

Homage to Buddha Amitabha!

Today, on the occasion of our practicing the Accomplishment of Sukhavati, I'd like to give a brief explanation in every-day language that is easy to understand of what to contemplate from the preliminary setting of bodhicitta motivation up to the final making of dedication prayer; so everyone listen well. If you don't listen well you won't apprehend what I'm saying, and if you don't apprehend it, you won't understand the meaning, and if you don't understand the meaning you won't know what to meditate on. For this reason Buddha said, 'O son of the lineage, Listen well, keep it mind, and I will explain.' If we don't listen well, we will be polluted by the three faults of a vessel and Dharma will not be able to benefit our mind. The three faults of a vessel are, if you don't listen, it is like the vessel is upside down. If you don't remember it is like the vessel has sprung a leak. If it is mixed with delusion it is like the vessel has poison in it.

Even if you are sitting in a Dharma teaching if you do not listen with single pointed focus, if a vessel is upside down, no matter how much liquid you pour into it, it won't go inside the vessel. Otherwise, even if you listen with attention, if you don't remember, it is like liquid not remaining in a vessel no matter how much is poured into it. Finally, even if you listen well and remember the teachings, if your mind is polluted by the influence of delusions such as pride, competitiveness, jealousy, and so on, it is like good food that has been defiled by poison. In such a case, even Dharma itself does not subdue your mind by acting as the antidote to the delusion, but, rather, assists the growth of delusions, which is extremely unfortunate. We need to recognize that Dharma is an unexcelled way to gain control of our mind. If delusion is not subdued through our practice of Dharma, our pride, competitiveness, jealousy, and so forth will just become stronger and stronger. As Dagpo Rinpoche said,

If Dharma is not practiced Dharmically, Dharma becomes a cause of returning to lower realms of existence!

We must be very careful that this does not happen!

In any case, if you are sitting in a Dharma teaching, without letting your mind go to the supermarket, keep your mind inside your body and don't let it be influenced by delusions. Listen to the Dharma with single pointed focus, like a deer listening to the sound of a violin.

Furthermore, when we listen to Dharma we should have four reliances:

Don't rely upon the person but upon their teaching.

Don't rely upon the words but upon their meaning.

Don't rely upon provisional meanings but upon definitive meaning.

Don't rely upon ordinary consciousness but upon transcendent wisdom.

Thus, regardless of whether the guru who is teaching is an ordinary person, a monk, or a tantric practitioner, we must think about their teaching itself.

Then, we should not be pleased by their words if they are interesting, poetic, and straightforward, but displeased if their speech seems faulty to us; rather, we must think about the meaning of the words they speak.

As the Kadampa masters said,

The supreme guru is the adversary of our faults.
Their supreme instruction goes directly to our faults.

Then, as for the meaning itself, we should contemplate not the meaning that Buddha taught provisionally in order for trainees to attain the temporary benefit of high rebirth, but, rather, the definitive meaning that Buddha taught in order for beings to attain buddhahood.

Then, with regard to the awareness which engages that meaning, we must not use ordinary consciousness that is associated with delusion and afflicted states of mind, but rather, non-conceptual transcendent wisdom that is free of delusion.

In brief, when we receive Dharma teaching we should listen without losing three recognitions: the recognition that we ourselves are like a sick person, that Dharma is the medicine, and that the teaching guru is the doctor. Furthermore, we should understand that the dharma being taught is something to remedy and transform our impure, deluded, afflicted states of mind.

In general, the word 'Dharma', in Sanskrit, when translated into Tibetan, means to hold or to protect. Dharma holds us back and protects us from falling into the abyss of the three realms of samsara and eventually brings us to the safety of a buddha's state of omniscience. Dharma is not principally verbal or physical practice, but a practice of developing our mind; this is very important.

As said in Guide to the Bodhisattva Conduct:

An instant of mental clarity results
in rebirth as Brahma and so forth.
Physical and verbal actions,
being lesser, do not yield such results.
All recitation and austerities that are undertaken,
even if pursued for great lengths of time,
if done with a distracted, wandering mind,
are therefore said to be meaningless.
If one does not know this secret instruction about mind,
even Dharma of supreme meaning,
done with the wish for happiness and to destroy suffering,
only leads to suffering and tormented wandering.

Before beginning the actual body of a practice, it is a very important precept to adjust your motivation. Buddha said in Sutra,

Specific intentions are that create virtue and non-virtue,
not the size of the reflection-like actions induced by those intentions.

Thus, as said, it is following upon whether motivation is positive or negative that actions performed by the body and speech become virtuous or non-virtuous, not by the actions

themselves; they are not most important factor. Therefore, before beginning the main body of a practice it is extremely important to adjust your motivation. The current practice we are doing, the Accomplishment of Sukhavati is a Mahayana practice and furthermore, an extremely sacred and profound practice of Secret Mantra Tantrayana. Even though it is Mahayana and very profound however, if the practitioners themselves lack the bodhicitta motivation the practice being done cannot become that of the Mahayana. If the practitioner has the bodhicitta motivation of Mahayana, however, even if a practice they are doing is a Hinayana practice, like iron transformed into gold with an alchemical elixir, the practice can become a Mahayana practice. Otherwise, if the practitioner is influenced by impure motivation such as competitiveness or jealousy, the practice will not even be beneficial; it could become very harmful! Like medicine transformed into poison, or a god brought down to the level of a demon. We must adjust our motivation this way: 'All sentient being was happiness and don't want suffering just like myself! Although beings want happiness, however, they don't know how to practice holy Dharma which is the real cause of happiness. Although they don't want suffering they run toward suffering throughout the day and night. As said in the Guide,

Though wanting happiness, because of confusion,
they destroy their own happiness like an enemy!
Though having the wish to free themselves from suffering
they run toward nothing but suffering!

It is as Shantideva has described. Think, I'll practice Dharma today in order that sentient beings may attain not just temporary happiness, but ultimate happiness. Then, with our mind guided by a genuine feeling of unbearable great compassion for beings, we should engage in the main practice.

Today our main practice is The Accomplishment of Sukhavati. The special indispensable support and aid to accomplishing Sukhavati through this sadhana is the four causes for birth in Sukhavati.

The first cause is bringing the pure land of Sukhavati to mind. The second cause is gathering immeasurable roots of virtue. The third cause is generating bodhicitta. The fourth cause is making prayers and dedications. If we practice the Accomplishment of Sukhavati with these four causes complete, as Buddha Amitabha said, the practitioner will take birth in Buddha Amitabha's Pure Land at the time of death or during the 'bardo' the intermediate state. Buddha Amitabha made the prayer that if a practitioner would not take birth in his Pure Land by having fulfilled these conditions then he, himself, Buddha Amitabha, would not attain enlightenment. The fact is, however, that Buddha Amitabha did attain enlightenment.

When we do the recitation of the main body of this practice we should do it with full concentration of our body, speech, and mind. We can consider ourselves very fortunate to be able to practice the Accomplishment of Sukhavati in our regular Monday evening practice. During this short time, the hour that we do the practice we should do it carefully and conscientiously. At the level of our forehead about a cubit's length in front of us, at best, if possible, visualize the entire Principal and entourage of Buddha Amitabha's Pure Land. If we can not visualize that extensively, we should simply think

that Buddha Amitabha and his two entourage of Avalokitesvara and Vajrapani are actually present in the space before us with faith and devotion.

When we recite the mantra visualize white nectar the color of milk pouring from Buddha Amitabha's body dissolving into the crown of our head. Like sunlight drying up dew on the grass, visualize that it purifies all physical sickness, spirit hindrance, negativity and obscuration and especially all obstructions to our attainment of enlightenment. Furthermore, if we are sick we should do this visualization of nectar dissolving into us repeatedly, again and again. This has tremendous benefit.

Remember, however, that we do not practice Dharma just for the sake of common attainments such as these, health, long life, and so on, but, rather, for the reason stated in our prayer to the lineage gurus:

We beg You, grant blessings and siddhis, To attain our innate Buddhahood!

This is our actual desired objective. The reason enlightenment is not easy to attain is that we are obstructed by many hindering obscurations and negativity. To dispel these obstructions the root of blessings is the Guru, the root of attainments is the Yidam, and the root of clearing obstructions is the Dakini and Dharma Protectors; we should rely on these.

Guru Rinpoche said,

Recite mantra like a child crying to its mother
with the sweet tones of lutes and flutes
making requests throughout the six periods of day and night.

When we do the recitation of mantra we should recite it like a child crying out for their mother. There is a reason for reciting the mantra with a chanted melody. To take the example, if a mother's only child went outside and encountered danger such as from a wild animal, the child would cry out and the mother becomes immediately very concerned about what is happening. In general, even if we are not crying out to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, they are watching out for us throughout the day and night; this is a special quality of enlightened beings. Yet we need to make the appeal for their assistance for something that is even more important than to become free of some temporary danger.

When we practice the completion stage we again make strong appeals to Buddha Amitabha visualize Buddha Amitabha as before now smiling at us with delight saying, Oh son or daughter of the lineage, as you have requested, I will bless and take care of you from now on until your attainment of full enlightenment. Rejoice when Buddha Amitabha says this. At the same time visualize that Buddha Amitabha in the nature of all the Three Jewels and Three Roots transforms into an orb of red light and dissolves into the crown of your head with blessings and attainments. Harmful physical actions such as of killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct, all negativity, faults, and obscuration of the body are completely purified and cleansed. Your body transforms into that of Buddha Amitabha.

Then the orb of light passes down from your crown chakra to dissolve into your throat. All non-virtue, faults, and obscurations of speech such as with lies, divisive speech, harsh speech, and meaningless talk is completely purified and cleansed and your speech becomes the nature of Buddha Amitabha's speech.

Then the orb of light passes down from your throat chakra and dissolves into your heart chakra. All negativity created through the mind through covetousness, malice, and distorted philosophies is completely purified and cleansed and your mind is transformed into the nirmanakaya, the truth body, the mind of Buddha Amitabha.

Thus your impure body, speech, and mind are all transformed into the nature of Buddha Amitabha's body, speech, and mind. Finally the meditated Deity and yourself, the meditator, disappear into vast expanse. Settle into equipoise on whatever appears without alteration, free of projections. As we say in our Prayer to Induce Dzogchen View,

Don't wander, don't wander, extend mindfulness
On the path of distraction lurk demonic bandits

Attachment and aversion are the demons

So look at the illusory nature, free from duality.

Primordially pure, unfabricated, your own mind manifesting,

Buddha is nowhere else, settle right where you are.

Not seeking elsewhere, settle in the natural state

Without meditation, spontaneously accomplished, enlightenment is attained.

Thus, meditate without distraction. Finally, we should make a dedication of all virtue such as that which we have created through our practice of the Accomplishment of Sukhavati so that all living beings be freed from the sufferings of samsara and the worse realms of cyclic existence. Dedication causes the roots of virtue we have created to increase exponentially. If we do not make dedication, roots of virtue will be destroyed by anger and other delusions. In order to preserve roots of virtue from destruction it is extremely important to make dedication prayers, so please do.

This completes these instructions given today in connection with the Accomplishment of Sukhavati practice. I would like to send my special good wishes to all those attending today, as well as to all those who are listening with great interest from afar over the internet. Tashi Deleks!

