

## *The Dharma that Belongs in Everyone's Heart*

Spoken by Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche

Translated by Erik Pema Kunsang

We all know, intellectually at least, that the Buddha's Dharma is not merely a topic of study, nor is it simply something to be practiced on our meditation cushions. As we hurry through our daily lives, it is easy to forget that the quality of formal practice is intimately tied to the quality of our minds, moment to moment. Practitioners of all levels are benefited by instructions on how to enrich their own lives and the lives of others by cultivating five noble qualities that are within reach of all of us: contentment, rejoicing, forgiveness, the good heart and mindfulness.

The basic nature of our mind is essentially good. The Buddha taught that all beings are buddhas covered by momentary obscurations; when those obscurations are removed, they are real buddhas. The true identity of every sentient being, not just human beings, is a state of unconditioned suchness. This is the basic nature simply as it is, pure and perfect. We notice in ourselves that without being taught we have an inherent capacity to care for others and to understand -- it's not a product of education or upbringing. To practice the Dharma simply means to develop and nurture these intrinsic qualities. That is our task, our responsibility.

In the Buddhist approach to spirituality the ability to care includes both loving kindness and compassion. We aim at cultivating loving kindness and compassion until they are boundless, totally free from partiality. When the ability to understand is developed to its utmost, it is called "the wisdom that realizes egolessness," an insight that sees the fact that the self, the personal identity, has no real existence.

There are many conventional methods for infinitely expanding our kindness and compassion and realizing the true view. *Contentment* for instance is quite a valuable asset, not only for so-called spiritual people, but for everyone. Discontentment ruins every chance for happiness and well-being; but in a moment of feeling content and satisfied, true happiness is immediately present. From today on, no matter what, try to appreciate whatever you have: the comfort of your home, the pleasure of your possessions and the goodness in the people close to you. Happiness is already present and accessible to each and every one of us.

Often when imagining what it takes to make us feel happy, we see some other place or object that we haven't managed to possess. "I'm just about to. I'm on my way there. I can achieve it, I simply haven't yet." As long as fulfillment is at a distance we will remain unfulfilled. When we do not get what we want, we are not happy. Ironically, once we do get what we seek, it's not that satisfying. Even after having already gotten it, we are still not happy. The grass is always greener on the other side. We all know that those who have nothing suffer. It is understandable. They are hungry and they have lot of other problems. They may be too hot or too cold. But who is truly happy?

We need to seriously investigate if people who have fame, power and wealth are happy and whether people who have nothing are always unhappy. When we look into this, we see that happiness is not based on objects, but on one's mental state. For that reason, whoever

appreciates what they have, is really happy. Whenever we are content, in that moment, we are fulfilled. The teachings of the Buddha are common sense.

On one hand it's very simple: we are all searching for happiness. How do we become happy without a big effort? Whenever we appreciate what we have, we are happy. That effort is an intelligent technique. We might have a very simple life. Still we can think, "This flower is lovely. This water is good." If we are too picky, thinking, "This is wrong, that's wrong," nothing is ever perfect. We need to learn how to be content, then whatever you have is precious, real and beautiful. Otherwise, you might be chasing one mirage after another.

The second point is *rejoicing*. Our basic goodness is obscured by negative emotions. The Buddha said that there are 84,000 types of negative emotions, but among these there are two which often make problems because they are quite difficult to notice: pride and envy. One of our biggest, most unnecessary types of mental suffering is envy. If someone else's life is better than ours, we become jealous, angry and disappointed. It can sometimes make us very uneasy, our food loses its flavor, we have trouble sleeping, and even our blood pressure can go up. Rejoicing is the second intelligent remedy to all this useless self-torture. We can mentally share in other people's happiness. Is there any easier way to attain happiness?

The third point is *forgiveness*, which is very important. Pride can be quite powerful. Even in moments when we are loving and caring, when we're not getting along with someone and our heart is saying, "The best thing to do is just forgive," behind that voice there is another one saying "No, don't. You are right. You did nothing wrong." Pride constantly prevents us from forgiving others, an act that is so healthy and beautiful.

Forgiveness and apologizing have the power to completely heal rifts, but we need to understand how and when to apply them. If we try too early, the situation might still be volatile. We need to find the proper moment, and once we've done that, be careful in what words we choose, the tone of our voice, even what physical gestures and facial expressions we make. Each of these has a lot of power and if one of them is off, we won't be that effective. If on the other hand we can express an apology in a heart-felt way we will always be able to achieve peace, respect and mutual understanding.

Most important of all is to have a *good heart*. Like everything else, in order to have a good heart we need to investigate until we are clear about what true well-being actually is, both in its temporary and long-term sense. The source of happiness and well-being is not only loving-kindness and compassion, but an insight into the true view of reality, because someone who fully recognizes reality becomes a tathagata, a fully awakened one. Oppositely, the source of suffering is hate, craving and close-mindedness. These three are the roots from which all our troubles grow.

It is an obvious and incontestable fact that to help everyone attain happiness and well-being, we need to bring forth in ourselves boundless loving kindness and compassion along with a true understanding of the unconditioned natural state. If we really want to help others then we need to support them in promoting the causes for happiness and well-being in themselves. Thus, we need to help others bring forth loving kindness, compassion and the true view.

In a nutshell, the real Buddhist practice is to try our best to bring forth the true sources of happiness and well-being in all beings—boundless love and compassion and the unmistakable realization of the natural state, the unconditioned innate nature—while at the same time removing both in ourselves and others the causes of suffering, which are craving, hate, and close-mindedness. That is what it really means to have a good heart.

Love and compassion can be expanded until they become boundless, genuine and impartial, making no distinctions between friend, enemy and stranger. We must continue in our efforts until we have removed even the slightest obstacle to our love and compassion. Only when our love and compassion have become boundless will they be truly effortless.

By “true view” I mean knowing the nature of things exactly as it is, the basic, essential nature of what is. This insight has to do with how we experience. Everything that appears to us seems to be real and solid, but is only a mere impression of something that occurs as a result of causes and conditions. In and of themselves, things do not possess even a shred of solid existence. This is why said the Buddha taught that all phenomena are emptiness while occurring in dependent connection. Hence, it is good to study the twelve links of dependent origination, both external and internal. We will then see that mind is of primary importance; everything depends on mind. Whatever is experienced, felt or perceived is dependent on mind, an experiencer experiencing it, observing it, knowing it.

Why would the Buddha say that all sentient beings are confused, bewildered? Was it because sentient beings really are confused? It could be that the Buddha was really mistaken and that all sentient beings are not. We need to investigate this point, because one of the two parties is definitely mistaken. The Buddha also said “Don’t take my words at face value.” If they are wrong then we should speak up. We are allowed to examine them for ourselves, to think and to question whether or not the Buddha was wrong.

Let’s take an example. The Buddha said that all formed things are impermanent and unreal. We however have the instinctive feeling that things are actually real and permanent. If we check it out for ourselves we can see that it’s not as we first thought. He really challenged us. He said that we haven’t bothered to look closely; we haven’t questioned our own beliefs. When we do, we discover that things are not really as they seem. Things are re-formed again and again, moment by moment by causes and circumstances. When we start to carefully investigate and dissect objects we also see that they are made out of smaller and smaller parts: molecules, atoms, more and more minute particles. If people bothered to explore this way they would find that even the atom does not really exist.

In the *Root Verses of the Middle Way* the great master Nagarjuna wrote that since the formed cannot be found to exist, the unformed couldn’t possibly exist either. He also said that samsara is merely our thinking. When we are free of thought that is real freedom.

The discovery of the unconditioned natural state involves a process of learning, reflection and meditation training. The most important of these three is meditation. We hear about spiritual practice, in all different styles—meditating, visualizing, reciting mantras etc., but we must understand that there is only one purpose to all these endeavors: improving ourselves. This means allowing our basic goodness to manifest. The goal of every technique we employ is improving ourselves; so, until we are perfect, training is still necessary.

To achieve this we need to apply the teachings in daily life. The first step toward developing kindness is *mindfulness*, making our minds as calm and clear as possible. This is something we can practice every day, wherever we are, whatever we are doing. We need to be aware each and every moment. What are we saying? What are we thinking? How are we moving about? Moment by moment, before moving the body, before speaking; and also while moving and speaking; then afterwards we’re still aware: what did I say or do?

There are many types of meditation training, but they all fall into one of two categories: deliberate meditation with effort and practicing being completely effortless, free of conceptual focus. The most profound, the truest, meditation is the training in complete effortlessness, but it is not our habit to be that way. We are pretty much in the groove of

being deliberate, in using effort whether mental, verbal or physical. Unconditioned suchness, which is our natural state, transcends every type of mental construct and is effortless. Learning, reflection and meditation are very important because we need to recognize our true basic state. Through listening and learning we become familiar with the teachings, and through reflection we become convinced of their truth and develop certainty. Learning and reflecting are definitely deliberate and require a lot of effort, but they are essential.

In order to be brought face to face with unconditioned suchness, our basic nature exactly as it is, there are two factors that are most helpful, but they are not easy to acquire. One is boundless love and compassion -- whenever love is almost overwhelming, when kindness and compassion are unwavering, there is a moment available for you to realize the unconditioned natural state. The other is sincere devotion to and unshakeable pure perception of the unconditioned natural state. Together with these, a respect for and pure perception of those who have realized it and have the capacity to reveal it to others spontaneously arises. This also includes a pure appreciation of anyone who really practices and trains in the Buddhist teachings.

Frankly speaking, loving kindness and compassion, together with devotion and pure perception are indispensable if you want to realize unconditioned suchness, the nature of mind that is the awakened state of the buddhas. There is no way around them. But you should also become weary of pointless pursuits. The real objects of renunciation are hatred, craving and close-mindedness, the sources of all trouble.

Meanwhile, our perseverance should be joyous and spontaneous. Such perseverance springs from our awareness of the unconditioned natural state. It is not merely an admiration, not simply a yearning or longing. As your comprehension of the profound nature becomes stronger and grows deeper you develop a confident trust. Spontaneous, effortless compassion begins to blossom as you continue to train after having truly recognized the natural state as it actually is. Sincere compassion radiates from the deepest part of your heart. You can't help it; it just naturally springs forth.

Before becoming aware of this natural state we are bewildered, creating painful states, all the time; but by continually training in this we will recognize that beneath everything is an unconditioned natural state. We will start to notice that every selfish emotion begins to soften and subside of its own accord. As pain and worry diminish, our confused way of experiencing subsides more and more. Then we will begin to really understand how other beings feel. You will ask yourself: What can I do to help them? If I don't help them, who will? This is when real compassion overtakes you, and a sincere, unchangeable devotion begins to grow within you. We call this the dawn of 'irreversible' or 'unshakeable' confidence.

True confidence begins with a trust in the instruction that reveals this nature. You have experienced first hand that it works, so of course you feel confident. This is also directed to the source of the instructions, the one from whom you received them. You are grateful to him or her, as well as the entire lineage of transmission through which the instruction came to be passed on to you. That is true devotion. These two, effortless compassion and unchangeable devotion, join forces so that your training grows deeper and deeper very quickly. Your practice is strengthened to the point that it is unshakeable, like when a strong gust of wind causes a huge fire with plenty of firewood to blaze even higher.

The great master Atisha wondered, "What does it mean to be really learned?" and concluded that real wisdom is to understand egolessness. True ethics are to have tamed or softened your own heart: whenever that is the case and somebody actually cares, is watchful and conscientious, that is real ethics. What is the foremost virtue? Atisha said it is to have a

profound sense of caring for benefit, and well-being of others. What is the foremost sign of success or accomplishment? Not clairvoyance or miraculous powers, but to have fewer selfish emotions. These may sound like just a few simple sentences, but they are very profound and of great benefit when you take them to heart.