
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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As usual let us spend some time on our meditation practice. [*Tong-len meditation*]

Now we can generate a positive motivation based on the bodhicitta intention, such as, 'in order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will engage in the practice of listening to the Mahayana teachings with the intention of putting them into practice well'.

As I've explained previously, when one's motivation is based on the altruistic intention to achieve enlightenment, this then becomes the most positive state of mind for doing the practice. And since we have already meditated on the *tong-len* (giving and taking) practice, it should be now very easy for us to generate the bodhicitta motivation.

The *tong-len* practice is actually the basis for developing superior intention. While superior intention is not explicitly mentioned in the technique of exchanging self with other, it is actually a key part of it. Superior intention develops naturally during the meditation, because when one engages in the *tong-len* practice, willingly taking on others' suffering and developing a strong intention to give one's own happiness to others', this encompasses the superior intention by taking on the responsibility to free others from suffering and endow them with happiness. In this way, the practice itself encompasses superior intention.

In the seven-point cause and effect sequence of developing bodhicitta, developing superior intention is the immediate cause for developing the actual bodhicitta mind. Likewise, when one willingly takes the sufferings of others upon oneself as a means of freeing all beings from suffering, and gives them one's own happiness to place them into a state of happiness, one is actually generating the mind of superior intention. After one takes this responsibility to free all beings from suffering by oneself alone, then the aspiration to achieve enlightenment develops spontaneously. As I've mentioned previously many times, bodhicitta consists of two aspirations. During the causal stage, one generates the aspiration (or wish) to benefit other sentient beings which is then followed by the aspiration to achieve enlightenment (for that purpose). But in the resultant stage, it is only after achieving enlightenment that one can fully engage in the means to benefit other sentient beings.

Liberation in the Palm of your Hand illustrates this point with a story of how, at a time of famine, a father was looking for food to feed his family. When he came upon a piece of meat, it initially occurred to him to take it back to his family and share it with them. But then he thought that if he shared it, each one would only receive a very

small portion which would be hardly enough to sustain any of them. It then dawned upon him that it would be far more worthwhile for him to eat the meat himself to gain more energy so he could continue to look for more food to help his family and others, and relieve the suffering of the famine. This analogy of the father being clever by eating the meat himself is very significant: it illustrates the need to obtain enlightenment for oneself first in order to be able to adequately benefit other sentient beings and relieve them from suffering. Without first eliminating all obscurations and acquiring every possible quality oneself, there is no way that one will be able to help others eliminate all their faults and obscurations and acquire all possible qualities. This is the main point to be understood.

During the causal stage, bodhisattvas engage in virtuous deeds with the intention to wholeheartedly benefit sentient beings, and thus fully commit themselves to the welfare of other sentient beings. Because of their long acquaintance with the wish to benefit others, the buddhas can benefit sentient beings effortlessly and spontaneously when they actually achieve the resultant state of enlightenment. It becomes completely natural for them to benefit sentient beings without any hesitation or effort from their side, and that is because benefiting others was their core practice during the causal stage where their only intention was to benefit sentient beings.

As the Buddha himself said, 'if you harm sentient beings, this is equal to harming me; if you benefit sentient beings, this is equal to benefitting me'. That is the extent to which a Buddha holds all sentient beings very dear without any biased mind. Of the two aspirations of generating bodhicitta, the aspiration to achieve enlightenment is for oneself. But that doesn't mean that the state of enlightenment is merely sought for oneself; rather it is for the sole purpose of benefitting all sentient beings. This needs to be understood well.

The incomparably kind Buddha said 'all sentient beings are my relatives'. The Buddha said this because he had perfected the practice of love and compassion to the extent of extending it equally to all beings. Because of this unbiased love and compassion towards all beings, they all naturally appear as affectionately close to the Buddha's mind; no one appears as an enemy to the Buddha! We can see this factually from our limited experience. When we feel a sense of love and compassion for others we can feel an affectionate attitude towards them and they appear close and affectionate towards us. But if love and compassion starts to diminish in one's mind, then others don't appear as close. Indeed, when one feels hostility within oneself then others will begin to appear as enemies. This is how we need to see the value of love and compassion. We definitely have the ability, the potential and the basis for developing love and compassion. So, it's a matter of familiarising our mind with it again and again; meditating on it again and again to activate our potential. Having that practice will definitely bring great solace and joy to one's mind as one

The last session covered the small scope. Now, as the commentary entitled *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Chokyi Gyaltsan explains:

Here, there are four meditational topics relating to the actual path of the person of a small scope which are – impermanence; the shortcomings of three lower rebirths; taking refuge; and training in the morality of abandoning the ten unwholesome actions. Furthermore, the first two topics are to generate the mental attitude of the person of a small scope and the latter two include the related practices.¹

The commentary mentions the four meditational topics. The first is ‘impermanence’ which, when elaborated in the lam-rim, relates particularly to ‘death and impermanence’. When one contemplates death and impermanence, one thinks of the experience one goes through when one comes to the end of this life. What we call ‘death’ refers to the actual separation of our physical body from our mind. When the separation occurs, the body disintegrates but the mind does not. There is a continuation of the mind along with the individual self or the ‘I’. And because there is a continuity of the mind and individual self, one ‘takes rebirth’.

With rebirth, one goes on to another existence, but this is not completely under one’s own control. Rather, it is under the control of one’s previously created karma. For as long as one takes rebirth under the control of delusions and karma, there are only two types of rebirth one can possibly take: a fortunate (happy) rebirth or an unfortunate rebirth. These are the only two alternatives. One does not have control over one’s rebirth, but what does help to avoid taking an unfortunate rebirth is taking refuge in the Three Jewels.

All these points are mentioned in the verse quoted last week from Lama Tsong Khapa’s *Lines of Experience*:

There is no certainty that after death we may not be
born in the lower realms;
The protection from such terror lies in the Three
Jewels alone;
So we must make firm the practice of going for refuge
And ensure that its precepts are never undermined.

This verse encompasses all the meditational objects mentioned earlier.

When contemplating death and impermanence, one realises that one has to take rebirth, and that there are no alternatives other than either a fortunate rebirth or an unfortunate rebirth. With the prospect of taking an unfortunate rebirth, one needs to contemplate the extreme sufferings one would have to experience, such as the extreme sufferings of heat and cold in the hell realms; the sufferings of extreme hunger and thirst in the hungry ghost realms; and the sufferings of stupidity in the animal realms. As one meditates on and contemplates these sufferings, a real sense of fear will occur in one’s mind followed by an urgency to be free from the lower realms. Motivated by fear of the lower realms one seeks the methods and means to be free from the sufferings of these unfortunate rebirths. At that point, when one sees the supreme objects of the Three Jewels, which possess the full ability to free oneself, one takes refuge in them.

REFUGE

The topic of refuge is presented in the lam-rim teachings, according to the *Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path* by Lama Tsongkhapa.

It consists of four main topics:

1. The cause of going for refuge; then based on that
2. The objects of refuge
3. The way you go for refuge; then having gone for refuge
4. The stages of the precepts

Liberation in the Palm of your Hand has a similar outline, but is slightly different as it relies on the commentary on the lam-rim called the Swift Path. So there are some slight difference. However, the main point is that the objects of refuge are actually presented with these four main topics.

The cause for going for refuge

The refuge of the small scope is when one generates the mind of wanting to be free from the sufferings of the lower realms and sees that the objects of refuge, the Three Jewels, have the full ability to free one from that suffering.

Medium scope refuge is based not only on the fear of unfortunate rebirths in the lower realms, but also by seeing that taking rebirth in cyclic existence in both the lower and higher realms is in itself the nature of suffering. When one cannot bear the thought of taking rebirth again in cyclic existence, one develops a strong determination to be free from the entire rebirth in cyclic existence, and goes for refuge in the Three Jewels; refuge of the medium scope.

Great scope refuge generates the mind of wishing all beings to be free from the entire range of cyclic existence. Beings of the great scope go for refuge in the Three Jewels with the determination to achieve enlightenment. It is good to understand this distinction to see how it fits into our own practice.

The general definition of refuge is: Having the conviction that the Three Jewels have the full ability to free one from fears of rebirth in the lower realms and cyclic existence. The definition encompasses the two causes: the first cause is that one generates a fear and a determination to be free from the lower realms and from cyclic existence in general. Then based on this, when one clearly sees that the objects of refuge have the full ability to free you from these fears, and single-pointedly and wholeheartedly places one’s conviction upon the Three Jewels, this is the actual ‘going for refuge’. So, in simple terms ‘going for refuge’ having faith in the Three Jewels.

The objects of refuge

The three objects of refuge need to be understood in terms of the Buddha as being the actual teacher or the guide; the Dharma is what is to be implemented and practised and the Sangha as being helpers along the path.

There is a very good analogy of how the objects of refuge serve as a purpose to benefit oneself. In the *Uttaratantra* Maitreya explains that a sick person must rely on a skilled doctor (the Buddha), who prescribes the unmistakable medicine (the Dharma), and rely on the

¹ Kindly translated by Samdup Tsering.

nurses or attendants (the Sangha) to help them. This analogy explains how the three objects of refuge are linked.

Also understand that the Buddha can be considered as our indirect teacher of the Dharma. Our actual teachers are those who present the teachings to us now. They are like the representatives of the Buddha, imparting his teachings through an unbroken lineage. It is good to understand this point otherwise one may wonder how can the Buddha be our teacher when we don't have direct contact with him or see him right now.

The way you go for refuge

A significant point I've mentioned many times, is that of the Three Jewels the actual protection is the Dharma Jewel. There can be misinterpretation when the Dharma is referred to as the actual Jewel which protects oneself. Some may then think that perhaps the Buddha Jewel and the Sangha Jewel are not sufficient refuges. That would be a misinterpretation. The reference to the Dharma Jewel being the actual protection is because while the Buddha and the Dharma Jewel are both actual refuges in terms of protection for oneself, the one which directly liberates us is the Dharma Jewel. That is because by actualising the Dharma Jewel oneself, one is protected from these fears, which is why it is referred to as an actual Jewel.

To further understand how the Dharma serves as the actual protection, reflect upon how it refers to actualising the Dharma within oneself through the paths and the cessations. If we were to refer to the Dharma Jewel as being object of refuge that is within someone else's continuum, then it would be hard to understand how it acts as a protection for oneself. Although they are immaculate with perfections, if the Dharma with its paths and cessations is within someone else's continuum, such an arya Sangha's continuum, then it is hard to get a sense of how that will protect oneself. Of course, the Buddha himself represents all Three Jewels: he is the enlightened being; the one who encompasses the Dharma Jewel as well as being the ultimate Sangha. However, the Dharma Jewel which is referred to here as the actual protection has to be developed or actualised within oneself. That is how we can understand the Dharma Jewel as that which liberates oneself from the fears of the lower realms and cyclic existence i.e. the actual protector.

To emphasise this point, the Buddha himself mentioned, 'One is one's own protector'. Thus, one becomes one's own protector by actualising the Dharma Jewel within one's mental continuum. This is the main point to understand. Within the presentation of the Three Jewels, the Buddha is the teacher and the Sangha are the helpers. So that leaves the Dharma as the only one of the Three Jewels to actually serve as the real protector for oneself.

This is an important point to understand. Otherwise, when we refer to the objects of refuge as the protectors that protect us, we may instinctively relate to the objects of refuge as being external. The ultimate Dharma Jewel as presented within the Four Noble Truths are true paths and true cessation within the mental continuum of an arya being. Since we have not reached the level of an arya being, this may leave us with a doubt such as, 'If the

ultimate Dharma is true paths and true cessation, and I haven't achieved this yet, then how can the Dharma Jewel actually protect me?' Therefore, the Dharma Jewel needs to be something that we have already cultivated within our mental continuum, which then serves as the actual protector. If we cannot posit something now in our own mental continuum as being the Dharma Jewel, it will be very hard to comprehend how the Dharma Jewel protects us. That is why it is important to have a clear understanding of this point.

On a personal level, one may contemplate the points mentioned here when contemplating on the sufferings of the lower realms. As we contemplate on these unbearable sufferings, we develop fear at the prospect of having to take an unfortunate rebirth. If we don't truly understand that there is something that can protect us from the sufferings of the lower realms, then it would quite useless to think about the sufferings of the lower realms. If one does not see that there is a protection from these sufferings, then contemplating it would just be an unnecessary extra suffering for us.

The stages of the precepts

Having contemplated on the prospect of having to experience the sufferings of the lower realms, one generates fear which then develops into the determination of wanting to be free, and seeking protection. The point is to identify the protection (the Dharma Jewel) within our own mental continuum, which at our level is the morality of abandoning the ten unwholesome actions. We all have the ability to abstain from the ten unwholesome actions. This morality is what we can refer to as the actual Dharma Jewel within ourselves right now, which is the main cause to free ourselves from an unfortunate rebirth.

The morality of abandoning the ten unwholesome actions is the actual cause to free oneself from rebirth in the lower realms. When one observes morality, one need not have any doubts about experiencing a rebirth in the lower realms. While one has not obtained the paths and cessation, one obtains a similitude of it by contemplating the sufferings of the lower realms and understanding suffering.

As mentioned in the teachings true sufferings are to be recognised; true origins are to be abandoned; true cessations are to be attained and true paths are to be actualised. So based on this understanding, one contemplates the sufferings of the lower realms, abandons engaging in unwholesome deeds motivated by the delusions, which is the origin. Observing the morality of abandoning the ten unwholesome deeds leads to not being reborn in the lower realms, which the attainment of cessation. And actualising the path is undertaking the practice of abandoning the ten unwholesome actions.

As it mentions later on in the presentation of the great scope, if we see the objects of refuge as 'external', 'distant, and 'on a high level', we will not gain the benefit of taking refuge. So, the real refuge has to be personal, something that is actualised within oneself. This leads again to the main point, the meditational objects of the path of the person of small scope *are impermanence, the shortcomings of the three lower rebirths, and taking refuge and*

training in the morality of abandoning the ten unwholesome actions. This is the practice of a being of small scope. When we put this into practice ourselves, we are incorporating the practices of the small scope.

KARMA

The need to contemplate karma arises at this point: thinking about the cause and effect sequence of engaging in non-virtue leading to undesirable results and engaging in virtue leading to favourable results. As Lama Tsong Khapa explains in the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*:

Freedom and endowments are difficult to find and life has no time to spare.

By gaining familiarity with this, attraction to the appearances of this life is reversed.

By thinking over and over again that actions and their effects are infallible, and [contemplating] the miseries of cyclic existence,

Attraction to the appearances of future lives is reversed.

While it is mentioned specifically in all three scopes, all three are subsumed into the small scope of how to reverse the clinging to this life. Thus, focussing on death, impermanence and karma, taking refuge and gaining sufficient training in the morality of abandoning the ten unwholesome actions, becomes the way to dispel clinging to future lives, especially the lower realms.

Contemplating karma encompasses thinking about positive (white) karma and negative (black) karma. This requires specifically contemplating positive karma and its consequences and negative karma and its consequences. As Lama Tsongkhapa mentioned, it really depends on one's state of mind. 'If one has a positive state of mind, then the paths and grounds will be positive. Whereas if one has a negative state of mind, the paths and grounds that one traverses will be negative'.

This means that observing or engaging in virtue and shunning negativity is really dependent on one's state of mind. So, observing karma relates to one's intention and one's state of mind, and we should be mindful of this as a way to adopt virtue and shun negativities. If one engages in virtue the result of that is happiness, and if one engages in negativity the result is suffering; one needs to reflect upon this well to gain a firm conviction of karma and its effects. For example, if one abstains from killing the result will be happiness for oneself, and if one engages in the act of killing one will experience suffering as a result. Since we all wish to experience happiness and do not wish to experience any suffering we need to create the causes for what we all want.

1. Lam-rim structure as presented in *Lam-rim Chen-mo*.

The General Characteristics of Karma

b' Developing the faith of conviction that is the root of all temporary happiness and certain goodness

1' Reflecting on karma and its effects in general

a' The actual way in which to reflect in general

1' The certainty of karma

2' The magnification of karma

3' Not experiencing the effects of actions that you did not do

4' The actions you have done do not perish

Karma is explained in the lam-rim under these three main headings:

1. Reflecting on karma and its effects in general
2. Reflecting on karma and its effects in detail
3. How you engage in virtue and turn away from non-virtue (after you have reflected on karma and its effects in general and in detail).

There is an actual way to reflect on karma in general, so these are points to understand. I will just touch on the main points and then you can read the texts for yourselves.

Reflecting on karma and its effects in general

There are four ways of reflecting on karma in general.

1. The certainty of karma

When one engages in any of the ten non-virtues, such as the first one which is killing, one needs to identify clearly what is referred to as non-virtue or negativity. If the actual act of killing is what we call non-virtue or negative karma, then refraining from, or avoiding killing is a virtue. This is how one needs to specifically identify what is non-virtue and what is virtue in relation to the creation of karma.

The certainty of karma means that when one engages in the non-virtuous act of killing (for example), then the certainty of the karma is that one will have to experience an unpleasant result, which is suffering. There are specific sufferings related to the non-virtue of killing - the details of which are explained again in the lam-rim text, which you can refer to. But briefly, it is an unfavourable result, which is suffering. There can never be a positive result from engaging in the act of killing. It will most certainly be an unpleasant result of suffering. When engaging in the virtue of refraining from killing, then it is certain that one will experience a positive result (not negative) result. This is how the certainty of karma should be understood.

In thinking about the certainty of karma, it is said that one needs to come to the conclusion (again a unique presentation in some of the lam-rim teachings) that 'I must definitely avoid engaging in negative karmas and definitely engage in adopting virtue'. That is the conclusion that one needs to reach.

2. The magnification of karma

The teachings explain the magnification (or multiplying) effect of karma with an analogy of a small seed. Even the small seed of a tree, when planted, can grow into a massive tree. In reverse, a huge tree can come from a small seedling. Using that as an analogy, the teachings describe how the magnitude of karma is even greater than seeds and their results. Therefore one should engage in positive karma. Even when one engages in the smallest positive deed, the results can be incredibly great in the future. Likewise, even if one engages in the tiniest negative deed, the results can also be incredibly great in the future. As the teachings explain in detail, the conclusion one needs to come to is that having contemplated the magnification of karma, one must avoid even the smallest negative deed and adopt even the tiniest of positive deeds.

We can implement this practice by contemplating these points – just thinking about it once or twice is not sufficient. One needs to really contemplate on it again and again. If one does so from the depth of one's heart, one can develop a strong conviction in karma. At that point, it is definitely possible to practice to the extent of avoiding even the tiniest negative deed and adopting the smallest of virtues. These are points to reflect upon.

3. Not experiencing the effects of actions that you did not do

If one does not create the causes, one will not experience the desirable effects; one needs to contemplate this.

As the teachings further explain, by contemplating this characteristic of karma, you will not experience the effects of the actions that you do not do. If one has created negativity, then one cannot possibly experience even though that is what one desires. By contemplating this way, the conclusion is that one must definitely resolve to purify any negativities one has accumulated with the aid of the four opponent powers. One needs to develop a very strong determination that one must definitely purify the negativities one has accumulated in the past. Having contemplated the nature of karma one sees the necessity for purifying negativities, So one engages in applying the four opponent powers as a purification practice.

4. The actions you have done do not perish

The teachings explain that when one engages in a certain action, whether it be positive or negative, the action does not perish nor does it go to waste of its own accord. Having contemplate this point, one comes to the conclusion that after engaging in virtuous deeds, one needs to dedicate and make pure aspirational prayers. As soon as one engages in a virtuous deed, one must adorn that virtuous deed with the dedication and pure aspirational prayers, which will then ensure that one's positive deeds remain secure and will not perish. When we adopt these practices in this way we have personalised these instructions for our practice

A commentary on the lam-rim mentions that what we should obtain from contemplation on karma and the desired result, is the conviction that if one commits even the slightest negative deed, then it will bring about great negative results. Similarly, by engaging in the tiniest virtuous deed, one obtains great positive results. Having developed a strong conviction in this, one actually engages in the practice of adopting virtues and shunning or abandoning negativities. That is the result one obtains.

We might think we have an understanding of karma, but if we don't apply it in our practice, then our understanding of karma is just superficial and hasn't really had any effect in encouraging us to engage in practice. But when we really take it to heart, and contemplate, and develop that conviction in karma, then we will naturally and spontaneously engage in the practice of adopting virtues and shunning negativities. This is what we need to aspire to.

The Buddha used two analogies to explain the reason for creating the smallest virtues and shunning even the tiniest negativities. The first analogy is the ability of small

drops of water to eventually fill a huge container; likewise by adopting even the smallest virtue we can accomplish great results in the future. This analogy is very significant. Then, as a way to advise us to shun even the smallest negativity, the Buddha used the analogy of a small spark or fire being able to burn and consume a great hay stack.

Similarly, even the smallest of negativities can destroy a lot of our virtues and bring about a lot of suffering for us as a result. I consider these to be crucial points of practice – personal instructions prescribed for us at our level. At our level we cannot assume that we can engage in great virtuous deeds when we don't have the full capacity and means right now to do so. Again, we might be complacent about small negativities and think 'oh, there's no harm in engaging in that!', or complacent about adopting the smallest of virtues saying, 'oh well, what's the point of doing such a small virtuous deed?'. Through contemplating these points, one needs to take every opportunity to engage in the smallest virtuous deed because as the analogy demonstrated, the accumulation of small virtuous deeds, can then bring about large positive results for oneself.

As the commentary explains, the first two topics aim to generate the mental attitude of a person of small scope, which is taking refuge and training in the morality of abandoning the ten unwholesome actions. These two include the practices that have been mentioned here. That is the practice that is to be adopted.

To summarise these instructions on a personal level, at the end of each day look at your deeds during the day. If you find that you have engaged in any of the ten unwholesome actions, or non-virtuous deeds, then you need to adopt the practice of developing regret and engage in a purification practice to purify those negative deeds. When you reflect on the day, and acknowledge that you have engaged in some virtuous or positive deeds, you should then adopt the practice of dedication and making aspirational prayers, to dedicate those virtuous deeds. This is the way we incorporate this practice into our lives.

Commenting on negativity, previous masters say there is one key quality about negativity and that is that it can be purified. One needs to understand that 'purification' means making a negative karma ineffective so one does not have to experience the negative results. This purification is a practice that nullifies the negative consequence of a previously created negative deed.

Practising virtue means increasing the virtue. So when the text says to practise virtue and avoid negativity, then that's what we need to do. Training the mind and so forth is a way to increase one's positive qualities and positive deeds.

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