I was looking at the magazine, but I was meditating. After three or four minutes, I finished my meditation. My meaning-of-life thinking was gone. My bad mood? Gone. Everything came back. Within three or four minutes, I knew exactly what to do in my life.

I cannot lie to you. It’s very bad. Spiritual lies are the worst. So it’s not a lie, this example to you. Whenever you feel difficulties, don’t forget Dharma and Buddha and Sangha.

To my beloved friends, I’d like to say how very fortunate you are that you have Tricycle. Two lovely people drove here from an hour away to create this video. They put a lot of effort into it. Then they needed to wait for me for 45 minutes! This is so meaningful because I know that some of you are going to benefit from this. I would like to send you love and care. Thank you very much watching this video. Thank you very much.
