

Columbus KTC Intro Class 3: The Three Vehicles

Introduction

A. We all want happiness, but we are all different

B. There are two approaches to gaining happiness

1. Outer, material methods

a) Problematic because everything changes.

b) Trying to attain lasting happiness by manipulating outer circumstances is like trying to protect your feet by covering the earth with leather (it's impossible!)

2. Inner, spiritual methods

a) As we experience everything with our minds, when we work with our minds, we work with everything.

b) It's like putting leather on our feet to protect them. Then wherever we go and whatever we encounter we are protected.

C. From the absolute point of view, Buddhism offers one path and one goal. But, from the relative view, there are a variety of methods to suit a variety of people and their understanding.

D. These methods are contained in three collections of teachings, called "vehicles" because they are designed to carry us from where we are to where we want to be: Buddhahood.

I. The Hinayana (Path of Individual Liberation)

A. "Hinayana" means "smaller vehicle", because the motivation is to liberate oneself from suffering.

B. *The Four Noble Truths* are a Hinayana teaching which is the foundation of all Buddhist tradition

1. Dissatisfaction, or suffering, is a part of life.

2. This is caused by self-clinging.

3. If we can abandon self-clinging, we can achieve the cessation of suffering.

4. There is a path which leads us to that cessation.

C. The emphasis of the Hinayana path is "abandoning" or "renunciation."

D. The primary practice is shamata meditation, where we develop a mind capable of letting go.

II. The Mahayana (Path of Liberation for All)

A. "Mahayana" means "Greater Vehicle", because the motivation is to liberate all beings from suffering by leading them to enlightenment.

B. The emphasis of the Mahayana path is "transforming". In particular, transforming negative emotions (anger, greed, ignorance, desire, jealousy, pride.)

C. We look beyond our own suffering to see that all beings want happiness, yet we all experience the same suffering.

D. The primary practice of the Mahayana is compassion meditation, or “tong-len”. We also practice the six paramitas, or perfect virtues (generosity, ethical conduct, patience, diligence, meditative stability, and wisdom.)

III. The Vajrayana (Path of Indestructible Mind)

A. The motivation of the Vajrayana, like the Mahayana, is the liberation of all sentient beings.

B. The Vajrayana teachings are drawn from texts called the tantras, so it is also called the “tantrayana.”

1. Tantra means “thread” or “continuum”, referring to the presence of Buddha Nature in all beings.

C. The Vajrayana’s emphasis is on recognizing the ultimate nature of mind and all phenomena.

D. Vajrayana is also called the path of skillful means, and this refers to the primary practices of mantra meditation, or deity meditation.

1. In these practices we meditate on the body, speech, and mind of a meditational deity, the embodiment of perfected qualities.

2. We then cultivate sacred outlook on and off the cushion, training in seeing all form as the body of the Buddha, all sound as mantra, and all thought as awareness.

Conclusion

A. The Buddhist path is a progression in which we gradually broaden and deepen our view and aspiration.

B. For our meditation to be effective, we also have to bring into our practice elements of all three vehicles

1. Increasingly letting go of our fixation on our worldly situation,

2. Benefiting others as much as possible through positive thoughts, words, and actions.

3. Learning to recognize our innate potential and develop sacred outlook.