

Karmapa's message for Vesak 2020

May 6, 2020

Thaye Dorje, His Holiness the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa, shares the following meditation on the eve of Vesak 2020.

The day of Vesak is this year the 7th of may, the full moon day commemorating the birth, Nirvana and demise of Buddha Sakyamuni.



སློན་ལམ། (smon lam) – MONLAM, Aspiration –

[Monlam means literary the way or method of wishing. Within Dharma, it means the way by wish or intention of *Bodhi*. Both in the sense of complete enlightenment, that is absolute *Bodhicitta*. As well as relative *Bodhicitta*, the open heart and mind with its attitude of no prejudice, that unfolds love of friendship to everybody and unlimited compassion with a deep understanding of emptiness. That is: *maitri*, *karuna* and *sunyata* in Sanskrit. It might appear very difficult to obtain such *Bodhi*, but everything begins with an intention. A little seed may grow very large in due time. It is actually quite important, what you wish for in life, because your intention or aspiration, Sanskrit: *cetana*, bring about both attitude and action.]

When it comes to becoming a Buddha, when it comes to blossoming into a Buddha, aspiration is a beautiful way to seed this state of Buddhahood.

To be a 'Buddha' is to be awakened. [Or: enlightened, *Bodhi*.]

To be more precise, if we split this method or vehicle of aspiration in half, the two parts can be understood as:

The 1st half is སློན་ལམ། (smon lam). 'Mönlam' is the Tibetan term for aspiration [for the good and beneficial], 'praṇidhāna' in Sanskrit.

The 2nd half is བསྐོ་བ། (bsngo ba). ‘Ngowa’ is the Tibetan term for dedication, ‘pariṇāma’ in Sanskrit.

‘Monlam’ is like inhaling and ‘Ngowa’ is like exhaling.

Just like breathing, it is most natural.

This path is known as becoming a Bodhisattva, a child of the awakened one – not to be taken literally, of course.

Right now, we are most probably dreaming.

This state of being human is [normally] a balanced dream.

Because we aren’t absorbed in ecstasy.

A being in a higher state, a god being, is in a constant state of rapture so that they cannot see reality. Like a life in luxury [without worries nor difficulty, whereby they forget their sense of suffering and motivation for Bodhi].

A being in a lower state, a tormented being, is in a constant state of agony so that they equally cannot see reality. Like a life in poverty [with unending problems, sufferings, deprivations and fear, that constantly occupies and fill up all attentiveness].

Both luxury and poverty are examples that are just relative.

A human state is what is known as a middle state, where we are on the verge of waking up.

Dreaming still as ‘you’ and ‘me’.

But every now and then we doubt, in a way questioning who you are and who I am, or whether we are dreaming or not.

A stream of curiosity pushes us to check.

The appearance of birth and death, and various states of changes, are the cues for our curiosity, which leads us to doubt whether we are really here or not.

So, human birth may not be ideal for pleasure, but it is ideal for waking up.

So, this smidgen of curiosity is a perfect and fertile ground for planting the seed of awakening.

This is done not by forcing something onto the human condition, but by implying that it's not wrong to doubt whether we are dreaming or not.

And to imply that waking up [in itself] is not frightening at all.

Either a spiritual guide [Sanskrit: *kalyanamitra*] can do it for us, or we can nudge ourselves to go a little beyond our habitual norm of being content with this dream.

At the same time, we have a kind of knack or instinct to always want to be different from the norm or from others, to stand out, like for example in the realm of fashion. In this case, we shouldn't fight this habit of wanting to be different, but go along with it.

If we want to be really different and do something 'out of the box', it is most interesting to set out on the adventure to wake up.

That's what Buddhas are saying actually.

Now, coming back to seeding awakening (Buddhahood): being content with dreaming this human dream is alright, but sooner or later this dream will cycle and there is no real guarantee that it will come full circle to reach back to this human state. [When you die, you might be reborn as a very different being.]

That's why waking up is sensible.

After waking up we can dare to dream any dream we wish.

So, when it comes to seeding awakening, aspiration is the simplest seed.

Because it is [anyway] something we do all the time. [That is: *striving* – so we may as well strive for Buddhahood.]

It doesn't require any kind of effort [besides joining the wish for Bodhi with breathing].

All it takes, is to aspire continuously, just like breathing or beating your heart.

That's not an effort, it's just a rhythm, like dancing.

Lungs dancing in and out, hearts dancing up and down.

Likewise, aspire away day in and day out.

Aspire to wake up, and from time to time look around and see who is still dreaming, and aspire for them to wake up.

Right now their dream is too real, to the point that we can't really force them and splash water on them to wake them up even if we wanted to, but we can aspire for them.

Most of them are too captivated by their dreams of being themselves, the way they are, the way others are – it's just so real that if we say it's a dream they will think we are insane.

Since we aren't fully awake ourselves, it's hard for us to convince others too.

So instead we aspire.

Mind you, aspiring is not like empty words or thoughts.

These feelings of 'Oh, it is just empty words and thoughts' are habits that have got stuck over time, when we took the easy route for ourselves and demeaned curiosity by saying that it's just child's play.

For example, we may do this when someone is enthusiastically in their own rhythm, but we can't get it, so we say he or she is like a 'machine'.

Or when someone is taking things easy, we say he or she is like a 'child'.

This kind of habit of not having understood something or someone completely, and labelling it as a machine or something, is making it easy for us, but it can stick with us, and plant seeds for us to dream deeper and not wake up. [Because we are relieved from doing anything with such interpretations and may conveniently ignore the information. At the same time curiosity is prevented from inquiring anything.]

So, aspire in a way that you breathe in, inhale, take in every act and thought, of yours and others, that are in alignment with waking up – namely, virtues and merits [Sanskrit: *punya*], such as kindness.

This has a quality that is not associated with slumbering, and instead it's associated with awakening.

So take that in, breathe that in.

That's aspiration.

Dedication:

Now that your lungs are full of the oxygen of virtue and your miracle-like human body has transformed it into CO₂, you have to breathe it out.

Exhale it.

Give it away.

Let it go.

Of course, you have to let it go without any real prior decision, just as the lungs do.

Without any religious or political decision, just dedicate. [That is, dedicate everything good, that has happened to you and everybody else besides everything good and wholesome in general, that has happened, is happening and will come to happen. In this way you dedicate all merits to the liberation and enlightenment of all sentient beings. Now also in connection with breathing.]

That's dedication.

The best example is that of a child breathing in a more profound way than an adult.

Now, that's karma well owned.

So, dear dharma friends, on this eve of Vesak, please aspire.

And all your dreams will become awakened!

[Text in square brackets have been added by Lama Tendar Olaf Hoeyer.]