

Introduction

This evening I will say a few things about the dharma. I wish to thank all of you for regarding this as something important and for coming to hear what I have to say. I will begin by offering a supplication. Please listen with faith in the Buddha and the Dharma. After that I will begin to explain the text.

[TR chants]

This evening I will be speaking about the stages of meditation that were taught by the great Indian master Kamalashîla. In Tibet we have both sūtra and mantra. The stages of meditation that Kamalashîla explained in his text on that topic are mainly those of sūtra.

In the seventh century, King Songtsen Gambo^a came to Tibet and, later, Trisong Detsen^b came there also. Both caused the teachings of the Buddha to develop in Tibet. Trisong Detsen invited the Indian master Shântarakshita, who has come to be known as the Bodhisattva Abbot, to come to Tibet. He accepted their invitation and established the Buddha's teachings newly in Tibet. Having disseminated the Buddha's teachings, while in Tibet, Shântarakshita entered nirvâna. Before dying, he said,

I have planted the authentic Buddhadharma in Tibet. However, in the future there will be trouble for the Buddhadharma in Tibet. Generally, when there is trouble for the Buddhadharma, it comes from those who are not Buddhists, but that is not what will happen in Tibet. The trouble will come from someone who is a Buddhist but who will speak falsely. When trouble comes, you should invite my student Kamalashîla, who lives in India. He will quell the troublemaker, which will allow the authentic Buddhadharma to remain for a long time.

In that way, Shântarakshita foretold what was to happen in the future.

Later, in accordance with the great Abbot Shântarakshita's prophecy, a man named Hwa Shang Mahâyâna came from China to Tibet and taught dharma. The dharma that he taught was a little different from the dharma taught by the great master Shântarakshita. Hwa Shang Mahâyâna said that just as black clouds cover space and the sun, so white clouds also cover space and the sun. Also, just as when a black dog bites, the bite causes pain and hardship, so when a white dog bites, the bite wounds and causes pain. The two dog-bites are the same in that way. Similarly, when nonvirtuous thoughts arise, they cover [the mind's abiding nature], and when virtuous thoughts arise, they cover [the mind's abiding nature]. Therefore, one should remain without any thoughts at all. Hwa Shang Mahâyâna said that that was the main point.

When Hwa Shang Mahâyâna taught this slightly different dharma, everyone became confused. They did not know how to practice dharma. They did not know how to enter the paths. Thus, trouble arose. When the king realized that trouble had come to those who practiced dharma, he convened a meeting so as to determine what would remedy the situation. At the meeting, one of the great Abbot Shântarakshita's students reminded the assembly of the prophecy that Shântarakshita had given at the time of his death. Since things had come about as Shântarakshita had foretold, the Tibetans invited Kamalashîla to come to Tibet, as Shântarakshita had recommended.

^a *srong btsan sgam po*, b. 617

^b *khri srong lde btsan*, who ruled from 755 to 797

When, having come to Tibet, Kamalashîla met Hwa Shang Mahâyâna for the first time, Kamalashîla thought, “If he has knowledge, we can meet in debate. If he is a fool, we cannot meet in debate.” In order to see whether or not Hwa Shang Mahâyâna had knowledge, Kamalashîla circled Hwa Shang Mahâyâna’s head three times with a stick, thereby posing the question, “From what cause do the three realms of cyclic existence arise?” Because Hwa Shang Mahâyâna had great knowledge and good qualities, he understood the gesture that Kamalashîla had made and withdrew his hands inside the sleeves of his robe, thereby replying, “The three realms of cyclic existence arise from the ignorance that conceives of the apprehended and the apprehender.”

In dependence upon that, Kamalashîla knew that Hwa Shang Mahâyâna possessed knowledge and that they could meet in debate. Thereafter, people gathered for the debate. The king, a witness, Kamalashîla, and Hwa Shang Mahâyâna were sitting together, and the king placed one garland of flowers in the hands of Kamalashîla and another in the hands of Hwa Shang Mahâyâna. The king then said, “Two systems of dharma have arisen: the dharma of sudden realization and the dharma of gradual realization. Because of that, people have become confused about how to practice dharma. To clarify that confusion, please debate. When you have debated, the loser should, without pride, offer his garland of flowers to the victor. Then, whoever loses should leave Tibet and return to his own country.”

Then they debated. Kamalashîla asked questions and defeated Hwa Shang Mahâyâna. Having lost, Hwa Shang Mahâyâna offered his garland of flowers to Kamalashîla, did not remain in Tibet, and returned to China. Beginning from then, the traditions of dharma taught by the great Abbot Shântarakshita and by Kamalashîla have held sway in the snowy land of Tibet.

After that, King Trisong Detsen said the following to Kamalashîla: “You have seen the trouble that arose here. In order that the teachings of the Buddha not be afflicted similarly in the future, please compose newly a good treatise that is easy to understand and of great benefit.” In dependence upon the King’s request, Kamalashîla newly composed the threefold text known as the *Stages of Meditation*, which consists of the *First Treatise on the Stages of Meditation*, the *Intermediate Treatise on the Stages of Meditation*, and the *Final Treatise on the Stages of Meditation*.

Thus, these treatises were composed newly in order to help the people of Tibet when the teachings of the Buddha were initially being established in Tibet. Now, because the teachings of the Buddha are beginning to flourish in America, I thought it would be helpful if I were to present these treatises, which are not like others.

Kamalashîla returned to Tibet two more times. However, there is debate about whether or not he returned to Tibet. In the account of Kamalashîla’s life that is given in the Introduction to the edition of Kamalashîla’s *Stages of Meditation* that was published at Varanasi in 1985, which we are using in presenting these lectures, it is said that Kamalashîla did not return to Tibet again. Rather, the author of the Introduction maintains that Hwa Shang Mahâyâna hired four Chinese men to kill Kamalashîla, and that indeed they succeeded in killing him. However, I think that Hwa Shang Mahâyâna was a great bodhisattva who taught dharma, and that he did not in any way arrange the murder of Kamalashîla.

Some people doubt that Kamalashîla returned to Tibet, and there *is* a basis for their doubt. When Kamalashîla left Tibet, he went to India. On his way to India, he came across the corpse of an Indian man who had succumbed to a terrible illness. Because the illness was contagious, no one dared come near the corpse. With love for the people of the area, Kamalashîla

transferred his consciousnesses into the corpse, walked the corpse to a distant place, dumped it there, and then transferred his consciousnesses back to the place where he had left his own body. However, in the meantime, an Indian siddha^a named Padamba Sangyay,^b who had a very ugly body, came across Kamalashîla's body, which was very handsome and completely free from illness. He thought, "This body of mine is not good. That fresh corpse is good and handsome. I would like to transfer my consciousnesses into that body." He then transferred his consciousnesses into the body of Kamalashîla and walked off, leaving his own body. When Kamalashîla's consciousnesses returned, the only body around was the ugly corpse of the Indian siddha, into which the consciousnesses of Kamalashîla entered. Thus, the mind was Kamalashîla's but the body was not.

Kamalashîla came to Tibet twice in the body of Padamba Sangyay. In that body, he disseminated the methods for practicing "the pacifier," also called "cutting."¹ This practice is included within the tradition of sūtra rather than within the tradition of mantra. Kamalashîla's *Stages of Meditation on the Middle Way*^c and the practice of pacification through cutting attachment are, in terms of their meaning, the same. Since the person who taught them is the same, it is not surprising that the meaning of these practices is the same.

The story that I have recounted to you is told in Karma Chakmay's^d *Mountain Dharma*.^e It does not accord well with the account given by the author of the Introduction to the edition of Kamalashîla's text that I am using. I believe that, in truth, the matter is probably as Karma Chakmay has reported it and, for that reason, have presented it to you as he does.

Generally speaking, the *First Treatise on the Stages of Meditation* covers three topics: (1) the need for compassion, (2) the need for the mind of awakening, and (3) the need for practice. The first thing taught is the importance of compassion. The main reason that compassion is important is that the Buddha himself said so. In what sūtras did he say that? In the '*phags pa chos yang dag par sdud pa*, in the '*phags pa blo gros mi zad pas bstan pa*, and in the '*phags pa ga yâ mgo'i ri'i mdo*, he said that compassion is important. The Buddha said, "Anyone who has one quality^f can become a buddha. What is that one quality? Compassion."

After that, the manner of cultivating compassion is taught. Knowing that compassion is important, we want to know the method^g for generating compassion in our continuum and the way to cultivate compassion. The way to do that is to consider sentient beings who are in pain. If one takes many sentient beings to mind and considers their pain, great compassion will arise. For that reason, this treatise explains how to think about the pain that sentient beings experience.

What is the way taught here for considering sentient beings who are in pain? One considers way in which wanderers^h of the six types suffer. I understand that some of you have studied the Buddhadharma for a long time and that some of you have not studied the Buddhadharma very much. Those of you who have not studied the Buddhadharma will be astonished at this notion of six types of wanderers. However, if you study the Buddhadharma stage by stage, you will be able to understand the meaning. Therefore, I will speak about the six types of wanderers in accordance with the way that they are spoken of in the text.

^a *grub thob*

^b *ba dam pa sangs rgyas*

^c *dbu ma'i sgom rim*

^d *karma chags med*

^e *ri chos*

^f *chos, dharmā*

^g *thabs, upāya*

^h *'gro ba rigs drug*

First, sentient beings born in hells suffer greatly from heat, cold, and so forth. Similarly, sentient beings born as hungry ghosts suffer greatly from hunger and thirst. Also, sentient beings born as animals experience many sufferings such as eating one another, becoming angry with one another, harming one another, killing one another, and being used by human beings. If one thinks about such suffering, compassion for sentient beings who take birth as hell-beings, hungry ghosts, and animals will arise.

Similarly, human beings have many kinds of suffering. Some human beings are put into prisons. Some are destitute. Some are enslaved by others. Thus, they are not actually hell-beings but their sufferings are like those of hell-beings; they are not actually hungry ghosts but their sufferings are like those of hungry ghosts; and they are not actually animals but their sufferings are like those of animals. One thinks in that way about the sufferings that human beings experience. Some human beings are wealthy and comfortable. However, that wealth and comfort does not last for a very long time. Not being able to enjoy wealth and comfort for a long time, in the end suffering comes to them too. When one thinks about the suffering that they experience, compassion arises.

As for gods, temporarily they are comfortable, but having lived as gods, they fall down into painful situations and, at the time of falling, they suffer greatly. Similarly, even the gods of the Form Realm^a and the Formless Realm^b cannot just stay there. They fall down to the states of hell-beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, and so forth. When they fall, mentally they suffer greatly. Therefore, sentient beings born in the states of the six wanderers have nothing but suffering. If one thinks about that, compassion can arise.

In thinking about sentient beings who are suffering, one thinks, “If I had to undergo that suffering myself, I could not endure it.” In that way, one generates compassion for others by imagining oneself to be in their position. After that, one thinks about the suffering of one’s friends, relatives, and others who love oneself, and one cultivates compassion for them. When one can meditate well in that way, one thinks about ordinary people—those who are neither one’s friends nor one’s enemies—and cultivates compassion for them. When that goes well, one thinks about one’s enemies—those who harm oneself. Realizing that they too have suffering, one develops compassion for them. In that way, compassion is increased more and more greatly. When one can generate compassion for one’s enemies to the same degree that one can generate compassion for one’s friends, one must then cultivate such compassion for all sentient beings in all the ten directions.

Meditating in that way, the main thing is to develop compassion for all, as if they were equal, rather than for some but not for others. For instance, one might have compassion for human beings but not for non-human sentient beings. Or, one might have compassion for human beings included within “us” but not for human beings included within “them.” Such compassion is not the genuine compassion that benefits everyone, both oneself and others. If one has only partial compassion, then one will help some sentient beings but harm others. Compassion that accords with dharma is not like that. In the perspective of such compassion, all sentient beings are as if equal. If one has compassion for all sentient beings, that is the principal among all compassions and it is superior compassion.

That is the first topic, the way to meditate so as to develop compassion. The second topic is the way to meditate so as to develop the mind of awakening.^c How does one do that? When

^a *gzugs khams, rūpadhātu*

^b *gzugs med khams, ârūpyadhātu*

^c *byang chub kyi sems, bodhichitta*

one has developed compassion for all sentient beings, one feels that one must be of some use to others. If one helps sentient beings with temporary things, generally it is useful and good. However, if one helps people only with food, clothing, wealth, medicine, and so forth, it helps them only for the time being. When those things are used up, they suffer again. In light of that, what will really help? Enabling sentient beings to enter into the excellent dharma will really help because by way of the excellent dharma they can achieve the final fruition, the rank of a buddha, so that in the end they will not have to suffer at all. Such an attitude, which is the effect of compassion, thinks, “I must protect all sentient beings from suffering by establishing them in the rank of a buddha.” That mind is the mind of awakening. If compassion arises in a genuine way, the mind of awakening will arise naturally.

There are two methods for cultivating that mind of awakening. What are the two? The first is that one’s guru,^a who is one’s spiritual friend and upon whom one relies,^b teaches the mind of awakening, speaks of its good qualities, and says, “It would be good if you were to give rise to the mind that aspires to supreme awakening. In fact, you must give rise to the mind that aspires to supreme awakening.” Having thought about that, one gives rise a mind that aspires to supreme awakening. That is the first way of giving rise to the mind of awakening and it is a good way. The second way is to begin by giving rise to compassion. Then the mind of awakening will arise naturally. The first way is good but the second way is stable and powerful. Therefore, the best way to give rise to the mind of awakening is in dependence upon great compassion.

That mind of awakening is important and beneficial. The Buddha himself explained this with an example. Just as when a diamond is broken into pieces, it is still much better than ornaments of gold. Similarly, even if one is not actually able to put the mind of awakening into practice, due to having it as one’s motivation, one’s virtue will surpass the virtue of hearers^c and solitary realizers.^d Therefore, the Buddha said, the mind of awakening is important.

Similarly, in another sūtra, the Buddha said that, although the merit of the mind of awakening has no form, if the merit of the mind of awakening did have form, it would fill all of space and would still exceed even that. The mind of awakening has that measure of benefit.

What minds of awakening are there? The mind of awakening has two aspects. What are the two aspects? There is the mind that aspires to awakening^e and the mind that enters into the activities that lead to awakening.^f The mind of aspiring to awakening thinks, “May I be able to accomplish the welfare of sentient beings. May I be able to establish all sentient beings in the rank of buddhahood.” Making effort for the sake of that is the mind that enters into the activities that lead to awakening. Those are the two aspects.

That concludes the second topic. I will stop here this evening. If you have questions that you would like to ask, please ask them.

Q: It has been said by some scholars that Hwa Shang Mahâyâna did not leave Tibet. They say that he remained in Tibet and had something to do with the arising of the Great Completeness^g teachings. Could you comment on that?

VTR: Some people do say that, but to say that is to criticize the system of the Great Completeness because it is to say that the system of the Great Completeness is like the system of

^a *bla ma*
^b *dge ba'i bshes gnyen, kalyānamitra*
^c *nyan thos, úrāvaka*
^d *rang sangs rgyas, pratyekabuddha*
^e *smon pa byang chub kyi sems*
^f *'jug pa byang chub kyi sems*
^g *rdzogs chen, mahâsamDaDdhi*

Hwa Shang Mahâyâna. Those are words that refute the Great Completeness. Some say that Hwa Shang Mahâyâna lost one of his boots when he left Tibet and that, through that condition, a little bit of his view is present in the Great Completeness teachings of the Nmamyngma. Actually, that is not so, and to say that it is so is to criticize the Great Completeness.

Q: You said that incomplete or partial compassion can harm other people. How is that?

VTR: Suppose that I have compassion for one group and do not have compassion for another group. If the two groups fall into disharmony, then I will take the side of the group for which I do have compassion and I will feel hatred for the group for which I do not have compassion. For instance, if I have compassion for my friend, and if there is someone who is harming my friend, I will feel hatred for that person. In dependence upon that hatred, I will initiate action that harms him or her. After I have harmed that person, he or she will harm me in return. Partial compassion is the cause in dependence upon which this arises.

Q: Are the six types of wanderers merely psychological states? You mentioned that in the human realm there are psychological states comparable to the hell-realm, hungry ghost realm, animal realm, and so forth. If they are not psychological states, where are the hell-realms and god-realms, and what are the beings there like?

VTR: The six types of wanderers are not just mind. Generally speaking, they have form. In Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Higher Knowledge (abhidharmakosha)*, it is said that hell-beings and hungry ghosts are mostly *under* the ground of Jambudv_{pa}, which is to say, *in* the ground. The gods of the Desire Realm, the Form Realm, and the Formless Realm are in the sky. Therefore, it is probably like that. For instance, scientists say that within the earth there is fire. Some say that there are sentient beings there.

Q: Why is Hwa Shang Mahâyâna's doctrine false? The prophecy said that someone would come who would say that both good clouds and bad clouds had to be cleared away. Kamalashîla taught that there are six realms, some good, some bad, and one must transcend all of those. How was Hwa Shang Mahâyâna wrong? Maybe they threw him out for no good reason, or at least for no bad reason. [JBL: The prophecy said that trouble would come from a Buddhist speaking falsely. Hwa Shang Mahâyâna, not the prophecy, talked about black clouds and white clouds. We could rephrase the question in light of VTR's answer. Listening to the tape, I hear myself saying, "Both black clouds and white clouds cover the sun. If one goes to bad transmigrations, they are painful. If one goes to good transmigrations, they provide only temporary happiness. Therefore, one must abandon the three realms of samDaDsâra and achieve liberation. How does that differ from Hwa Shang Mahâyâna's tradition?"]

VTR: Generally, Hwa Shang Mahâyâna's thought is not some terrible thing. However, if one refutes the value of virtue suited to the occasion, then people will not be able to practice virtue. If people are not able to practice virtue, meditation will not be able to increase to a higher level. In dependence upon that, saying that it is not good to refute the value of appropriate virtue, Kamalashîla refuted Hwa Shang Mahâyâna. Refuting the value of appropriate virtue does not lead to much good. It is in dependence upon one's accumulation of virtue that one's meditation increases to a higher level. In dependence upon one's meditation increasing to a higher level, one achieves the rank of a buddha. Kamalashîla said that although the happiness of humans and gods is generally not very stable, to achieve liberation gradually, it is important to have the body of a god or a human as one's support. To achieve the lifetime of a god or a human, one needs to practice virtue.

Q: Could not recognizing the sun itself—compassion—be more than a temporary virtue? Could that not be something that would last? Would that not refute Kamalashîla? [JBL: Aban-

doing both black clouds and white clouds, one must realize the sun. “Sun” means the compassion that naturally exists with one’s mind. Having realized that compassion, would one not achieve liberation and omniscience? Would that not refute the tradition of Kamalashîla? Would that not be contrary to Kamalashîla’s tradition?]

VTR: Huh? [I tried explaining this to VTR, and he looked very puzzled. So, I then said to the questioner (Reid Fossey)]

T (translator): How does this contradict Kamalashîla’s system?

Q: He said that the Chinese teacher’s mistake was in not recognizing the need for appropriate virtue. I would argue that recognizing the sun is both appropriate and enduring virtue, which would refute Kamalashîla. [JBL: To recognize the compassion that exists with one’s mind would not be just appropriate virtue gnas skabs kyi dge ba...(VTR then interrupted my feeble attempt to explain this question by saying)

VTR: It is not quite like that. In Hwa Shang Mahâyâna’s system, compassion is only temporary virtue, and must be destroyed. Kamalashîla held that one must cultivate both compassion and the mind of awakening. Hwa Shang Mahâyâna held that one must destroy both compassion and the mind of awakening. In his view, one must destroy everything. That was the point that they debated.

Q: I have heard that as human beings we have the unique ability to experience all of samDaDsâra to some degree. Is there a connection between that and our ability to hear and practice the dharma? If not, what is it that makes birth as a human being an unusually opportune situation?

VTR: Kamalashîla’s text explains that humans experience situations that are similar to those of the lower realms but are not identical to them. For instance, human beings who have been put into prison are not hell-beings but experience something similar to a hell. Also, human beings who are poor are not hungry ghosts but experience something like the poverty of hungry ghosts. However, it does not say that human beings experience the actual suffering that hell-beings or hungry ghosts experience. Thus, human beings experience something like the suffering of hell-beings but, compared to the suffering of actual hell-beings, human beings have little pain. Similarly human beings experience something like the suffering of hungry ghosts but, compared to the suffering of actual hungry ghosts, human beings have little pain. Therefore, as human beings we have achieved the opportunity to practice dharma. Hell-beings and hungry ghosts have not achieved the opportunity to practice dharma. That is the difference between our situation and theirs.

Q: What about the beings in the higher realms? What keeps them from being able to hear and practice dharma?

VTR: What is the reason? They are extremely comfortable and are not able to feel discouragement with samDaDsâra. Because they never feel discouraged with samDaDsâra, they cannot generate the wish to enter into the dharma. In dependence upon that reason, they have no opportunity to practice the dharma.

Notes

1

Trangu Rinbochay is referring to the practice of *jmamö* (*gcod*). *jmamö* means “cut” and, in this context, “cut” means cut attachment. “The pacifier” (*zhi byed*) is another name for this practice. For a discussion of it, see Khetsun Sangpo Rinbochay, *Tantric Practice in Nyingma*, pp. 161-166.