

The Three Kayas – Dharmakaya

Brief Research and Discussion as related to “Guide to the Way of the Bodhisattva”

5-13-03

Anne Barnett

This document is organized by each source reviewed, followed by some discussion comments. At the conclusion of the sources, a summary is presented.

1. “The Way of the Bodhisattva”, Padmakara Translation Group, ref. #18.
Dharmakaya is a translation of the Tibetan “chos sku”, literally the “Dharma body”. This is understood as referring to the “truth body”, the absolute aspect of a Buddha, i.e., one of the three bodies of a Buddha, along with the Sambhogakaya or “body of divine enjoyment”, and the Nirmanakaya or “body of manifestation”.
2. ZaChoeje Rinpoche, public talk, 12-8-02, “The Nature of Enlightenment”.

”Sang-gye” is the Tibetan word for enlightenment. “Buddha” is the Sanskrit word for enlightenment. Sang-gye and Buddha mean awaken, complete, innermost, purest spirit, the ultimate and clear light state of being. There are three principle aspects of enlightenment or three kayas. “Kaya” is a Sanskrit word meaning body. Kaya refers to the embodiments of true nature, wisdom, loving-kindness, and skillful means.

Dharmakaya:

The Sanskrit word “dharma”, in general, means existence. In this case, “Kaya” means the true nature of existence, the truth. Dharmakaya refers to the ultimate and true nature of the enlightened mind. It is permanent and unconditional. It is like the nature of sky that is not corrupt. The sky does not become less vast for the clouds. Likewise, when the sky is cloudless it is not vaster.

From beginningless time the nature of our mind has been that of emptiness. Its appearance is clarity but this is not Dharmakaya. Our mind has long been contaminated with delusion. Because of this our mind does not yet have the nature of Dharmakaya.

Our mind becomes Dharmakaya when all of the delusions in our mind are transformed into supreme realization. This transformation takes place through our practice. When our primordial nature becomes Dharmakaya it resembles the rising of the sun of wisdom in the night of ignorance. All darkness is instantly dispelled.

Buddha Nature:

”The nature of mind is clear and stains on the mind are only temporary” Dharmakirti
Buddha Nature refers to the seed of the uncontaminated mind and to the emptiness nature of the mind. All sentient beings have this Buddha nature. Therefore the minds of all sentient beings have the potential to have all delusions removed.

The clear nature of the mind is always present. The purity of water, for example, exists even in muddy water. We are unable to identify the purity because of the dirt.

The main purpose of understanding our Buddha nature is to reveal the ultimate luminosity and unique potential of our minds.

Discussion Comments:

Can we understand Buddha nature without understanding its three aspects? Can we understand Dharmakaya without understanding Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya: the nature of enlightened mind, the enlightened subtle body, the emanation body. These three bodies are not separate, but combine in various forms – it seems.

3. “The Buddhism of Tibet”, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, p.80-85

“Praise of the elements of superior qualities”, Nagarjuna

“When a metal garment which has become stained with contaminations and is to be cleansed by fire, is put in fire, its stains are burned but it is not,

So, with regard to the mind of clear light which has the stains of desire and so forth, its stains are burned by the fire of wisdom but its nature, clear light, is not.”

Thus, not only is the ultimate nature of mind unpolluted by contaminations, but also the conventional nature of the mind, that is, its mere clear knowing, is unpolluted by contaminations as well.

* * * * *

[Following some discussion on the stages of the Bodhisattva path]

When the third accumulation over a countless aeon is completed, a body of truth, a true cessation, which is the state of having utterly abandoned forever all types of defects, is attained. The Three Bodies of Truth, the position of Buddhahood, which is the perfection of wisdom, love, and power, is realized.

Discussion Comments:

The nature of the mind is uncontaminated. The Three Kayas are manifested simultaneously.

4. “Kindness, Clarity, and Insight”, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, p.19

Therefore, if you familiarize steadily over a long period of time with good attitudes that have a valid foundation, bad attitudes that do not will gradually diminish. When training physically in broad jumping, for instance, the basis of the process is the gross physical body, and thus there is a limit to how much you can jump. However, since the mind is an entity of mere luminosity and knowledge, when the basis of training is the mind, it is possible through gradual familiarization to develop salutary attitudes limitlessly. ...Qualities that depend on the mind can be increased limitlessly.

Discussion Comments:

The true nature of mind is also limitless.

5. “Meditations from the Treasures of Pema Dudal”, translated by Robt. W. Clark

The Three Kayas, i.e., three bodies of the Buddha, viz., Nirmanakaya (Manifestation Body), Samhogakaya (Divine Enjoyment Body), Dharmakaya (Body of Ultimate Truth). ... Yeshe Sogyal ... with her eyes of the Three Kayas, she perceives according to the three modes...

Discussion Comments:

Do the “eyes of the Three Kayas” refer to the depiction of Enlightened Beings having eyes in the forehead, palms, and soles of the feet?

6. “The Three Bodies of Enlightenment”, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, in “Buddhadharma”, Spring 2003, p.46-53

Dharmakaya is like the sun, Sambhogakaya is like the rays, and Nirmanakaya is like the rays hitting the objects on the earth. Nirmanakaya is the physical situation, and Sambhogakaya and Dharmakaya are the level of mind.

* * * * *

To start from the beginning, the first body, Dharmakaya, is background or origin. It is why we are here... [Why the universe exists. How the universe exists. The universe is both born and unborn.] How is it possible for space to exist eternally, if space doesn't give birth to itself constantly? Otherwise, space would be dead... the reason space exists constantly, but still maintains its unborn nature, is that space never gives birth! ... we have a unique process at this point; immense space, which exists eternally or noneternally, does not give birth [literally] and does give birth [in the larger sense] – immense birth – at the same time.

* * * * *

The word Sambhoga means, “enjoying pleasure”, or literally, “interested in pleasure”. It is simply energy. [Once Dharmakaya has setup space, energy naturally follows.]

* * * * *

At this point, we have descended from the space of the Dharmakaya to the energy of Sambhogakaya. In the transmission from the Dharmakaya down to the Sambhogakaya, the first impulse of the Sambhogakaya principle seems to be a sense of humor and energy.

* * * * [Discusses the five Buddha families] * * *

The Sambhogakaya leads to the Nirmanakaya, which is the physical, bodily state of existence. It is everything we experience in the visual-audial world in the very ordinary sense.

* * * * *

The Tibetan expression “Kusum yerme” means “the indivisibility of the three bodies”. In the Kagya tradition, it is always said that the three bodies came simultaneously.

Discussion Comments:

This seems to be a discussion of the Three Kayas with a cosmic analogy.

7. “The Spirit of Tibet”, Matthieu Ricard, quoting Khyentse Rinpoche, p. 104

Mind has no form, no color, and no substance; this is its empty aspect. Yet mind can know things, and perceive an infinite variety of phenomena. This is its clear aspect. The inseparability of these two aspects, emptiness and clarity, is the primordial, continuous nature of mind.

Discussion Comments:

This is another teacher’s description of the true nature of mind.

Research Summary:

The Three Kayas represent the three most important aspects of Enlightenment: the enlightened mind, the enlightened way of living (e.g., basic emotions and actions), and the enlightened physical form, or manifestation.

Thus, the concepts relating to enlightenment are very complex. Though it is a natural state; it seems difficult for human minds to grasp. But, by gradually grasping these concepts, in addition to correct living, the human form may move towards Enlightenment.

THE PRECIOSUNESS OF HUMAN LIFE

-1-

I bow down to the all the Nobel beings without whom I would be deaf, dumb and blind to the truth, stuck without hope suffering in this sea of Samsara. I bow down to my root guru without whom I would ignorantly be wandering tossed helplessly by the winds of my negative karma without inspiration, without hope not knowing of the magnificent state of liberation.

-2-

I am without skill, my practice sadly shallow.
I write this merely to remind myself of the preciousness of human life to stimulate my practice training my mind without delay for the sake of all beings.

-4-

Buddha said “Just as a dewdrop on the tip of a blade of grass will quickly vanish at sunrise and will not last long, so human life is like a dew-drop. It is limited and brief. This one should wisely understand”

-5-

The great Lama Tsongkhapa said “This opportune physical form is worth more than a wish-granting gem. You only gain its like this once, so hard to get, so easily destroyed. It’s like a lightening bolt in the sky. Contemplate this, and you will realize all worldly actions are but winnowed chaff, and night and day you must extract some essence from your life. I the yogi, practice this way. You wanting liberation do the same”

-6-

Santideva said “You can free yourself from the great river of suffering by relying on the boat of human rebirth. Such a boat will be hard to get again. O blind one this time do not fall asleep”. If I squander this rebirth that I have managed to obtain it is a great pity, there is no greater loss. Buddha said” Just as a line on water drawn with a stick will quickly vanish and will not last long; even so is human life like a line drawn on water. It is short, for no one who is born can escape death”

-7-

Santideva said “No-self-deception could be worse after obtaining such an opportunity than not using it for virtuous ends. Nothing could be blinder”. The 7th Dalai Lama said “For many lifetimes we have amassed spiritual energy through generosity, discipline and pure aspiration. This has won this precious human life, this ground from which ultimate goodness can be grown. More rare is human rebirth than for a blind turtle to put its head through a yoke floating on the ocean than for a handful of dried peas tossed in the air to stick to a stone wall”

-8-

The 3rd Dali Lama said “You can take advantage of your extremely valuable human life, a life-form hard to find and once found very meaningful. Brace your teeth and do not let the once attained opportunity afforded by human life slip away. If you do not utilize this tremendous potentiality, is your heart not vain?”

-9-

Nagarjuna said in his Precious Garland “From non-virtue comes all suffering and likewise all the lower realms. From virtue come all upper realms and all happy rebirths”. Santideva said “I have obtained the optimum human rebirth, so hard to achieve, but which can achieve a person’s aims. If I derive no benefit from it, how could I hope to inherit such a pure rebirth again?”

-10-

Milareapa said “Impermanence is like the spreading shadow of a mountain sunset. No matter how hard you run from it, the darkness will finally overtake you”. Santideva said “The fluctuation of life is like a bubble of water; remember death for we perish so quickly, after death the effects of good and bad karma pursue us as the shadow follows the body”. As I have often heard ZaChoeje Rinpoche say “next day or next life who is to say which is next?” We will all travel alone after death.

-11-

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama said “Because human life is so precious we should not waste the opportunity offered to us because human life is so precious and so difficult to achieve. As life is valuable it is important to do something meaningful with it right now, since by its very nature it is also transient”. Buddha said “Used well this body is a ship to liberation. Otherwise it is an anchor in Samsara. This body is the agent of all good and evil”.

-12-

Abandon all evil doing, practice virtue well, subdue your mind this is the teaching of Buddha. ZaChoeje Rinpoche said “We don’t pursue positive change for ourselves for the sake of others we are simply shameless”

-Dedication-

From my many lives and until this moment what ever virtue I have accomplished including the merit generated by this practice this I offer for the sake of all sentient beings. May sickness, war, famine and suffering decrease for each being while their wisdom and compassion increase in this and every future life. May all the lower realms be constantly empty. May I clearly perceive all experience to be insubstantial as the dream fabric of the night and waken to see the wisdom display in the arising of every phenomenon. May I quickly obtain Buddhahood in order to work ceaselessly for the benefit of all beings.

Defining Bodhichitta¹

by Mark Lussier

“Bodhicitta (*byang chub kyi sems, bodhicitta*): literally ‘mind of enlightenment,’ the altruistic intention to become enlightened in order to benefit others.”²

The importance Shantideva placed on the concept of “bodhichitta” can be discerned by its detailed elaboration within the opening chapter of *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*. Just as the “career of a bodhisattva begins with the first awakening of the ‘enlightenment mind’ [bodhi – chitta],” so too Shantideva’s text begins with this crucial concept.³ Immediately following the traditional homage paid to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, Shantideva suggests that the only aspect of sentience capable of withstanding “the great and overwhelming strength of evil” (34:6) is “perfect bodhichitta” (34.6):

Thus behold the utter frailty of goodness!

Except for perfect bodhichitta,

There is nothing able to withstand

The great and overwhelming strength of evil.

The core of most definitions of bodhichitta involves a commitment to practice “compassion toward all beings,” which generates “the desire to free others” from the negative effects of samsara.⁴ This emphasis placed on bodhichitta at the outset of Shantideva’s work reinforces the view that the concept, in a phrase drawn from Panchen Sonam Drakpa, functions as “[a state of] mental consciousness, which is the entrance to the Mahayana path.”⁵ As ZaChoeje Rinpoche suggested

¹ All references to the root text under discussion, unless otherwise specified, are drawn from Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group (Boston: Shambhala, 1997). Inside of parenthesis, the page number is followed by the verse number.

² John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1995), 449.

³ John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1995), 97.

⁴ Kalu Rinpoche, *Luminous Mind: The Way of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom, 1997), 97; Tenzin Gyatso, The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, *A Flash of Lightning in the Dark of Night: A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994), 15.

⁵ Venerable Lobsang Gyatso, *Bodhicitta: Cultivating the Compassionate Mind of Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1997), 11.

during his last teaching, one has not truly entered the Mahayana path until one has generated the mind of enlightenment as the necessary, preparatory condition for all subsequent practice.

Once the mind of enlightenment has been generated, it has the capacity to transform the base substance of “human flesh” into a “priceless body of a buddha” (43: 10), just as the philosopher’s stone of the alchemists was said to be capable of transforming “base” metals into “precious” substances (34: 10). As well, bodhichitta, as verse fifteen makes clear, has “two aspects”

Bodhichitta, the awakening mind,

In brief is said to have two aspects:

First, aspiring, *bodhichitta in intention*;

Then, *active bodhichitta*, practical engagement.

The simple wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings (one might say the ‘desire’ at the heart of the path of the bodhisattva) speaks to “bodhichitta in intention,” which itself carries with it considerable positive merit (“bears rich fruit”).

This aspiration (an altruistic wish or desire) subsequently leads to further commitment, and application or embodiment of this aspiration “begins with taking the vows of bodhichitta and promising to put it into action.”⁶ Putting aspiration into action unleashes “A great and unremitting stream . . . of wholesome merit” (36:19), generating merit with “no bounds” (36: 21).

⁶ Tenzin Gyatso, The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, *A Flash of Lightning in the Dark of Night: A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994), 19.

ASPIRATIONAL vs ENGAGING BODHICHITTA

In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* by Pabongka Rinpoche, he says, “Aspirational Bodhichitta is the pure intention, wish or desire to achieve Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. The engaging or involvement form of Bodhichitta is the desire to train in the tasks that follow development of Bodhichitta.” He goes on further to say, “The former is illustrated by someone planning to go to India; the latter by the man who has already set off on the road.” So, in essence, Aspirational Bodhichitta is the committed desire and Engaging Bodhichitta is the action.

For those of us that attended Green Tara Empowerment this past weekend we learned that Aspirational Bodhichitta is represented by Avalokiteshvara, the white masculine form, and Engaging Bodhichitta is represented by the female form of Green Tara which symbolizes the active part of compassion.

According to Sogyal Rinpoche in *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, “When you meditate deeply enough on compassion there will arise in you a strong determination to alleviate the suffering of all beings, and an acute sense of responsibility toward that noble aim.” That is Aspirational Bodhichitta.

He goes on to further say, “Compassion is not true compassion unless it is active.” I found the following story he told to be a bit gruesome but very telling:

“Asanga was one of the most famous Indian Buddhist saints, and lived in the fourth century. He went to the mountains to do a solitary retreat, concentrating all his meditation practice on the Buddha Maitreya, in the fervent hope that he would be blessed with a vision of this Buddha and receive teachings from him.

For six years Asanga meditated in extreme hardship, but did not even have one auspicious dream. He was disheartened and thought he would never succeed with his aspiration to meet the Buddha Maitreya, and so he abandoned his retreat and left his hermitage. He had not gone far down the road when he saw a man rubbing an enormous iron bar with a strip of silk. Asanga went up to him and asked him what he was doing. “I haven’t got a needle,” the man replied, “so I’m going to make one out of this iron bar.” Asanga stared at him, astounded; even if the man were able to manage it in a hundred years, he thought, what would be the point? He said to himself: “Look at the trouble people give themselves over things that are totally absurd. You are doing something really valuable, spiritual practice, and you’re not nearly so dedicated.” He turned around and went back to his retreat.

Another three years went by, still without the slightest sign from the Buddha Maitreya. “Now I know for certain,” he thought, “I’m never going to succeed.” So he left

again, and soon came to a bend in the road where there was a huge rock, so tall it seemed to touch the sky. At the foot of the rock was a man busily rubbing it with a feather soaked in water. “What are you doing?” Asanga asked.

“This rock is so big it’s stopping the sun from shining on my house, so I’m trying to get rid of it.” Asanga was amazed at the man’s indefatigable energy, and ashamed at his own lack of dedication. He returned to his retreat.

Three more years passed, and still he had not even had a single good dream. He decided, once and for all, that it was hopeless, and he left his retreat for good. The day wore on, and in the afternoon he came across a dog lying by the side of the road. It had only its front legs, and the whole of the lower part of its body was rotting and covered with maggots. Despite its pitiful condition the dog was snapping at passerby, and pathetically trying to bite them by dragging itself along the ground with its two good legs.

Asanga was overwhelmed with a vivid and unbearable feeling of compassion. He cut a piece of flesh off his own body and gave it to the dog to eat. Then he bent down to take off the maggots that were consuming the dog’s body. But he suddenly thought he might hurt them if he tried to pull them out with his fingers, and realized that the only way to remove them would be on his tongue. Asanga knelt on the ground, and looking at the horrible festering, writhing mass, closed his eyes. He leant closer and put out his tongue..... The next thing he knew, his tongue was touching the ground. He opened his eyes and looked up. The dog was gone; there in its place was the Buddha Maitreya, ringed by a shimmering aura of light.

“At last,” said Asanga, “why did you never appear to me before?”

Maitreya spoke softly: “It is true that I have never appeared to you before. I was with you all the time, but your negative karma and obscurations prevented you from seeing me. Your twelve years of practice dissolved them slightly, so that you were at last able to see the dog. Then, thanks to your genuine and heartfelt compassion, all those obscurations were completely swept away, and you can see me before you with your very own eyes. If you don’t believe that this is what happened, put me on your shoulder and try and see if anyone else can see me.”

Asanga put Maitreya on his right shoulder and went to the marketplace, where he began to ask everyone: “What have I got on my shoulder?” “Nothing,” most people said, and hurried on. Only one old woman, whose karma had been slightly purified, answered: “You’ve got the rotting corpse of an old dog on your shoulder, that’s all.” Asanga at last understood the boundless power of compassion that had purified and transformed his karma, and so made him a vessel fit to receive the vision and instruction of Maitreya. Then the Buddha Maitreya, whose name means “loving kindness,” took Asanga to a heavenly realm, and there gave him any sublime teachings that are among the most important in the whole of Buddhism.”

Reflections on Chapter I, Verse 28 of Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*

by Marcia Lussier

—Those desiring to escape from suffering hasten right toward suffering. With the very desire for happiness, out of delusion they destroy their own happiness as if it were an enemy.

While explicating this verse, Rinpoche used the analogy of a moth drawn into a flame out of the desire for light. Aptly, The Three Poisons : anger, ignorance, and attachment are also sometimes referred to as “the three fires” because, as Hsing Yun states in his book *Being Good: Buddhist Ethics for Everyday Life*, “they make our minds burn and rage with ignorance like a fire out of control” (31). When we misunderstand the meaning of true happiness we exist in a delusional state; before we know it the three fires expand into the six passions of hatred, greed, ignorance, desirous attachment, jealousy, and pride.

Kalu Rinpoche, in *Luminous Mind, The Way of the Buddha*, writes that we humans “suffer from not getting what we want and not being able to keep what we have” (83). We live in a time of particularly excessive greed and ego-centrism. According to Kalu Rinpoche, “it is now so important that we recognize the harmfulness of desires for, and attachment to, material possessions and passions” (83). If we fail to recognize the harmfulness of these desires and mistake them for happiness, the cost will be, as in Shantideva's verse, the destruction of our true inner happiness .

The only way to avoid endlessly being burned up by the flames of deluded thought is to give the concept of impermanence the pre-eminent place in our minds. If we fail to do this we will become like the man in a tale related by Kalu Rinpoche called Dawa Drakpa's Father:

A poor man one day found an enormous sack of barley. Thrilled at having found it, he tied the

sack to the ceiling above his bed in order to protect it, then lay down and dreamt that he could sell the barley and make a lot of money, which would allow him to find a wife and have a family. He told himself that he would surely have a son and wondered what to name him. At that moment a ray of moonlight entered his room and he thought, "I'll name him Dawa Drakpa." While he was caught up in these fantasies, some mice bit through the cord that held the sack of barley, which fell on the man and killed him (200).

In this story we can see how following a deluded notion of reality not only destroys happiness, but can also squander the precious opportunity for human existence.

All delusions are like that of Dawa Drakpa's father. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, in *Eight Steps to Happiness; The Buddhist Way of Loving Kindness*, explains that delusions "project onto the world their own distorted version of reality and then relate to this projection as if it were true"(5). We can only live in a state of confusion, frustration, and disappointment when we grasp onto something that has no inherent reality. Is there a way out of this type of suffering? Here is the gift the Buddha offers us in *The Sutra of the Bequeathed Teaching*:

People with many desires are always looking for gain and thus they suffer and have many troubles. People with few desires feel no need to lust after things and thus they are peaceful and free of many troubles (Gyatso 37).

Works Cited

Gyatso, Geshe Kelsang. Eight Steps to Happiness; The Buddhist Way of Loving Kindness.

London: Tharpa, 2000.

Kalu Rinpoche. Luminous Mind ; The Way of the Buddha

Boston: Wisdom, 1997.

Yun, Master Hsing. Being Good ; Buddhist Ethics for Everyday Life.

New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1998.