



Hi, how are you today? This is the last episode of our Dharma Talk series. I'd like to take the opportunity to thank Tricycle again for this wonderful opportunity to share the Pure Land school's teachings with you. As a Buddhist minister, the question I am asked most frequently by people at the temple or on social media is how to apply Buddhist teachings to our lives. This week, we will see how to apply the teachings we learned last week to our ordinary lives.

As Buddhists, we need to target the source of our desires and attachments, which produces our failure and foolishness. We need to be mindful of our life and attitudes. Let's examine how we can free ourselves from the shackles of ego and relax in our buddhanature. First of all, we need to understand that we have three poisons in our mind: ignorance, craving, and wrath. These three poisons are responsible for producing all of our karma.

We think we can deal with our karma and control it, but because we sometimes act without thinking, that's actually very difficult. We have unconscious biases about people, we curse, we produce suffering without intending to; all of it generates bad karma. Of course, we do also generate good karma, but as I said last week, it's very difficult to balance the bad karma with the good karma.

If we can't control our karma, how can we attain Buddhahood? Because Buddhahood—enlightenment—is a state where we don't judge or resist situations anymore. Our judgements are produced by the three poisons, so we need to get rid of them. The Buddha said we need to follow the Middle Path to get rid of the poisons. The first part of which is right conscience. Everything starts from that point, because it's almost impossible to have the right speech, right mind, and right attitude without the right conscience.

To do that, we need to understand our position in samsara, and we have to understand how to deal with its poisons. Shinran was very descriptive when he said that poisons are like clouds in



front of the sun blocking its light. The sun is the Buddha’s compassionate heart, and the clouds are our poisons of ignorance, craving, and wrath. The sun is always there, but we think it is night because we can't see the sun; it is obscured. It's like our true nature: because of our passions, we cannot see our true nature. We cannot see ourselves without those passions, and because of that, it's very hard to attain Buddhahood in this world. That's why last week we talked about the Pure Land philosophy of being reborn in a pure land as a way to attain Buddhahood.

But since we live here in this world, we need to deal with the obstacles around here. We can live in the pure land after this life, but we need to prepare ourselves here and now by being mindful of our speech, thoughts, and actions. To do that we need to understand that we are part of a system that Buddha used to call Indra's net. He used the metaphor of Indra’s net to explain how every action we take impacts all the other nodes of the net. But we forget that all the time, and we are unaware of how our actions impact others. Every time we act with a egoic attitude we forget that we impact all the others around us.

‘Mindfulness’ has become a buzzword; it is fashionable now. There are a lot of training courses and methods that say they teach mindfulness without the religious part. I don't know how this happened, when you talk about mindfulness, there is a religious purpose to develop mindfulness, which is to eliminate the poisons in our minds. The Buddha taught we need to be mindful of our speech and attitude so we can get rid of those poisons.

We have an *objective* with mindfulness. The objective is not to work more or to produce more. The objective is to become more compassionate and to learn to act with more wisdom. Compassion and wisdom are the two main characteristics of a Buddha. In the Jodo Shinshu school, we develop mindfulness by reciting the name of the Buddha, *Namu Amida Butsu* [or “*Namu Amida Bu*”]. When we recite a person’s name, we automatically think of that person’s qualities, whether those are good or bad. If somebody says my name, Mauricio, if they know me,



they will think of me. They will remember I'm a Buddhist minister; they will remember I'm married; they will remember I have two daughters; they will remember I like road cycling.

When I recite the Buddha's name, I remember his qualities. I remember his example, so I remember the dharma. To recite the *nembutsu*—*Namu Amida Butsu*—is the same as recollecting the Buddha and the dharma. Why do we need to recollect the Buddha and the dharma? Because that helps us to be mindful of our actions and our presence in this world. We can develop those qualities anywhere, in any situation, just by putting ourselves in someone else's shoes so we feel what he or she feels, and we understand all the suffering they experience and how they live.

Chanting the *nembutsu* helps us to understand that we are all equal and have the same level of passions as anybody else. When I recite the *nembutsu*, I remember the dharma, and I remember the teachings that say there is a Pure Land waiting for me where it is much easier to practice than in this world. I remember that a Buddha—many, many years ago, far away from here—made a vow that every single sentient being can attain Buddhahood, and I entrust myself to his compassionate heart.

In practicing the Buddhist teachings every day we should be careful not to develop a materialistic spiritual life. Like Chögyam Trungpa [Tibetan Buddhist teacher; founder of the Shambhala International school] used to say, practicing the dharma is not about living a life that is fake. It's not about trying to be a person that you can't be just because you start to study or practice the dharma or meditation. You just need to be yourself. You just need to recognize your boundaries and limitations based on the poisons of your mind. Once you remember that—once you remember how Shinran called himself "foolish body," and how Shakyamuni Buddha gave up harsh ascetic practices because he couldn't transform himself through them—then you understand that trying to be a person that you are not will lead to failure similar to ascetic



practice. It's much better for you to become exactly what you are, to recognize yourself with all your limitations and understand yourself. Then you try to improve yourself.

Take the metaphor of carrot cake. Imagine you go to the grandmother's house on the weekend and there is a very nice carrot cake on top of the table. You get a piece of that cake, eat it, and then you think, *Mm, this is a good cake, but I'd like to improve it.* Maybe you can put a little more sugar or a different type of carrot or chocolate icing on top of it. But you don't know the recipe and your egoic attitude won't let you ask your grandmother for it. You go home, try to put all the ingredients together—not knowing the amount or the quality—and just try to make a better carrot cake. Well, you're going to produce anything *but* a carrot cake. You're going to produce something totally different from what you are expecting because you cannot improve something that you don't know.

We spend a lot of time trying to improve a person that we don't know and trying to hide our poisons instead of finding antidotes to them. Maybe we are so delusional that we think we've found the antidote, but it's just a cover, just makeup. When we are practicing, we feel we are almost enlightened, but when we go out into the world and drive a car, we curse, shout, and wish bad things upon people. But we go to the dharma center every single week, of course. You have to go. We all go. But we need to *live* the dharma, we need to *live* the teachings. It's better to understand one teaching and practice it 100 percent of the time than to try to be a bodhisattva. Remember what I said two weeks ago about oxygen masks on planes—you need to help yourself first before you help others.

To apply the Buddhist teachings in our lives is like reciting the nembutsu, *Namu Amida Butsu*. For me it's about trying to remember the Buddhist teachings every time I speak or act. But don't think you can get rid of all your karma; it's almost impossible to do that because we are producing more karma every day, both good and bad. The nembutsu helps us to jump across



samsara and reach the Pure Land. The nembutsu is one method among many others, and I'm not saying it's better or worse than the other ones. It's just a method dedicated for those who can't be bodhisattvas.

The numbutsu is a method dedicated for those of us like Shinran, those who are incapable of carrying on a rigorous practice and recognize that their minds are full of passions and poisons. To practice on a daily basis is to recognize the poisons in our minds every day, at every moment, and to put ourselves in a humble position in front of the others. We should try to understand other people's experiences and motivations. Of course, we are going to judge, but if we remember the Buddha, we will be reborn in the Pure Land.

I hope you enjoyed what I have shared with you and are interested in learning more about the Pure Land doctrine. I would like to excuse my English and my accent, but I hope you understood my words. I'd like to thank Tricycle again, from the bottom of my heart, for giving me this opportunity to do this four-week teaching. I invite you to recite the nembutsu with me once more and I hope you stay well. Namu Amida Butsu. Namu Amida Butsu. Namu Amida Butsu.