

TEACHING ON THE medicine buddha

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Buddha Shakyamuni gave the Medicine Buddha teachings at the perfect moment and at the perfect place – Vaishali, India. As he meditated on healing, he emanated light toward the eastern direction, and streams of light returned to him from an eastern pure land. All who had gathered for the teaching began to see the eight Medicine Buddhas visible in the sky above them. At that moment, Buddha Shakyamuni presented the teaching that would be preserved as the Sutra of the Medicine Buddha. This teaching became very prominent in India and came to Tibet in the eighth century. Master Shantarakshita, who was known for the beautiful praises and sadhanas that he composed for all the Medicine Buddhas, first introduced the Medicine Buddha teaching in Tibet. His teachings on the Medicine Buddha have been passed down in an unbroken lineage. The Medicine Buddha practices are important in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

According to the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni in the Sutra of the Medicine Buddha, the Medicine Buddha is a presently living buddha who embodies the healing energy of the buddhas. He possesses the power to pacify all physical, mental, and emotional obscurations. In his pure land in the eastern quadrant of this universe, known as “Pleasing Upon Seeing” or “Lovely To Behold” (*men do* in Tibetan), the Medicine Buddha continually turns the Wheel of Dharma, healing beings in all universes and giving teachings on all levels, especially the Mahayana. The whole realm of his pure land is a repository of medicines that heal all kinds of illness by balancing the elements of earth, air, fire, water, and space.

According to Buddha Shakyamuni’s teachings, there are seven other emanations of the Medicine Buddha, each with his own color and pure land. Sangye Menla, the Medicine Buddha we are discussing here, is blue and dwells in Pleasing Upon Seeing. These various Medicine Buddha emanations are of various colors, such as gold, yellow, pink, red, and blue. They dwell in pure lands with names such as Undefeatable, Filled with Jewels, and Having No Suffering. The Eighth Medicine Buddha, who is gold in color, is Buddha Shakyamuni and his pure land, called “Inseparable,” is this world.

Countless pure lands exist, extending in all directions. Pure lands are not spontaneously occurring phenomena; rather, they are the direct result of the aspirations and work of bodhisattvas. These great beings who are on the path to buddhahood seek the best way to benefit beings. Bodhisattvas aspire to generate pure lands as a form of compassionate action; purified universes become havens that the bodhisattvas dedicate to the cultivation of the spiritual abilities of advanced beings. Eventually, bodhisattvas are able to refine the samsaric nature of a chosen universe to that

of the perfection of the pure-land state. Such an action greatly increases bodhichitta in this and all universes.

The Medicine Buddha provides his pure land for advanced beings who aspire to take rebirth in order to heal and benefit beings caught in samsara. Highly advanced beings and bodhisattvas seek out his pure land in order to reach final enlightenment through prayer and spiritual practice. Through the intent and power of practice, a universe becomes saturated with the blessings of the buddhas. Gross and impure elements are purified by the presence of a bodhisattva.

At some point in the distant past, the Medicine Buddha was a human being like us. Destined for buddhahood, his bodhichitta nature grew over the course of countless lifetimes, thus creating a mind so vast that he easily gained knowledge of an infinite number of universes. At some point in time, the Medicine Buddha's awareness touched upon a universe whose transformation to pure land status would benefit great numbers of beings. He then worked tirelessly toward his goal of purifying that universe. The Medicine Buddha's aspiration to emanate a pure land of healing was fulfilled simultaneously with his final attainment of the state of a living buddha.

At some point in the process of becoming a buddha, a bodhisattva will define the avenues by which he or she will most directly and effectively benefit sentient beings. These clear aspirations arise from bodhichitta. In this way, countless types of pure lands come into existence for all types of beings, meeting the infinite diversity of their needs. As a form of skillful means arising out of bodhichitta, advanced beings and bodhisattvas are able to seek rebirth in a universe that will provide specific types of benefits.

While still a bodhisattva, the Medicine Buddha likewise proclaimed a set of twelve aspirations that defined the specific ways in which he sought to benefit beings. He announced them to the infinite field of buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout space. In addition, he vowed that he would defer his transition to buddhahood until the day he had completed the purification and perfection of the pure land, *Lovely To Behold*.

Declaring a series of twelve vows, he described the bodhichitta practices that would shape the course of his journey through the ten bhumis of the bodhisattva path. He chose these attributes to be the objects of his prayers and practices. Ultimately, the Medicine Buddha's commitments have the force of truth. They are a distillation of his bodhisattva path. We can have full confidence in them.



A hillside at Padma Samye Ling, viewed through stained glass at the Medicine Buddha temple.

The Twelve Aspirations of the Medicine Buddha

1 In my pure land, may all beings exhibit the 32 major marks and the 80 minor marks of a buddha. If this does not come to pass, may I not reach enlightenment.

2 May all sentient beings born in my pure land radiate glowing light – a light that dispels all dwelling in dark- ness. If this does not come to pass, may I not reach enlightenment.

3 Whoever is born in that pure land, may they always enjoy material abundance and be free of all worldly concerns. If this does not come to pass, may I not reach enlightenment.

4 May the beings in that pure land possess a stable vision of the pure view. If this does not come to pass, may I not reach enlightenment.

5 May those born in my pure land pay utmost attention to the purity of their conduct. May the results of negative karma due to previous actions be deferred to the time of most benefit to spiritual growth. If this does not come to pass, may I not reach enlightenment.

6 May they all emanate health and growth in body and mind. May they be relieved of any discomfort or disorder that hinders spiritual growth. If this does not come to pass, may I not reach enlightenment.

7 May my name become a mantra that heals all ailments. May the sound of my name and the image of my nirmanakaya be a balm that eases all pain. May the sound of my name or visualization of my image cure physical troubles and sickness. If this does not come to pass, may I not reach enlightenment.

8 May those who wish to change gender have that wish be fulfilled. May that choice lead directly to enlightenment. If this does not come to pass, may I not reach enlightenment.

9 May those who hold wrong views or beliefs regarding dharma immediately develop right view when they hear my name. As a result, may they engage in bodhisattva activities. If this does not come to pass, may I not reach enlightenment.

10 May those who live in fear and are easily controlled, who feel threatened with incarceration and punishment, leave behind their fears of catastrophe. If this does not come to pass, may I not reach enlightenment.

11 May those whose subsistence has depended on predation and the killing of other beings have all their material needs met upon hearing my name. May their freedom result in the recognition of their innate bodhisattva nature. If this does not come to pass, may I not reach enlightenment.

12 Upon hearing my name, may those who suffer from any kind of hunger, thirst, or cold have all their needs provided for. May their food, drink, and clothing free them from mundane concerns so that they may begin to benefit others. If this does not come to pass, may I not reach enlightenment.

After the great Medicine Buddha made these bodhisattva vows, he kept these promises throughout all his lifetimes as a bodhisattva. When we practice the Medicine Buddha, we should remember these commitments and aspire to do the same, for the sake of all living beings. If we do this with love, compassion, and bodhichitta, it will benefit us and all other living beings. ■

The Khenpo Rinpoches gave this Medicine Buddha teaching on May 24-26, 2003, at Padma Samye Ling.