

A GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT

TOI Newspaper (Speaking Tree) December 27, 2010

Lama Doboomb Tulku

In Tibetan Buddhist scriptures, human life is referred to as precious because it has special powers of accomplishment. One comes across three things in the context of human life: body, enjoyments and virtuous roots. We offer these to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha in the mandala-offering practice. We are also expected to dedicate these to the well-being of sentient and non-sentient beings.

The body refers not only to the biological body but to the whole psycho-physical existence of human life. As humans we have the capacity for both positive and negative forms, just as technology could be used for either positive or negative purposes.

Our strength lies in vivekavigyan or our power of discrimination that enables us to know the difference between the good and bad -- for oneself and others. A Buddhist scripture says, "Happiness in human life is not possible without satisfying material requirements". It also says "the satisfaction of requirements come from generous activities". If you get something it becomes your responsibility to give something back to its sources, sentient or non-sentient.

The phrase "generous activities" may be seen as covering not only the giving of the material but anything that benefits others. It refers to the "non-attachment" aspect of spiritualism which rises from "renunciation". From this term one may get the idea that you must first leave society and family and go somewhere else, instead of starting from where you are. Well, if you look at the life of the Buddha, he left the palace and spent a long time in solitude in the forest. So did Sain Milarepa in Tibet. These demonstrate to us the extent to which one can go if one develops a strong determination. Practicing renunciation does not mean you have to abandon everything. You may be staying apart from people physically, but if your mind is occupied with worldly things it is not renunciation. Renunciation has to come from sustained meditation and reflection on the whole predicament of cyclic existence.

As long as we live in the human realm, we should try to be engaged in generous activities which are pragmatic and not fixed theories, ideas or rules. It is about generosity of spirit that creates goodwill and well being for not just self but for all.

The Buddha taught us that there are three roots of virtues: non-attachment, non-hatred and non-ignorance. These can be understood respectively as, renouncing selfish desire, the focus of Buddha's first Sermon at Sarnath; loving-kindness towards all, the message from the Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma at Vaishali and other places; and the power of the Special Insight into Emptiness, the direct teaching contained in the second Sermon delivered at Rajgir near Nalanda in Bihar.

The very basis of roots of virtues is the pure nature of the mind. The elaborate ceremonies associated with various tantric rituals, and the ritual arrangement of implements and paintings, mudras and dance, are meant as an aid to understanding and imbibing the teachings of the Buddha. They are not to be mistaken for the essentials.

In other words, renunciation is necessary, but does not imply denunciation of worldly life; loving-kindness is a must, while pretentiousness must be abandoned; special insight is the most important of the roots of virtues, and can never be accompanied by showmanship.