



Namgyal Yangzab Buddhist Community of Canada

Essential Points of Buddhadharma

Excerpts from “Covid_19-Online-Dharma-Teachings 2020”
by Lama Chokyi Gyaltsen (Lama Mark Webber)

If you change the word “prayer” – which you should do! – into “wise, compassionate, liberative intent,” and placing that in your mindstream over and over again, it has incredible benefits for sentient beings!
Lama Chokyi Gyaltsen

April 14, 2020 – Excerpt of a Dharma Teaching by Zoom-meeting

Lama Chokyi Gyaltsen

On Prayer and Intent-Mind

Question:

How does prayer work?

Why is it important that we pray for beings?

How would that affect them?

How would that make a change in their situation?

Lama Chokyi Gyaltsen:

Wonderful questions!

This topic often has to do with the conception of the word “prayer” as something that we do, which is very hopeful. The questions are very timely. It is also why I have sent out “The Twelve Vows” or “The Twelve Aspirations” of the Bodhisattva that eventually became the Medicine Buddha.

We must realize that prayer has to do with **causality**, with what we aspire to in our mindstream, which is sometimes quite hidden from us. What we do on the outward level is not always what we really are doing on our inner level. So, at the deepest levels, we want to bring forth our most excellent aspirations, which is actually **mental power**, into manifestation.

Our internal mental speech is a force that eventually ends up manifesting in outer speech, and in internal hormonal bio-chemical inner speech which triggers everything. We eventually want to manifest excellent aspirations throughout our physical body.

So, when we pray, think of prayer not so much as something that we do with an empty hollow wish but actually, prayer which is turning about the aspiration, the force of the **intent mind**, what the Buddha called *cetana* (in Pali), the force of mental activity. This volitional force gives rise to everything we do!

And furthermore from the point of view of actual perception, what many of us don't know—we have to do a lot of meditation to realize this!—is that this force of the intention mind is also giving rise to all of our experience: where we find ourselves, what we eat, what we do, what we think about, what we watch, what we read, every single thing that we do, even our biochemistry, how hormones get secreted. How we interpret sensations is to do with the force and the quality of our intent mind.

Most of the Buddha's teachings—my suspicion is between 70 and 85 percent—all the way through the Three Baskets are really on about this one point: to go from that which is unwholesome or neutral (which doesn't really go anywhere but appears as if it really does) to that which is wholesome. A process of refining and discerning that which is wholesome and that which is unwholesome, that which goes nowhere (which is paralysis and anxiety) and those mental states that blossom into good states, beatific and awake states and eventually liberative states; into mental states which fulfill the aspirations and activities of wisdom-compassion for us and other sentient beings.

So, prayer is very, very deep! One person's prayers and one person's aspirations, one person's wish for blessings, for liberation, awakening, great compassion for other sentient beings—you may not feel that you have that power—but maybe someday you will have that capacity to affect millions and millions of people, as many individuals have done throughout history! They have positively affected the course of history, and they have been incredibly compassionate and loving. They have helped to raise the standard of living at a relative level, have helped to build hospitals, build school programs, have become psychotherapists, good politicians, and so on.

Also, let us talk about the saints such as Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Theresa, Jesus Christ, Milarepa, Gampopa, Machig Lobdron, the Karmapas, Jigten Sumgön, Guru Rinpoche—and the Buddha!—and other people who have had profound effects on beings and still today, they have far-reaching effects on humans and other beings. Where does that come from? Prayer!

So, if you change the word “prayer”—which you should do!—into “wise, compassionate, liberative intent,” and placing that in the mindstream over and over again, it has incredible benefits for sentient beings! Not just in the future, but right now!

Namgyal Rinpoche once said during the first Academy at the Dharma Centre back in the 1980s, “It is the prayers of Refuge and Bodhicitta (especially!) that carry over lifetimes!”. The force of those prayers, how much we do and how heartfully we take those in, is actually the force that brings forth Bodhicitta and brings us to the Dharma faster and faster and deeper and deeper

lifetime after lifetime. As great “medicine”! I have never forgotten those words from Namgyal Rinpoche!

You might wonder why we put such emphasis on the “Preliminary Liberating Instructions.” Because they ARE the highest aspiration; they are prayers, but they are also meditations and contemplations. They change the force of the **volitional intent** of our being, which means we change physiologically, cognitively, and we get into the deepest recesses of our physiology. And remember that our physiology is our cognition! Whatever we experience is our physiology and our cognition interdependently. Whatever we think about is physiological and makes physiological changes in our being. If we do enough of it, we change our physiology. If we are in a difficult state physiologically, it can overwhelm us mentally and actually plant the seeds for very difficult mental states.

And you may question why is it that people who are in long term states of anxiety, anger, greed or delusion, don’t just die from it right away. That’s to do with karmic and genetic propensity. You can be a very hateful being, I am sure all of you know someone like that. I certainly have met people like that who dwell in a lot of anger, resentment, guilt, shame, and so on. But some have a constitution which is so remarkable that despite that force of negativity—maybe it is extreme narcissism or psychosis—they still live until 99 or 110 years old. Their constitution of karmic formations is able to withstand that. Others cannot do that. They will die from the stress. They will die from the greed, hatred or delusion, from the difficult physiological states resulting from stress at the age of 25, 30, 40, or 50. So we are all built differently, we have different life spans and different physical constitutions. Just because one lives a long life, and they are healthy most of their life does not mean they are actually a being of goodness or saintliness. There are great saints who have been sick most of their lives. And there are great saints who have died at the age of 25, like Mingyur Dorje in 17th century Tibet. And some of the Karmapas, Dalai Lamas, and so on died early, but they had great power to affect the liberation of other sentient beings.

So, how does prayer work? It changes the inner environment, and it changes the outer environment because we are truly **interdependently interconnected organisms**. Maybe not instantaneously... perhaps it does? Actually, it does! But some things take a long time to become obviously manifest. One needs a lot of patience to see changes.

As Sakya Trizin said to a dear friend of mine who passed away, who was an excellent Dharma teacher, “The place you need to change is the warfare that is going on in your heart. That will be way more effective than trying to change the outer warfare at this moment.”

Of course, we can do both. But if we do not change the inner war, we will spread the poison to other sentient beings like coughing viral particles into the air. As Namgyal Rinpoche said on an occasion, a lovely statement, “Do the trees and the vegetation bend towards you or—if you pass them—or do they bend away from you, trying to flee from you?” I would say: work on the green thumb! It is worthwhile. Do creatures flee, or do creatures move towards you? Everything is interdependent. We know this from mainstream science too. Not just me speaking, but take a look at the mainstream science-journals of today; you will see that they are full of words such as *interdependence* and *interconnectivity* and of ideas and evidence of how all life forms are connected. So, what we pray for is what we aspire to, and it changes everything!

April 17, 2020 - Dharma teaching by Zoom-meeting

Continuation of Dharma-Talk by Lama Chokyi Gyaltsen

On Prayer and Intent-Mind

I want to talk again about prayer briefly. I may get back to this topic again and again...

When I was cleaning these glasses this morning before coming down (*Lama Mark takes off his glasses*)—sometimes cleaning my glasses is my best moment of inspiration!—it occurred to me why people sometimes have difficulties with prayer. It is because some people think that prayer is “acausal,” some sort of a mystical-magical process. Prayer is not acausal! It is not acausal in any way. And certainly in the Buddhist Teachings it is not acausal.

Prayer actually has logic behind it. And the logic has to do with emptiness and interdependent origination. One of the things we do a lot, for example, in sadhana practice, is create interdependent wholesome, beatific, and transcendental environments that can give rise to wholesome, beatific, transcendental, and full awakening opportunities. And there is only one way to do that: you have to set up your mind in that course or direction. If you don't, it does not have enough force; it does not deliver “the goods,” to use a corporate slogan. One has to put considerable wholesome force behind one's wishes!

And we never know how long it takes for the fruition of these wishes to come true. It may not manifest even in this lifetime. Westerners—not to beat up on them, it is just the way it is, our culture—we think in terms of just one lifetime or in very short time periods. But if you view with a big timeframe of mind, in this way, you see that—I have seen this many times—fruits of wishes and aspirations manifest 10 or 40 years later. Even things that Namgyal Rinpoche, Ontul Rinpoche, or the H.H. the 16th Karmapa said to me, I know, are only bearing fruit many years later after they gave their instructions or statements. Those were aspirations, predictions and things like that. We have to take a very long view towards the nature of prayer. It can be short, it can be quick, it can be long. And it is causal! And watch out, it may not come out as one has envisioned! So, don't think it is some mystical thing out there. It is actually direct cause and effect when we pray.

It works because of interdependence; both the twelve causal links of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* (interdependent origination), and the twenty-four causal processes and associations of the *paṭṭāna*, the “conditioned relations.” These relations are so complex and so intertwined that we cannot be sure of all the factors at work. It is said in Dharma texts that the only people that can be ever sure and knowledgeable about all the interconnections are fully awakened beings.

In other words, to say that prayers have no effect, if you think of negative prayer, of some of the greatest mass murderers of the planet who had great aspirational intent for doing nasty things—we can go through recent history, Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, Hitler—they had many unwholesome states, but big intentions! Look what happened out of those masses of evil mind states!

And look what happens out of great positive aspirations, even for one's life, and even for the greater of good all beings. It is truly fantastic!

The greater the merit field, the greater the opportunity for prayers of Bodhicitta. It is really the merit field and the scope of pervasive awareness, this completely awake awareness, that brings about great blessings for beings.

And please, do not think that you can always pray and get what you want! Do not think that you can always effect change, because the causes, effects and the situations happening with other beings, times and environments maybe way more powerful or far more interlinked than what even a fully awakened being or a highly realized Bodhisattva could ever effect or change immediately. Somethings have to run their course and free themselves up. Like a pandemic and mental confusion that foster its spread. There are karmic windows of opportunity.

This is important to know: things sometimes have to take their course. And yes, you can pray, and many people can pray for good outcomes. But also, we need to allow for cause and effect to work its way through environments. Then there will be opportunities—openings—for getting in there and providing space and freedom, love, health, or vigor. It is way more complex than a simple “I pray this should happen!”. It is not like that.

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May any errors and omissions do not obscure the essence, and may they be forgiven.

May these teachings, so generously offered, help lead to the cessation of suffering and the full awakening of all beings!