

Contentment

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As this morning the subject was Contentment, Compassion and Wisdom, I think all of you are already learned in this topic, but since it is the topic of the day, I will explain. In general there is a lot to say about this, particularly about Contentment. Contentment is not some topic practiced specifically by Buddhists. This is also present within Christians, Hindus, Muslims and so on. Contentment is something that is described in the scriptures and it is also something that needs to be practiced. Nowadays Contentment has become extremely important, I'm sure you are aware of this and this is also the way I think.

In Buddhism contentment was first taught by the Buddha. You know the story of the Buddha; he was born in India as a son of a king. He was born in a position in a family with lots of power, wealth and all the best situations one could expect, so he was supposed to have no problem of any kind in his life.

When Buddha was born a rishi was invited to make a prediction about the baby's birth, what he would become. The prediction was that if he became a king, he would be an extremely powerful king, and if he became a monk, he would be someone with a power to help sentient beings. He started growing up and at some point he left the palace to go and look how it was outside of this palace environment, and this is when he met the suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death for the first time. The Buddha thought that if he stayed the way he was at that moment, his life would be alright, but there would be no way he could escape death, no way he could escape suffering altogether. So he decided to stop being a prince.

Many people say Buddhists always talk about suffering, and that's why we don't like, but don't worry, after that we talk about the methods how we become free from suffering.

So he left the palace and went on to solitary places to search for a path that would lead beyond those sufferings. He first relied on Hindu teachers, so he sat with them and studied with them meditation of calm-biding, of clear vision and so on, but he found out that the path they offered would not lead him completely over the cyclic suffering. So then he made the result on his own, and he found the view, meditation and conduct, which would lead there, and this is what is studied nowadays.

But some Hindus don't see it in this way. They say that Buddhism is actually part of Hinduism and that in particular he is teaching what is connected with one of the Hindu deities, the tenth one called Jangchub. They say the Buddha was sent to develop this part of Hindu religion. We Buddhists don't believe it.

He was looking for his own path, the view, meditation and conduct, and he spent six years in a place called Naranjana. This is when he established this path of Contentment. This path has three aspects: one which is dedicated for those of the best intelligence or faculties, one for those with middle faculties and one for those with less good faculties. So, one is more for those who are called shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, and one is more for the bodhisattvas, and the last one is for the secret mantrayana practitioners. But even if he wanted to teach the last wheel of teaching, he thought there was nobody who would be able to understand that, so for seven weeks he stayed in meditation.

He found a path which had not been followed before, and after seven weeks he went to Varanasi in India. There he found five students and he started teaching the Four Noble Truths. This was the first wheel of the Four Noble Truths.

The second wheel of teaching he taught on Vulture Peak in Rajgir. This is where he taught the view of emptiness. The last wheel of teaching was taught in a place called Maripa and also in Yongpachen, so he was travelling at that time. He taught in different places and the topic of the last wheel of teaching was the buddhanature, which is the disposition to become a Buddha. He taught that each and every sentient being has it within themselves, and if they do practice the path, then everybody has the potential to become Buddha themselves.

The Buddha said: "I have shown you the method which leads to liberation, but you should know that the liberation depends upon yourself." So, the Buddha said that he has taught to everyone the full path that can lead to liberation, but then whether one makes an effort and follows the path or not, it depends on each individual to get there.

There is another quote by the Buddha saying: "Monks and learned ones, just as gold is burned, cut and rubbed, examine my words carefully. Do not accept them simply out of respect." He was talking to an assembly of monks and learned ones, which means bodhisattvas, and saying that they should not trust in what he was teaching just because he was the Buddha and it was the Buddha's words, but they should analyze in the same way as we work with gold to check for its purity: it is burned, cut and rubbed etc. So, the teaching should be analyzed, and if one thinks that this part can be beneficial in this and future lives and if one thinks that one can attain the omniscient state by practicing this path, then one should go on and practice. But if one thinks that is not the case, then one should not follow this path.

In the Buddhist scriptures you can find about contentment mainly in the Hinayana texts, shravaka texts. Among the explanations about contentment they talk a lot about limited desire and contentment. In the Mahayana the exact words are not there so often, but I think that the meaning of the Mahayana texts is exactly the same. What is the reason for that? It is because for the shravakas it is said that if one has big desire for food, the remedy for is to go and beg for food. If one has desire for craving clothing, the remedy is to wear the monk's attire. But it is also said in the text that if one has attained a state of arhathood, a state where there is no more craving, then it doesn't matter what type of clothes one wears, even if they are made of gold and it is alright to stay in a big palace and so on. It is a question of inner craving. This is why I think the other vehicles, even if they may not use the same wording, they are talking about having or not having this inner craving.

And I think that in order to understand contentment it is necessary to know what is its opposite, craving, to understand better what is craving. So I will talk briefly about the cause, the essence and the result of non-contentment. It is said that the ultimate cause of non-contentment is ignorance, but it is also the three poisons together, which are ignorance / unknowingness, desire / attachment and anger. If we add on to these three poisons jealousy and conceit, then we have five poisons. The three and five poisons are most dangerous, they create everything. The five poisons are also called the five disturbing emotions, and if we act upon them, we do what is called non-virtuous actions.

For example, if there is someone we don't like, let's call it our enemy, then we have anger. Because of the anger we may wish to kill the person and if we act upon it, we kill. Killing is the first of the ten non-virtuous actions. Anger is called a disturbing emotion, and action made out of it is a non-virtuous action.

In order to have real unvirtuous action there are some necessary characteristics: we need to have a support, the motivation of killing, the accomplishment and the result. So the support can be a human being or an animal that is going to be killed. And another necessary factor is the motivation. If a being is killed by mistake it is said to be lesser non-virtuous action.

Do you all know what the ten non-virtuous actions are?

Audience: No.

Okay, then I will explain. For each of the non-virtuous actions there needs to be the support, the motivation of doing it, there needs to be the accomplishment of the act and there needs to be the result. If one of them is missing, it is said that the action is less unvirtuous. These are quite important and we can reflect upon them.

Let's take the second one of the ten non-virtuous actions, which is to take which is not given, in other words it is to steal. Here again we have the four branches. The first one is the support, which can be an object that is stolen, for example. The second one is to have the motivation and that and be the idea of stealing, to have the wish to steal. The third one is the accomplishment, it can be done directly in front of the person, just to take, or it can be done in secret go and steal unseeingly. That is the putting to practice the wish to steal. And the last one is the result of stealth, one has actually stolen something. If these four aspects are there, then it is a complete unvirtuous action of stealing.

The third one, sexual misconduct would be having a sexual relationship with someone who is not one's partner, one's wife or husband. Again we need the four: the support i.e. there is the person, if we mistake the person for example, there will not be all the four branches together. It is still non-virtuous action, but not as bad as having these four branches gathered when doing the non-virtuous action. And sexual misconduct is mainly for the lay people, because monks and nuns have completely abandoned sexual relationships.

The fourth one is lying. Again we need the support, the person to whom the lie is being spoken. The motivation of lying, and the lie needs to be spoken, it has to be heard by the other person, which is the achievement of the action. The first, second and third one, killing, stealing and sexual misconduct are non-virtuous actions made through body. After that there are those made through voice: lying, words which separate people and create discord, words which hurt others and the last one is gossip. The three non-virtuous actions of the mind are covetousness, the wish to harm others (maliciousness) and the last one is wrong view. And again there are these four branches, which we saw before.

The non-virtuous actions are based on or occur because of the five poisons of ignorance (unknowingness), attachment, anger, jealousy and pride and these poisons occur because of lack of contentment. The essence of non-contentment is desire to have everything for oneself. It is this craving. There would be no problem with craving if it wasn't creating problems for us. The fact is that through craving we suffer both mentally and physically, so the result of craving is not something nice.

We see nowadays how people for the sake of making more business, or politicians for the sake of one chair, for having others to vote for them, they would go in great length and bear much trouble. All the weapons that are developed up to nuclear weapons and wars and so on, all of them happen because of lack of contentment. And the environmental problems nowadays happen because of lack of contentment. We know about deforestation for example, fish and marine life dying in the oceans and so on, we need to understand that all of this is ultimately due because of lack of contentment. These problems were created by human beings and the solution to them can be put into place by humans. We can't hope for somebody else to fix them for us.

So the result of lack of contentment is suffering. There are three types of suffering: the all-pervading suffering, suffering of change and suffering of suffering. What is all-pervading suffering? It is the understanding that everything in the world is either the cause or result of suffering. Of the Four Noble Truths the two first ones are the Truth of Suffering and the Truth of Origin. For the Truth of Suffering there are general sufferings that everybody goes through, which are the three just mentioned before, and then there are specific sufferings that each type of being may go through. The Truth of Origin of Suffering, the second Noble Truth, is said to be disturbing emotion and action. Disturbing emotion is the fact that we have already mentioned: attachment, anger, unknowingness, pride and jealousy, and the action is accumulated through them, it is non-virtuous action.

Let's see about contentment; we will see what the cause, the essence and the result of contentment are. The cause of contentment is the opposite of what we have seen, the non-contentment. So, the cause of contentment is the virtuous actions. The first non-virtuous action, if you remember, was killing. So, the opposite is to preserve life. The second one is stealing and the opposite is being generous. The third one is sexual misconduct and the opposite is to maintain proper discipline. The opposite of ten non-virtuous actions are the ten virtuous actions and there is one for each. This path of accomplishing virtuous actions is the path of humans and gods and due to this path we attain good life and also good rebirth in the next life.

The opposite of clinging to self is the understanding of no-self. There are two types of no-self, the no-self of individual and the no-self of phenomena. The no-self of individual is mainly the practice of shravakas and pratyekabuddhas. So here when we have the understanding of the specific individual we have the specific result as well. How do we understand what is meant by the non-self of the individual? An individual is constituted of the five aggregates, and this is usually called "the self", but when we look at it we find that there is no self which we could put on top of the five aggregates. This is called "the small emptiness". In the Mahayana path what is practiced is the no-self of the phenomena. So, when we meditate on this type of no-self it is done on entirety of phenomena. This is why it is called "big emptiness".

This was about the aspect of the methods and now the aspect of wisdom is love, compassion and bodhicitta. Love is the wish that beings find happiness, compassion is the wish that they do not suffer, and bodhicitta is when this wish is applied to all, the entirety of sentient beings.

If we want to practice the bodhicitta in aspiration, then we need to practice what is called the Four Immeasurables, which are love, compassion, joy and equanimity. And if we want to practice the bodhicitta in application, we practice the Six Paramitas. When we do the practice of Four Immeasurables, we start with equanimity. Why do we first meditate on equanimity? It is because thanks to equanimity we will apply everything to everyone.

Due to immeasurable equanimity we will not have the kind of ideas that this is my friend and this one is my enemy, I want my friend to be happy, my enemy not. It's the opposite, it is to treat everyone equally and to wish that all sentient beings may be free from suffering and that they may all attain happiness. So the immeasurable equanimity works together with compassion and love, and also when there is joy. Joy is when we rejoice when others have state of happiness. In order to develop bodhicitta in aspiration we practice the Four Immeasurables. It is the wish that all sentient beings may be free from suffering, that they may be liberated from it.

Bodhicitta in application is when we really do something in order to help other beings. So it's not only the wish but when we actually put it into practice. This training is usually done through the Six Paramitas. These Six Paramitas are generosity, discipline, patience, perseverance, meditative concentration and wisdom. They can be divided further, three each, so that they make 18, but what is the most important point with these paramitas is that they depend on action. It's a question of mind and not the outer appearances.

For example with generosity, whether it is real generosity or not, will not depend on what is given, but it depends on whether one has the wish to give, and if one is doing it without stinginess or attachment. So, if we take generosity as an example, it could be material generosity like offering food or offering objects, but generosity is also to offer protection from the fear of death to sentient beings, and it can also be offering dharma. And again here what makes it a real act of generosity is whether the person who is giving has in mind the wish to give and no craving.

And the second one of the paramitas is discipline. It can be refraining from harming others. This is with the aspect of guarding our body, speech and mind and refraining from doing things which could be harmful. The second aspect is to

act in a way which is useful to others. The third aspect is to not just to act in a way which is useful, but to do it with altruistic mind. Here what makes it real discipline is whether we have the mind of abandonment when we do that.

Patience can be not to respond to provocation. The second type of patience is to endure difficulties for the sake of dharma. The third type of patience is not to get afraid when we hear teachings, when we study emptiness and the ultimate state of phenomena and so on. The essence what determines whether it is an act of patience or not, is whether we get angry or not.

Let's take perseverance, there are three types as well. The first one is called the armor-like perseverance. This is the commitment, quick commitment: we have to help others. And the second type is the actual practice for helping others. The third type is the continuity in the time, to continue what we are doing, which is to help beings. Here the essence, what really makes it an act of perseverance is whether we have enthusiasm for this virtuous action, enthusiasm for practicing the paramitas etc.

And now meditative concentration, this has also three kinds: childlike meditative concentration, meditative concentration which clearly distinguishes, and meditative concentration in which the Tathagatas rejoice. Then there is the state of meditation which is practiced by the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, or the one which is practiced by the Noble Ones. The third type, the meditative concentration in which the Tathagatas rejoice is only in the minds of the Noble Ones. But anyway, for this meditative concentration there is again one essence, which make it purely meditative concentration, and this is whether one is able to remain focused in one point.

The last paramita, which is wisdom, is also divided into three: there is the wisdom of listening, the wisdom of reflecting and the wisdom of meditating. The first one, the wisdom of listening, refers to listening a spiritual friend and studying with him about different things about what is to be abandoned and adopted, but mainly about no-self. The wisdom of reflection is when we apply our intelligence into what we have been listening; whether it is reasonable or not. We look at what the Buddha has said, what the commentaries say and what we ourselves think about it, whether it make sense or not. So we think about it, reflect. The wisdom of meditation is when we take what we have received from the teacher and reflect on it on our own. We reflect and meditate upon what we have understood. Then we mix this understanding with our own mind and this process is called wisdom of meditation.

These were the Six Paramitas and in particularly wisdom. Wisdom has two aspects. The aspect of distinguishing in between all phenomena, this is to understand what needs to be adopted and what is to be abandoned. But mainly it is the wisdom of understanding what emptiness is, what no-self means.

So, if take the first five paramitas: generosity, discipline, patience, perseverance and meditative concentration, and we practice them only, they are called worldly paramitas. If we enhance them with the wisdom that realizes no-self, then they are called "beyond worldly". If our goal is just to be happy and have a good life, to be happy in this life, then we can practice the worldly paramitas and we will achieve that. But if our goal is to go beyond the cyclic existence, then we need to practice the paramita beyond worldly.

What are the causes of contentment? If we put forth to practice the Four Immeasurables, if we put forth to practice love and compassion, if we put forth to practice the Six Paramitas, then the result will be that we will have contentment. Let's see what the essence of contentment is. The essence of contentment is to have a virtuous mindset, which is free from craving. And here we can say that there is the real contentment, which is in the minds of the Noble Ones, noble shravakas, noble pratyekabuddhas, noble bodhisattvas and noble buddhas, which is stable, constant contentment. There is also simile contentment which is the type of contentment that we engender at the moment, which is not stable: sometimes we are content, sometimes not, it alternates. In order to engender fully characterized, real contentment in our mind we need to be completely free from selfishness.

Rinpoche in English: Free from selfishness, that is real contentment. But it is difficult for us.

The result is also twofold: there is temporary and ultimate result. The temporary result is that we will have happy life and also we will be able protect the environment. So there are many results in this way. And what is the ultimate result? The ultimate result is to be free, liberated, from samsara. So, from the beginner level where we are now up to the level of buddhahood it is like climbing staircases, and when we arrive at the end there, then this is called the ultimate result, buddhahood.

So now we have received an explanation on what contentment and its opposite are, but just by hearing the explanation we are not going to have contentment in our mind. We need to practice. And if we want to practice contentment, we need to rely on or listen to a teacher who him/herself has contentment, because just listening the theory will not make it for us to engender it ourselves. Nowadays is not very good time for us as people, because the teachings which are contained in the philosophy or religion are not so much applied anymore, and just receiving explanation without application is not going to be of much help.

Anyway, when we want to meditate on contentment, it's not enough to just think once about it, it's something we need to reflect and to keep in mind again and again. And first we need what is called calm-abiding to be able to keep the mind in one focus, to focus it on one point. This can be done if we are Buddhist, Christian, Muslim or whatever, we can think of a picture which is dear in our tradition, or if we do not have any religion we can take any kind object as a support for our meditation.

In order to develop stable meditation there are the Nine Methods for Setting the Mind. I shall just read their names; they are called Placing, Continual Placing, Repeated Placing, Close Placing, Taming, Pacifying, Close Pacifying, One Point Placing and Even Placing. These are nine steps which one goes through until one attains stability and one can keep one's mind focused on one point. And for beginners the three first ones are particularly important, they are again: Placing the Mind, Continual Placing and Repeated Placing.

In the beginning when we try to keep our mind focused on one object, and it is just not going to remain there, it is said that we can continue practice with the help of the wisdom of listening, which is to remember instructions which we have received from our teacher. The when our mind goes way we can remember the instructions, and then we place our mind again on the object of focus. Then again it goes away, we remember the instructions and place it again. During this phase, when we have to place the mind again and again there are the three steps, which are called Placing, Continual Placing and Repeated Placing.

Then we continue our meditation practice of keeping our mind focused one point, step by step. There is one point where we get the experiences of bliss, clarity and no-thought. What is the experience of bliss? It is a special feeling, which we can have in the body and mind, a happiness that we have never experienced before. Maybe it is difficult to understand or to think about it when we are just beginners and have never experienced them, but this does happen at some point. Some people also through their practice of meditative concentration get clarity, which is some clairvoyance of how things are far away, and there is also the experience of no-self, emptiness. When these experiences occur, if we get attached to them, if we cling to them, this is still worldly meditation. If we don't get attached, if we don't cling to them thanks to the wisdom that realizes no-self, which we apply at that time, this is real contentment, this is beyond the worldly.

When one gets to the stage of meditation and the meditative concentration, where one has these experiences of bliss, clarity and no-thought, it is said that one is in a state where even without eating, just meditating one can remain alive, normally we can say a hundred years, but there are cases of people remaining 200-300 years etc. They would stay in

this position, the nails growing around their body. There are stories of them remaining on the mountains in caves and so on.

Are there any questions? Ask me, try! This is a Christian place, isn't it? Nowadays it has become that the host is Christian and the guest is Buddhist and I would like to say thank you very much for the host to organize this.

Audience: Thank you. You gave us a lot of things to things to think about.

Rinpoche: I'm not a teacher who can express themselves in funny ways and be very entertaining, when they are teaching. So I apologize for that, maybe some people go little bored.

Question: My question is not related to the content. You seem to talk English pretty well, why do you prefer to use your own language?

Rinpoche: My English is limited. Sometimes my English is more fluent, sometimes just little, difficult.

Audience: You tend to be modest.

Rinpoche: I'm nervous, haha! Maybe next time.

Audience: You gain confidence.

Audience: Thank you very much for the very interesting lesson. I think it's a very good idea for you to speak in your own language because then we can hear different languages, it's very nice to hear Tibetan.

Question: May I ask for advice, because you had a very interesting point. Friends in this day and age get together and there is a lot of discontentment: "Oh, it's difficult." We spend a lot of time complaining. I think quite often our response to those friends who are not familiar with these concepts is... it's very common to just agree. This is a social way to relate to one another. But how to do if you want to avoid this kind of continuing complain?

Rinpoche: Complain doesn't work. I'm worried about Buddhism, I did complain a bit about Buddhists behavior. It doesn't work. Just start from inside ourselves is better, I have experience. If everybody meditated about contentment, then it will be better, but complaining doesn't work at the moment, very difficult. It harms other people, harms ourselves. No complain.

Question: So should we tell others to stop complaining? How do you tell your friends nicely that you are not calm enough, you need to stop complaining. To think another way, be nice, nicely break the cycle of complaining.

Rinpoche: I think everybody does their best themselves and practices, then it becomes better and better. But if we complain about other people they will never listen but it creates more trouble, I have experience. I didn't complain about other religions but I did complain in my religion, Buddhism. I wrote a book called Contentment in Tibetan, it's a very thick book, but it did not do much. I have experienced that.

Question: What do you do when your friend complains?

Rinpoche: The best is that you yourself practice, love, compassion and so on. There is not much you can do for others. If there is somebody, who is ready to listen your advice, then you can tell that person very kindly.

Question: Is it that if somebody is negative then the negative grows bigger and bigger, but if you are positive then you start to have bigger and bigger positive things, which then win the negative things?

Rinpoche: Yes, you try to do positive and complain about them, and things get even worse, very difficult, doesn't work. I'm worried about Buddhism, because I'm Buddhist. I explain what the Buddha taught, and it doesn't work at the moment, in this world I think everything is like...

Audience: But keep on talking, because that is very important to keep on talking and teach people about peace and compassion, because if you stay quiet that's worse.

Rinpoche: Yes, my teacher taught like that. Whatever your students or audience are like, say something, give advice, there is a little benefit. Complaining doesn't work. Okay, thank you.