

Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism

By Geshe Tenzin Zopa on 17th Feb 2008 @ Losang Dragpa Buddhist Society

Good afternoon to everybody! Happy New Year! Gong Xi Fa Cai!

First of all I would like to welcome all of you here to LDC, in Tibetan word LDC is called Losang Dragpa Center. I am very happy to see everyone of you and I can see that all of you come with so much interest and enthusiasm to learn about Buddhism in overall, but specially on Tibetan Buddhism today, so I am very happy. At the same time from the depth of our heart we welcome you to this shrine, we hope that you will enjoy this moment and not feel bore by listening to my blah blah.

Today subject is to introduce on Vajrayana Buddhism. In order to get into the detail knowledge of Vajrayana Buddhism, first of all I would like to give you a rough idea on where Buddhism came about, and in which country Buddhism flourished in the past centuries.

Buddhadharma came from India which was taught by Shakyamuni Buddha whose earlier name is called Prince Siddhartha. Gradually Buddhadharma spread to different part of the world, especially in Asia. After Shakyamuni Buddha completed his study, meditation and contemplation, he attained the full enlightenment - the nirvana stage, he actualized all the realization and he became omniscience. So he gave the teaching which is his own advice base on what he practiced, what he followed and what he had gained, he provided the teaching in three circles - the first turning of the wheel of Dharma, second turning of the wheel of Dharma, and third turning of the wheel of Dharma.

During the first turning of the wheel, he turned it at Deer Park which is in India, which is also call as Sarnath, or Tibetan call it Varanasi, which is near to Bodhgaya. It is about 12 hours away from Bodhgaya - the central holy land of Buddhist. In Sarnath he taught the teaching on The Four Noble Truths,

- 1) The Truth of Suffering,
- 2) The Truth of Causes of Suffering,
- 3) The Truth of Cessation – freeing from suffering, and
- 4) The Truth of Path – antidote to eradicate the causes of suffering and suffering itself, then obtain the peerless happiness.

This teaching is categorized into Hinayana teaching, which is also label as Theravadan teaching, such teaching practice in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Burma.

During the second turning of the wheel of dharma by Shakyamuni Buddha, he turned it in Vulture Peak. He taught Heart Sutra or also call as Wisdom Sutra, in Chinese is call 'xin-jing' which is in the category of Mahayana teaching. Vulture

Peak is about 2 ½ or 3 hours away from Bodhgaya in India. This Mahayana teaching on Wisdom Sutra is well practice in China, Korea, Japan, especially in Indonesia. Indonesia is one of the country where Mahayana teaching base on Wisdom Sutra was greatly flourished. There was another teaching that the Buddha himself has taught within his life time which is call the White Lotus Sutra which is very famous in Chinese community. White Lotus Sutra and Wisdom Sutra is well flourished, preserved, and practiced in Indonesia, mainland China, Japan and Korea.

The third turning of the wheel of dharma is base on Cittamantra School, which is one of the Four Schools described within Buddhist philosophy. In Buddhist philosophy there are four schools,

- 1) Vaibasika
- 2) Sutra follower
- 3) Cittamantra or the Mind Only School and
- 4) Madhyamika.

After that, the Buddha turned the wheel of dharma on Vajrayana teaching base on Kalachakra Tantra which talk about world peace. Even today His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been granting this initiation of blessing every now and then for over 40 years, 100 over times, this is call Kalachakra Tantra. This teaching is taught by Buddha Shakyamuni in the holy place of Amaravati. His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave Kalachakra initiation there in year 2006. This is the place where Buddha Shakyamuni taught Kalachakra Tantra on Vajrayana teaching which is within the category of Mahayana teaching.

Hinayana teaching, Mahayana or Bodhisattvayana teaching, and Tantrayana or Vajrayana teaching are all Buddha's teaching.

Vajrayana teaching was well flourished in Japan while we always thought that the Vajrayana teaching is only in Tibet, in fact Vajrayana teaching was well flourished in Korea also. Later by the kindness of Indian Pandits, the Vajrayana teaching was brought to Tibet and preserved, and it is one of the main spot where the teaching greatly flourished. From there many scholars and practitioners of Tibet brought Vajrayana teaching to Inner & Outer Mongolia, Russia, and later was well flourished by the Tibetan Master. As well as there are hundred of Mongolians come into Tibet to study Tibetan Buddhism which is the practice of Vajrayana teaching, then they went back and flourish it in Mongolia, even today there are great practitioners remain in Mongolia. At the same time the Vajrayana teaching is also well preserve and flourish in Himalaya region such as Nepal, Bhutan, India, Ladakh and Uttra Pradesh, those places around the Himalaya range and the practices that they practice is the Vajrayana practice which is again brought by Tibetan great scholar and practitioner out of Tibet.

What is the definition and essence of Theravadan teaching in which even today is widely practice and very greatly purely preserve in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Burma? The main focus is on the outer aspect of Vinaya rule. Vinaya rule is the sangha's ethic, monk & nun's ethic which is well preserve and practice by Sri Lanka, Burmese, Thailand monk and nun, even in Malaysia, you can see in the Theravadan temple that those monks and nuns are not cheeky like me, they are very serious. When they sit, walk, eat, communicate with people and interact with people, they have very strict rule, which is the Vinaya rule, or Sangha rule which is one of the main practice by the Hinayana practitioner.

At the same time the inner practice on what they do is the practice of The Four Noble Truths, which is renouncing themselves by understanding the suffering of smasara and the suffering of who we are. When we think carefully on ourselves, we are very suffering, our emotion is very unstable, one moment we feel so happy, the next moment we feel so unhappy, all sort of thing happen within one second, all those are the aspect of samsara. If even human being experience that, for sure animal realm have more suffering, hungry ghost realm have more suffering, hell realm definitely have more suffering, including the worldly god, they have great suffering. That is the practice by the Hinayana practitioner.

Mahayana practice is categorized into 2 session:

- 1) Bodhisattvayana practice
- 2) Vajrayana practice or Tantra practice.

The practitioner in China, Malaysia, Korea, Japan, Tibet, but majority in China, Korea and Japan who read a lot of sutra - the White Lotus Sutra and Heart Sutra, these two are the main objectives of their practice. Then they try to understand selflessness, try to learn detachment to oneself and outer phenomena, try to be free from attachment, and to learn about the meaning of life by understanding the truth nature of existence such as outer phenomena is in the nature of emptiness, so their main practice is to tame their mind by actualizing the emptiness within oneself and emptiness within outer phenomena. These practitioners are call the bodhisattvayana practitioner, at the same time, they provide help to themselves as well as to other by actualizing the practice of loving, kindness and compassion.

The compassion here, they especially integrate the great compassion, not just ordinary compassion. Great compassion mean the mind which inspire to liberate every single living being from entire suffering without any discrimination on either it is friend or enemy or stranger. As long as it is a suffering being, then you take the responsibility to liberate them from entire suffering, this is Mahayana bodhisattvayana practitioner, their main focus is practice great compassion and emptiness.

The Vajrayana practice which greatly flourish in Tibet, also call it as Tibetan Buddhism which origin from India, which is the Buddha's own teaching, it is nothing to do with Tibetan scholar re-establish Dharma there, it is pure Dharma and originated from Shakyamuni Buddha himself from India. The essence of this teaching is the great compassion and emptiness but conjoin with the practice of deity yoga which explain through Tantric practice.

To be more specific than that, Tibetan Buddhism is well known in the complete practice which contain the entire field of practice taught by the Buddha – Hinayana, Bodhisattvayana and Tantrayana, all three in one. It is preserve today by Tibetan practitioner, and label as Tibetan Buddhism, which is well flourish in many parts of the world, in fact it is the whole world, not just in the eastern country, but also the western country, including Middle East such as Israel. Israel is one of the country that many Jewish inspire by Tibetan Buddhism, and there are hundred of people come into practice of Tibetan Buddhism everyday. They find Buddhism is very open minded, practical teaching, also it is so easy to integrate into our lifestyle. The Vajrayana teaching in Tibetan Buddhism is qualified to be philosophy, science, and qualified as the essential teaching emphasize on compassion. As for today, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the one who bring the light of Tibetan Buddhism into every part of the world, even in western country such as America and Europe. Every where and every single day, hundred of hundred of youngster as well as some other fellows, believers and free thinker, they come into practice of Tibetan Buddhism. Therefore Tibetan Buddhism contain all aspect of the practice of Buddha's teaching.

The practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism, in outer aspect they live in accord with Vinaya aspect base on Theravadan teaching. Even the lay practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism, in their outer aspect they live a life of at least taking 5 lay vows - not killing, not stealing, not lying, not sexual misconduct, and no intoxicant. If even lay practitioner live in the aspect of these vows, that mean the Tibetan practitioner in fact practice seriously in Hinayana teaching. Of course they did serious meditation and practice of the Four Noble Truths as well.

The inner aspect of Tibetan Buddhist practitioner is that they live a life contemplating on emptiness and selflessness, as well as developing great compassion, inspire by renunciation on your own suffering, and other's suffering. And by renouncing suffering within oneself and suffering within others, they inspire or hope to obtain the state of everlasting happiness, which is Buddhahood, the everlasting happiness which is the happiness that last for ever, this is not temporary happiness, it is the happiness which is ever contented, ever joyful, ever blissful. The practitioner inspire to obtain that which is not just benefit for themselves but for the benefit of other also, it is not just for some others, but for the benefit of every single living beings, so that is the objective.

In day to day life, they perform the practice of Six Perfection: 1) Generosity 2) Morality 3) Patience 4) Enthusiasm 5) Concentration 6) Wisdom

To live your life in moral ethic, be a true person, be a honest person, at least not get into trouble of sexual misconduct, stealing, lying, killing and drug addict. As long as we get into the trouble of these five, we are in big trouble. And this happen almost in every aspect of age, for young children, especially for those in middle age, even the senior one, everyone can get into this trouble. So your mind has to be always alert and mindful to live in this ethic and precept, at least not to break the five vows, you commit yourself not to live in such kind of life, you commit yourself in front of your parents or Buddha or friend or stone, as long as you promise yourself to live a life with pure ethic, that is the practice of morality.

Then also engage into the practice of generosity, for those who need material help, base on your ability you willingly have the heart to give, to offer and to share. When you go to school, if your friend didn't have breakfast, and if you have a bun in your bag, if you knew that your friend didn't have breakfast, whether the friend want to have or not, but from your side you should offer at least 50% to share, but if he or she say no, then it is ok. If he/ she say 'yes', then you should feel so happy.

If on the way to school, some how your friend's motorbike or car break down, if you happen to see that, instead of feeling joy for them, you should stop and offer to help, all these are act of generosity. If in the school, especially in university, even for monk, I also get bully in university. The senior student will make all sort of fun on them, so I am sure your university sure have. The senior student will form a gang and come to disturb them, and because they are new student so they will feel very hurt and lonely, and even want to give up university, that kind of experience happen, so in this case, you should be the protector, you should be the person who stand in front of the lonely person, help them, comfort them, educate them, and inspire them to stay to study happily, this is one form of protection, this is one form of generosity call the generosity of protection.

The first one is generosity of material, 2) generosity of protection, 3) generosity of dharma.

When you provide generosity of Dharma, it is to do with virtue advice. If somebody smoke a lot, you tell the person,

"It is no good for your health, it will harm your lung. Now you are so young, still during schooling time and you smoke, when you grow up, all your earning will need to spend on smoking."

This is the advice on Dharma, you are giving generosity on Dharma. It is not necessary that you have to advice them to come in front and pray to Buddha, there is no need. It is advising your friend or anybody to be free from suffering. Here I won't give too much comment on smoking.

Some people say smoking make them feel better, I have no idea on this because I never smoke, but definitely it will pollute the channel inside the body. If you wish to become Buddha, smoking is one of the very dangerous obstruction. Or if you want to fly by yourself without using airplane, then smoking is one of the obstacle, it will block the channel. More than that, at the time of dying, we wish to have clear light mind, so whether we believe or not, there is a life after, there is a journey in between before taking next life, it is called the intermediate state, everyone of us will experience it one day. In order to choose a good life in next life, and in order to have smooth journey in between during the intermediate state, you need to have clear mind. So the intoxicant, or the drinking, also the smoking, some people have other kind of drug, also including many medicine, and sleeping pill, it has the effect of obscure our clarity mind. If at that time our mind is not clear, we don't know the direction, if we don't know the direction, we might fall into wrong direction, the wrong direction is the lower realm, the worse one is hell realm, second one is hungry ghost realm, and the third is animal realm. This is from the spiritual point of view. Even in normal health advice, smoking is always banned. It is so interesting that when you go to shop, you can see the sign board on the disadvantage on smoking, but people still totally obsess and enjoy smoking. Anyway this is up to individual, I am nobody to stop smoking if anybody has such kind of habit, but this is something that spiritually is good to lessen it.

I will tell you one story. I went to act in one documentary filming, my director is a super smoker, chain smoker, he doesn't mind skipping breakfast, lunch and dinner, but he can't skip smoking in every 5 to 10 minutes, so much smoking! One time we need to do shooting in monastery, I told him,

"In monastery, you better don't smoke." Then he said,

"Oh... then I can't survive, you ask me to give up anything I can, but never ask me to give up smoking."

I said, "I think you can, it is just the matter on your mind and your altitude. Why not you try? I will guide you in certain way."

So I keep all his cigarette boxes inside my room, and there is no way he can go to buy around in monastery. He is living together with me, and he respect me, I respect him also, that's why I am doing this for him. The moment I see his reaction in 5-10 minutes time when there is no cigarette, his face changed, become unstable and talk non-sense. Then I make very strong coffee, and also I cut the incense that normally we burn into small pieces, burn this incense stick, ask him to close his eye and imagine that he is smoking. Later he realize it helped, and it was relieving, then gradually I make the coffee lighter and lighter, and in 2 days time, I only give him the incense stick and stop giving him coffee. Although he still feel some kind of bliss like how he enjoy smoking, but none of the smoke go into his mouth. It is the act, he close his eye, and whatever he

imagine I have no idea, sometime he sat for 2-3 minutes, then back to live and work. After about 4 days time, his reaction totally change, he totally free from smoke. But I still want to make sure that he sustain, so I start to give him some sweet once a while instead of incense stick. At that time, his wife and children didn't follow him for this filming, and his wife has been requesting him to cut down smoking, but he never success. This time he was so happy, there was no physical reaction, he can sleep well, he was totally perfect, so he call his wife and give his wife the best present which is that he quit smoking. But last year I saw him, he smoke again! So such advice that if it is no good for health, mind or any aspect of life, if you advice, it is call generosity of Dharma.

Then the practice in concentration, effort, especially all of us need to study a lot, we need to put so much effort, whatever we study if we can use this Mahayana teaching in the form of effort, then the mind will have so much joy by understanding the benefit of study, then you engage into the study. At the same time practicing wisdom.

These are the practices mainly practice by Tibetan Vajrayana practitioner as inner practice. They live a life practicing selflessness of self and selflessness of phenomena, and developing unconditional and universal loving, kindness, compassion, then inspire to obtain bodhicitta – the mind wishing to obtain full enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, then engage in the day to day life the practice of Six Perfection, these are the inner practice.

The outer practice is as Hinayana practice, inner practice is bodhisattvayana practice. And there is secret practice, which is Vajrayana practice, the Tantra practice.

What is Tantra? Tantra has 4 schools:

- 1) Kriya Tantra
- 2) Action Tantra
- 3) Yoga Tantra
- 4) Highest Yoga Tantra

There are the 4 schools in Tantra practice in Buddhism. This tantric practice is totally different from the tantric practice provided by Hindu practice. In Hindu, the Tantra practice has total different explanation, meaning and purpose. This Tantra which taught by Shakyamuni Buddha in Buddhism has total different aspect from Hindu, this is very important for us to know, otherwise people has mixture understanding. Many people even see Hindu practice and Buddhist practice is the same, in fact it is 100% different, the motivation is totally different, the actual practice and goal is completely different.

The first three Tantra school such as Kriya Tantra, Action Tantra and Yoga Tantra were well flourished in Japan and Korea in early time. Also in India after

Shakyamuni Buddha passed away, four years later there was one scholar name Nagarjuna who also bring the re-establishment on Tantra practice. Later on, some how the Buddhist Tantra practice in India were lost, it become very un-seen. The Theravadan practice was well manifest and bring into human society. There is at one stage the Hinayana practitioner criticize that the Tantric teaching is not Buddha's teaching, and that the Tantric teaching is like a flower in space. In the space there is no flower isn't it? So the Tantric teaching is like that. But in fact, Tantric teaching is Buddha's teaching. As I mention earlier, Tantric teaching was taught in Amaravati, the first Tantric teaching was taught in the aspect of Kalachakra Tantra.

Therefore in Tibet, you can say Tibet is the only one which preserve even by today or earlier time, all the four schools of Tantra. Even though in Korea and Japan, Tantra school was well brought up, but it was only the first three schools, Highest Yoga Tantra was never ever been able to bring about into human practitioner in Japan and Korea. So in Tibet through the kindness of India Pandit, such as Guru Padmasambhava, we call the Lotus Born Buddha, later Lama Atisha, many scholars bring in the Tantra teaching especially emphasize on the Highest Yoga Tantra. This Highest Yoga Tantra contain one of the most powerful to tame one's mind into concentration. Even though every aspect of Buddha's teaching teach about concentration, but the concentration which taught from Highest Yoga Tantra is the most profound and most essential. How do they do? They use the channel as wind and drop, including the male and female essence, to use as a tool to develop and bring about the highest level of single pointed concentration, that's why if you smoke too much, that will obstruct the inner wind channel.

In fact there are 24 different root channels which come from heart and spread into 24 different channels within your body. Within every channel, there is wind, that channel is the follow of concentration. Intoxicant is one of the disturbing obstacle to obstruct the channel, and you will not able to success to gain Highest Yoga Tantra concentration. Once you gain the concentration, as I mention earlier, if you like to fly, you can fly. There are practitioner in Tibet and India, they can fly from one mountain to another mountain, they don't need flight and helicopter. One of the ancient Tibetan yogi Milarepa, after so many years of meditation, he wants to check how much concentration he achieved, he try to fly from one mountain to another mountain, and he was able to fly, so that is the sign that he gain very high level of concentration. That can only bring about by practicing Highest Yoga Tantra. And this was practice secretly by Tibetan Buddhist practitioner.

Therefore we say the Tibetan Buddhism is the complete set of Buddhist practice – outer aspect as Hinayana, inner aspect as Bodhisattvayana, and secret aspect as Tantrayana, all three in one. Otherwise there are many different places, although they are practicing purely Buddha dharma, but they are unable to integrate everything into one, so that is the different.

Overall, what does it mean by Tantra? This is very important to know. Tantra means transformation. In Sanskrit we called it mantra, Tibetan we call it 'ngak'. The meaning of 'ngak' in Tibetan is called 'yi-kyop', which is to protect your mind, so Tantra mean to protect the mind. From here you can see the Tantra which explain from other religion and in Buddhism, you can see the different.

To protect your mind, this mean to protect from attachment, protect your mind from falling into domination of attachment, anger, hatred, pride, jealousy, and all other negative afflictive emotion, so all are protected. If you wish to research on Tantra, you have to find the valid book or material which talk about protecting your mind falling into the domination of delusion, otherwise it is a very exciting topic, especially if you refer to other religious explanation on Tantra. And especially for youngster, it is very interesting, it talk about all sort of interesting thing, therefore if you wish to learn seriously about Tantra, you should go to search the Tantra which teach you to protect from delusion.

Second interpretation on Tantra is transformation. When you practice Tantra, you are able to transform all ordinary aspect. This mean all ordinary aspect you transform into divine, this is all about Tantra. Just an example: whatever tree, water, stone, house, whatever outer phenomena, other than the being you see, you transform them by using the power of your mind into celestial mansion, like a beautiful pure land. That mean that as you are a Tantra practitioner, for you, this celestial mansion can become pure land. It does happen, it is to do with concentration. When you have concentration, you can fly, for sure you can transform all these into celestial mansion, and then into pure land, it is so easy.

Whoever the being you see, all the man you transform into daka, you see as hero, this is not the film hero, this hero is in the sense of deva, or male angel, enlightened angel. All the female regard and look at them as dakini, a female angel. When you have that kind of transformation from your mind, you see every single living being is pure, nice, wonderful, perfect, only quality, no fault. If you can see everybody so pure, the first benefit you get is that you will never get disturb, nobody will disturb you, because your mind is so pure to see everything is perfect, this is come about from the practice of Tantra. If you don't like a house, you practice Tantra, you will like it. If you don't like a person, but you practice Tantra, you will sure like the person. If you don't like the food, but if you practice Tantra, you will sure like the food.

Question: What about animal? If animal is angry?

Geshe la: If animal is angry, you need to transform your mind. In Buddha dharma it said that all problem come within you. All object of anger, attachment and hatred, all come within you, not from outside. If attachment come from outside, that mean there should be a fix object of attachment.

Just look at ordinary human life, let say a flower, for you maybe this flower is the best flower, but for other maybe this flower is the worse flower. It is all depend on your mind. It is the same thing on friend, for you, she is one of the best woman in the whole world, but for other maybe your girl friend is one of the worse woman in the whole world. So it is all up to you, all up to your mind. But if you can regard the best in the whole world, everything become best. If you are unable to, then everything become worse. That's why if you don't know how to transform your mind, then depression, unhappiness and emotional problem come. As long as you know how to transform, every single aspect of your life is perfect.

On top of that, if you can able to practice secret mantra by using the most subtle concentration mind, you even no need gross food. We work so hard to earn some money to fill our stomach, when we think carefully, up to our age of 5, our parents feed every now and then, then we grow up, from there when we go to school, it is almost like our purpose is to earn living that's why we study. When we think about it ourselves, why do we study, because we want to have a good job, but why we want a good job? Because we want good money. Why do we want to have good money, it is for good food. When we talk about good life, the main thing is to talk about stomach, we can't live without the three meals. But if you can able to transform, you no need three meals, that mean maybe gradually no need to work. Then everybody will be very happy isn't it?

Anyway, what I am trying to say is that by training in this concentration on secret mantra, there is great benefit in achieving the transformation. As long as you can achieve the transformation, and transform whatever existence phenomena around you, that's the state of happiness.

Therefore the conclusion here is that I want to tell you that whatever lifestyle that we have, spiritual path is very necessary, spiritual practice is very necessary. I am not recommending you because I am a Buddhist, but through my own experience and analysis, this is nothing to do with religion, the practice of compassion and practice of loving, kindness, and also practice of transformation is marvelous, stunning, wonderful, you must learn and practice, and definitely there will be a day that you will achieve it.

I am 32 years old, even though I didn't achieve much but whatever I achieve through my spiritual path, I am very contented and happy and proud to tell you that in my life, after meeting Dharma at the age of 9 up to today, I only experience happiness. I am very happy in my way of living, my education, my friend, my family member, wherever I live or wherever I go, it is only in the state of happiness, and everyone of us we want happiness. From my own experience, I gain this happiness from my spiritual path, not from money, big bunglow house, beautiful car, it is through the practice of transformation and loving, kindness, compassion, that is the source to bring inner peace, then wherever you go, you are perfect, you are happy, and some how you will be attracted by everybody. I don't mean that I am attractive to people, I don't know how many people feel that

I am attractive but for me I transform everybody become attractive to me, so whether people attract to me or hate me I don't mind, this is their business, but in my mind, I am so happy. And if in one day you don't want anybody attraction, then again you transform, nobody will be attractive to you, so no need to put effort to change other people, just change yourself, just change one person, don't need to go change anybody outside, change one person can change the whole world, so you can live a very happy student life, after that you can live a very happy working life, then a very happy relationship life, then happy family life, then in the end, happy ending life, and happy intermediate journey, and very happy next rebirth, it is wonderful isn't it?

Transcribed by Ven.Osel @ Losang Dragpa Buddhist Society on 30th March 2008