
The Middle Length Lamrim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Make sure your motivation for listening to the teaching is to extend benefit and happiness to all other sentient beings. It's really important to check one's mind because all our verbal and bodily actions are driven by our mind. Mind predetermines the quality and effectiveness of physical actions we express through body and speech.

If we observe our mind we recognise that we generate two types of minds. One type of mind is beneficial and brings satisfaction and happiness. The other type of mind or pattern of mind is harmful and brings problems and suffering.

Likewise, we can also observe how our physical actions of speech or body can be beneficial or harmful. Of the actions of body, speech and mind, the action of mind is more encompassing because mind always goes with us. Besides, whether we are happy or unhappy primarily depends upon what we experience on the mental level. So, it is very important to understand the mind and get it right.

Based on the results of the actions of body, speech, and mind, actions become beneficial or harmful, right or wrong. Hence, we gain an idea and knowledge of what we should do and should not do in terms of the conduct of our body, speech, and mind. We can easily understand all this because we have unique intelligence and a sense of discrimination as human beings.

THE METHOD FOR RESTORING IT IF IT HAS BEEN DEGENERATED

Third: If you transgress the trainings, except for the two transgressions of giving up the aspiring mind and mentally giving up sentient beings, as long as you do not have bodhisattva vows, there is no infraction from the point of view of a bodhisattva. However, since it transgresses the trainings of the promise of intermediate virtue, it becomes faulty conduct and therefore should be confessed by means of the four powers.

The four powers refer to **the four powers of antidote** to purify karmic sins or negativities. We have accumulated bad karma and negativities not only in this current life but also since beginningless time. These negativities will result in suffering unless we purify them. We have to recognise the immeasurable amount of negativity that we could have accumulated; for example, how much negativity would we accumulate even in one life time if we were born as a tiger or leopard which lives on meat by killing other animals.

Since there is no beginning to our life, the number of times we have taken a life which survives on killing other beings would be countless. In this way we have to

recognise the fact that we have accumulated a great number of negativities and think of purifying them or else we will have to suffer endlessly.

The first power of antidote, which is **the power of the object or the base**, is to prevent the ripening result of these negativities propelling us into lower rebirths. If we sincerely realise the ripening result of all our negative karmas, it would give us a sense of dread and fright and make us look for a remedy. The remedy is applying the power of the base by the taking refuge in Three Jewels and generating bodhicitta.

The word 'base' refers to the main base or the object through which we accumulate bad karma or virtuous merit. This is either the higher object like the Buddha or the lower object like a sentient being. **Taking refuge in the Three Jewels** means from the depth of our heart having full faith in the Three Jewels to liberate and protect us and completely entrusting ourselves to them.

So, there are two causes or elements for taking refuge. The first is the fear of being subject to the suffering of samsara in general and the lower realm in particular. The next is the faith we have in the Three Jewels to be liberated and protected from suffering. By cultivating these two causes by thinking on the suffering that results from our karma and mental defilements, and the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels, we will take refuge in Three Jewels properly, and by having love and compassion for all other beings, we will generate bodhicitta.

Everyone recognises bad karma, sins or negativities as something undesirable in the sense of bringing bad results, and hence, nobody likes it. All the major religions talk about sins as the cause of suffering and present ways to purify them. For example, Christianity teaches about purifying sins. In this gumpa, which used to belong to a Catholic centre, in the far-left corner is a confession room. Christians believe the practice of confession is important to purify sins in order to prevent falling into hell realms.

As for the types of karmic sins or negative actions, the main ones are included within the ten non-virtues. We should put effort into abandoning these ten which are not that difficult to recognise and consequently abandon. Knowingly and unknowingly every day we accumulate a lot of non-virtues throughout this life and if we consider how many non-virtues we would have accumulated in our past lives, we will guess the size of karmic sins or negativities we have accumulated are unmeasurable.

Thinking about the accumulation of karmic sins and their results orients and leads us to taking refuge in the Three Jewels. For example, when you realise that you are sick, you seek help from a doctor and take the doctor's advice seriously in terms of taking the medication correctly and in a timely manner. Taking the right medicine and the right dosage at the right time as prescribed by the doctor is the key to one's recovery. So, one would follow through with the instructions.

Some medicines are even kept in a locked room and administered only by the nurse to prevent any

medication errors. In a similar fashion, we must follow through the practice of taking refuge and other practices as instructed in the Dharma teachings to purify negativities and recover from the devastation of karma and delusion.

The second power of antidote is called **the power of applying the antidote**, which is to engage in virtue with an intention to purify karmic sins or negativities. However, some say that any virtues we engage in serve as the power of applying the antidote in the sense that they help purify us and result in bringing wealth, long life and merit.

The third one is **the power of regret**, which is sincerely regretting or feeling remorse in all the negativities which we have accumulated because they will result in suffering, which we do not want. The benefit of generating the power of regret is to prevent the negativities from increasing by preventing us from repeating the negativities such as killing, and thus motivating us to engage in virtues or positive actions. There is also the benefit of being born in a favourable environment in the future.

The fourth power of antidote is called **the power of resolution or promise** which means affirming to ourselves not to engage in non-virtue again. The main benefit of this is to prevent the thought of committing non-virtues again or preventing the habitual result of non-virtues from arising.

When we say the four powers of antidote are a means to **purify karmic sins**, we are talking about preventing the karmic sins from yielding their results, but not necessarily uprooting karmic sins, because this requires the dispelling of ignorance through the realisation of selflessness. Since the non-virtues that we accumulate result in a great deal of suffering for us, we cannot afford to just leave them; we must purify them. It is said that karmic sins have no good qualities; the only good thing is they can be purified. If we purify a non-virtue, we will gain the benefit, while if we commit a non-virtue we receive harm contrary to the benefit.

For example, if we purify the non-virtue of killing other beings, we will receive the benefit of living longer and having more happiness. Whereas on the contrary, if we kill other beings, we will live a shorter life and find more suffering as the result of shortening other beings' lives and causing them pain and suffering.

Similarly, refraining from stealing results in prosperity and wealth for us in the future. Whereas on the contrary, stealing will result in poverty or not having the fortune to enjoy the wealth we have, as we have done the same to others.

Lying to others, such as deceiving others and causing them problems, results in something similar coming back to us. By abandoning lying, we will gain the trust of other beings in our speech and they will be honest with us in the future.

Abandoning sexual misconduct is a cause to meet good friends and enjoy harmonious relationships with them in

the future. We should not only think about it but translate our thinking into believing with conviction in the truth of the cause and effect of virtues and non-virtues until it becomes clear to us what to do and what not to do and live our life accordingly.

If possible, each day when we go to bed, we should mentally review our daily activities. If we have any negativity, like lying to others and so on, we should feel remorse and say to ourselves that we won't do it again and purify it. If we have done any good things we should feel good and rejoice in it.

There are numbers of purification practices that we can do, such as taking a self-initiation, which has a built-in purification practice, and reciting the confession prayer of the 35 Buddhas. There is a tremendous benefit even simply saying each name of the 35 Buddhas. If you understand the meaning of the prayers, then as you think of the meaning, your recitation becomes more meaningful and beneficial. The 35 Buddhas confession prayer includes all the four powers of antidote.

Now we continue with the lamrim text.

HOW TO TRAIN IN THE CONDUCT HAVING GENERATED THE MIND

Having generated the mind, how to train in the conduct

There are three points. The first is:

The reason it is necessary to train in the precepts after generating bodhicitta

Under the first heading, *the reason why it is necessary to train in the training, having generated the mind* we understand that we must apply the teaching into practice. For example, having generated the mind is not enough, we must also engage in all the practices, for example all the precepts relating to bodhicitta mind. Without practice we cannot achieve the state of buddhahood. So, it says the third has three points.

1. The reason why it is necessary to train in the trainings, having generated the mind;
2. demonstration that Buddhahood is not achieved by training in method or wisdom alone;
3. and explanation of the actual stages of training in the trainings.

The text continues:

Buddhahood is not achieved without accomplishing the trainings.

Even if you do not train in the trainings of generosity and so forth after generating aspiring bodhicitta in this manner, it will still be of great benefit according to the above scriptural passage from the *Life of Maitreya*. However, if you do not make the bodhisattva trainings your essential practice, it will be impossible to become a buddha. Therefore you should train in the conduct.

In the *King of Concentrations Sūtra* it says:

One should make it the essential practice. Why? Because, oh youthful one, for one who makes it his essential practice it will not be difficult to obtain unsurpassed perfectly complete enlightenment.

First of all taming oneself because one will not tame others without taming oneself.

As Kamalaśīla says in *Stages of Meditation I*: [195]

A bodhisattva who has generated the mind understands that he cannot tame others without taming himself and thoroughly applies himself to the practice of generosity and so forth. Without the practice he cannot achieve enlightenment.

Here, the text touches on the very important aspect of the bodhisattva's practice which is not only to generate the bodhicitta mind but apply bodhicitta spirit in practice by engaging in, for example, the six perfection deeds: giving, moral ethics, patience and so forth. All these are to benefit others. The practice of giving is to benefit others. In order for the bodhisattva's deeds to be effective, to benefit others then bodhisattvas themselves practice what they teach to others. They engage in all these practices.

As said here, the goal is to help others in subduing or taming their mind but to be effective in this way to help others, bodhisattvas have to make sure that they have tamed or subdued their mind as well. Not only on the level of the bodhisattva practice, in our ordinary life if we want to inspire others to do certain things, we can only inspire them if we also believe it and do what we tell others to do.

If one is not in the habit of giving or is not generous, advising others to practice generosity will only lead to them laughing at you instead of listening. As with anything, to truly benefit others, whether through speech or action, we must be honest and live up to what we say. Through speech, we can benefit others by offering advice, but for it to be effective, we must practice what we preach. Similarly, we can benefit others through our body language. For this to be effective, it must be genuinely and sincerely pleasant and likable, so it becomes truly beneficial.

In the past, for ordained individuals, such as monks or nuns, the practice of giving primarily emphasised offering Dharma teachings because their livelihood depended on receiving offerings from others. For the ordained, the giving of Dharma was especially emphasised. In contrast, for lay practitioners, there are instances where a bodhisattva manifests as a king and engages in the great practice of giving material wealth to others. In this way, the emphasis lies on the importance of putting all these teachings into practice ourselves if we wish to help others control their minds or become more compassionate and patient. We must first embody these values in our own practice.

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