

Rinpoche's Teaching

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We will be spending several days together here at the Pal Karma Dorje Zimpa Ling. We will spend our time focusing on Buddhist teachings, sutra text explanation and meditation methods. Everyone came a long way to get here. Everyone has a career or family obligations. Yet everyone is willing to come to this retreat regardless of the long travel and their busy schedules. I am very pleased.

We all think that we have this life and the next life. If we wish to achieve prosperity and happiness in this lifetime, and wish the same for the next life, then we must value our inward progress and first strive to achieve inner peace. So what is the focus for our retreat in the next few days? It is to raise our awareness and to improve our knowledge and ability to achieve awareness. I hope everyone will look inward and feel happy attending this retreat. When you are in class, I hope you relax your mind and listen with a happy attitude. If you are not comfortable sitting on the ground, you may choose a chair in the back of the room. If a meditation pose causes you to have leg cramps, extend your legs. Stretching your legs so that your legs are not cramped will aid your meditation.

It is not necessary to meditate while listening to lectures. It is most important to relax your mind. Sometimes, if you meditate while listening to teaching, you are so tight on accomplishing both that eventually you fall asleep. In the end, you do not meditate well nor understand any teaching.

I encourage you to meditate with a relaxed mind, not too tight and not too loose. If our mind is tight: "We will spend this retreat meditating really well and listening to teachings with great concentration and understanding". "Or now that I have a good grasp of teaching, it is as if (I witness) a full bloomed flower or a bright warm sun". "And once I understand this teaching, I should be able to fly to the sky or go underground without any obstacles". The truth is that flying or going underground are no surprise (we wish for), our goal is to rid us the frustration and five poisons of attachment. On the other hand, if our mind is too loose, then we won't try hard. The reality is that every improvement requires some effort. By thinking that I cannot understand teaching, I cannot meditate, I have no ability, and I achieve nothing. Regardless of one's capability, we should always do our best!

The Great Buddha, Shakyamuni, had a disciple who was taught meditation methods. When the disciple meditates, he is very anxious and feels tight, so he cannot concentrate and eventually gives up on meditation. But this

disciple is a very famous musician. So Buddha asks him whether he plays an instrument. The disciple answers, "yes, that's my talent". Buddha asks him, "So when you play, does the music sound better with the strings too tight or with the strings too loose"? The musician shakes his head and responds, "The Great Buddha, you are mistaken. The sounds are no good either with tightly strung strings nor loosely strung strings". And the Great Buddha answers, "the idea is exactly the same with meditation". The musician thus understands what Great Buddha teaches and becomes a very good disciple.

Therefore, we should understand that the "Easy Middle" is the correct way. How do we achieve it? When it comes to meditation and teaching, I will do my best according to my ability. I will not focus so much on the end result but on my ability to do my best. If I try my best, I will eventually understand. I will apply an "easy middle" attitude with my meditation; and not just meditation, but with life in general. One example is when we drive, we wish to arrive at our destination fast or we wish to pass a slow driver ahead of us. Our mind is so tight on the speed that we may miss a turn and end up in the wrong place; we may take even longer to reach our destination or we may get into an accident. But if we relax our mind, we actually will get to our destination quickly. The difference is the "easy middle" mindset. When our mind is relaxed, we actually are more aware of our surroundings and changes and we won't miss a turn or get into car accidents.

Another example is that of a person at work with tightness in mind. One thinks to accomplish a project with no margin for error. We bind ourselves tightly and become very nervous and anxious about the project. We become very narrow minded and focused on every minute mistake. The obscure view prevents us from generating innovative ideas. When we are narrow minded, we cannot see the big pictures to correct and improve our project. We plan our project noticing every little imperfection and become anxious to fix these imperfections and thus overlook the big picture. In the end, nothing is to our liking and we become despondent and not able to complete the project.

So when we have tightness in our mind, we tend to view outlooks with great reservation and strong disappointment. It is very difficult to appreciate and develop a deep understanding of Buddhism, not to mention our day-to-day lives.

Therefore, we will not worry about obligations or events at home or work or business in these next four days. If we worry about the obligations while we participate in this retreat, "How are my kids? How is my business and my projects?" The truth is that worrying will not bring in more business or complete your project. It would be a great method if your worry actually improved your business or advanced your career. At least, the worry would provide a positive result. This is just joking.

While we are here at the retreat, if any trouble or hardship occurs, and you have an ability to improve or correct it, then you don't need to worry about it.

However, if you cannot change the outlook of your trouble or hardship, then your worry is pointless.

We tend to worry ourselves sick by creating our own dilemma. We create many troubles for ourselves, and even more hardship. The cause of our worry is that we look at things through obscure visions and make our mind tight and worrisome. The worrisome mind will produce a strong reservation and strong desire to succeed. When we have high hopes for something, we worry about not being able to achieve it and therefore create more anxiety and become more despondent. The anxiety and despondence weakens our wisdom, knowledge and ability to resolve issues.

I hope that everyone understands that when we practice with “Easy Middle ”, not only will we improve greatly in meditation and prostration; we will equally improve our attitude and ability to deal with our daily work, family and business. All the worry and anxiety are not necessary. They generate unnecessary hardships and troubles that are meaningless and redundant to our lives.

So how do we get rid of the unnecessary worry, hardship and trouble? We need wisdom. What is wisdom? When we encounter hardship or trouble, we ask ourselves two questions: can it be changed? Or can it not be changed? If the situation can be improved because there is a way and I happen to know the solution, I don't need to worry about it or feel hurtful by it. Why worry when things can be changed and improved and I have the know-how to do so? If situations can be improved, then worry is no use.

However, if a situation cannot be changed, or there is no solution nor do I know of any or I am not aware of the situation, then worry is even more useless. The reason is that worry cannot resolve the situation. Since the situation cannot be changed for the better, nor do I know of any method or understand the situation, then worry is not helpful. No matter how I worry, the situation cannot be improved. No matter how I worry, I don't know anyway to resolve it. Then why worry?

For example, the stock market goes up and down. When the market goes down, you watch the graph go down and down and you become very worried. You gasp and knock your own head and think that this is it, I loose big. Will your anxiety and your hitting yourself help the market to climb up? Of course not... Your worry and anxiety will not help the market to go up but will create a tremendous obstacle for yourself. You are not able to eat or sleep; you cannot execute your new projects not to mention the current works you are involved with. Your knowledge and wisdom is completely immobilized by the worry. Do you understand?

So what is the solution? “Easy Middle” is the way, not too tight and not too loose. As I mentioned before, albeit our meditation, our work or our business in progress, just do our best! We carry our best ability, and whether we reach our goal, or whether the result is ideal is beside the point. Execution and End Result are two different perspectives. Especially when it comes to our day-to-day life. Whether we will succeed in our business or work, a determining factor is our karma. If we accumulate many merits through our past lives, we accumulate good karma and will easily achieve success in this life. We, however, will not succeed easily if we have no good karma. Or sometimes, we encounter many obstacles along the way, but these obstacles are not karma from previous lives. The best way to rid oneself of these obstacles is to pray to the Three Jewels, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When we firmly believe in the Three Jewels, the obstacles will often dissipate.

Generally speaking, when you pray to the Three Jewels with sincerity, you will be able to remove obstacles in life. If the obstacles are not removed after your prayer, then it mostly likely presents itself as karma. If it proves to be a karmic situation, then your worry and anxiety will not improve the situation. It is actually a blessing in disguise for you to reflect upon your own life. We may realize that diligent meditation is the most practical way to achieve peace and harmony in our mind. Meditation will help with our current lives and even improve our future life with accumulated good karma. The reason is simple in that our hope for liberation is in Buddhism. A General may have command of thousands of soldiers, to high honor and lots of money; yet, these mean nothing to him when time comes for spiritual liberation. The true liberation lies in Buddhism. So I hope that everyone will now understand and continue to maintain an “easy middle” mindset during the practice for meditation during this retreat.

Everyone came from afar and must be tired from the travel. We will stop right here. Are there any questions? You may ask any question, whatever is on your mind. Because you don't understand, so you “quest”-ion; if you understand, there is no need to quest.

Question 1: How do I determine whether I know or don't know if a situation can be changed?

Rinpoche: This usually indicates that the situation cannot be changed. As I mentioned before, things cannot be changed, or there exists no known method to improve it. In general we attempt to help with a situation according to our ability, when there is no solution or possibility to correct a situation, then it becomes very difficult.

We of course will always try our best, but not to limit our mindset with one perspective and/or high expectation. An example is that we do a project and expect a hundred percent success with no margin for any error. If we think that way, our mind becomes very tight. The reality is that we may try our very best, and we may or may not achieve a successful result. The reason is that

everything is impermanence. Impermanence is constantly changeable and another reason for the possibility of failure is the karma carried from previous life.

If we grasp with a strong desire to succeed, the outcome may really turn out successfully, but the success may come with a high price. An example is to look at the pot of flowers there. My hands are here. I would like to hold a flower and how do I do that? There are two ways to do so. One is that my mind is thinking about grabbing the flower. I become tight and worry of reaching for the flower. Because I am nervous, I may inadvertently drop the pot or I may grab a flower but spill dirt all over. The second method is to think of reaching the flower and directly picking up the flower. Just like that... easy does it. The first scenario is to take the flower with a tight mind. You are very nervous under such a circumstance because you are very narrow minded and afraid to make any mistake. You become very tiresome and anxious in the process. If you relax your mind you can also pick up the flower. The second scenario is far more relaxing because you do not have high expectations or reservation that comes with strong grasping. You achieve your goal with ease.

Tai Chi is another example. You need to relax your muscles when practicing Tai Chi. The more relaxed you are, the more strength you produce. You may hit a tree with a Tai Chi movement, and a branch may break. If you tighten your muscles, you may use a lot of strength, but no use. If this holds true for the body, then it applies to the mind. It is not easy to relax one's mind, because we all come with many bad habits, but slowly we can improve upon them.

Question 2: When we practice or meditate, how do we know our mind is tight and how to relax our mind?

Rinpoche: As I mentioned before, we try our best. We do our best to practice and meditate, and not to think or worry about the end result. When we try our best ability, we often will achieve good results.

We will learn more about this in the next few days. Good night.