

Teachings of His Holiness
17. Gyalwang Karmapa,
Ogyen Trinley Dorje

lähde: <http://www.livingthedharma.eu/>

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1. Living the Dharma

Generally speaking how to do Dharma practice and how to live our life in a proper way are very similar.

In life we have lots of doubts and lots of confusion, our purpose, our objective, is not very clear. If we don't have the correct view, don't have a clear stance, then we have lots of concerns, lots of thoughts, and life doesn't go very well.

In the same way Dharma practice is also like this. First we have to have a very clear understanding, we have to see our purpose very clearly. If we understand our objective, our view, our stance, then Dharma practice becomes very easy.

If our practices have too much thinking in them, it doesn't become Dharma practice. It becomes a religion, it becomes a system. When that happens a lot of things appear; gods, ghosts, good, bad, many kinds of dogmas, but the real practice is not there. When we practice Dharma it also has its views and concepts in a way. When we really apply the Dharma to our life it is not necessary that we have to understand lots of philosophy. If we understand, that is good, but if we do not understand, that is also good.

The main thing is that we have to work for the benefit of beings. When that happens we are applying the Dharma to our life.

2. What is Dharma?

In general, the Dharma is to transform our minds, our personalities, and our ways of being.

To transform ourselves in a positive way we need instructions. We need deep instructions. We need proper instructions. We need to know how to do it. It is said that we get these instructions from a genuine Lama, but then it is not easy to find a genuine Lama. Sometimes you feel that you found a genuine master, but then later on you find out it is not quite like that.

There are two kinds of masters, teachers who are fully and completely practising the Dharma and who have the experience of the Dharma, these are the ones you can really rely on, the ones that you can go to for Refuge. Then there are others from whom you can receive teachings, from whom you can understand the Dharma, but you can't really rely on them to the same extent or take Refuge in them. However, the important thing is that you can still find people with whom you can study the Dharma. These masters are real living beings.

But not all masters need to be living beings. Sometimes it is said that everything that appears can be a Dharma. Everything can be a teacher. Everything can be a Lama. In the teachings on mind training it is said that a negative event can be your teacher also.

If you look at the four seasons, for instance, if you just look in a general way, you feel now it is winter we need more clothes, now it is summer it is hotter. You know the winter is the disappearance of the warmth and the vegetation

loses its leaves, but if you look deeply, you know that everything is continually changing. When you look deeply you understand impermanence taught by the seasons. That itself is an instruction.

If you really look you can see all kinds of vibrant, living teachings in life itself. It is not necessary to hear instructions only in words because instruction can be found in what's around you, what you see.

There are many different ways to learn about and understand Dharma, it doesn't happen only through hearing.

3. Practising the Dharma

The practice of Dharma has to relate strongly with our mind, it has to become one with our life.

Many new practitioners think they have to bring the Dharma into their lives, but I think it can be difficult, especially for those of us who are beginners. In our lives we have many difficulties and many problems, we also have certain empty spaces in our life, so that is where the Dharma needs to be applied. We need to use the Dharma to work on those problems and difficulties. Your life is an important thing. You apply the Dharma in the way you live. There is a way to bring Dharma into your life.

I have seen many examples, that people have good harmony with their family, then they entered the Dharma, but did not understand a lot of things very clearly. So they brought a lot of changes to their lives, for instance, vajras and bells and things like that. Things that made the other members of the family feel uneasy. Sometimes you can create disharmony within the family because you do strange things in trying to bring the Dharma into your life. I don't think that is the right way to do it.

In our life we find we have problems to solve, empty spaces to fill up. Dharma helps us to bring these onto the path. Your relationships with family and friends do not need to change much. You become a better person when you live with the intention of being helpful and useful to other people. Then you live the life of the Dharma. Your practice of Dharma, your life, becomes stronger and stronger. Slowly, your life becomes Dharma. This way you can bring more balance into your life.

You do not need to disturb the harmony. You don't have to make your life imbalanced. You can use the Dharma in a beneficial way.

4. Attachment

When we are really attached to something, it is very difficult to separate our mind from it.

For example, anger comes and goes, it is not always there, but attachment is something which is more or less continuously present. It is something that is not easy to separate ourselves from and therefore, it disturbs our peace of mind.

There is a Tibetan saying; "if you touch it, it burns your hand, if you don't, it breaks." It's like a hot pot, if you hold it, it burns your hand, if you let it fall it breaks. So it is a little bit like that. Whatever we do attachment remains problematic.

It is important to discover why and how attachment and clinging arise. Now, for instance, if we see something that we are attached to, something that we really like, then we see the positive side, the good side of that thing, almost too much really. We do not see the negative side. When we are attached to something we can't separate our mind from the good things we see in it, they become as one.

When something we are attached to appears to your mind, it appears as something really desirable. In fact, unless it appears as something really desirable, it will not attract our mind. So desire and the appearance of the object of your attachment usually arise together. You see the object of your attachment as a very desirable thing. For this reason, you feel; "I cannot bear to be separated from it." So you can see that the attachment or craving is something that is not free.

For instance, people make things desirable because they want to sell you something. They try to work out what will attract your mind the most. They try to work out which thing will create such a strong desire in you that you have to buy it, and you don't even mind how much you have to spend on it. Then, when your mind likes it so much, you have such a strong craving for it, you want to get it, you have to buy it no matter what.

The main issue about this attachment is that you get overpowered by the object that you are attached to.

5. Interdependence

Ultimate truth is understood through relative truth, otherwise we have no basis for understanding it.

When we talk about the ultimate nature of things it has to be understood through the nature of interdependence. Everything is dependent, interdependent. There does not exist anything short or long on its own. When you think about something short, it is related to something long. If you say this is long, then there must be something shorter. Nothing short or long exists on its own. Short and long are related to others.

In some way, when you think about east we can say east, because there is a west.

We make this designation that there is a vase. It does not just happen. We contribute a lot in terms of creating this vase. It is dependent, dependently arising, dependently designated. We say dependently designated because nothing exists on its own without parts and conditions coming together, dependently arising. Therefore, the nature of things is emptiness.

When we talk about emptiness it has to be based on the understanding of related things. The reflection of the moon on the water does not exist on its own. There has to be a moon in the sky, water, reflectibility. When all these things come together then you see the reflection of the moon in the water. That is emptiness.

Emptiness and interdependence go together, because everything is interdependently arising and interdependently designated. Nothing exists on its own independently, therefore the nature of things is emptiness. Because everything is empty, everything is interdependent, it means everything is possible. We think everything is fixed, just as it is, but it is not always like that.

Take poison, for instance. We think of poisonous plants as something very negative, but a lot of poisonous plants are not poisonous for some animals. So does that poison really exist on its own? If it existed on its own it would kill every living being. As it doesn't kill everything, we can say that nothing exists on its own as it is. It's all interdependent, all dependently arising.

Ultimately it is emptiness. Emptiness, or ultimate truth is the understanding of relative truth. If ultimate truth is seen as something separate, not based on relative truth, then that approach is like nihilism. It's like saying; "there is nothing there," but it is not like that. The most wonderful thing is the togetherness, the co-emergence of ultimate and relative truth.

Things are empty in nature but they arise interdependently. Therefore, they are empty. Therefore, everything is possible. That is the most wonderful nature of things.

6. Awareness

If you look from the Buddhist point of view, awareness can be explained in this way.

Take the case of a newborn baby, the baby breathes, the baby has awareness and consciousness. The baby's body can only arise from causes and conditions similar to the body itself.

Likewise, the consciousness of the baby can only arise from causes similar to its nature, which is conscious. If a similar entity hasn't already existed, then there is no way it could be reproduced. Everything that is of the same kind has its own continuity, which means it cannot create something totally different. The consciousness of the baby can only arise under the same causes and conditions.

Consciousness is by nature something aware, something clear, something that experiences. Therefore, awareness or consciousness cannot be form or matter alone.

Matter cannot create awareness or consciousness. In order to continue, consciousness has to have a similar cause, a similar condition, which can only be conscious, aware, and experiencing. Matter has its own kind of continuum. If matter could turn into consciousness or could produce awareness, then everything that is material could produce it. But this is not the case.

Consciousness and awareness, the nature of mind, is something that knows, something that can experience, something that we can truly experience.

7. Reincarnation

One thing that is common to many people, regardless of their beliefs, is that when someone dies we somehow feel that the person is not completely gone from us, we feel there is still something alive and present. Mostly, we cannot bear the thought that we are forever separated. That brings too much suffering. No matter what our background or culture is, this feeling is universal.

In this world, people are continuously discovering new things. Some things which were earlier thought to be impossible, turn out to be possible later on. It seems to me that the case of life after death is also like that. One can have doubts, but one cannot exclude the possibility that reincarnation exists.

There are lots of people who remember, or think that they remember, their past lives. This is not something only happening in Buddhist countries or among people who believe in life after death. It is something that people can not totally explain.

Therefore, reincarnation should be something which at least has to be categorised under doubt.

8. Sentient beings

We come from many different countries of the world. We live in many different societies and environments. But the most important thing is that we think of other beings, we keep them alive and present in our minds. If we forget other sentient beings, we lose contact with the very people that we want to benefit.

We are supposed to be Mahayana practitioners. The main practice is not to give up on sentient beings. If we can let the happiness and suffering of many other people arise in our minds, then that will help us to transform ourselves, to change ourselves.

If we just think of ourselves, saying; “I am alone, I am free, or if I change myself I am afraid I will disappear or something bad will happen to me,” if we think like this, then there is no reason to change.

But if we think about other people, if we think about their happiness and their problems and we feel a certain kind of responsibility, a concern about their welfare, then there is the possibility that we might have a strong inclination to change ourselves. Because when other people are really suffering, then an image comes to mind of the importance of other people, the importance of so many people, and that starts to change our way of being, our way of seeing.

In our mind and in our eyes the image and experience of all these other beings becomes an important part of the basis for practice, so that our own self-interest, our own self-cherishing can become a little less.

9. Compassion

Although making the decision to be compassionate is important, first you have to understand, have to know the reason why it is important to have compassion.

So why do we need to be compassionate?

If you say; “I will be compassionate,” that is not enough. This is not a situation where you can say; “ok I will do it,” then it happens. It has to be based on a clear understanding of why and how it is so important.

When you have developed that understanding of the importance of compassion, why compassion is necessary, then maybe you arrive at a place where you have more clarity around what the choices are. If I am compassionate it will be like this, if I am not, it will be like that.

It is maybe more important, better, to really feel the necessity of being compassionate. That is the time you need to decide; “yes, this is right, I should really be compassionate.”

10. Time

Sometimes people think of Dharma as a ritual, something that you do with your body and with your speech, or some kind of special action with some special activities. This kind of Dharma practice usually takes place at a special time in your shrine room or meditation space.

But if you look deeply, the Dharma is not just that. Dharma is not a ritual, not something you do only with your body or speech. Dharma actually is something that transforms your mind, something that changes your mind.

If we are aggressive or angry then we try to see why it should not be like that. We instruct ourselves. We try to change ourselves, and then slowly we become less angry.

Or if we were somebody who had a lot of attachment or a clinging person, we do something about it. We transform ourselves. We transform ourselves from within, and start to lessen the power of that emotion. That is what we actually mean by Dharma practice.

With this kind of Dharma practice you do not need a special time. You can do it during your everyday life. You can do the Dharma practice even when you are at work. Dharma is something where you look at your way of thinking, at your aspirations, how you act and react, how you can change that and how you relate and connect to other people. You examine these things and you become aware of what you are doing. This kind of practice is very important.

11. Mind Poison / Peace of mind

Generally speaking there are two ways of dealing with mind poison.

At first, for the beginners, we try to evade mind poisons, to not get attracted by them, to go around them and not get too much involved with them. Trying to run away from them, that is the first stage. That in fact you should really challenge it, work directly with it.

The second stage is to actually fight against it, make a kind of war on it.

Then the third stage is when your wisdom becomes much clearer and stronger. Then you use skilful means. Now you are much stronger and you can actually challenge, make war, attack the negative emotions. You find a way to even use it as a friend, not as an enemy. You use it in such a way that it can be very skilfully used.

There are different levels, different stages. One has to work on it step by step.

Peace of mind

The following is something very important that we cannot do without. We need to give our mind some rest, we need to bring it peace and joy. When we give time to meditate, or to do certain practices, it is to train our minds to bring peace and rest and relaxation, otherwise our mind cannot rest and we cannot find peace. It is too distracted and too turbulent. It is like our mind is sick, has fever, a cold or something like that. It does not act in a peaceful way.

Therefore, this kind of training, this formal practice to bring our mind rest and peace, is very important.

12. Fear

When we look at the five aggregates as a representation of the self, we do not consider each of them separately as the self, but all of them together we consider to be "I," the self.

We take the aggregated self as something very real, as something very solid. Then we fear that this aggregated self, that I call my self, is something that we might lose, or that something bad might happen to it. That is why the fear comes. So the true source of fear is the clinging to the self, because the self is seen as something separate, something solid and independent. Then it is because of that independent self, that one fears losing, becoming sick, that bad things will happen, that this is the true source of all fears.

If we look deeply into this and we see that these aggregates are not independent or something separate, if we can see that they are not solid, not something that is one, but that they are like an illusion, the more you see them as an illusion, as interdependent, then there is no need to have any fear.

If we see ourselves, or our aggregates, as a reflection of the moon in the water, the reflection of the moon in the water does not get damaged whatever you do. It will not be destroyed, nothing gets lost.

If you understand interdependence and dependently arising, if you really get introduced to that, really seize that, then there is less reason to feel the fear. To understand clearly the causes and effects, to really see how things are, is the important remedy for fear.

For instance; when I was a child I was very afraid when there were clouds in the sky with lightning and thunderstorms. But when I saw clearly how it was happening, many different things coming together, that it was summertime, that there were clouds coming, how all the things were happening, when I saw this, when I understood this, then I did not have to be afraid. But when all these things suddenly happen and you don't know what is happening, then you have fear.

This shows that the more you understand the causes and conditions and how things really are, there is less need for fear, less reason to have fear.

13. Transforming emotions

The Buddha Dharma is for clearing all the impurities of the mind.

There is nothing in the Dharma which is not aimed at clearing our negative emotions. There is nothing in the Dharma that is not a direct antidote for our negative emotions.

In some teachings, sometimes attachment is the main target to work on and sometimes the main practice, or the main target, is aversion or anger, and sometimes ignorance is the main practice.

According to the teachings, there are different kinds of methods and different levels of teachings to suit different needs.

14. Anger

Aversion and aggression are both expressions of anger.

It becomes very obvious because when you feel anger and aggression you express it very clearly, either through your face, speech, or body language. The way you act becomes rougher and less careful, so it is not difficult to recognise angry or aggressive feelings when they arise. It is easy to notice these emotions.

The way we work with it is through patience. This is the antidote we have to use.

Sometimes we have this feeling; “This person did a negative thing to me. They insulted me. They did this and that.” We respond thinking; “I have a right to be angry, it’s ok. I have a right to be aggressive for this or that reason.” When you see things in this way, it is very difficult to deal with aggression. I find this most difficult to deal with because you think it is a very reasonable response, and that you really need to react with this aggression or anger. But there are many different ways to deal with anger, and sometimes you can’t work directly with it using your own understanding.

It is best if you have a clear understanding of the reasons why you should not be angry or aggressive, but if you can’t do that, sometimes it can help if you can think up reasons why you shouldn’t be angry, make some excuses in a way.

Suppose I have a very genuine master, a Lama, and that every time I get angry or aggressive I think about that Lama, and I say to myself; “this Lama told me not to get so angry.” If I can divert my attention that way, this will sometimes help. It may have a good effect and it helps me let go of my anger.

If I can remember instructions from good books and teachings that are true and inspiring and have inspired me, if I can think of these, they will also help me.

15. Shifting Attention

Usually when we get angry about something our mind is totally focused on this one point, this personal incident, so our anger becomes stronger and stronger, then we feel that we have to do something about it, that we have to act. Anger can go to many places, towards oneself as well.

Instead of focusing on this one thing, if we can shift our attention, if we can let our mind feel the same about anger as we do about other things, if we can shift our attention and say; “I am angry about this thing, this is not right, and I am angry about that thing, that is also not right,” if I can concentrate on the many different things that I am angry about, then somehow my anger becomes less, because its not solid. It is not focused on one thing. After some time your mind moves evenly across many things that you are angry about, so that you do not need to be angry about one particular thing anymore.

It is very important that we try to shift our focus, our concentration, from one point to many other things. If we generate bodhicitta there are many benefits, many positive things.

16. Desire

When I was young I was taken to China. They sometimes took me to shops. There were very nice toys and other interesting things. This is nice, that is great, everything is fascinating, but of course you cannot buy everything. If you give in to your desire completely it can lead to stealing, because you cannot afford to buy everything. Of course some people steal out of need, but it also happens because of too much desire.

Now, when we think about these things and say; “look at that, so nice, so desirable,” is it really that?

Of course, there are nice things. But basically what is desirable and undesirable has very much to do with our own mind. It is an idea that we create. If everyone says; “this is very desirable, this is very good,” then collectively everyone agrees that it is desirable, and good. So desire for certain things is something that we create, something that our society creates.

It is also important to be aware the thing that seems desirable, in another way, can be undesirable. There are things which attract our mind totally, that cause us to be completely captivated, and that becomes attachment. When we are overpowered by attachment we lose our freedom.

It has also to do with the way we see, how we think. It is not the object that makes us like that, but how we react to the object that makes us lose our freedom. Our mind, overpowered by attraction or too much desire, over values the quality of the object.

For example, a diamond; these days there are many fake diamonds made so well that they look like the real thing. So if I take the fake diamond to be a real diamond, I think it really is a real diamond. I view the thing I am attracted to as a hundred percent good, but actually it is not like that. The way it is, and the way my mind sees it, are different.

Now you could say that your loving kindness, your compassion for beings is also something desirable. Is that not attachment? But I do not want to give up on these beings because I have compassion for them. From that point of view it is similar. My mind does not want to give up on sentient beings.

But now the difference is, when you are attracted to something, then the way your mind works is to think; “I like it, I want it.” You have so much desire that you cannot control yourself. You have lost your freedom to choose.

But when we have compassion and love for sentient beings, it is a little bit different. Here the question is, why do you love sentient beings, why do you have compassion? You have many genuine reasons why you do not want to let go of them, why you do not want to forsake them, such as; “they have been very kind to me in many different ways.” Because of certain genuine reasons you love people and have compassion for them. It is a choice that you make. It is a free choice. You have the freedom to like these people. You do not want to give up on them. Not giving up because of loving kindness is very different from the clinging of attachment.

With attachment there is a very strong holding on tight, a strong feeling that you cannot let go. But with compassion

and loving kindness it is not like that. It is a much more open and free, a very warm feeling.

Most of you are householders, so you all have to face the challenge of attachment. When we say that attachment is something negative, it doesn't mean that every kind of desire or attachment is something bad, that everything you are attached to has to be given up. Sometimes people think; "I should not be attached to things, so I have to give up everything, give up everybody." That is wrong. That is not what we are saying. We are saying that we have to base our relationships and attachments on things for the right reasons. It happens that you get fully into something and then you can't get out of it. This brings problems and suffering and pain. That is not what we want.

Sometimes you get involved with a relationship without understanding the correct way to behave, then it is very difficult to get out of it. This creates a lot of problems for both sides. If you look deeply, I think then you can understand, and you can make good relationships harmoniously without any problem.

There is a story that I remember. It is said there was once a couple, not doing very well together. They were not even talking to each other. One day, the man wrote a note to his wife saying; "please wake me up at 8 o'clock." Then he went to sleep, and of course he overslept. It was already ten when he woke up. He found another note next to his note, and it said; "you must wake up now. It is already 9.30."

It does not mean we should avoid relationships, but relationships should not become a source of suffering. They can be a source of great happiness. The way we comprehend things makes all the difference.

17. Buddhist Logic

Generally speaking, there are many aspects to Buddhist logic, but the following is the main point; the continuation of material things and the continuation of consciousness are something separate.

Because the continuation of consciousness is understood through the experience and awareness that there is clarity in our mind, it is not something you can actually see, or experiment with from the outside. Because in this century people are much more materialistic, it is very difficult to demonstrate to them this fact of the mind's continuum, for them to understand the fact of the mind continuing.

Although there could be different methods, traditionally meditation is one way to understand it. Through meditation your basic or unrefined consciousness goes deeper. It becomes more and more clear and subtle. At a certain level you can actually remember your past lives. So therefore, when you go deeper into your consciousness, at a more subtle level of consciousness, real clarity can be experienced.

It also sometimes happens that your mind can be brought into a deeper consciousness through medical science, and then maybe sometimes you can also experience certain memories of the past. So there are also other ways.

18. Bodhicitta / Bodhisattvas

If we generate bodhicitta there are many benefits, many positive things.

It is said that if bodhicitta had a form, then that form could not be contained in the whole of space. That is what the Buddha said. Especially if we generate action bodhicitta, then even if we are not doing anything, if we are just sleeping or completely distracted, even then, beneficial positive deeds are always taking place. But this description of the benefits of bodhicitta is not limited to only words. There is a very deep meaning to be understood.

Wherever there is sky, and throughout the space beyond, there are sentient beings, and where sentient beings are, there are also karma and the kleshas, and wherever there is karma and klesha there is suffering, therefore the need to have compassion and kindness. This is extended through our compassion and bodhicitta. The bodhicitta covers all the places where sentient beings exist, and wherever there is space there are sentient beings. This is really the case.

At the beginning of the 20th century some people in Tibet did not know much about the different countries of the world. Maybe they'd heard about America, or a few large countries, but maybe not even about Russia. They thought Russia was an imaginary place and Russian people would be like other-worldly beings.

People didn't know so much, but they had the understanding that wherever space exists there are sentient beings, sentient beings who need to be loved. So therefore, bodhicitta is also there. Even when they did

not have any information about the other countries in this world, people had the understanding to send a sense of compassion and care to all the sentient beings throughout space. Therefore, when you generate bodhicitta, love and compassion goes to wherever the sky covers, to wherever space extends.

So it is understandable when they say that when you generate bodhicitta, then the merit, the virtue, the benefit is as vast as space. It is right to say that.

Bodhisattvas

When we think about the happiness and suffering of all sentient beings, we also have to think of this world. This world is the container in which we sentient beings live. It has the capacity to provide all the necessities of all the sentient beings who live here. Therefore, we must be aware of the needs of the environment.

We should realise that we have been very ignorant in our destruction of the environment, destroying the forests, destroying the environment in a very terrible way, without any compassion or consideration. We have wrongly understood what we should do and what we have to get rid of for our well-being. We have been very ignorant about this, so therefore, we would like to get more enlightened, and by becoming enlightened we are able to know what to do, and what not to do, for the benefit of ourselves and others.

This is also a way of thinking. It is generating an aspiration. Just having the aspiration is very good and in one way that is already enough. However, it is not really enough just to have the aspiration. We must also generate bodhicitta and the Bodhisattva commitment.

In order to fulfil that aspiration we make a commitment to do something. We make a commitment to work until we become totally enlightened. We commit to working on the Six Paramitas, to train and act using the Six Paramitas. That is what we call the action of the Bodhisattvas, bodhicitta in action. And when we make the commitment it is important to understand that we have to do it according to our level of mind strength, our level of attainment, whatever stage we are at. It is very good to take the Bodhisattva commitment, but you have to know how to work at your own level.

When we make the Bodhisattva commitment we are promising to help all sentient beings. We are inviting all sentient beings to become enlightened. Therefore, it is very important that we accomplish it and not give up that path or that promise. But it must be done step by step. If we just give up, we are giving up our promise, we are deceiving people and letting them down.

So therefore it is something we have to work on, step by step, without giving up.

