

Contentment, Compassion and Wisdom, a Buddhist Perspective

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Johanna Konttori (University): Good afternoon everyone, today we have a guest lecture, we have Minya Tulku from Tibet to tell us about Tibetan Buddhism. Today the point of view will be that of a religious practitioner, not so much of a scientific scholar's point of view, but a practitioner's point of view. Please give a warm welcome to Minya Tulku.

Minya Tulku Rinpoche:

Good afternoon everybody. My English is not enough, that's why we have translator.

Translator: Today what we shall talk about is first an introduction to Buddhism, and then after the introduction I will talk you about contentment. And this will be in brief as well, because there is not so much time. In one and half hour I can only give an introduction to what is meant.

Buddha, Dharma and Sangha

Generally Buddhism is the science of the inner, literally speaking. The first one who introduced Buddhism was Buddha Shakyamuni, who was born in India. The teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni are called Dharma in Sanskrit, and this term has several meanings, but here, when we say Dharma, we mean the authentic teachings of the Buddha.

And Buddha is someone who has abandoned the two obscurations. What are these two obscurations? There is the obscuration of the disturbing emotions and the obscuration of the knowable. The obscurations of disturbing emotions are such as anger, ignorance, attachment, jealousy, pride and so on. The obscuration of the knowable is the idea that these are true existents. When somebody has abandoned these two obscurations one gets the true knowledge: the knowledge of things as they are and the knowledge of things as many as they are.

Now we are about to turn to the Dharma, the teachings of the Buddha. There are two categories; one is the scriptures and one is the realization. So, the Dharma is the scripture and the realization. The scripture refers to the scripture of the Buddha – there are 84,000 volumes that can be summarized into 12 excellent categories of teaching, and they can also be summarized further into what is called the Tripitaka.

Among all these 84,000 volumes that comprise the teachings of the Buddha, nowadays only approximately 15% is left, which represent 105 - 106 volumes.

And now about the Dharma of realization, what is that? This is the training which is taught in the teachings of the Buddha, in the scriptures. There are three trainings. One is the training in discipline, one is the training in samadhi or meditative concentration, and one is the training in wisdom.

And then there is a third term, which is very important: it's the Sangha. The sangha is two-fold. There is the ordinary sangha and then there is the real and sublime Sangha. Ordinary sangha is everybody who has taken the path of Buddhism and is practicing. And there is the real and sublime Sangha; these are

individuals who are bodhisattvas. They have already walked quite far on the path and they have attained at least the path of vision. They are also called “nobles”, which means that they are on a quite high level. Nowadays there are many people who confuse these two Sanghas: the ordinary sangha and the real or sublime Sangha.

All of you here are studying religion. This is why I have been using some quite technical terms: maybe it's the first time and it is a bit difficult for you to comprehend. But now that you have heard them later you can reflect and see them again, and it will be a good base for developing your understanding.

Now we have seen the Three Rare and Sublime Ones, which are Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. And Buddha can also be explained as the one who shows the path, the guide. The Dharma is the path and the Sangha are the friends, those accompanying.

Contentment, Compassion and Wisdom

So there was a short introduction to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. And we are going to the topic of the day, which is Contentment, Bodhicitta and Wisdom. Contentment is not something that is particular to Buddhism. It is also something that is practiced by Christians, Muslims, Hinds, Sikhs and so on. So, it's a quite large subject, which I am aware is practiced by many religions. I don't know exactly the definition of contentment in these other traditions, but for sure I am aware and I have read about it that they too practice contentment.

Today I will explain you to you what contentment means in the context of Buddhism. Generally speaking what is contentment in the context of Buddhism, and then as the second part, my own understanding of contentment. In Buddhist texts it is mainly found within the framework of Hinayana. Buddhism can be divided into two big categories of Hinayana and Mahayana, which can be translated as small path [lesser vehicle] and big path [great vehicle]. But then, in the Hinayana the definition of contentment makes a difference between someone who is an ordinary being and someone who can attain arhathood.

So the definition and all the explanations of contentment can be mainly found in the Hinayana texts, but the meaning also refers to the Mahayana and the Vajrayana practices. If we take a text of the Hinayana, if we look at the means and the wisdoms, the means is defined as limited desire and wisdom is defined as the wisdom that realizes the no-self of the individual. In the texts of the Mahayana then the means is defined as love and compassion and the wisdom is defined as the no-self of the phenomena. What this means is that it refers to contentment. And in the secret mantrayana [Vajrayana] the means are called the generation phase and the wisdom is the dissolution [completion] phase. So we see that there are different words used, but the meaning is actually the same: it's contentment.

So the limited contentment and limited desire are talked about mainly in the Vinaya, which is text that belongs to the Hinayana mainly, while in the Mahayana there is a lot about the means and wisdom. And in the Vajrayana there is a lot about the creation phase and the dissolution phase. But my understanding is that it is other words for the same meaning, which is contentment. I haven't seen it written, but this is the way I understand it.

Non-Contentment

And now, let's talk about the Contentment itself. What is the definition of contentment? In order to understand what contentment means, we have to understand what its opposite is. We have to understand its essence and also what practice we need to do, if we want to develop contentment.

In order to explain what is not conducive to contentment, the opposite of contentment, I have made three subcategories. First are the causes, second the essence and third the result. So, what is the cause of non-contentment? (For the opposite of contentment we can say non-contentment.) We can say craving, great desire. If we look at the ultimate cause, in Buddhism it is said that it is ignorance. Ignorance is a mind, which doesn't know. What doesn't it know? It's a mind which is obscured; it doesn't know which the real state of phenomena is.

Ignorance is the opposite of wisdom. What is it ignorant about? It doesn't know what needs to be taken on and what needs to be abandoned. Because of being unclear about all this one goes to wrong direction. Ignorance is divided into two types. There are the connate ignorance and the labeling ignorance. What is connate ignorance? It is unclarity which has been us from beginningless time, for a very, very long time during samsara from rebirth to rebirth. This unclarity, which has been with us for very long time is called connate ignorance. And then there is the second one, labeling ignorance. This is something that comes to us as humans having ideas about race or ideas about culture or about politics. Ignorance of whatever, and we have some ideas about how things are, which are not true. So we have wrong understanding of things.

And because of these two types of ignorance, the connate ignorance and labeling ignorance, in our mind stream there is the idea of "me", "I" – that comes. And then, because of this idea of an existing self, which is first based on the five aggregates, there is a clinging to it, a clinging that this self exists, and it gets bigger and bigger and to a point where the clinging goes also or to objects or to other people, or to my country, my culture and so on. There is this clinging to things as mine, which also develops. This clinging to "I" creates a lot of suffering.

This clinging to the "I" and clinging to the mind, these two are referred to as clinging to the self of an individual. There are two categories: clinging to the self of an individual and clinging to the self of phenomena. This is clinging to the self of an individual. And when this clinging gets bigger, we start to cling to something which is other than ourselves. And then we see there is my side and we see them as enemy, meaning anything that we don't like. So, we see that from this first ignorance there is attachment which grows into clinging and from there anger and ignorance and so on also occur.

In Buddhism these three, attachment, anger and ignorance are called the three poisons, which are the source of all the suffering. They are called poisons, because poison is something, which can put our life in danger. These three poisons, attachment, anger and ignorance bring the suffering of circular existence.

And of these three poisons first one is attachment, we can say desire. When desire / attachment grows bigger, then we also develop pride. When anger grows bigger, then we also develop jealousy. The third one is ignorance and all together we have what we call the main five disturbing emotions, the main five poisons. When these five poisons, desire / attachment, anger, ignorance, pride and jealousy have become present in our mind stream, from there develop a lot of thoughts and from there develop non-contentment, the opposite of contentment, and also suffering.

What is the essence of non-contentment? The essence of non-contentment is to think only of our own benefit. This is the idea that I want everything for myself, and this brings discomfort. It may be in the context of culture, when I want everybody to have this culture of mine. Or in politics: I want all lands, or with economics, material things: I want everything to myself.

And what is the result of non-contentment? The result of non-contentment is suffering and there is said to be three types of suffering. One is called the all-pervading suffering, one is called the suffering of change and one is called the suffering of suffering. The first one, the all-pervading suffering means that everything is either the cause or origin of suffering, or resultant suffering. Suffering can of course be smaller or bigger, here we may talk about small type of suffering, but in any case there is always in the world something which is either a cause of suffering or resultant suffering.

What is the suffering of change? This is for example when everything goes well, we are happy, having a good time with old friends and so on, but then all of a sudden it's changing. So maybe we separate, maybe we get sick, or whatever happens. This is the suffering of change.

And what is the suffering of suffering? This is when for one who is suffering, one problem is not finished and another one starts immediately. For example we have a headache and on top of that we get stomach ache.

It is said that all sentient beings in samsara do experience these three types of suffering. And then there are also sufferings, which are more specific to a type of being, for example all human beings go through the sufferings of birth, sickness, old age and death. Gods will go through the suffering of falling from their state; demigods will go through the specific sufferings of always fighting and so on.

Contentment

a) Love, compassion and bodhicitta, the means

So, we see that all this suffering gives us a lot of problem, don't they? If we ask, is there a way of getting rid of these problems, the answer is yes, there is a way, and this way is through the path of contentment. Let's see then what contentment is. We will see what are the cause, the essence, and the result of contentment. For the cause, if we look at it from the aspect of the means, then the cause is said to be compassion and love. And if we look at it from the side of wisdom, we can say that the cause is no-self of the individual and no-self of the phenomena.

So, contentment is about love, compassion and bodhicitta. How do we develop these qualities? We develop them through an object, which is the sentient beings. We reflect on the fact that all sentient beings have been our own mother or parents. When they were our mother for example, they were extremely kind to us during nine months carrying us and after that they gave all love and care and education and whatever was necessary so that we could manage our life. Reflecting in this way on the kindness of all beings who have been at some point our parents we develop the wish that we would be able to do something to help them in return. In order to do that it is necessary to develop the qualities of love, compassion and bodhicitta within ourselves.

What is compassion? Compassion is the mind that we have when we see the suffering of sentient beings. We see somebody who is suffering and we think: may he or she be free of all that suffering. This is compassion. Love is the aspect of thinking may he or she be happy, when we see sentient beings. May I do something for each and everyone to be happy, this is love.

What is bodhicitta? Bodhicitta is based on compassion and love, but here we make a wish that may this being be completely free of all the suffering of samsara, and we take the commitment to do something so that we can help them to attain the state of complete liberation from suffering.

b) Wisdom of two no-selves

Love, compassion and bodhicitta were about the means. Now let's look at the aspect of wisdom. We have seen just before, when we were looking at contentment, that the cause was the belief in the self of an individual and the belief in the self of phenomena. Now let's see the opposite: what is the no-self. Here we look first at the no-self of an individual. We saw that the belief on the self was based on the belief on the five aggregates that constitute our body as one thing. In order to get rid of the idea of self we develop an understanding of no-self. Then we have to get rid of the clinging to the self or to the mind. In order to go through that process we check out if this self is one thing or if it is many things.

If we think it is one thing, we can go through an analysis of a chariot (or a car). To see what a chariot is, to identify it, we will separate each part of the chariot. When we have removed each part one by one, we end up not knowing what it exactly is what we call a chariot. Through that analysis we understand that there is nothing that we can call the self of the chariot. The self is not established and we see that this example of a chariot is something other than what there truly is.

And the no-self of phenomena is the opposite of the belief that all phenomena are truly existent, and we can see a chair as an example. When we see a chair in our mind, we have the idea of something, which is maybe square, has a specific color, specific shape. And we can divide it into parts to see what it is that we think of as a chair. When we divide it we end up having particles. We can divide the particles even further on and then we find nothing which is the chair. This is the no-self of the phenomena. This understanding and this way of analyzing was explained by the Buddha Shakyamuni 2500 years ago. It's actually the same conclusion where the scientists have come now, when they analyze particles.

When we meditate again and again on these two no-selves, the no-self of the individual and the no-self of phenomena, then contentment will be engendered in our mind. On the opposite, if we continue with the idea of existing self of an individual and phenomena, we will have more and more craving and non-contentment in ourselves.

So, these two, the method and wisdom are the causes of contentment. The method we have seen to be love, compassion and bodhicitta, and the wisdom of the two no-selves.

Ultimate and Temporary Results of Contentment

The essence of contentment is the virtuous mind, which does not have desire for the objects or the other. We can say that there is real contentment or characterized contentment, and something which is similar to contentment. Fully characterized would be somebody who has attained quite a high level of wisdom, which

is called a noble being, somebody who has no desire, no attachment at all, and then there is ourselves. We sometimes have contentment but sometimes we do not. Sometimes we get again desire, attachment and suffering caused by it.

And so, contentment is this virtuous mind, which does not have desire or craving, and we can say that there is the ultimate result and temporary result of contentment. The temporary result would be in this life to have a healthy body and also a happy mind, happy life. If we do not have contentment, it is obvious that even in this life we will not have happy life.

In the Mahayana also there is often mentioned bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is always directed towards all sentient beings. It is the wish that may all sentient beings not suffer, may they all find happiness. When we say all, it's the opposite of specific, wishing happiness for somebody only. We all have this wish that may our father and mother, sister and brothers be happy. But here we talk about the wish that may all beings be happy and not suffer.

And the ultimate result of the practice of contentment depends on which path we have been practicing, we can be on Hinayana, Mahayana or Vajrayana path. Anyway, it's classified into two: arhathood and buddhahood. This is the ultimate result of the path of contentment.

Practice of Contentment

Contentment does not depend on wealth, it is not so that someone poor would not have contentment and someone rich would have contentment. Contentment is something in mind. It is a thought that it is okay like this, it is enough. It is not to have craving in the mind.

How do we engender contentment, practice contentment? The practice is called yoga and we could explain a lot of this term. In the beginning it is necessary to practice shine, calm abiding. This can be done through support of two different types.

Nowadays when we say yoga we all think of these bodily exercises, only. But actually yoga is a much wider Sanskrit term. There is the yoga of the body, which we know about, and then there is the yoga of the mind. And the yoga of the mind is calm abiding and clear vision. This calm abiding can be done with or without support. What kind of support can we take? We can take a statue of Buddha or something like this, if we are Buddhist, or depending on whatever religion we can take an image, which is fine to us. If we have no religion we can just focus our mind on a form or color, doesn't matter. But first we look at it, then close our eyes and try to see clearly in our mind how it is like, and keep the focus on it continuously, until we get still mind.

And what is shine / calm-abiding without support? The support is to keep the mind focused on something like compassion or emptiness, these kinds of ideas, but this is more difficult. For beginners I think to do calm-abiding with support is better. It is said that in the calm-abiding meditation when the body is straight the mind is straight. So, first we keep the body in straight position in the posture of the 7 points of Vairocana. Then we keep focused on the chosen object.

In the beginning of course we cannot keep focused. We lose the focus and have to place our mind again and again on the object we have chosen, be it a physical or not. At that time we also do a lot of analytical meditation: what has the teacher taught about the meditation technique, what is our own experience and so on.

And there is what is called The Nine Methods of Placing the Mind. First is placing, repeated placing, continual placing, and so on. We practice and go through these different progressive steps. Then we have in mind what are the cause, the essence and the result of non-contentment, and the cause, the essence and the result of contentment, and with that we practice the shine / calm-abiding. I think it is very good to do it in this way.

All of you here are interested in religion. I suggest that you read the texts of the Madhyamika, Prajnaparamita, Uttaratantra and texts on logic. It's very good to read these, whether you are Buddhist or not. It is a good support to read those texts. It will help to develop your wisdom and your intelligence. This I have experienced. I have done it myself a lot, and I'm really convinced that reading those texts helps to increase the intelligence.

Minya Tulku Rinpoche in English:

Yes! Normally I'm a lazy guy, but I like study. Do you have any questions?

Questions

Question: How do you comprehend human consciousness? Desire and craving you were talking about, it seems to be the direct result of consciousness. What is being conscious?

Answer: We cannot say that it is the direct result of consciousness. In consciousness there can be contentment or non-contentment, both are possible, and there is a possibility to change that, to make it the way we want. We all have contentment and discontentment, but we can change. Try!

Question: I heard you to speak about shambala and the translation was contentment, but can it mean other things as well?

Answer: Shambala is a name of a place, and a Buddhist center in the US is called Shambala. I was talking about *jampa*, it means love.

Question: Is it possible that there is in human condition both contentment and non-contentment at the same time? Or is it an absolute, either one or the other?

Answer: Not same time, but sometimes we have little bit discontentment. "That is not good..." Too much desire will be suffering; we have that kind of mind state sometimes. Sometimes we have little bit contentment, sometimes little bit discontentment. Noble Ones on the first bodhisattva's level, they never change, but we are changeable. However, you can't have both contentment and non-contentment together.

Question: I have found that it is possible to try to deal with discontentment by actually suppressing desire instead of doing the right way working with the mind. So, how do you recognize when you are actually working with the desire and when you are suppressing it, blocking?

Answer: Yes, with our ordinary mind it seems as if we had contentment, but then discontentment comes. Once you get to the first level bodhisattva you will never come back. There is something called habitual tendencies. At the moment we have contentment in our mind there is still discontentment in the form of habitual tendencies. And when we have discontentment in our mind, then there is still contentment in the form of habitual tendencies.

Was this an answer or are you still confused?

Question: Confused!! Is there a deeper layer of things in the mind, the habitual tendencies?

Answer: Like hide and seek what babies do. In our minds contentment is like children's game hide and seek. When one is up the other one is down. Contentment is not continuous, but sometimes we have little bit contentment, sometimes more desire, always changeable. If you want your contentment to continue, practice more. Then you will be stable.

Question: I'm curious to know where the knowledge and wisdom, understanding, came from to Buddha?

Answer: There are two kinds of wisdom, the wisdom that knows things as they are; this is the wisdom that knows the natural state of things. And then there is a second type of wisdom that knows everything as it is, various things. To develop these two wisdoms we need to go through what is called the two accumulations of merit with and without concepts. This is the same as these two no-selves that we have been speaking about. To know no-self practice more, then you will be buddha. We are ordinary persons because we have two selves, selfishness. This is "I am", this is "mine". We have that kind of very deep emotion. That is like our fault.

Question: I have a problem with understanding the origin, from where did the Buddha get the understanding?

Answer: Practice, practice the two non-selves, then you will abandon the two afflictions. Then you will get the buddha-knowledge.

Question: Is it a type of revelation that you will achieve?

Answer: No, it's not a revelation. The Buddha himself did practice, did research, and at the end had the result, which is this wisdom. Afterwards the Buddha said: "I have shown you the methods which lead to liberation, but you should know that liberation depends on yourself." There is another quote by Buddha, who said: "Monks and learned ones, just as gold is burned, cut, and rubbed, examine my words carefully. Do not accept them simply out of respect." The Buddha insisted very much that it is not correct to believe what he says. That each and everyone needs to analyze using logic. There are three types of logic: the logic of things that we see directly, (is it against what we see directly), the logic of indirect [inference] and the logic of very indirect [inference]. So, everyone should analyze very carefully, and if one thinks that this is

correct, that this path will lead to a result, then one applies to the path. There are a lot of very profound texts that were written. Commentaries were also written very long time ago in India by a group of eight people called The Supreme Ones. I really believe that these are a very good basis for our study.

Question: Do I understand it correctly that this is a continuous process of research?

Answer: Yes, but first you learn. It doesn't matter what is your religious background, that doesn't matter. You just learn from [texts of] Nagarjuna, Asanga, Ariadeva, Dharmakirti and Jinaga. They were excellent scholars in India in ancient times. When I was in India and in Tibet, we said that these are the six or eight supreme persons. I thought maybe Buddhist people are very selfish. But now I am wandering around the world. I know their philosophies are excellent. You must learn, everybody. Don't care about your religion. Just study, you don't need to take refuge in Buddhism, just study, study. Very deep.