
The Middle Length Lamrim

ལྷན་ཁུངས་འབྲིང་གི་བྱང་ལེན་ལྷོ་བའི་རིམ་པ།

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3 March 2020

As usual we'll begin with the meditation. [*Tonglen meditation*]

Just as we've done here, it's very beneficial to continue meditation practice in your day-to-day life.

Normally, we don't recognise the states of mind within us that make us unhappy. However, if we observe such a state of mind when it arises, we can recognise it as the immediate cause of our unhappiness. Then we can see how, by getting rid of that state of mind, we can get rid of our unhappiness; this is all it takes to get rid of our unhappiness.

Now, to get rid of that unhappy state of mind we need to recognise its causes and conditions and apply an appropriate remedy. First, we need to closely observe as it arises. As we do this, we can see that it arises due to a certain object or a thought with which our mind engages.

Each state of mind arises in dependence upon its object, and the type of mind that arises indicates the relationship between the mind and its respective object. So, an unhappy state of mind can't arise without its object. Hence, from one perspective, all we need to do to get rid of any unhappy mind is to simply forget about the object the mind is preoccupied with. It sounds simple, doesn't it? Anyway, at least we are getting a better understanding of our mind.

Meditation practice is a means of training or subduing our mind. Through meditation, we habituate our mind to abide in a positive object, which enhances the peace and happiness in our mind while overcoming the unhappiness and chaos.

Meditation practice allows us to be aware of, and to recognise the train of thoughts that arise within us. We generate many different thoughts, but normally we don't observe them, nor do we try to control them. As we said before, if we check, we will notice that these conceptual thoughts arise due to their contact with various objects or events. These objects serve as immediate causes and conditions. So, to prevent such unwanted thoughts from arising, we need to prevent our mind from venturing after the respective objects of those thoughts. By doing this, we can definitely put a halt to such unwanted thoughts, at least temporarily.

When we can engage in meditation practice – where we make a deliberate effort to stop the mind from going after a particular object, and instead try to fix it on whatever object we have chosen for the meditation practice – we can prevent unwanted thoughts from arising. If we can practise such meditation for even one or two minutes, we will see the effect on our mind, in terms of reducing the influence of an unwanted thought on our mind.

We can apply meditation practice to overcoming anger. Anger arises when our mind is preoccupied with a certain thought or object. When we talk about subduing or changing our mind, from one perspective it's simple, in the sense that we don't have to do anything, but just disengage our mind from the object serving as the cause or condition for that unwanted thought. We must remember that if we

can overcome this unwanted, negative state of mind, we will feel much better – our mind will be much clearer, and we will even feel a sense of cleansing or purifying our continuum.

Meditation practice benefits us, not only in terms of overcoming the disturbed states of mind that bring us mental unhappiness, but also in enhancing our physical health and comfort.

Let me illustrate this point. Think about two people: one is suffering from a painful physical disease, and the other one doesn't have any physical illness, but suffers mentally because of uncontrolled anger. If they both engage in meditation to overcome their suffering and pain, they can both benefit from the practice.

The person who doesn't have a physical illness but is prone to anger can, for example, eliminate anger by meditating on and developing loving-kindness. When the anger is eliminated, he or she can truly find peace and happiness and no longer have to suffer as before.

While meditation practice will not immediately relieve the person with the physical problems from their pain nor cure their illness, he or she will still find meditation practice very helpful. People who experience aches and pains because of physical illness also go through tremendous mental and emotional pain and suffering, such as fear, anxiety, and depression. So, even if meditation practice didn't reduce their physical pain or cure the disease, they would appreciate or see the benefit of meditation, in terms of reducing their negative view of their situation and thereby reducing their mental suffering.

If people who suffer from a physical illness are not careful then, on top of that illness, they can also become over-anxious about their disease, worrying they will die, or they may end up like this or that. When this anxiety persists, it can cause severe mental problems, such as fear, stress and tension.

Take, for example, someone who suffers from a serious eye disease. In addition to the pain associated with the disease, the person may go through an emotional crisis through not being able to cope with the worry about going blind, thinking, 'If I go blind, I won't be able to see and walk by myself, I won't be able to do this or that.' So, the person may suffer more on the mental level than on the physical level.

Perhaps it is difficult for people who have not experienced such a disease to fully understand the impact it can have on their life. The fact of the matter is that when people suffer a severe health problem, not only do they have to deal with whatever illness they have, but they often also undergo a great deal of emotional and mental suffering.

We should never think we won't end up like others who are suffering life-threatening or chronic physical illness. If you recall, we have learned about something called in Tibetan *ne ngan.len* – *ne* means place, *ngan* means bad, *len* means taking or bringing – 'something that brings badness'. We all have the *ne ngan.len* of suffering. It is said that *ne ngan.len* serves as the basis of our present suffering, as well as the basis of our future suffering.

EXPLANATION OF HOW TO ASSUME THE MIND GENERATION BY MEANS OF A RITUAL

Getting back to the commentary on the lamrim teaching, we are talking about how we generate the bodhicitta mind through a ritual. To generate the bodhicitta mind, we say the

prayer: 'For the sake of all mother sentient beings, I generate the altruistic mind of enlightenment.' In Tibet, people say this prayer every day. Even Tibetan nomads say, 'For the sake of all mother sentient beings ...' frequently.

Now the question is, why do we call all other sentient beings our mother when they are not? The reason we use the word mother in relation to all other sentient beings is because they're like our actual mothers, in that they've been kind to us in the past. So, we can call them our mothers.

When we think of our current mother, we feel deep appreciation for her unconditional love and support for us. Similarly, if we reflect on the kindness of all other sentient beings towards us, we can also feel the same sense of gratitude, appreciation and loving kindness towards all of them. All other sentient beings are like our current mother, because we have received a similar amount of love and support from them.

We hear of people who are taken care of by their step-parents, saying, for example, that while their stepfather is not their biological father, he is truly like their real father. They feel that way because of their appreciation of the loving affection and support they have received from him. For the same reason, some people feel the same way about their stepmother – or stepbrother or stepsister – seeing them as being their actual mother, and so forth, because of the love, kindness and support they receive from them.

Some people even say they feel closer to their stepparents or stepbrothers and sisters than they feel towards their biological parents or brothers and sisters. That is because they remember the kindness and support of their stepparents, and so forth.

This example supports what we are talking about here – how, through training our mind with the meditation on remembering the kindness of all other sentient beings, it is possible to recognise and see all other sentient beings as our own mother. All other sentient beings don't have to be our actual mother right now in order for us to feel that they are as kind as our mother.

We are up to the following section of the text:

2B4B-2B3B-2C1C. How: the ritual by which it is taken

1. The preparatory ritual
2. The actual ritual
3. The concluding ritual

The third has three points: the preparatory ritual, the actual ritual, and the concluding ritual.

2B4B-2B3B-2C1C-1. The preparatory ritual

This is elaborated under three sub-headings:

- A. Special going for refuge
- B. Accumulating the accumulations
- C. Training in the attitude

The first has three points: special going for refuge, accumulating the accumulations, and training in the attitude.

The text talks here about a *special going for refuge*, which can mean refuge practice conjoined with, or within, the force of bodhicitta – that can sometimes be what this special going for refuge refers to. Here, however, the reference is more directly to the uncommon Mahayana refuge – to achieve supreme enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and for this purpose, one goes for refuge.

The text continues:

2B4B-2B3B-2C1C-1A. Special going for refuge

1. Decorating the place, displaying representations, and setting up offering substances
2. Making a request and going for refuge
3. Stating the trainings of having gone for refuge

This section comprises three parts: *decorating the place, displaying representations, and setting up offering substances*. This can be explained in terms of the things to be done by the lama and by the disciples.

2B4B-2B3B-2C1C-1A1. Decorating the place, displaying representations, and setting up offering substances

A. General indications concerning the place, the representations, offerings, and so forth

First: Clean an isolated place, smear it with the five cow substances, anoint it with exquisite perfumed water such as sandalwood water, and scatter fragrant flowers. Set out representations of the Three Jewels—metal statues and so forth, texts and so forth, and images of bodhisattvas—on a throne, a table, or a raised platform. Do the preparatory ritual with as valuable offering items such as canopies and flowers as possible, as well as music, food, and so forth. Arrange a throne for the virtuous friend and also adorn it with flowers. You accumulate the accumulation of merit by paying respect to the former masters, the Saṅgha, and giving an offering cake to the elemental spirits.

When it says *first: clean an isolated place*, the word *isolated* implies a place we might find if we were undergoing a retreat or some spiritual practice.

Then, *smear it with the five cow substances* – here, in the English translation, there is a footnote reading: *These are products of a cow that has lived in remote mountain areas for a certain period of time feeding only on the pure grass and herbs of such places. (Oral explanation by Geshe Thubten Soepa)*. The type of cow referred to here is red in colour. In Tibet, this specific type of cow only grazes in the mountains, where medicinal herbs and grass grow, so this cow only grazes on those medicinal herbs and grass.

The *five cow substances* are related to the cow are urine, manure, yoghurt, butter and milk.

As you learned under the topic of calm abiding, when the text says *isolated place*, the word *isolated* should not necessarily be taken to mean a place where we pursue meditation. It is wrong to think that we can't pursue a meditation practice or retreat unless we find such an isolated place. More importantly, the word *isolated* refers to one's own mind being isolated from, or free of, distracting thoughts, or at least having a minimum level of distracting thoughts.

Isolated can also refer to the physical body, in terms of staying away from social gatherings or the hustle and bustle of towns. So, more important than the physical location, we take the meaning of *isolated* here as referring to protecting one's own mind and body from the influence of distractions.

B. Clearing up doubts about this

If you do not have any offerings at all, as described in the *Sūtra of the Good Eon (Bhadrakalpikasūtra)* it can be accomplished even with cloth fringes. If you do have offerings, they should have been obtained through great effort without deceit and should be arrayed in such a way that your friends cannot help marveling.

The only thing we should note here is that it clearly says that it's not necessary to actually have the objects of offering,

but that if you do have offerings, they should be *obtained through great effort without deceit*.

With reference to the words *without deceit*, in the Tibetan version, it literally means that the offering substance should not be 'bent' or crooked. This can be taken to refer to the way you arrange offerings on the altar – they should look beautiful and in good order. Or, we can take the meaning of not being 'bent' in terms of how you have acquired the object being offered. It should not be bent in the sense it is not corrupted or acquired through deceitful means – for example, it is not appropriate to steal things in order to make offerings. It can also mean offerings should not be bent in terms of the motivation with which you make the offering; that should also not be bent or corrupted.

The text continues,

When the Elder was requested for the mind generation by Tibetan teachers in Mangyül and Samyé, ...

These are places in Tibet.

... he reportedly said that it did not arise through inferior offerings.

Thus, the mind generation, or bodhicitta, won't arise through inferior objects of offering.

The text continues,

He said that also as a representation a consecrated statue of the main master of the teachings was imperative, ...

As mentioned here, the objects of refuge that we arrange on the altar should include the main master of the teachings, such as an image of the Lord Buddha.

... and also as a text at least the *Verse Summary of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines (Prajñāpāramitāsañcayāgāthā)* should be used.

Now we will just read the text as it is quite self-explanatory.

C. The steps to be performed by the guru and student

Then, the assembly of āryas is invoked. The student, washed and well dressed, with his hands joined, is encouraged by the guru to generate clear faith in the excellent qualities of the merit field from the bottom of his heart. He should then slowly do the seven-limb practice, imagining that he is in front of the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The seven-limb practice is the seven-limb prayer, which we recite regularly.

2B4B-2B3B-2C1C-1A2. Making a request and going for refuge

- A. Making a request
- B. Special going for refuge

2B4B-2B3B-2C1C-1A2A. Making a request

Second: Then the student, having generated the perception of his guru as the Teacher, prostrates to him and makes offerings, including a mandala, to him. With his right knee on the floor, palms joined, he makes a request for the purpose of bodhicitta:

So here, the student *makes a request for the purpose of bodhicitta*. In Tibetan, the word request comprises two syllables, *sol.deb*. The *sol* means to request and *deb* means to offer.

Then it says,

Just as the tathāgata, arhat, perfectly complete buddhas, as well as the great bodhisattvas abiding on the great grounds, first generated the

mind of unsurpassed, perfectly complete enlightenment, likewise I, whose name is (...), request the master to generate the mind of unsurpassed, perfectly complete enlightenment.

Repeat this three times.

2B4B-2B3B-2C1C-1A2B. Special going for refuge

1. The attitude together with the objects
2. The words of the ritual

1. The attitude together with the objects

Then the student goes for refuge, ...

This gives some guidance on how you should go for refuge.

... with the behavior explained earlier, to the objects—the Buddha, the Dharma, that is the true paths that mainly bring about the cessations, and the Saṅgha, that is the irreversible ārya bodhisattvas, with the general attitude thinking: "From now until I achieve enlightenment, in order to protect all sentient beings, I go for refuge to the Buddha, the teacher of refuge; I go for refuge to the Dharma, the actual refuge; I go for refuge to the Saṅgha, who I ask to be my companions in practicing refuge"; and with the special attitude of making the strong aspiration: "I will never turn away from this attitude at any time."

Here, we see a summary of the objects in which we take refuge, the length of time for which we take refuge, for whose purpose we take refuge, and the cause for taking refuge. All these features of refuge practice can be explained in terms of both the common refuge, and the uncommon Mahayana refuge.

Of course, the Buddha refuge object is the same for both the common refuge and the uncommon Mahayana refuge. But, as explained here, the Dharma refuge object here refers specifically to the Mahayana Dharma – the true path and the true cessations of the Mahayana path. In terms of the Saṅgha, in the uncommon Mahayana refuge, Saṅgha refers to the ārya bodhisattvas, whereas in the common refuge, the Saṅgha don't have to be ārya bodhisattvas.

Then, in terms of the time for which you take refuge, in the common refuge practice, this can be just for the rest of one's life, for as long as you live; for that period, you pledge to take refuge in the Three Jewels. Whereas here, in the uncommon Mahayana refuge, the period is until you achieve the state of buddhahood.

For whose purpose do you take refuge? In the uncommon refuge, it is for the sake of all sentient beings. Then, as to the cause for taking refuge, here, in the Mahayana refuge, the cause is to benefit all sentient beings. So, while both fear and faith are the causes of going for refuge, here you primarily fear for and are concerned about all other sentient beings falling into suffering, not only oneself. So, in order to free oneself and all other sentient beings from suffering you faithfully and wholeheartedly take refuge in the Three Jewels.

You have already studied refuge practice in the past. As you know, you can understand the different refuge practices in the context of each of the three persons of the stages of the path.

In terms of the person of the small scope, their dissatisfaction or fear mainly relates to falling into a lower rebirth. For the person of the middle scope, their fear is of being reborn in this cyclic existence. But what motivates or drives the person of great scope to take refuge is to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

The last sentence, which I read before, is:

“I go for refuge to the Saṅgha, who I ask to be my companions in practicing refuge”; and with the special attitude of making the strong aspiration: “I will never turn away from this attitude at any time.”

I’m going to read out the words of the ritual for taking refuge. As it says, this statement is repeated three times.

You begin by calling the master. The text says master, which in Tibetan is called *lo.pon*. It is said that you call the master a *lo.pon* if you have a Dharma connection with them. But if there’s no such spiritual connection, then in Tibetan you call the master a *tsun.pa*. However, in the third and last recitation, you can use the word *lo.pon* for the master with whom you haven’t previously made any spiritual connection, such as not having received the holy teaching.

2. The words of the ritual

Master, please grant me your attention. I, whose name is (...), from now until I reach the essence of enlightenment, go for refuge to the best of humans, the blessed buddhas.

We have to bear in mind that when we take refuge and make this statement, ‘I go for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma ...’ and so forth, the main thing is to feel, from the depths of our heart, a sense of complete trust in each of the refuge objects. That is very important.

Master, please grant me your attention. I, whose name is (...), from now until I reach the essence of enlightenment, go for refuge to the best of Dharmas, the Dharma that is peace, free from attachment.

Master, please grant me your attention. I, whose name is (...), from now until I reach the essence of enlightenment, go for refuge to the best of assemblies, the Saṅgha of irreversible ārya bodhisattvas.

Repeat this three times. The request for attention when going for refuge to each of the Jewels and the unusual words of going for refuge to the Dharma accord with the ritual composed by the Elder.

2B4B-2B3B-2C1C-1A3. Stating the trainings of having gone for refuge

Third: Here too the master should mention the trainings that were explained before in the context of persons of small capacity.

So, the training or instructions relate to taking refuge in each of the three refuge objects. For example, there are positive instructions and three negative instructions with respect to taking refuge in each of the three refuge objects. There is also mention of common and uncommon instructions for refuge practice.

2B4B-2B3B-2C1C-1B. Accumulating the accumulations

We’ll leave it here for tonight.

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