
The Condensed Lam Rim

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We can practise a little bit of meditation as usual, so sit in a relaxed and comfortable posture.

After having sat down [for meditation], one needs to know how to make one's mind happy. We must understand the benefits of improving the mind – of increasing its good qualities and abandoning its faults.

It is important to understand one particular quality of the mind – that it is a creature of habit. Since the mind is a creature of habit, we can and should train the mind in positive ways, developing qualities, becoming familiar with those qualities, and making them an integral part of the mind. By doing so, one will benefit oneself as well as benefiting others.

Normally, those with well-developed positive mental habits experience more happiness and have an easier life. Those with many harmful mental patterns and for whom unsuitable thoughts continually arise, however, experience more difficulties in life. These people lose their courage and strength of mind more easily; even if they are able to generate some mental happiness, it quickly goes away.

A person can be termed a 'good' person in dependence upon the positive and wholesome actions of their mind and their outward positive actions. A person's good actions and positive mind are like a certificate proving them to be a good person.

Through increasing our positive mental states and making the mind more positive and wholesome, we will become happier and more peaceful. Further, we will be able to transmit that happiness and peace to others, making those around us happier and more peaceful as well.

So, one should think of a positive mind as an indispensable possession. Even if one's external situation deteriorates and one loses external happiness, through maintaining this positive mind, one will not be affected and will still experience internal happiness. Having this state of the mind is an indispensable tool for living a good life.

We will meditate for a few minutes, bringing the mind back home and focusing it inwards.

We should reverse the mind from objects that agitate the mind and make it unhappy. There are certain external objects which, when we think about them, induce a negative and harmful train of thought and unhappy mental states. So, we should reverse the mind from those objects and mental states and instead focus the mind internally.

And after having focused the mind completely internally, try to remain in that state for a little while. Then, when you find the mind again trying to escape to external objects, place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. We will meditate in that manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

[Regarding the commentary on the root text,] we have started the section on **the four greatnesses of the Lam Rim**. We have largely finished **the second greatness** – the greatness that all the instructions of the Buddha, all the teachings of the Buddha, appear as advice and instructions.

After having gained a good understanding of the Lam Rim, from the first topic of guru devotion up to the final topic of calm abiding and special insight, whatever teaching of the Buddha we may listen to thereafter will appear to us as personal advice and instruction for practice.

The greatness of being able to easily comprehend the theme of the Buddhas teachings

The third greatness of the Lam Rim is that one will be easily able to comprehend the intention of the Buddha, or the theme of the Buddha's teachings. The term 'theme' here refers to the three principals of the path: renunciation, bodhicitta and the correct view of emptiness.

In general, all the Buddha's teachings can be condensed into the practices of the three types of beings: the small, medium and great type of being. One can then condense the teachings further into renunciation, bodhicitta and the correct view of emptiness. Here, where it says that one will be easily able to understand the theme of the Buddha's teachings, it particularly refers to the correct view of emptiness.

Even though the direct teachings of the Buddha, including the commentaries – meaning the great philosophical treatises and the extensive sutras – are the supreme oral instructions, people who haven't received many teachings or other oral instructions and have studied other philosophical texts may find the teachings difficult to comprehend. Even though these people may be able to comprehend more extensive philosophical treatises, they're still not able to comprehend the intention of the Buddha, the theme of his teachings.

What is missing for these practitioners are the oral instructions of the Lam-Rim, such as The Lamp for the Path of Enlightenment and the other Lam Rim texts that follow it. When we talk about oral instructions, we shouldn't have the notion that these are teachings that were only given or passed on verbally. Actually, all the sutras are all instructions, but they are all written down. So, just because they are called oral instructions doesn't mean they cannot be written down.

Therefore, by relying upon the oral instructions of the Lam Rim teachings, one is able to comprehend the theme of the Buddha's teachings. Within a short Lam Rim text, the whole theme of the Buddha's teachings is present: renunciation, bodhicitta and emptiness. Even if one is not

able to study the more extensive treatises because of lack of time, by reading one short Lam Rim text, one has everything laid out and can easily comprehend the intention of the Buddha's teachings.

For example, we will comprehend that renunciation doesn't refer to the giving up of external objects or changing one's external situation, but refers to a change of attitude. Likewise, one will also correctly comprehend bodhicitta and the correct view of emptiness.

By studying the Lam Rim one will be able to comprehend how renunciation refers to renunciation for every state of cyclic existence. It is also explained in the Lam Rim how one can use all of one's practice to develop renunciation. Then, if one wants to move onto bodhicitta – developing an altruistic attitude – the Lam Rim also explains how to do that, how to centre one's practice around developing bodhicitta, and how to develop the correct view of emptiness.

So, if one practises what is explained in the Lam Rim, one will make progress. The Lam Rim lays out all the instructions on how to make the mind less harsh, more flexible and happier. Otherwise, if one does not practise what is in the Lam Rim, it will be one's own loss and one will end up in a situation where, although one has listened to many teachings, one still will not know what to practise.

If we can enjoy our material wealth, our friends and family, and our good human body without attachment, we will have a very good life. However, as the Lam Rim explains, although we do enjoy a good life situation – material wealth, good friends and family, and a healthy body – sufferings and problems crop up all the time. The reason for that is our attachment to these samsaric perfections. By giving up attachment to samsaric perfections, one will be able to enjoy them and have a really nice life – this is explained further on in the Lam Rim.

The need to reduce one's attachments is a point one must consider well. While it is difficult to be without any attachment, at least we should try to reduce our attachment and have true love for our friends and the people around us. For those who have no attachment, life becomes very easy. They don't cling to their possessions. If someone were to ask them for their watch, they would just give it away and not be concerned whether they would get it back or not. Even if the recipient were to give the watch to someone else, a person with no attachment would not be concerned.

Certain ways of thinking cause problems, while other ways of thinking are liberating and bring happiness. The important point is which way of thinking or point of view one will adopt.

So, the third greatness of the Lam Rim is that it allows one to very easily understand the intention of the Buddha, the theme of the Buddha's teachings. Of course, it is also possible to understand the theme of the Buddha's teachings by studying the more extensive treatises, but one may not be able to do that because of time constraints. Even if one doesn't have time

constraints, it is still more difficult to understand the theme of the Buddha's teachings by merely studying the great treatises because one has to be able to receive explanations on those more extensive treatises, and so forth. However, by merely studying the Lam Rim, one is able to accomplish the same result.

The Lam Rim also explains how to cut off the root of cyclic existence – ignorance – by meditating on emptiness.

The greatness that the great fault will naturally be abandoned

Now we come to **the fourth greatness** of the Lam Rim – that the 'great fault' will naturally be abandoned. The 'great fault' refers to the fault of abandoning the Dharma. This fault is called great or heavy because, as well as being a grave fault to commit, it is difficult to reverse away from, which is why it is also called a subtle fault. This fault is naturally stopped by understanding the first two greatnesses of the Lam Rim – understanding how all the teachings of the Buddha are complementary; and understanding how all the teachings of the Buddha appear to one as instructions and advice for practice.

As we have already said, all the teachings of the Buddha are complementary and outline the path to enlightenment. However, if one becomes confused and starts developing a biased attitude because of the different paths outlined in the Buddha's teachings – for example, if one belongs to the Theravadan class of teachings and thinks that the Mahayana teachings are not the teachings of the Buddha, or vice versa, if one is a Mahayanist and thinks that the Theravadan teachings are not the teachings of the Buddha – then one commits the fault of abandoning the Dharma and that is a very heavy fault indeed.

This completes the four greatnesses of the teachings. So, we have explained the greatness of the author and then the greatnesses of the teachings. The next point is the explanation of how the student has to listen to such a Dharma that possesses those two greatnesses, and also how the teacher has to explain those teachings that possess those greatnesses.

It is all nicely laid out here in the outline [of the root text], explaining for the students how they must listen to the Dharma – the mental outlook that one should adopt when one listens to these teachings, and so forth – and explaining for the teacher how to go about explaining those teachings. It is quite comprehensive. We can go on with that point next time.

Do you have any questions?

Question: For what purpose do we take refuge, and with whom do we take refuge?

Answer: The motivation behind going for refuge is that one recognises that one experiences many sufferings, and that those sufferings will continue in one's future lives if one doesn't do something about one's suffering and the causes of suffering.

Generally, one takes refuge from a Lama; that's the

traditional thing to do. When one goes for refuge, it's a bit like becoming a refugee, it's similar to the situation of the refugees arriving in Australia. First, they are detained in detention centres until it is decided of whether they are genuine refugees or if they have just come for economical reasons.

The idea of taking refuge is similar. If someone has lost their country or can't stay in their country for certain reasons, they go somewhere else – for example, they come to Australia, thinking that Australia will be their refuge.

Within the refugees, we have those two categories – those that are actual refugees and those that are not. When true refugees who can't stay in their country because of different reasons come to Australia, they see Australia as their refuge, and think that Australia will provide refuge for them. If they are genuine, the Government will provide that refuge. When the other category – those who feel they are not happy where they are living so decide to try another country where they think they will be happier – come to Australia, the government does not provide that refuge. It is similar with taking Buddhist refuge.

Question: I've heard in a teaching recently that when you take refuge, you don't take it in the teacher, so who or what do you take refuge in?

Answer: The objects of refuge are the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha – they are what you take refuge in. But the person to whom you make the refuge pledge is the teacher. Taking the pledge of refuge with a high lama has the benefit of more strongly conveying to us the seriousness of our situation, and also causes us to be more cautious and develop more conscientiousness and care regarding our refuge vows.

Question: This is probably going to sound like a really basic child-like question, but I was reading about the promises that monks and nuns make and wondering why are singing and dancing not recommended?

Answer: One can do those things for the benefit of others, but one shouldn't do them out of attachment.

For example, if one sings while thinking "I've got a really melodious and beautiful voice and I'm going to become famous and well-known", that is not such a good motivation to have. But if one sings with the intention making many people happy and bringing happiness to their minds, that's a good motivation. For example, monks and nuns during pujas and prayer time sing the mantras and prayers and play musical instruments, such as the bells and so forth, but they do it on the basis of having a good motivation.

Question : This has been a problem for me when I've taken 24-hour precepts, because when I'm happy, I sing. I've caught myself two times now after I've taken precepts and just without thinking, I sing. And I'm thinking, "Oh I've blown it". Is it terrible if you just sing when you're feeling happy?

Answer: You should only do it with a good motivation.

Student responds: It's just an expression of happiness –

there's no mindfulness involved!

Answer: Actually, it is impossible to express something verbally without having a preceding motivation. Some type of motivation precedes every verbal action. For example, if you think that your singing will make your partner or friends happy, that is a good motivation.

Student responds: What if I'm by myself!

Answer: If you're alone, that's even better (*laughter*). Sometimes, a problem could arise if you don't have a nice voice (*more laughter*). So, if you are alone and don't have a nice voice, the only one who will suffer is you (*more laughter*)!

Question: Sometimes you can do things for other people, and you think you are doing it for them, but it ends up like an 'arrogant humility'. How can you know the difference?

Answer: It is difficult to have any action that is completely untainted by pride, but at least one should try to make sure that the motivation phase of the action is pure.

It can happen that before we engage in an action, the motivation we generate is pure, but then when we engage in the actual action of benefiting others, because they may admire us or laugh at what we say, we might start to think we are quite good, and pride may arise during the time of the actual action. This is possible.

Of course, ultimately we should try to have our action untainted by pride, but realistically, in the beginning, it is difficult to do that. So, one should try to at least have a pure motivation. For example, a parent may find it difficult to have a completely pure mind when they actually have to tell off their children, especially when they talk back. But at least one should try, before scolding the children, to have a good motivation and not engage in that action out of having anger from the outset. Try to have a good motivation. On the basis of this, one can frown at the children and be stern with them.

Of course, it can happen that when the children talk back, one will get angry during the actual action. However, it will leave a different impression on the children's minds if one tells them off with a good motivation, if one has the welfare of the children in mind. Children will later on understand the parents' motivation and where they are coming from. Then they will think, "At that time I was quite naughty and I didn't listen. Even though my parents told me not to do that for my benefit, I didn't listen".

Children will generate a different type of feeling later on if they know that the action was done with harmful intent from the outset.

Do you have another question?

Question: a lengthy question involving exchange between the student and translator (to clarify what was being asked). Student refers to his understanding of something in the Diamond Sutra where he thought it spoke about the Buddha renouncing nirvana to spread the teachings.

Answer: Are you referring to what was said earlier in relation to the fault of abandoning the Dharma? What we

were talking about is that abandoning the Dharma is a fault – we didn't say that you should abandon the Dharma.

It doesn't say in the Diamond Sutra that one should abandon the personal nirvana. What it is referring to in this situation is that for the Mahayana practitioner should not aim at the small-scope nirvana because the Mahayana practitioner should aim at the great-scope or non-abiding nirvana. If a Mahayana practitioner started to be attracted to the small-scope nirvana, it would cause him or her to give up the Mahayana path.

So, it's not correct to say that one should abandon the attainment of nirvana – what the text is saying is that the Mahayana practitioner shouldn't aim for that small-scope nirvana.

However, the small-scope nirvana does not fall into the category of that which has to be abandoned. And a Mahayana practitioner does not aim for liberation from cyclic existence merely for his or her own purpose. That is the difference – so one can't say that the small-scope nirvana is an object of abandonment; it's just not an object of attainment from the point of view of a Mahayana practitioner.

To generate the motivation wanting to attain liberation from cyclic existence for oneself alone is also a virtuous motivation, so it is not something that is to be discounted altogether. It is just that, from the point of view of a Mahayana practitioner, this is not what one trains in.

The differences between the Mahayana path and the Hinayana path come about through motivation and result – what one aims for. The motivation of the Hinayana path is primarily one's own peace and liberation for oneself. The object of abandonment is the afflictions – those practitioners whose aim is personal liberation mainly abandon the delusions. The Mahayana practitioner, on the other hand, aims for the happiness of all sentient beings, for complete enlightenment, with the motivation of doing it for the benefit of all sentient beings. These practitioners abandon not only the delusions, but also the obscurations to knowledge, the subtle karmic latencies of those delusions.

The reason one path is called 'small' and the other one 'great' is from that point of view – motivation, abandonments and aim. The distinction is not made from the point of view of one being a lesser Dharma than the other. They are both equal in being Dharmic paths. One is called 'great' and the other one 'smaller' from the point of view of motivation, aim and abandonments, which is not to say that one is bad and the other good.

The Diamond Cutter Sutra frequently refers to the different types of Hinayana results – such as Stream Enterer, Once Returner, Non Returner, or Arhat – and says things to the effect that once a Non Returner thinks that he or she has attained the fruit of No Return [to cyclic existence], they haven't done so; someone who has attained the fruit of No Return doesn't think, "I'm a Non Returner". So, that text talks a lot about not grasping at the true existence of those different types of results.

As was explained at the beginning, bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards, then placing it single-pointedly at the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha, not letting it wander off to external objects.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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