
The Middle Length Lamrim

ལྷན་ཁུངས་འབྲིང་། རྒྱུ་སེམས་སྤྱོད་བའི་རིམ་པ།

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About meditation

We will begin with a short breathing meditation together. Choose a posture that is most convenient and relaxing for yourself. If possible, assume the posture which has the seven features of Vairochana Buddha. It is recommended that you sit on a cushion that is a bit higher at the back to support your buttocks. This helps to keep your back straight and the channels in your body straight.

We engage in meditation practice to subdue our minds. Why do we need to subdue our minds? Because our mind usually falls under the control and power of mental afflictions. Think about this - Lama Tsongkhapa has said that we are overpowered by our mind and our mind is overpowered by mental afflictions. As a result, we encounter the shortcomings arising from mental afflictions.

Although we may rely on an external object for our meditation practice, the actual object to which we should focus our mind is the mental image of the object that is in our mind. So, when we begin our meditation, we need to recognise that the actual object of meditation is whatever object comes to mind, and this object represents the external object, if we are using one. So, we focus our minds on the generic image of that external object. If we mentally focus on that generic image and remain on it, it means our mind is abiding within ourselves. We need to bring the mind as close as possible to that image, even to the point that the mind enters into that object and merges with it, and the mind and the object become one.

Discipline is essential

Meditating regularly would be very beneficial. You should put aside time for meditation on a regular basis and try to stick with that. We must have some discipline in our life - that is very important. In particular, we need to discipline our minds in order to better manage them. Without discipline in our life it can sometimes seem like time drags on, but we are still not getting anything done, which results in stress, anxiety and frustration. Whereas if we have good discipline, we have more control of our life and can manage our time better.

Our mind is usually crowded with a lot of wandering thoughts. If we always follow after these, we will become insane. For example, if we say out loud whatever is in our mind or whatever our mind wants us to say, people will think we have gone mad. However, we don't do that, at least not externally, so we don't appear to others as being insane, even though internally we really are mad or insane because of what our mind is thinking. Because our mind is lacking discipline and control, it is following all sorts of wild thoughts which make us feel like our life is going up and down. However, we can change our mind, subdue it and prevent it from being overpowered by wild thoughts.

Self-observation and decision

We have a choice of where our mind goes. To make the right choice we must observe our minds and apply discriminating

knowledge or wisdom. As we observe our mind, we will note the details of each state of mind and the emotions and impulses that arise from it. Using our wisdom knowledge, we should examine and assess it to determine whether to accept or reject it. For example, before opening our mouths we should check our mental impulse as to whether what we want to say is beneficial or not. If it is not beneficial, we should not be saying it. In this way, we discipline our mind, speech and body by utilising our own discriminating knowledge and wisdom and deciding what to do and what not to do. This is how we can effectively recognise, minimise and eliminate faults, and acquire or maximise the excellent qualities within us.

The most effective way to correct our faults and develop qualities is by working on ourselves. However, instead of recognising our faults and weakness by ourselves, if some other people, even if they are our close friends, point out our faults, we may get very angry and it is unlikely we will even acknowledge them. We don't like it when other people tell us what we ought to do.

When we recognise our faults by ourselves, we won't get angry, rather, will be motivated to correct them and put effort into developing qualities.

Buddha potential

In this way, we need to realise that it is our own responsibility to eliminate faults and cultivate qualities, as we are the recipients of the benefits of having abandoned faults and accomplishing qualities. We should never expect that another person will clean up our mess and enrich us with qualities. In a sense, the state of buddhahood is the ultimate perfection of ourselves, completely free of all faults and possessing all qualities. Dharma is the means or the path to achieve this.

The word Buddha or 'an awakened one' is *sang-gye* in Tibetan, where *sang* means free of all faults and *gye* means the development of all qualities. There is no sudden way to reach or leap to achieve the state of a buddha. Rather we reach there gradually by eliminating faults and increasing qualities, one by one.

If, through our own effort, we are able to remove one fault or increase one quality within our minds, this means we are a bit closer to the state of buddhahood. We can say that we are a Buddha or *sanggye* with respect to the elimination of that one fault and increasing that one quality that we have achieved. We all have a natural tendency to be free of faults and possess qualities, so we can come closer towards the state of a buddha. Not only that, all sentient beings have the potential to become a buddha.

This indicates that we all have a seat of a buddha which only we can sit on. It is not like the seat of the prime minister because all the candidates have to compete for it. So, I say that everyone has their own future seat of a buddha. To take that seat we must become a perfect being, a fully awakened one, by eliminating all faults, and cultivating all qualities, one by one, to the point that there are no more faults to eliminate and no more excellent qualities to achieve. When we pray, 'may I achieve the state of buddhahood', we are praying to actualise the full buddha potential within ourselves or to attain the status of a future buddha. This is not, however, the state of buddhahood of Buddha Shakyamuni or any other buddhas - which we cannot become anyway.

Dharma practice is the true refuge

In the end, it is up to us. If we wish to become a buddha, then we must create the causes to achieve buddhahood which is to engage in the practice of eliminating faults and cultivating qualities. If we are not interested or do not wish to achieve buddhahood, that is fine. But we all definitely want to find happiness. We all want to live a good and happy life. Otherwise, what is the purpose of our life? If we suffer now because we do not avoid the causes of suffering and do not create the causes of happiness, we will find no happiness but, rather, unending suffering in the future.

What then is the purpose of our life? The best way to make our life meaningful is through cultivating bodhicitta, love and compassion within us because this will bring happiness and peace in this life, and in the long run will enable us to achieve the highest goal of complete enlightenment or buddhahood. It is said that bodhicitta, love and compassion are very precious and rare, which is why we rarely see people who fully devote their lives to benefiting others. It is important that we recognise the benefits of bodhicitta in making our lives happy and meaningful so that we are inspired to cultivate it. Bodhicitta is the most beneficial mind that we can have for ourselves and for others.

It is evidently very clear that genuine happiness and peace are primarily based on the internal factor of a positive mental outlook, rather than external circumstances of life. There are many instances of people who are extremely wealthy, including billionaires, or those who are very successful externally but who are not happy and are confused about their lives.

Overcome attachment

In Dharma teachings, we learn that we have past and future lives, not just this life, and we learn about the importance of cultivating love and compassion for other beings. By contemplating and applying this knowledge to our lives, we will live more holistically, and find more insight, hope, courage and positive thinking in the face of difficult and challenging situations. When we are internally equipped with courage, a stable mind and positive thinking, external adversaries will not affect our internal peace and stability very much. For example, in the Dharma teachings, we discover that not only do we have to be concerned about the needs of this current life, but we also need to think about what will happen when we leave this life. As we think about this, we begin to have some idea about our journey to future lives. When considering the possibility of future lives, where will we go? There are only two possibilities: taking a happy rebirth or taking a bad rebirth. Since we do not want to take a bad rebirth, we need to find out what spiritual practices we can apply to prevent a bad rebirth.

The teachings relating to the path of the person of the small scope, such as the teachings on the ethical practice of refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions and taking refuge in the Three Jewels, can help us in preventing bad rebirths. More specifically, the Dharma Jewel is the actual refuge or protection from falling into bad rebirths. So, if we don't want to go to a bad rebirth, we must practise the Dharma for a happy rebirth.

With respect to taking a higher rebirth or status (in Tibetan *ngon-toe*), it is said that there is no other cause than morality. Even though we learn in the teachings that the Dharma Jewel refers to the inner realisation and the quality of the cessation within the continuum of an arya or superior being, for us it refers to our Dharma practice or qualities, such as our practice of refraining from the ten non-virtues. What is

important is that we practise Dharma so that, at the best, when we die, we die happily. If this is not possible, then dying without any regret. And even if this is not possible, at least dying without any fear.

When we engage in Dharma practice, it is important to understand that we are practising to benefit ourselves in life after life. Simply being concerned about this life is too narrow; we must aspire to achieve higher and more far-reaching goals. We must diminish attachment to this life in order to broaden our vision and achieve higher goals. By diminishing attachment, clinging and craving for material possessions, for example, we will find more satisfaction and more purpose in this life. A lot of worries, stress and problems that we have is caused by attachment. Because of strong attachment, people become so stingy that they won't use their wealth, even for themselves. Some people have enough wealth but to save it they don't eat properly and look pale and sick. And you hear in the news of some rich people committing suicide after they become bankrupt.

It is the attachment in the mind that is a cause of our unending problems, not necessarily the wealth itself. So, overcoming attachment does not mean that you must get rid of external objects, rather, you have to get rid of your attachment to them.

Dharma practice and its benefits

Dharma practice can be done according to individual levels, anywhere and anytime. If there are certain practices that we cannot possibly apply right now, we should practise them on a mental imaginary level. For example, whenever we eat, drink, rest or sleep and so on, the purpose is to achieve good health or make a good livelihood to pursue Dharma practice, so that the Dharma flourishes, and benefits other sentient beings. By integrating our daily activities into Dharma, we will accumulate a lot of merit and develop our habituation with Dharma practice. As we become habituated, the practice gets easier. How much interest and effort we have in the Dharma depends on our faith in the Dharma and recognition of the benefits of the Dharma.

It is true that when we are in despair, for example, facing our death, everything fails us. However much wealth, glory and friends we possess, they fail us; even our body fails us. At that time the only thing that can benefit us is the Dharma because through it we will have hope and spirit. Dharma helps us to cultivate positive and virtuous states of mind, the effect of which culminates in inner peace and happiness. When we understand that, we can really appreciate the benefit of Dharma practice and will then be motivated to apply Dharma practice to our life.

Also, we can find that the Dharma is an effective and handy tool to solve the various problems that we face in our life, in particular at the point of death, which we all have to face – then the Dharma is the only thing that can benefit us.

I know the benefits of Dharma from my own experience and also from the many people who have shared their positive experiences of Dharma practice with me. That's why I talk about the benefits of Dharma. I never tell people to become Buddhist. I am also not into criticising other faiths or discouraging people from following their ancestral religions. I can't do that because I lack an understanding of other religions. I think it is important that people stick to their traditional religions.

I know a woman who came to the centre when she was around sixty-five and since that time she followed Buddhist

practice and meditation. She passed away recently at the age of ninety-seven. She had a very peaceful death. Her son wrote to me to say thank you and acknowledged the benefit of the Dharma for his mum, especially in going through the death process. Her son is not a Buddhist, so to hear from him about the benefits of the Dharma is very inspiring. What is important is that we must put the Dharma into practice. If we practice it, we will reap the benefits of the Dharma.

There was a man who used to see me quite often. He was not a Buddhist. He sought my advice and I told him to just try to keep his mind inside; if it goes out, bring it back. I advised him that he would find the best support and friend within himself. He really liked that and began to practise as I had advised. Later he passed away and his friend passed on a message to me to say he passed away peacefully.

What's important is to put the Dharma into practice, especially as we consider ourselves to be Buddhists; if we have faith in Lord Buddha, we must practise the Buddha Dharma. This practice is to habituate ourselves with virtue, such as bringing our mind inwards and remembering the Buddha's qualities; this is very beneficial. We can be assured that cultivating such virtue will prevent bad rebirths.

As I said before, we must also invest in Dharma practice to benefit us in our future life. We all wish to take a good rebirth such as a human being, and the cause for that is engaging in the practice of morality. It is not enough to simply be reborn as a human being as we also need to have good living conditions, such as sufficient wealth in that life. For the cause of finding good conditions, we need to engage in the practice of generosity. If we do not have actual objects to give to others, we can still practise generosity mentally by cultivating and developing the thought of giving.

Furthermore, if we want our rebirth to have a beautiful appearance so that we can easily find many partners, the cause for that is engaging in the practice of patience. If we wish to have a peaceful and subdued mind in the future life, the cause is engaging in meditation practice in this life. And to have an intelligent and sharp mind, the cause is engaging in analytical meditation.

In short, our Dharma practice is to have a good heart and show kindness to others and to engage in the six perfections of giving, morality, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom as much as possible.

Remind yourselves all the time to never harm others. Think that just as we do not want to receive harm and suffering from others but want to receive only happiness and benefit, all other beings are exactly the same. Every single being is the same; they are looking for something that benefits and doesn't harm, and happiness, not suffering. In this regard, just like you, all others are the same. With this in mind, we should try to live our life to benefit others and prevent harm to others. As a result, other beings around us will naturally like us and admire us as a good person and want to be our friend. In this way, we can see how the Dharma practice that we do in our life brings joy and happiness in this life.

We have not attained the actual six perfections such as the perfection of giving, morality and so forth, but we can engage in practices that represent the actual six perfections. For example, we can engage in the practice of the perfection of the morality of refraining from the ten non-virtues. Of the ten non-virtues, the Buddha taught the morality of refraining from killing first, to indicate not harming others or non-violence as the principal teaching of Lord Buddha. In this way, it is said that you must apply morality as the foundation

or the base, and then incorporate the other perfections as a supporting cause to find an excellent human rebirth.

Our ultimate spiritual goal, the state of buddhahood, is too far away from us to realise at the moment, so it is important that whatever we practise brings joy to our mind and benefits us now. Dharma practice enables us to habituate ourselves with virtue and ensure that we enjoy the practice.

As I have said before, as our short-term goal, through our practice we create all the necessary causes to find another good human life because we need to depend on a string of good future rebirths before we reach our ultimate goal. This current life is very short, however by depending on it we create a cause to find another human life. In a way, we rely on good rebirths to progressively acquaint ourselves with spiritual practice. That's how we can see the possibility of reaching the ultimate goal of the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings.

We will stop here and have tea together. Having tea with other friends is a good thing. But we must remember that we have this good opportunity as a result of virtues we have accumulated in the past. At the same time, this situation should remind and motivate us to do more Dharma practice. If we find happiness, that is the result of our virtue.

Therefore, this should inspire us to create the cause for the same in the future. If you encounter some hardship, recognise that this is the result of one's non-virtues, therefore, see that as a lesson on how to minimise the accumulation of non-virtues.

In this way, we can see every experience and occurrence in our life as cause and effect, especially if we understand this cause and effect from the Buddhist point of view of the law of karma. We can utilise all our experiences, all that occurs in our lives as a means for our mental development or Dharma practice.

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