

Buddha Nature

Tonight's topic is buddha nature. Most of you know are long time students and know what it means. But some of you are hearing about it for the first time. This topic is not easy to talk about. Through practice and realization we can talk at some level on this topic. We can talk at the academic or philosophical level, but most of the time understanding has to be based on meditation practice. If you have practiced it is easy to understand buddha nature. I will try my best to introduce at some level the topic of buddha nature, even though I don't know if I am realized or not.

To discuss this topic is very precious. The most magic Buddhist teaching is buddha nature. When we talk about this, we have to explain what the words buddha nature means. The Sanskrit word that buddha nature is translated from is *tathagatagarbha*. What does this mean? *Tathagata* means buddha and *garbha* means nature or essence. It is the essence of enlightenment. It is the essence of all beings. The three Buddhas who preceded Shakyamuni Buddha had the same essence as him, the completely awakened mind. Everybody possesses the qualities of the Buddha. Buddha means awakened. It was translated as *sangye* in Tibetan. *Sang* means free of all afflictive emotions. *Gye* means increase. What increases? It means the increase of all the good qualities. Buddha has all complete wisdom. Whatever enlightened beings lived in the past had the same awakened mind. This mind also pervades all sentient beings. This quality is realized by some, but other have not realized it. Maybe some have realized it many times and others only a few times. But it doesn't matter. This quality is within us. We do not need to seek it outside somewhere. Some realize it, but others have not practiced enough and have not seen it.

Another question is Buddhism believes the awakened mind free from all afflictive emotion. The question is, if it is always there why do we not realize it and have to study and practice? The true nature of the awakened mind has always been pure from beginningless time. It always will be pure. It cannot be destroyed. The question is why we still have ignorance, anger, hatred, depression, and so forth. The true buddha nature is like a light. But due to our ignorance, attachments and anger arise, so we do not see this light. These afflictions are only temporary in nature. If you believe they are permanent, you cannot be free of them. So study and practice are needed.

The essence of enlightened mind is like space. Space has always been there. When we fly above the clouds, the blue space is always there, isn't it? But we do not always see it. The reason practice is required is like dispelling clouds. Clouds are only there temporarily, but they obscure the blue sky. Within ourselves is this buddha nature, the essence of the Buddha's enlightened mind. But we do not see it without practice. It is important to be introduced to it, so we see the true awakened mind. We always look outside ourselves. But our ability to see outside is limited.

Rather than looking outside, we should look inside ourselves and open another eye that sees much more than outside. You will see something amazing that you have never seen before. By resting naturally without accepting or rejecting, you will see your true nature. So this is the reason for practicing.

Buddhism talks of conventional and ultimate truth. Ultimate truth is within ourselves, the buddha nature. Buddhism says skillful means and wisdom are like the two wings of a bird. They are not outside, but within ourselves. That is the teaching of the sutras. In tantra they talk of the two stages of meditation, the generation and completion stage. They are inseparable from buddha nature.

Because of the temporary afflictive emotions, buddha nature is covered. To see buddha nature in some cases is not difficult, but in other cases it is. Once you see your buddha nature, you should not make the mistake of not practicing. The most important practice is mindfulness practice. If you do not know how to do this you cannot keep the awareness of buddha nature all the time. When you are mindful of buddha nature the temporary afflictive emotions dissipate like mist. Our fundamental nature has always been pure. It is like a flower that is potentially present in a seed. But just having a seed is not enough. It must be planted and cultivated. If it is not cultivated correctly, the seed will not be transformed into a flower.

The fundamental nature, buddha nature, is like a seed that must be cultivated. Cultivation requires meditation practice. Our meditation should not be neither too tight or loose. To see buddha nature in oneself requires a qualified master. Then you must practice mindfulness with sitting and walking meditation. Then in the tantric tradition it talks about the clear light. So we have this precious buddha nature. Because of it everyone can become enlightened in this life time.

So what is the result of seeing the buddha nature? Once you see it, the result is loving kindness and compassion. There is no other result. Everyone is seen as equal and respected equally, because others also have the same clear light quality. Love and compassion are within ourselves but temporarily covered by afflictive emotions like clouds. Calm abiding meditation is important for seeing buddha nature. Once everything is calmed, the heart opens. If the mind is not calmed it is hard to see the true nature. This true nature is always loving kindness and compassion. So therefore everyone possesses buddha nature, even our enemies.

I will share a story from fifteen years ago. You know Tibetan Buddhism has a tradition of philosophical debate. When I was in the university in India a big ceremony was going on. They held a debate and one of the topics of debate was buddha nature. One student was asked if the enemy has buddha nature. When he was asked this he just started crying.

Everyone wants happiness. Buddhism talks about how happiness and suffering are within our minds. So we have to solve the problem ourselves. But this doesn't mean others can't help us. All practice is for the purpose of

completely realizing our buddha nature. You may see the awakening mind at any time. It will be for a brief interval. But to see it completely requires very hard work. It takes energy and practice. For me it is a big challenge. But it is possible for anyone to realize with practice. The most excellent practice I have found is mindfulness practice. You can practice it through your whole daily life. If some challenge comes up it doesn't matter. You can still move forward. Buddha nature brings confidence in oneself.

Buddhism always talks about the life story of the Buddha, so we can see he was a human being like ourselves. All the great masters were human beings. We all can heal ourselves and change things for the better. In Arizona a friend named George wanted me to go to see a Jewish teacher. He played the guitar and sang songs in Hebrew. One song had the lyrics, "Things break, but they can be repaired." I liked that. Because our nature is covered by afflictive emotions we have ups and downs. That is the nature of life.

One of my masters told me that the truth is we have to work hard. Without working hard, we cannot achieve. In the history of the lineage masters we can see that they had very warm hearts to realize the truth. Sometimes I don't want to practice. I want to drink tea and watch television. So that encourages me to work hard. When you look at all the lineage masters each of them worked hard. No one realized without working hard.

We have to realize our buddha nature through meditation. It's also important to practice loving kindness to others. Crystal always has the power to sparkle. But until the sun shines on it, you will not see it. The snow is on the mountain top, but until the sun shines on it, the snow will not melt and feed the mountain stream. Buddhism does not teach Buddha is outside ourselves. It is inside. So why do we revere outer Buddhas? We do so to help to realize the inside Buddha and see the two as inseparable.

In the beginning calm abiding meditation is the most important. Then we practice insight meditation. Later one will see that they are inseparable. First you practice meditation by following the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. If all the practices of mindfulness are combined with the practice of loving kindness and compassion, then buddha nature is there. That is what I have been taught. Once you love self and others truly it is easy to avoid what is harmful to ourselves. Otherwise it may be difficult to get rid of negative habits. So buddha nature is not something we find outside. Inside us there is a great quality.

So my talk this evening was to share sincerely what I know. You may disagree, but it is not necessary to accept everything I say. Sometimes I talk too much and wonder what I am talking about. So if there is something good in what I have said, please take it. The real protector is the Buddha's teaching. If we follow it we will have the wisdom to see.

Lama Gursam

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