

# Turning the Wheel of the Dharma

## Gen Rinpoche Teaches on Pure Practice

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From a teaching given by the Most Venerable Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey at the Dhargyey Buddhist Centre, Dunedin, Sunday 11th September 1994. It has been edited by Ven. Ani Sönam Chökyi from the oral translation by Losang Dawa.  
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Because people interested in Buddhism have different levels of intellect, aptitude and development, Buddha did not give one stereotyped teaching but taught many paths. He taught the paths of Shravakas (Hearers) and of Pratyekabuddhas (Solitary Realizers), collectively known as the paths of the lesser vehicle, and the paths of the Bodhisattvas, and tantra, collectively referred to as the Bodhisattva paths.

For a Buddhist practitioner there are many choices--check your aptitude and find a suitable practice.

Some feel that doing retreat is the most suitable choice of practice, while others feel that gathering merits on a spiritual pilgrimage will be more beneficial. There are a multitude of practices that can be done. We must choose those that best suit our individual dispositions and ability.

Some teachings are suitable to be given privately to a single person, such as the teachings of the eighty great tantric adepts of India. It would be wrong to broadcast such teachings to the general public. Similarly, specific advice given by a master to a disciple should not be taken by others as a general teaching. When Milarepa told Rechungpa, "Listening to teachings is not necessary," it was because Rechungpa had mastered all the teachings. It would be quite misleading to apply such teachings generally. There are teachings given for the common good of all, and others given to particular individuals to suit their own special needs. Milarepa in fact generally emphasised the need to listen to as many teachings as possible.

For us to practise Dharma purely we must give up attachment to the Eight Worldly Dharmas--the eight worldly hopes and fears.

There was a geshe of the ancient monastery of Retring, whose main practice was circumambulating the stupa. Dromtönpa, observing this, spoke to the geshe, advising him, "It is very good that you are circumambulating but it would be better if you practised Dharma!" The geshe thought to himself, "Circumambulation does not seem to be a very good practice; perhaps I'd better read scriptures!" Dromtönpa again told him, "You are doing fine with your reading of scriptures but it would be much better if you practised Dharma." So the geshe thought that perhaps he should concentrate on meditation, but again he was advised that although meditation was good he would be better off doing a pure dharma practice. The geshe, who had now run out of ideas about what he should do, asked Drom, "What do you mean by 'a pure Dharma practice'?" Dromtönpa told him, "You should give up your attachment to the eight worldly hopes and fears."

Dromtönpa was also circumambulating but with a different attitude--he was constantly repeating a verse from Nagarjuna's *Friendly Letter* of advice to the king, about the need to abandon the eight worldly dharmas in order to engage in a pure practice.

Another great master, also a disciple of Atisha, was Naljorpa Drag Chödrugpa. Atisha became very ill and everyone feared that he may pass away at that time. Drag Chödrugpa asked for a final teaching about his personal practice. He asked if he should meditate intensively but was told that this was not a good idea. Then he asked if it would be better to combine some meditation with teaching. Again he was told that this was not a good idea. After some time, Atisha passed away. Drag Chödrugpa offered a meal to all the great lamas of the area, inviting Dromtönpa as the highest lama and others such as Geshe Chengawa and Geshe Potowa. During the meal they talked, and at one point Drag Chödrugpa turned to Dromtönpa and said, "Dromtönpa, you have only one fault. You always say, 'I don't know.' But it is not that you don't know--you are the lamp of dharma. Now that our great master Atisha has passed away, you must let your knowledge of the teachings shine forth." He gave similar advice to all those lamas present--Potowa, Chengawa, Puchungwa, and others.

Then he said that from the following day he would confine himself to strict meditation. People would at times see him circumambulating a yak's horn placed on the ground and it was said that inside the horn were relics of Atisha--bones and some cloth from his robes. During his solitary practice he maintained strict silence. At one time the three omniscient Kadampa lamas happened upon him. All that he did was raise his hand in salute then disappeared without speaking a word. He truly lived his word, meditating all the time as a total recluse. It is related in the annals of the great Tibetan masters that this Lama Drag Chödrugpa was reborn as the great Milarepa. This makes sense as we know that Milarepa was the champion of all recluses. No other had his stamina and energy for solitary retreat in the mountains.

### **The eight worldly hopes and fears**

- To feel happy when you find some mundane worldly reward
- To feel unhappy when you don't find such rewards
- To feel happy when praised
- To feel unhappy when criticized
- To feel happy when you have mental and physical well-being
- To feel unhappy when you don't feel mentally or physically well
- To feel happy when hearing pleasant things
- To feel unhappy and agitated when hearing unpleasant things.

Milarepa said, "I left my home and sought the solitude of the mountains but even there the eight worldly winds followed me. When I came to choose a cave I looked for one which was warm, dry and sheltered. The eight worldly winds were still blowing in my mind."

The Victorious Kelsang Gyatso, the Seventh Dalai Lama, said, "Although I direct my body, speech and mind to the practice of virtue, the practice is polluted by the ugly owls of the eight worldly dharmas. Although I call what I do 'dharma', it is nothing but a means of pampering myself in a mundane way. When I see this a sickening feeling arises." The Seventh Dalai Lama felt that although his whole life was dedicated to practising dharma his mind was still contaminated by desire, attachment and aversion, driven by the eight worldly hopes and fears. In essence, he spoke of his practice as nothing short of spiritual materialism, merely providing for his own mundane comfort and needs.

According to Jamgön Lama Tsong Khapa, the eight worldly hopes and fears can be divided into three types--white, black and striped. He tells us that these eight will follow us even if we abandon the crowd and go to remote mountain caves. If a recluse, meditating in the distant mountains, has the thought, "Perhaps the people in the town are thinking of me as a great meditator," then at once his mind has become muddled by the worldly winds.

According to Bakri Dorje Chang, when a monk applies himself with great energy in the morning to studying texts and thinks, "Perhaps I will become a geshe of great renown and even be elected Abbot," the reading of scriptures that he is doing will not be classed as a pure practice. On the other hand if a monk thinks, "I will read this scripture in order to understand the essence of the practice, to serve the teachings themselves and be able to benefit all sentient beings," this is a pure practice.

A pure practice is not contaminated by the eight worldly dharmas. We must do our best in this regard although it is very difficult.

Ignorance, the misconception that all things have true or inherent existence, once spoke out: "I have influenced everyone--the great geshes teaching from their thrones, the high lamas with canopies above their heads. There is hardly a person who I have not blessed with the misconception of true existence of things." This is a passage from the writings of Panchen Losang Chökyi Gyältsän where he presents a beautiful dialogue between the personified Ignorance and Wisdom.

Ignorance continues: "Although there are many who don't want me, there are few except the Arhats of the lesser vehicle, Bodhisattvas on the eighth level and above, and beings who are fully enlightened, who don't hold me in their hearts. For you, Wisdom, to grow in the minds of sentient beings requires a supreme effort from their side. But for me it is easy--I just spontaneously arise. Sentient beings know me much better. Even the lamas sitting below golden canopies know me well."

Wisdom answers: "You many say this but your days are numbered. One day I will evict you from the minds of all beings. You have tricked beings into thinking in a deluded way--misconceiving things as existing truly from their own side. Because your influence is based on something false you will never be able to strengthen and defend your position but will effectively be challenged by the power of truth. The truth is on my side. The teachings of the Buddha are the evidence which will give me final victory."

This morning please meditate on selfless existence--how things do not exist independently from their own side. The word 'selfless' does not mean that the self or person is non-existent. It refers to a self which exists conventionally but not as an inherently existent self, an independent entity from its own side. Independent 'self-existence' is not a reality. Let us contemplate on this meaning.