

## Lojong Point #6

### Abide by the Three Principles

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As you know Shamar Rinpoche has really been emphasizing the study of mind training. He even wrote a book for that, *The Path of Awakening*, and so in the coming Sundays I'd like to go through some of the points. And then after that, when we come back to the meditation, we can let it sink in and try to process that, and then not keep it as a topic to work on throughout the week. I want to take the sixth and the seventh chapters, on the sixth and seventh points of mind training, because they are very short but essential instructions.

There is a tradition to expound and teach about the seven points of mind training that correlates each of the seven points with one of the six paramitas, the transcendent qualities. Of the seven points, the first one is the preliminary, and the last one is a set of general advice, so we're left with five points. The second point has two major subsections; working with absolute bodhicitta and working with relative bodhicitta, in both meditation and action. Then all the others will follow, so you have six topics. In the tradition of expounding the six topics by relating them to one of the paramitas, the sixth point is actually connected with the sixth paramita, the prajnaparamita; the discernment. And here I want to refer to Chogyam Trungpa's *Training the Mind and Cultivating Lovingkindness* to give you this idea of how we connect them. He says, "The paramita connected with the sixth point of mind training is prajnaparamita. These slogans are all connected with sharpening your intelligence in order to work with yourself. But it is the idea of the sword of prajna. Prajna is regarded as the sword that cuts the bondage of ego. The way to cut the bondage of ego in Mahayana practice is basically the same as in Vipashyana practice. It is awareness relating to the rest of your world and to your life. It is connected with a larger sense of your entire life and particularly with post-meditation experience."

Then it goes on, and you are welcome to read this book, which is a very good explanation of mind training, but at this point I would like to come back to Shamar Rinpoche's text with this idea that the six points are here to help us sharpen our discernment. The word intelligence used in the Buddhist context is not the same as we understand it in the Western lay context, as in being good at

thinking. It's being able to tell the difference between what's false and what's real, what's wrong and what's right, in the sense of appreciation of the phenomena that we encounter, and the reactions we have. This will progressively help us to sharpen the sword of prajna, or the sword of discernment. Shamar Rinpoche says the sixth point lists the fifteen precepts of mind training, with the exception of the first, which provides broad guidelines. But the other fourteen point out the behaviors you should shun in your daily life, mistakes which will spoil your efforts and your progress in practice.

So today I'd like to go through the first one. The first one is, *always abide by the three basic principles*. The three basic principles guard you from mistakes, so that's why Shamar Rinpoche says these are broad guidelines. All the rest fits into this. The first one is, *keep your commitments and vows*. This includes the two unsurpassed refuge and bodhisattvas vows and are related to mind training precepts. *Do not overlook or disregard even in the slightest of transgressions*.

So the first set of vows, which means taking refuge, as the Buddha as a goal, the Dharma as a path, and the Sangha as qualified spiritual friends, is really the foundation of all the other efforts, and that will include the practice of generosity, ethics, and patience, and will eventually lead to prajna; to discernment, wisdom. This foundation has to be very solid in our life. This is something we cannot just forget. Assuming there is a day when we take refuge, and we sort of like "join the club" and then after that, once we're "in," we might take it for granted. It's really something we should always cultivate. The perspective of enlightenment, reaching enlightenment or reaching the capacity to help all beings to be free from suffering, should be the central pillar of our life. Our actions will rest on this. The words we say, the thoughts we have, the actions we take will all be motivated by this central aspiration. This really has to be consolidated all the time; if we waver, if we're not sure, we have to come back to this and strengthen this commitment. Why did I make this decision, this commitment, in the first place? Going for refuge and finding support, shelter, protection, in enlightenment, in the Buddha? And consequently, because from the Buddha comes the Dharma, if you go in this direction, towards enlightenment, then there is a way to go. Therefore there are actions that are conducive and others that will lead you astray, so Dharma is going to help us to understand the right steps.

So from the refuge in the Buddha comes the refuge in the Dharma and then the refuge in the Sangha, which is a provisory refuge, of course, and is here to help us to grow in our understanding

of Dharma. The Sangha could be a good role model of humans who have struggled and overcome their difficulties, so this can provide great inspiration for us, to see others making progress and so we know that, being human we struggle and may fail, but we can also progress, and we have these living examples and living proof of that. That's why they're so helpful and supportive. Whatever is connected with the Buddha, Dharma, and the Sangha, we're going to strengthen it and never let it go.

And once we've developed this intention to take refuge and move towards enlightenment, then we can follow this up with the bodhisattva commitment. So I'm going to reach enlightenment not only for my personal liberation, but I understand I'm part of a network of beings, and all these beings have been kind to me in different ways and I owe them a lot, and I see their legitimate aspiration to freedom, and I also see their clumsiness with which they act, creating the very suffering they wish to avoid. And so the heart and the mind, we could say, both intelligence and sensitivity, will speak and say, "I'm going to help." We take the bodhisattva vows, first as an aspiration, and then after that we commit more precisely to actions.

So this should be strongly present in our life as the central pillar of our actions, thoughts, and words. And we should not disregard or overlook even the slightest transgression; we shouldn't think it's just a trifle, some little detail, because from a small detail might come great effects. Vast effects, we never know. Remember, you may be a tall and strong human being, but you have been a small little thing moving towards your mother's egg; so a small thing can have a large effect. But this doesn't mean we should obsess, like if we fail it's something terrible and we've lost it, and so on. The advice here is to be present. To be mindful. To know yourself, and know when you're about to succumb to laziness and the easy way of doing things. One of the precepts regarding the Buddha is *always take refuge in the Buddha*. Never take side steps like, let's cut a deal, there's an easy way out here. No. Really work with the sanity of awakening; it may be difficult, but it's also very rewarding, and won't lead you astray. So not disregarding even the slightest transgression.

And Rinpoche goes on to say, *In order to succeed in subduing self-clinging, clinging to the self as inherently existent and autonomous and different from the rest of the world, in order to succeed in overcoming this old habit, do not overindulge in anything, including your self image*. Like self-promotion; me, myself and I being the first and the top of the world. This is the form of ethics that we have to maintain. *Do not try to stand out or*

*make an impression that you are someone different or special, either overtly or subtly.* Like in a hidden way, a sort of underground promotion of your grandeur.

*Be equally patient with everything.* That's pretty much connected with Dharma, you know, whatever comes your way is an opportunity to work with things. So taking refuge in the Dharma is to develop this form of patience; seeing that everything is workable, I can recycle all of that. But if I take the side refuge of lazy and easy shelter, I will never want to work with this, therefore I won't see it as another opportunity, but just as another pain that I have to deal with. And patience shouldn't be selective. For example, you shouldn't choose to be patient only with your friends and not your enemies. I noticed something about myself. I can be very patient when I have to work with really hard things, but when times are easy, I'm pissed; everything annoys me. That's biased patience, because you should be patient when times are relaxed and easy and little details come and hurt your feelings or whatever, and not only big flights, like I'm patient for big fights only and the rest is, you know...anyway, everything is equally important. Whether you're at ease and there are little disturbances you work with them with a very equal state of mind, or if it's really major difficulties and major hardship you work with them also. So that is the first of the commitments of mind training as Rinpoche called them. *Always abide by the three basic principles.* So keep your commitments, don't indulge in anything, including your self-image, and be equally patient with everything.

I think we can see this in meditation also, when we sit we let our mind rest in the Buddha nature; taking refuge in a very essential way. We can see the promotion of myself as a good meditator, with the hope of having a good meditation, and the disappointment when it is not as I thought it should be; and the form of impatience that might come with this. Slight disturbances, such as the room is cold, which as I said earlier is a mental construct, or major obstacles in your life, in your health, or in your afflictions. Like your mind is totally overwhelmed by all sorts of mental afflictions that you have to work with. You must remain very even, which according to mind training is a sign of spiritual mastery, when you can work with everything big or small with a very even attitude, that's a sign of stabilized qualities. So we can see this in meditation, I'm sure we can also see it in our daily life, so let's go back to silent contemplation.