

Conventional Truth & Ultimate Truth

By Geshe Tenzin Zopa @ KYCO on 24th January 2008

Good Evening to everybody! First of all I would like to express my deep respect to Master Tony Wong for providing this great opportunity to share some Dharma knowledge with all of you wonderful people in this wonderful Center where all of you practicing the essence of Buddha's teaching which is compassion. There are numberless beings already gain high realization up to enlightenment relating to this particular Center and this compassionate Master Tony Wong. And inspired by all the wonderful good hearted students and friends who directly or indirectly connected to this particular Center, I feel very happy, grateful and fortunate to have this opportunity to look at everyone's face with lot of happiness, so thank you very much!

Today topic I would like to touch in the general understanding on Buddhadharma base on the few points which is the essential teaching and knowledge for us to cultivate and to obtain enlightened state of Kuan Yin or Buddhahood.

The principal teaching divided into 3 categories:

- 1) the fundamental truthful base
- 2) the fundamental actual form of practice
- 3) the fundamental truthful result of attainment

The purpose of practicing dharma, especially Buddhadharma is to obtain liberation. When the practitioner conjoin the practice base on compassion practice such as the practice relate to the Buddha and Bodhisattva of the Compassionate One, that mean our principal, aim and goal is to achieve full enlightenment.

The state of enlightenment refer to the omniscience state, perfection state, all knowing state, and peerless happiness state. This is a state of oneself obtaining the true state of perfection, the perfection of wisdom body - Dharmakaya, and the perfection state of form body – Nirmanakaya.

These two enlightened form is obtained by all Buddhas, and these two forms and the state of true perfection is for all of us to obtain, and this is the goal that we have to aim to attain.

In order to obtain this goal, you need to obtain through cause and condition, and to obtain by the cultivation on cause and condition. What are the cause and condition? Here come the actual form of practice which need to be cultivated to

gain the realization and to obtain the two states of perfection which is the Dharmakaya and Nirmanakaya.

What are the two actual forms of practice? It is refer to the practice of method and wisdom, or we can also say the cultivation of method such as loving, kindness, compassion, bodhicitta, and the practice of wisdom refer to the wisdom realizing selflessness in self and all phenomena.

Without these two wings of knowledge in method and wisdom, without the wing of method such as compassion and bodhicitta, and the wing of wisdom such as the emptiness realization, one will not be able to achieve the two perfection state which is Dharmakaya and Nirmanakaya.

Now if our purpose is to become Buddha, or Chenrezig, or Kuan Yin, then we have to learn, understand, cultivate, meditate, habituate, and live a life with compassion. Not only that, one have to realize the actual fact of existence which is the realization on emptiness.

In order to actualize these two forms of practice, we have to actualize the fundamental foundation teaching on Buddha which is the teaching on Two Truths, or teaching on Two Facts. What are the Two Truths or Two Facts?

- 1) Conventional Truth
- 2) Ultimate Truth

In order to perfect our practice on compassion, loving and kindness, the fundamental knowledge we need to have is to understand Conventional Truth.

The Conventional Truth in general

What is Conventional Truth? Conventional Truth is the thing or phenomena namely exist, labeling existence such as a being, or Six Realms beings, or environment which encounter by Six Realms being, or Universe, or human being, or Eight Hot Hell, or Eight Cold Hell, or Vajra Hell, or every single aspect of suffering in hell, whatever thing that exist by name and label, we call it Conventional Truth.

The particular suffering of hell being is the particular Conventional Truth refer to hell being. But the general Conventional Truth of hell being is the Pervasive Suffering of just being born in samsara, that suffering itself is general Conventional Truth of hell being.

The Conventional Truth in particular

When we refer to hungry ghost being or preta being, they have the Conventional Truth in individual, and Conventional Truth in general. What are the Conventional Truth of individual? It is the suffering of hunger, thirst and not finding food. Even if find food, they can't swallow, it turned into needle or thorn, all the water turn into

liquid of hot iron, all these are individual Conventional Truth of hungry ghost. General Conventional Truth is just to be born in samsara itself such as the general Conventional Truth of the hell being and hungry ghost being.

It is the same to animal being, human being, asura being and god being. When I try to explain this, please try to concentrate and understand the essence of the Conventional Truth. These Two Truths are always spoken in every where and all the time, but not given much explanation, and not habituate it. Here I would like to relate the Two Truths in practical form of practice in our day to day life.

The Conventional Truth of animal being in animal realm is the suffering of torturing each other, the big animal eat small animal, fierce animal eat innocent animal, the torturing or harming within the animal realm. The main Conventional Truth of animal being is ignorance. The general Conventional Truth is just to be born in the animal realm of samsara itself is suffering.

As for human being, the individual Conventional Truth of being born as human being is suffering of conceiving, birth, aging, death and intermediate state, all these circle of suffering have to experience, all these are tremendous suffering. The individual Conventional Truth of human being is also the suffering of not meeting the object which you desire, and meeting the object which you do not wish to encounter. The thing that you wish to be apart such as suffering but never apart, thing wish to encounter but never encounter and always stay apart, such and such, there is tremendous suffering that human being have, that is the Conventional Truth of human being.

Look at ourselves in our one day life, just to spare one hour or less than that, let say 5 minutes, within that 5 minutes, all our entire life up to today, we never separate from suffering, we are encountering all three types of suffering – 1) *Suffering of Suffering* such as body aching or mind feeling down, disappointment, grasping, attachment, anger, hatred, anxiety, every single moment within that 5 minutes, we live a life in dissatisfaction, we never separate from the mind of dissatisfaction, we always inseparable from dissatisfaction, that itself is Suffering of Suffering. Then we encounter 2) *Suffering of Change*, which is that we grasp on senses pleasure. When we see beautiful object, we attach on it because we feel happy. When we hungry, we urge for food, when the food go into mouth, we feel happy. But a lot of time we end up with discomfort, disappointment, dissatisfaction, that is Suffering of Change. Then 3) *Pervasive Suffering*, the existence of our aggregates itself is contaminated and impure, it has the only essence of degeneration, quality of degeneration. The moment you were born, it starts to degenerate. We think we become youth, but in fact it is in the process of degeneration. We think we become more mature, in fact we are going through the process of degeneration. Look into ourselves now, we already have the degeneration on our physical appearance such as a lot of wrinkles, white hair, mentally very forgetful, very difficult to grab the memory, verbally very difficult for us to express whatever the thought come, eye also difficult to capture vision,

taste also unbalance - suppose to taste sweet but taste sour, ear sense losing out, feeling sense feel more tough, all these are the quality of contamination, all these we possessed. Even for one second, we are inseparable from suffering, that is the common and uncommon Conventional Truth of human being.

God, demi-god, their common and uncommon Conventional Truth of suffering is facing the death. By wasting all their merit accumulated in the past life, and facing the pre-appearance of their next rebirth which is in the hell, this suffering is as great suffering as in the hell, if it is not more, than it is not less.

Now we get an idea that every single Six Realms beings, the fact is that they are truly suffer, only suffer, including us, in fact we have only suffering. This is the Conventional Truth of us and the beings.

The Conventional Truth of contamination

The object or outer phenomena, such as samsaric possession, other than a being, all are the Conventional Truth of contamination. The meaning of the Conventional Truth of contamination is that they exist by ignorance and karma of living being. Such as this table, this samsara table, the Conventional Truth of this table is exist by the force of ignorance and karma, therefore it is suffering. The fact of samsara, even the outer object, it is still suffering. This is very interesting. When we say suffering, we always refer to being, we never refer to outer phenomena. But now we are referring it to outer phenomena, as long as it is samsara phenomena, it is suffering. Now we need to know why we call even the tree outside, the flower, even this house, eye-glasses, earring, flower, watches, mug, mala, everything is suffering, this is very interesting.

It is suffering because it is contaminated. Why is it contaminated? It is contaminated by the force of ignorance and karma. Who's ignorance and karma? Our ignorance and karma. This table exists here by the force of all of our ignorance and karma. If we don't have karma to see this table, we will not see this table, and this table won't be here. If our ignorance mind didn't make it, this table won't be here. We think we are smart and have wisdom to perform this table, in fact it is not, it is from the ignorance mind by the force of karma, karma and ignorance mind perform this table, including this house.

Because the ignorance and karma itself is suffering, therefore the cause of suffering itself is already suffering, now this table is suffering because it is the cause of suffering. I attached the beauty of this table, then I suffer. I attach this flower, therefore I suffer, but that person suffer because of this flower blocking him to see me, now this flower cause hatred to that person to make him suffer. Some people here because of this flower cause ignorance and suffer "why Master Tony Wong put this flower in front of table? He shouldn't have put it! It should be put some where else, why put on table?" It is because Master Tony Wong offered this to Kuan Yin but people didn't know, because of ignorance mind so people have very uncomfortable feeling, then flower cause suffering.

Now this flower can cause somebody's jealousy mind, and jealousy is suffering, flower causes suffering therefore itself is suffering.

Let say one of the student come to offer this flower to Master, Master show so much attention to the person, and 50% of the people are watching and wonder "How come Master show special attention to this person who offer flower?". All the boiling mind are suffering, just this much flower it causes suffering. Now this flower can cause arrogant, the person who offered this flower receive so much attention and feel that he/ she is the best in the whole world, that itself is suffering.

Why do we call the outer phenomena such as flower and table are suffering? It is because they causes suffering as like ignorance and karma causes suffering.

What do you do after understanding the Conventional Truth?

From the understanding on Conventional Truth, now you should inspire to generate great compassion - I myself totally trapped and chain by ignorance and karma and constantly suffer, there is not even a single moment of separation of suffering. It is the same thing and same situation to all other living being, and it is facing by the Six Realms beings. By understanding each and individual suffering sentient being, there is no choice for me not to generate compassion, so I must generate compassion.

When you generate that compassion, the compassion looking toward yourself, it is call renunciation; compassion looking toward other is call compassion. Now you got the real essence – renunciation and compassion because of understanding Conventional Truth. If we didn't understand Conventional Truth, even how much we try to express the great compassion, it is so difficult to come from the depth of our heart because we didn't renounce ourselves first. If we are unable to renounce ourselves first, no way we can provide the big heart to save other from entire suffering, this is out of question!

The understanding on Conventional Truth inspire oneself to generate renunciation in oneself and have compassion toward others. This great compassion, the unconditional thought to liberate every single living being from entire suffering and to inspire oneself to obtain the altruistic mind, or the greatest heart, which is called bodhicitta, so without understanding on Conventional Truth, no way there is renunciation. Without renunciation, there is no way to generate great compassion. Without great compassion, there is no way to generate bodhicitta. Without bodhicitta, there is no way to obtain enlightenment.

After understanding this, now you reflect to your own ability – "do I truly have the ability to actualize the mean of renunciation in myself, and the actual work and benefit of compassion to other?" By making this big question to yourself, you will realize it is impossible.

Why is impossible? This question is very important. It is impossible because of my innate ability which is the clear light mind and the Buddha nature in which every being has, it is completely dominated by ignorance, completely cover and chain by the ignorant mind.

Therefore without cleansing and eradicating this cloud of ignorant, delusion and disturbing emotional thought or mind, there is no way we can able to actualize the actual brightness of Buddha nature which we already have.

How to cleanse this ignorant mind and this cloud of disturbance thought? To find a tool to cleanse or in order to wipe out or clean dirt, we need a broom. As a broom to cleanse ignorant mind, we need antidote as a broom to clean the dirt, what is the antidote? The antidote is called the wisdom realizing true nature of phenomena, or wisdom realizing emptiness or the mind of emptiness.

The Ultimate Truth

In order to understand or gain the realization on the antidote or the realization on emptiness, we need to understand the second fundamental foundation teaching of the Buddha from the Two Truths - the Ultimate Truth.

What is the Ultimate Truth? The Ultimate Truth is the ultimate nature of existence, ultimate nature of Six Realms being, ultimate nature of all the phenomena up to enlightened state.

We have just found or realized what is the Conventional Nature of which is the actual fact of suffering, actual fact of Six Realm beings, actual fact of samsara's outer phenomena. In each and every single existence, it has the final truth, it has the ultimate truth which is call the ultimate fundamental fact of phenomena.

Early on we say that Conventional Truth is whatever we name it to exist, we label it to exist - the suffering as suffering, person as person, animal as animal, preta as preta, flower as flower, whatever existence that is namely imputed, it is Conventional Truth. Now this namely existence, when we perceive and project, we grasp it as independent existence, that is a fault. When we project, grasp and perceive a Conventional Truth such as flower, we understand it is dependant existence, which is opposite of the initial perception which perceive independent existence, now our mind realize it is not independent existence, it is dependant existence so the understand on dependently existence on the Conventional Truth is call the Ultimate Truth.

The independent perception on flower, table, suffering, happiness, Buddha, enlightenment, you grasp and hold that is independent existence, that is call grasping mind, and this grasping mind is categorize into two:

- 1) self grasping mind which is grasping on oneself that I exist independently. Tenzin Zopa exist independently, then hold on and grasp on it. This is call the self grasping mind.
- 2) Flower exists independently without any cause and condition, that is the grasping mind on phenomena.

So here has the grasping mind on oneself and grasping mind on phenomena. Or you can also say grasping mind on aggregate, for example, your hand, when you perceive your hand, you perceive it independently on you. When you perceive your head, your head is independent on you. You never think that in order to have your head, first of all you need to have a mind, and to have father and mother to form it, and the karma to have the head, you never think about it. The direct and immediate perception is to hold your head as independent, there is nothing to depend on anything. Look at yourself, look at your hand, you never think this is dependently existence, it is independent appearance. So this is call the grasping mind on phenomena. These two grasping is the obstacle for us to become Buddha. In order to eradicate these, we need the opposite mind, the negation, the antidote which is the wisdom realizing selflessness on self and wisdom realizing selflessness on phenomena.

This grasping mind, you can label it as ignorant mind. This ignorant mind has covered and chain our Buddha nature, that's why we cannot become Buddha. And in order to cleanse it, we need the opposite mind which is wisdom. With the wing of wisdom, compassion and bodhicitta, one can able to fly cross the ocean of samsara and reach enlightenment.

Here we conclude that the important of understanding the three points:

- 1) The fundamental foundation Two Truths
- 2) The fundamental body practice of Two Path which is the path on wisdom and path on method, and
- 3) The fundamental result which is for us to aim purpose of practice that is the result of the Two body of Buddha - the wisdom body of Dharmakaya, and form body of Nirmanakaya.

So this complete the whole length of our Buddhadharma practice, and understand how to go about the step by step to enlightenment.

Can one attain enlightenment after understood the Conventional Truth and Ultimate Truth?

This is the stages of knowledge, the understanding on philosophy, and it is to be cultivated, meditated and actualize the realization. Just by having this much cultivation, and having this much meditation, and having this much philosophy understanding, just by having this much intellectual knowledge, is it sufficient for us to truly gain the realization on all the stages of the Path up to enlightenment or not? This is a big question, a huge question.

The answer is that it is still not enough. There are something still lacking, something we still need to actualize it. What is that? It is the blessing, the blessing of Buddha and blessing of Guru. It is because on the way of practicing, it occur so much obstacle. In order to overcome obstacle, we need to have lots of purification because we have accumulate so much negative in the past, they become the obstacle, so that have to be purified. In order to strengthen our will to achieve our goal, we need so much support and merit, and in order to actualize great amount of merit, and great practice on purification, we need to relate to Buddha, Bodhisattva, deity, Guru. Therefore it is very necessary for us to relate to Buddha Kuan Yin, the life of Bodhisattva Kuan Yin by recalling the Bodhisattva's act, the benefit that they provide to other, and then having ourselves engage into such kind of action by relating to the good example of Bodhisattva Kuan Yin. And inspire by the Buddha's manifestation – the master or guru in whom from day to day life courage us, push us and inspire us, provide the opportunity to not forget about cultivating bodhicitta, or recitation on Om Mani Padme Hung, or gathering on social service, developing good heart, become a better human being for yourself and the community. All these are the form to actualize the realization on the stage of the path within one's mental continuum.

Therefore it is the supreme object from which you can accumulate great and vast amount of merit, and the supreme object from which you can relate to do great purification on past negative karma. Buddha Vajradhara prophesized and spoke that during the five degenerate time, he will manifest into ordinary form of Guru because the being in degenerate time will not be able to see even if Buddha Vajradhara manifest directly in front of us, we don't have the wisdom eye to see and perceive and get the blessing from him. Because of that, Buddha Vajradhara and all the Buddha, such as Kuan Yin have no choice to manifest in the same aspect of ordinary person like us, who born from father and mother, at the beginning maybe cry during the time of birth, then go through the process of aging, dying, experiencing sickness, possessing act of anger, attachment, exactly like us ordinary being. If the Guru doesn't manifest exactly like us, we cannot relate to Guru. This is Buddha Vajradhara with no choice has to manifest like that, because of this reason, Guru is the supreme object of one's merit and supreme object for purification.

One very condense reason is that if one is unable to see the Buddha appear in front of your eye, you will not be able to receive any benefit. Even your own Guru, he/she might be ordinary, but appear in front of your eye, and guide you with the blessing of advice, pure heart, compassion, you will receive great benefit. This is the very condense simple reason for us to accept this statement which provide by Buddha Vajradhara.

None of the past Buddha and Bodhisattva, holy being attained enlightenment without relying on Guru, including Buddha Shakyamuni attain enlightenment relying on Guru, none of the practitioner attain enlightenment without relying on Guru.

Now how to derive blessing of great merit, great purification, great realization relate to Guru? It is through the devotion and conviction on mental, physical and verbal by pleasing the holy mind of Guru, but how? By practicing great compassion within yourself. Here it is very clear. Pleasing the Guru by your practice. What is the practice? It is the advice. What is the advice? It is to cultivate compassion. This is a very clear statement.

In day to day life, while we are training in the process of actualizing great compassion in one's heart, we should simultaneously train one's body, speech and mind in great respect to the Guru and to all living being. Be very sweet, and say respectful word and gentle word to Guru as well as all living being, and have positive virtue thought and pure thought to Guru and all sentient beings. To live a life with that, it is the method to derive blessing from the Guru whom in fact is the Buddha.

Whether the Guru is Buddha or not? In the very ordinary word, it is not your business. Whether the person is Buddha or not? It is depend on your own mind, faith, devotion, perception. If you have full faith and conviction seeing the ordinary Guru as Buddha, as inseparable from Buddha, as in oneness with Buddha, that ordinary Guru is Buddha for you. And you will receive Buddha's blessing relate to that ordinary Guru, otherwise even Buddha appear in front of you, you will not receive the blessing.

As Buddha said,

'Never cultivate unwholesome action,
ever cultivate wholesome action,
subduing one's mind,
this is the Buddha's teaching.'

So to subdue mind, it refers to the practice to enlightenment up to the initial practice of devotion and respect. This devotion and respect refer to Guru and all living beings. If we have respect mind, forgiving mind, understanding mind, compassionate mind, a sense of good person, all these are meant to subdue our mind, which is the Buddha's teaching that we have to cultivate. As long as we don't cultivate the Buddha's advice or Guru's advice to subdue our mind in that manner, it doesn't become Buddha's teaching. The longer we practice dharma, the longer we practice Chenrezig, the lesser the delusion, the good heart improve. The more we chant Om Mani Padme Hung, the more we see Kuan Yin image, the more we meditate on Kuan Yin, the more we see our guru, the more we come into center, the outer aspect of physical and verbal, the sign should be seen becoming more humble, more gentle, more forgiving, more smiling, more caring, more respectful. The sign that we have cultivated all those advice, meditate and habituate all advices of Guru, Kuan Yin, and the effort to come into the Center, it is to look into our own mind and see the process of degeneration

on delusion, and construction on pure mind, pure attitude, or development on virtue thought and intention, this is the sign we need to predict in our everyday life, therefore Buddha dharma, the advice of guru and Buddha, and having all holy object, dharma brother and sister around us is to remind ourselves to guard our body, speech and mind.

I was very inspired from long time through my Guru Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche who is the founder of LDC – Losang Dragpa Center, Rinpoche mentioned again and again the quality and compassion of Master Tony Wong. Recently due to Rinpoche's visit, Rinpoche always admired and mentioned how wonderful is Master Tony Wong, how much great benefit that he has provided unconditionally from years to years, so it is truly qualified and compassionate holy Guru that all of you have here.

All of you I see through your physically, verbally, and I hope mentally, but I cannot see your mind, and I hope everyday also because I only see short time a few times, but of course I hear from some of your student who go to LDC to study, I hear all the praises and good quality of Master Tony Wong, it is truly inspiring, it should be that way, that's the whole reason I explain about the guru devotion just now, which is the foundation of all good qualities for us, the foundation of ultimate enlightenment, the root is the Guru, the root is the master, and seeing the Guru in Buddha, seeing the Guru inseparable from Kuan Yin, then there is possibility that one will receive the blessing on compassion. When one see the fault in Guru, then one should remind oneself that it is the fault of oneself reflecting on Guru. Guru is Kuan Yin, Kuan Yin has no fault, but why does one still see the fault? It is because Kuan Yin purposely manifest in ordinary aspect, otherwise how to communicate, talk to each other and have a cup of tea together? While having a cup of tea, what we receive is advice, encouragement, dharma, but because our mind is so contaminated, there is always danger of seeing fault. As long as we make sure to remind ourselves that the fault is only reflection, it is like when one's face look into mirror, the mark on one's nose, although there is no such thing on the mirror, but because of the reflection on the mark on one's nose on mirror, that's why one see in the mirror that on the face there is a mark. But in fact, in mirror there is no face, it is just one's reflection. So to think on this example, then you tame your mind and train in devotion, definitely you will obtain the enlightenment on Kuan Yin. I highly rejoice everyone of you, the great devotion that you are showing, it is unconditional devotion, it is timeless, limitless, so I truly salute and respect both Guru and disciple.

So now we dedicate that all of us with positive mind, positive attitude, and positive motivation that we have come together here to accumulate extensive merit, may this merit be the complete cause to actualize all the realization on the stages of the Path within oneself to obtain enlightenment, which also become the complete cause to liberate entire numberless beings into the fully enlightenment. I rejoice the merit in myself and every other. The dedicator which is ourselves, the merit which we will be dedicating and the object of dedication which is

enlightenment, all these three phenomena are lack of inherent existence, empty from its own side, empty from independent existence, every single of this exist dependently. May our day be auspicious, may our night be auspicious, may every single moment be auspicious within oneself, our family, friend and all sentient being.

Thank you very much!

Transcript by Ven.Osel of Losang Dragpa Center on 3rd April 2008