

SAKYA MONASTERY OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM

Dharma Activities at Sakya Monastery

H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Sakya Rinpoche

Translated by Jeffrey Schoening, Ph.D.

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H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Sakya Rinpoche will briefly explain about the Dharma activities that we do here at the monastery.

There are some new people here so he will explain especially with them in mind about the practices.

We talk about going for refuge and there are objects to which we go for refuge and then there are individuals who are doing the taking of refuge. The objects are referred to as the Three Jewels and these are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The Buddha is the teacher - the enlightened one who shows us the path to enlightenment. The Dharma is his teaching and this can be represented by the Four Noble Truths, for example. The Dharma is also the path that leads to enlightenment. The third jewel is the Sangha, the community of followers of the Buddha. The community includes lamas, reincarnated lamas, bodhisattva emanations, educated monks and nuns, regular monks and nuns, and so on. So these then are the objects in which we take refuge.

There are the practices of the Hinayana, which is the lesser vehicle, the Mahayana, which is the great vehicle, and the Vajrayana, which is the esoteric vehicle. So there are these different practices that were done in Tibet, although mostly it was in the Great Vehicle and the Vajrayana – the esoteric teachings. But then Buddha's teachings can be divided into the sutra teachings and the tantric teachings - the sutra being the more public ones, and the tantric being the more esoteric ones. Here at the monastery our main practices are in the tantric tradition or in the Vajrayana tradition, so more in the esoteric line of Buddhist teachings.

H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Sakya Rinpoche's lamas have talked to him about the importance of the sutra teachings as being the foundation for the tantra teachings, so it is important to first know the sutra teachings - that is the

more public teachings of the Buddha - to be more versed in them and have a good grounding in them. The lamas gave an example of building a house. When building a house, one needs a good firm foundation. With a good foundation for the house, the house can last for a long time. It can be well built and strongly built to withstand the forces of nature. But if the house has a poor foundation and poor basis than faults will appear and the house will not last. It will be subject to being destroyed by various acts of nature. So, likewise it is important in one's practice of Buddhism to have a firm basis in the sutra teachings - these are the public teachings - then it is upon the sutra teachings - these public teachings - that the esoteric or tantra teachings can be developed. If the foundation is not good or properly laid there is not going to be much success with the esoteric teachings.

We read the Praise of the Twelve Exemplary Deeds of Lord Buddha and we saw in the praise how the Buddha was born as a prince. He had a wife and a family. Then he perceived that the activities of samsara are insubstantial and upon this perception he renounced the householders life and traveled through the sky in front of a stupa - the Namdak stupa - where he ordained himself. So he had this understanding about the insubstantiality of cyclic existence in this life with birth after birth after birth. Then he performed austerities for six years and at the conclusion of these austerities he attained enlightenment. Upon attaining enlightenment he began to preach. The first teaching he gave was of the Four Noble Truths - that is that there is the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, there is an end to suffering - the cessation - and finally there is a path that leads to the cessation of suffering. He went on and taught for another forty years, so this shows that in the Buddha's own life he began his teachings with the exoteric or sutra teachings about the Four Noble Truths so this shows the importance of beginning with these public teachings - these sutra teachings of the Buddha.

These can also be characterized as being the three baskets. The three baskets are those of the sutra collection, the collection of the rules on discipline - Vinaya, and the Abhidharma, the collection of teachings on systematic presentation. In the sutra presentation the practices that are emphasized are called the six perfections, and those are generosity, moral behavior, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, and discriminating insight or wisdom.

Moral behavior can be described as having three aspects. There is one in which one restrains from unwholesome activities, there is one in which one performs wholesome activities, and there is one in which one acts for the benefit of sentient beings. So moral behavior can be described in these three ways.

What H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Rinpoche is talking about is sometimes called the four magnetizing activities. These are the activities that enable the teacher to gather students. These are, to quote the verse here in the Silver

Book:

Having gathered a retinue by generosity and pleasant speech and then by correctly explaining the meaning of the practice of the holy Dharma, as I and others adhere to the Dharma in accord with its meaning then may the benefit of others increase in accord with the Dharma.

When we do the meditation on compassion - the Chenrezi meditation - all these things that H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Rinpoche has been going over are important aspects of the practice and these are the items being cultivated during the Chenrezi practice - this meditation on compassion.

The tantric practices, in particular the refuge in the tantric tradition (so, going back to refuge), there is a fourth object of refuge. Whereas in the sutra tradition there is the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, in the tantric tradition there are four - there is the added lama or guru and then the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The lama is the essence of all the Buddha's of all the times and directions. The lama is also the essence of all the teachings of the Buddhas. The lama is the essence of all the followers of the Buddha. The lama combines within him or herself all the other objects of refuge. Also, in the tantric tradition there can be other objects of refuge such as the meditation deities or the protector deities, the dakini's - beings that bring spiritual inspiration, and the wealth deities. All of these different types of spiritual influences are combined within the lama. In the tantric tradition - the esoteric tradition - there are prayers to the lama. First of all there is praying to the lama for the lama's blessing, and also that throughout our rebirths we never be separated from the lama. That is because of the prime importance of the lama within the tantric or esoteric traditions of Buddhism.

The lama then is inseparable from the Buddha, Dorje Chang, or also known as Vajradhara, the Holder of the Vajra. The lama appears in his or her ordinary human form but in essence is this essential Buddha who combines within him or herself all the other Buddha's - that is to say Vajradhara.

In the tantric tradition there are Buddhas such as Vajradhara, the Holder of the Vajra, and this is a peaceful appearance - the Buddha appearing in a peaceful form inseparable from the lama. But also the lama can be considered inseparable from Heruka. Heruka is another Buddha who is not in a peaceful aspect, but combines other qualities with a wrathful or powerful appearance. This too is the lama inseparable from this Buddha and has these qualities as well. This is all part of the tantric tradition having the lama as the main objects of refuge.

On the back wall there is a picture of a lama lineage. In the center of this lineage is Vajradhara - Dorje Chang - the Holder of the Vajra because the lineage begins with him and then it goes through all these other figures. This is H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Sakya Rinpoche's own father's lineage for the Lamdre teachings. The lama Vajradhara

represents all the Buddhas, all of their teachings, and their followers, and likewise all the other lamas in the lineage have held this role and are equated with Vajradhara.

This lineage is characterized as the Sakya Khön lineage - the Lamdre lineage. It begins with Sachen Kunga Nyingpo - he is in the top row, far right so he's the first Sakya in the Khön lineage. The Sakyas are also known as the Khön lineage because one of the ancestors had a fight with a demon, so there is a history to the name. Khön means conflict or quarrel. This lineage is represented here for the Lamdre teaching coming down to H.H.Jigdal Dagchen Sakya Rinpoche himself.

Within the tantric practices there are some that are called preliminary practices and these are very important - these preliminary practices - because we as humans have obscurations of body, speech, and mind and these preliminary practices help to remove these obscurations. H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Rinpoche gives the example that in our tantric practices we do visualizations of meditational deities - we think that we are these deities - that's part of our meditative practice. But we are to do this without grasping - without clinging to the deities. If we have clinging to the notion that we are the deity then this is a fault in our practice. So doing these preliminary practices helps us to purify, weaken, and get rid of these clingings and attachments that we have so we are able to do these more advanced practices in the correct way.

So, concerning clinging and grasping that we have, especially in regard to our-selves, it is important to note that the teachings of the Buddha about our self-nature is that we have no self. This is the teaching that is taught by the Buddha and also the figures pictured above the windows - called the two supreme ones and the six ornaments - they are the ones who taught and continue these teachings about our self nature as being that we have no self or no inherent self. This is called the view- the philosophical view that needs to be cultivated and gained insight and understanding of.

This philosophical view about selflessness - this is also, well, there is the teaching that there is the view, then there is the behavior of the individual, and then there is the meditative practice. These three work together, so we need to have a view or correct understanding - this assists our conduct or behavior and this then is useful in our meditative practice because these three work together. This was taught to H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Sakya Rinpoche by his lamas.