

Finding Peace in a Troubled World

Melbourne Visit by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin, May 2003

Thank you very much for the warm welcome and especially for the traditional welcome. I would like to welcome you all and take this opportunity to extend my best wishes to the Sangha members and to all the brothers and sisters who have gathered here this evening. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the organizers, helpers and those who assisted in preparing my trip to Melbourne, and also in arranging this program.

As you know, I have been to Australia three times – this is my third visit, so we have already made very good connections. There are many familiar faces as well as new faces. In any case, it is a great joy for me to share the teachings of the Buddha with you this evening. Before I begin my talk, I would first like to recite a short prayer.

(Prayers follow)

Now in this world in which we live, there are many different races and many different religions, many different philosophies and many different cultures. But one aspect they all have in common is that they all aim to help their adherents



attain happiness and be free from suffering. There is no disagreement about this.

Every individual, every organization, every society tries to achieve happiness. In order to gain happiness, we make many efforts at the material level. During the past century, we have made tremendous progress



in the fields of science and technology. This has brought many benefits to mankind, such as improved medical treatment, communications and so on. But by the same token, it is clear that material progress alone is not enough. It is very important for us also to make inner spiritual progress. This is because if we do not make inner spiritual progress, outer material progress, though it confers many benefits, can bring with it much harm and destruction. Therefore, to find real peace and happiness in this world, it is important to acquire inner peace and happiness. If outer material benefit is combined with inner spiritual development, real peace and happiness will be achieved.

I personally believe that all of the major world religions have a role to play in this. From the Buddhist perspective, the Buddha himself gave many levels of teachings. One kind of teaching is not enough, because human beings are innumerable and their levels of defilements and their spiritual propensities are so varied. One kind of medicine cannot cure all the different diseases that exist in the world. Not only do we need many different kinds of medicine, but we need many different systems of medicine, e.g. for certain diseases allopathic medicine is more effective, but

for other diseases ayurvedic medicine is more appropriate. Similarly, one system of teaching is not enough. We require many different kinds, as we each have different tastes, different mentalities and so on. Therefore each one of the world's religions has an important role to play in helping mankind. All the religions need to cooperate and unite in their efforts to help mankind and to show sentient beings how to make this world a better, happier place to live in, with less suffering.

As a Buddhist, I can say that according to the teachings of the Buddha, not only human beings, but all sentient beings possess the Buddha nature. The true nature of our mind is unstained by obscurations. Our mind has been pure from the very beginning. At the moment we can't see the actual true nature of our mind, as it is stained by two obscurations: the obscuration of defilements and the obscuration of knowledge. The obscuration of defilements covers negative emotions such as ignorance, desire, hatred, jealousy, pride, stinginess, and so on. The obscuration of knowledge means the dualistic stream of thoughts related to the three realms, such as subject and object and the thoughts themselves. These obscurations block us from seeing the



true nature of the mind. As long as we have these obscurations, we are not free. We remain in samsara, which means the circle of existence. The wheel of life goes around and around in never-ending circles.

Now as sentient beings, we have a physical body and a mental consciousness. We know where the physical body came from, how it is maintained and how it will be disposed of. It is something we can see with our naked eye and touch with our hands. We can describe its colour, shape and so on. But, where is the mind? Mental consciousness is something we can't see with the naked eye, we can't touch with our hands, we can't measure. We can't describe its shape, colour or size.

The mind and body are very different. Mental consciousness has its own requirements; it can't arise, continue and develop out of nothing. It can't arise out of things which have a different nature, such as the elements of the physical body or material substance. It must have its own kind of continuity from one moment to another. If we ask ourselves where this mind came from, we can prove that we had some kind of life before taking on our present physical body – we had a previous life before we took this present form. It goes on – before

that another life, and before that another life. There is no such thing as the beginning of a person's consciousness. In other words there is no beginning. That is why we refer to 'beginningless time.' We have been born previously in many different forms, taking many different physical bodies. We change bodies just like we change clothes. But the same continuity of mental consciousness continues from beginningless time right up to the present. It will keep going on well into the future too, until such time as we attain enlightenment.

As long as we remain in samsara, we are not free from suffering. In fact, the very nature of samsara is suffering, just as the nature of fire is heat, regardless of whether it is a big fire or a small fire. Since the nature of samsara is suffering, to overcome this suffering we must eliminate the two obscurations.

It is important to know about suffering and where it came from. What is the root of suffering? The answer is, the root of

suffering is lack of wisdom. It is due to ignorance, that is, not knowing the true nature of the mind. Without logical reasons, we cling to a self. When we cling to a self, we also at the same time cling to a sense of 'others'. When we have a situation where there is a self and there are others, we develop attachment and desire for our own side and anger or hatred towards others.

But in reality, there is no self. If there were a self, it would have to be the physical body, the mind or a name. But a name is a mere label, which can be given to anything at any moment. With regard to the physical body, if we examine every part of the body, such as flesh, bones, blood and so on, we will not find a single substance that can be called the self. Even in common usage, when we talk about my body, we mean the body that belongs to me, just like my car, my house, etc. But the body is not the self. What about the mind? Could the mind be the self? But the mind is changing all the time. The past mind has already ceased and the future mind is yet to arise. The present mind changes moment by moment. Something which is changing all the time cannot be the self.

If the name, the physical body and the mind are not the self, where is the self? Despite not being able to find it, we all have

a very strong habitual tendency to cling to a combination of the physical body and the mind as the self. This habitual tendency has been with us from beginningless time up to now. It is very strong in all of us. We always cling to the notion of a self. No matter how much we love other people, we always care more for ourselves than for others. We have always been very selfish, because of this self-clinging to a personal self, our present form, feelings, etc. Yet when we try to investigate where this self is, we cannot find anything. So we cling to this self in spite of the lack of logical evidence that it exists.

This self-clinging is the source of all our problems. It is the basic ignorance from which all the negative emotions start. If there is a self, then there are others and if there is a self and others, there is attachment to the self and anger towards others. This situation creates the basic three defilements, which are greed, hatred and ignorance. From these three basic defilements arise others, such as jealousy, pride, stinginess, etc. Once these emotions are present, they soon develop into physical, verbal and mental actions. When we perform such actions, it is like planting a seed which leads to the growth of suffering.

Any actions created under the power



of these emotions are known as negative or non-virtuous deeds. These deeds create all our problems and suffering. The negative experiences people face in life, such as having a short life span, poor health, mental suffering, anxiety, poverty and inability to fulfill their wishes are not produced by any outside force. Neither do they happen accidentally. They are created by our negative emotions, which lead us to commit negative deeds. The result of committing negative deeds is yet more suffering.

There is no point in blaming our problems on what is going on outside. All problems begin within our own minds, from our negative emotions. We should not blame others when things go wrong, because all problems originate from our own negative emotions. Buddhism teaches us that everything arises from causes and conditions. Even natural calamities such as floods, earthquakes and so on are the products of our own actions. This is because when many people indulge in negative deeds together, it results in natural disasters. We can tell from our own experience what the consequences of negative emotions, such as anger, are. We lose our peace of mind and become unhappy. Our face becomes grim, we lose our peace, our happiness disappears and even our family members are affected

and cannot experience peace and happiness either. This may extend to our neighbours too. People who are selfish and angry may destroy the entire world.

When our minds are relaxed, our physical body will be healthy. When our minds are angry and disturbed, feelings such as jealousy and pride arise. We cannot find peace and happiness. These negative emotions also affect the body. Doctors tell us that many diseases are related to mental tension and anxiety. In short, all our physical problems and all the problems in the outside world are caused by our negative emotions. Yet it is very difficult to avoid negative emotions. It may be easy to recognize them, but we have been bound by these defilements since beginningless time. As I said, our individual mind has no beginning. Our consciousness has continued from beginningless time up to now. The first step is to know this. So instead of blaming our problems or the community's problems on others, we should look inside and blame our own defilements, our own negative emotions. No external enemy can do as much damage as our own negative emotions can. Besides, no matter how many outside enemies you destroy, whenever you destroy one enemy, another appears. It goes on and on. There is no end to it. On the





other hand, if you turn inwards and address you own negative emotions, such as anger and jealousy, all the enemies disappear. The person who is without anger has no enemies. That's because the actual enemy is not outside, it is within our own mind. And the worst enemy of all is anger. The worst negative deeds are those initiated by anger. So anger is the worst negative emotion we can have.

The realization that negative emotions are the cause of all our problems is a great step, but it is only the first step. The second step is to try to reduce our negative emotions. It is just a matter of how much effort we put into it. For example, it is very easy to become angry about the slightest matter – like a person's way of speaking, acting or looking. To overcome anger, we need to practise patience. Now it is very difficult to practise patience, so we may not be able to control our anger the first time we try, but the second time we may handle it better, and the third time we will do even better. Though we may not control our anger completely, we will start to be able to reduce it. By even just reducing the level of anger, you will already feel the benefits. Your mind will be calmer, and you will start to feel peaceful and happy. It will also have a very beneficial effect on the body. When you are healthy and happy you will live longer. Not only will you be a happier person, but by refraining from anger, you

will not disturb other people's peace and happiness. This is what we call a purposeful life: being happy and at the same time benefiting others. Otherwise, if we exist just to find food, clothes and shelter and continue living a miserable life, being unhappy, harming others and making them miserable too, what is the benefit? If we want to have a purposeful and beneficial life, it is very important for us to work on our negative emotions.

We can see that the first step is to recognize the root of the problem, and the second step is to try to work on it until eventually we can control it. If two or three more people also continue to work in this way, it will spread and bring benefits for all of us. If we can combine the progress we are making in the fields of science and technology with the positive energy of a peaceful and happy mind, it will be of great benefit to so many beings. On the other hand, if the developments in science and technology are linked with negative emotions, they will produce great harm. Such developments may make it possible for the destruction of many people within a short space of time. We then become far worse than the most dangerous of animals, such as tigers and snakes, that we fear so much. But how many beings can animals attack? Basically they attack only to provide themselves with food. They can only attack very few other creatures. They are



incapable of killing thousands of beings at a time. But if we humans continue to develop high technology without dealing with our negative emotions, we will be capable of destroying the whole world in a very short time. That's why it is so important for us to work on our negative emotions.

In addition to working on our negative emotions, we should try to develop a positive mind. All the good things in our lives, such as good health, prosperity and the fulfillment of our desires, all the happiness we long for – these things must have their own causes. They don't come about by accident or through any external cause. They are produced by our virtuous deeds. We may define virtuous deeds as actions without defilements – arising from loving kindness, compassion, patience and forgiveness. All positive qualities arise from these states of mind. We all long for happiness. If we truly want happiness, we must create the causes of happiness. We cannot experience happiness unless the causes are in place.

In short, whether we suffer or whether we experience happiness, it is all in our own hands, nobody else's. The Buddha's way to help human beings was through giving instructions or teachings about the right ways and the wrong ways of living. We must not follow the wrong path. We must definitely follow the right path, for the right path will lead us to liberation and enlightenment. The Buddha said, "I have

shown the path to liberation. The attainment of liberation depends on the individual."

That's why the Buddhist teachings say that you yourself are your own saviour. Nobody else can save you. When we are sick, it is important to have competent doctors and correct medication. But at the same time, the patient also has to do his part. He has to take his medicine and follow the doctor's advice to avoid creating causes for sickness. Otherwise, he cannot be cured. The Buddha is like a doctor, the Dharma is the medicine and we are the patient. In brief, to cure our negative emotions, we must do the correct practices and avoid the incorrect ones. If one wishes to follow the Buddhist path, there are various levels. Basically, the first step is to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The Buddha is the guide, the Dharma is the actual path, because it is through the Dharma that one makes progress on the path and the Sangha, which means community, are the companions on the path.

Taking refuge is the first step and it is the foundation of all the vows.

As I am going to give the major empowerments tomorrow, I think it is important for you to know about taking the three vows: the pratimoksha vow, the bodhisattva vow and the vajrayana vow. Pratimoksha means individual liberation. We take this vow to be able to free ourselves from the sufferings of samsara and to attain

liberation. To do this we must abstain from negative deeds and for this it is necessary to take a vow. This vow has different levels, such as the lay vows and monks' and nuns' or renunciates' vows. The cause of individual liberation is the aspiration for renunciation. This comes with the realization that samsara is nothing but suffering, and that to liberate ourselves from suffering we must renounce the world. It is a vow to keep the five precepts – the general precepts adhered to by all the Buddhist traditions. There are basically two forms of the vow: one form for lay people and another for renunciates.

Then there is the bodhisattva vow, which also has different levels. Of course we all want happiness and we want to be free of suffering. But it is not enough to seek liberation for ourselves alone. After all, everything in our life depends on other beings, and this has been true during every one of our lifetimes since beginningless time. It follows that at one time or another, we have been connected to every single living being. They have been our parents, siblings, friends or partners. But because we have moved from one life to another, we do not recognize each other. We see some beings as enemies. But these people we now see as enemies have been dear to us in the past. Therefore we must think about the suffering, wellbeing and liberation

of all sentient beings. Sentient beings are limitless in number, they are innumerable, they are infinite, like space. All sentient beings are undergoing suffering, although no beings want to suffer. However, due to their ignorance, they are creating more and more causes of suffering. We must try to rescue them from their misery. The only way to help sentient beings effectively is to attain enlightenment.

Although the state of nirvana is free from sufferings, that state does not develop all qualities. For this reason, one on this level cannot help all sentient beings. To help all sentient beings, we must attain full enlightenment, also known as 'non-abiding nirvana.' The state of 'non-abiding nirvana' is above both samsara and nirvana. When one reaches this state, through great wisdom one does not remain in the extreme of samsara and out of great compassion one does not remain in the extreme of nirvana. That is why we say it is above both the two extremes of samsara and nirvana. In order to attain full and complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, one takes the bodhisattva vow. There are different sets of rules depending on the type of person taking the vow. But basically the main thing is to take the vow to attain full and complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

The next is the vajrayana vow. The vajrayana teachings are the highest level of teachings given by the Buddha. It is said that through these teachings, one may attain full and complete enlightenment during one lifetime. This vow has its own set of rules. Basically, by taking these three vows, one enters on the path.

So with this I conclude this evening's teachings. If you have any questions, I'll be happy to answer them.

Questions and Answers

Q *Your Holiness, we are blessed by your presence and we pray for your health and continued teachings. My question concerns the dilution of dharma. I have heard that in the present time, the purity of practice has diminished. What is your opinion about this, please?*

A **Actually, we are now in the degenerate times, and people have lots of negative emotions and these are very difficult. Of course there are many different kinds of people, some good and some bad, and the same applies to teachers. If we are going to practise Dharma, it is important that we practise the pure Dharma in the right way.**

Q *Someone rang with a question. She comes from a country where there is a civil war. She is leading a happy life in*

Australia, but she keeps thinking about her relatives who are in danger. How can she feel peaceful when she is always thinking about the dangers her relatives are facing?

A **Creating loving kindness and compassion, especially for those who are facing difficulties will create a feeling of peace and will definitely have a positive impact.**

Q *Can you please explain free will in the context of karma? How can you have free will – the ability to choose what you want to do – and at the same time be subject to karmic causes and conditions, which arise without our choice?*

A **It is not so much about what we choose, really. After all, we all choose happiness. Nobody chooses to experience suffering. So that's the extent of our free will. On this basis, if we want to achieve happiness, it is very important that we know how to create the causes of happiness. Conversely, if we do not want suffering, it is important for us to avoid the causes of suffering. Without creating the appropriate causes, you can't expect to get the results.**



Q *Somebody asked, 'What is emptiness?'*

A What we see and what the reality is, are two different things. At the moment, we perceive many different things, such as forms, sounds, etc. But are the things that appear to us ultimate reality? They are not. Ultimate reality is something else. It is emptiness. The reality of phenomena is beyond all description. One cannot say that it exists, that it does not exist, that it both exists and does not exist or that it neither exists nor does not exist. Ultimate reality is beyond perception and beyond description. It is referred to as 'emptiness' simply because there is no other way to describe it.

Q *You spoke of the two obscurations: the obscuration of defilements and the obscuration of knowledge. Would you explain a little more about the obscuration of knowledge?*

A "Knowledge" here means the stream of thoughts. We have so many thoughts, related with subject and object, and thoughts about the Three Realms. This stream of thoughts is the obscuration to seeing reality. It has to be eliminated through the practice of calm abiding meditation and concentration. This practice reduces and eventually eliminates these thoughts.

Q *If the mere 'I' is beginningless and lacks inherent existence and is also part of dependent arising, what does the mere 'I' depend on?*

A The mere 'I' depends on the aggregates. This is because we cling to what appears as reality to us. We see forms, feelings and perceptions as real. When you cling to these, you cling to a self. There is a personal self (I) and a phenomenal self (things).

I wish you all complete success in your individual lives as well as on the spiritual path. Thank you very much.