
The Condensed Lam Rim

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We can meditate a little bit as usual. Take a relaxed and comfortable sitting posture.

You also need to generate a motivation that is concerned with the welfare of others. As long as one has not subdued one's mind, however, one will find it difficult to effectively benefit others. Therefore, we need to subdue the mind, and for that purpose we meditate.

As the great bodhisattva Shantideva said: "The unsubdued mind involuntarily attracts suffering so, in order to experience happiness, the mental afflictions need to be pacified". A mind that is unsubdued and is under the control of the mental afflictions will always experience suffering.

To experience even ordinary happiness – not to mention the uncontaminated happiness that has gone beyond – we need to subdue the afflicted mind. To subdue the mind, we need to generate the wisdom that can distinguish right from wrong, the wisdom that can identify karma and mental afflictions, a wisdom that knows which consequences will follow from which actions.

We need to identify our positive inner qualities as well as our inner faults, and then we need to increase our qualities and decrease our faults. By proceeding along this path, the mind will develop naturally.

This is considered actual Dharma practice. We need to apply the wisdom that can distinguish right from wrong to our own mind; we need to apply that wisdom internally, recognising mental states that facilitate happiness and those that induce suffering, then increasing the good mental states that produce happiness. It is said that the Dharma is not misleading- so one needs to recognise the truth of the Dharma – that certain good mental states induce happiness, while harmful mental states generate suffering. One needs to be able to discern these two and then develop the good mental states and decrease and purify the harmful mental states.

To increase the positive mental states and decrease the harmful mental states we meditate by focusing the mind internally on a meditation object. The mind is fastened to the object with the tool of mindfulness. Mindfulness keeps the object in focus and enables the mind to abide single-pointedly on the object. The mind that abides single-pointedly on the object is not concentration; rather, concentration is that *part of the mind* that is single-pointed and abiding on the object. The mind abides single-pointedly on the object *through* mindfulness; that mind itself is not referred to as concentration.

Through continual practice, the power of one's mindfulness will increase, which is very important. One has to also use the tool of mental introspection to recognise whether the mind is meditating well on the object or not.

On the basis of sitting in the meditation posture, we initially focus the mind inwards. We stop engaging external objects and bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards, then placing it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. You can meditate in that manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

4.2.2 The way in which one takes the essence

4.2.2.1 The general presentation of the path

4.2.2.1.1 Training of the mind in the stages of the being of small capability

Last time, we said that the Buddha initially generated bodhicitta for the welfare of sentient beings. Then he practised the path for three countless great eons, also for the welfare of sentient beings, accumulating the merit and wisdom to become enlightened for the welfare of sentient beings. He then taught the Dharma for the welfare of sentient beings.

The welfare of sentient beings can be summed up by higher status¹ and definite goodness². For sentient beings to achieve the first aim of higher status, the Buddha taught the teachings common to the being of small capacity.

Since all the teachings of the Buddha are for the purpose of enabling sentient beings to attain higher status and definite goodness, the teachings common to the three types of beings, which contain all the teachings of the Buddha, have to relate to these two aims.

The teachings common to the being of small capacity are for the purpose of practitioners to attain higher status. Here, a being of small capacity is defined as someone who has given up attachment to this life. The being of small capacity referred to here is a being who has given up concern for the happiness of this life and practises the Dharma to attain happiness in the next life. This being would accumulate the merit and virtuous karma to have happiness in the next life.

In *Lamp to the Path*, it says that the being of inferior, i.e. small, capacity is a being that has given up concern for this life, and practises to have more personal samsaric happiness in the next life. The small capable being is someone who is satisfied with attaining happiness in his or her future life, and doesn't extend that concern any further. Such a being is interested in taking another rebirth in cyclic existence. While such a being practises the Dharma purely, because he or she is still involved in cyclic existence, such a being is referred to as a being of inferior or small capacity, compared to a being of medium capacity, who wants to become free from cyclic existence altogether.

¹ Higher rebirth

² Liberation and enlightenment

When one practises the Lam Rim and meditates on the practices of the small capable being, one doesn't actually go down the path of the small capable being. Rather, one follows the path that is shared with the being of small capacity. There is a difference, because one does not want to become a being of small capacity; one wants to generate bodhicitta and attain enlightenment. The path to generating bodhicitta and ultimately enlightenment, however, is shared for a certain length of time with the being of small capacity.

For example, if there are three people and each has a different destination along the same road, all three will share the same route until the first person has reached his destination; then the other two will share the road for a bit further until the second person has reached his destination; and finally, the third person will go on until he has reached his destination, which is the furthest of the three. Although the third person shared the route with the other two initially, he had a further destination.

Similarly, one does not want to become a person of small capacity but shares their path up to a point in order to reach a higher level; one initially has to engage in the same practices and generate a similar motivation as the person of small capacity. That's why it says one meditates on the practices common to the being of small capacity.

The Buddha in his kindness taught the practices of the person of small capacity for those practitioners concerned only with attaining samsaric happiness in the next life. To achieve this aim, these practitioners give up the happiness of this life, abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions, engaging in the ten virtuous actions, and purifying non-virtuous karma. Some practitioners belonging to that category will also engage in meditation on the different form and formless absorptions in order to be reborn in the next life in a form or formless realm.

However, we do not want to attain the state of a human or a god in the next life just for that purpose only. Rather, what we ultimately want is to generate bodhicitta and attain enlightenment. This is what should form the foundation for our practice of the Lam Rim – generating bodhicitta and attaining enlightenment – and we should approach the different practices from this point of view. So, although one travels the same path, one does not actually become a being of small capacity, but shares their practices as preparations for progressing further along the path.

The Buddha taught the teachings of the medium and great capable beings so that sentient beings could achieve definite goodness. Definite goodness consists of liberation and enlightenment. The teachings that were taught so that beings could achieve the aims of a hearer and self-liberator are the teachings of the being of medium capacity. A being of medium capacity wishes to attain individual liberation from cyclic existence, so he or she engages in the practices of the three higher trainings. Such a being wants to attain personal liberation from cyclic existence or nirvana.

But what do we mean by liberation? Liberation means to

be liberated from karma and mental afflictions. Samsara refers to a state of bondage by karma and afflictions and to be free from that suffering is the state of liberation. To achieve this, the practitioner engages in the practices of the three higher trainings.

So, a being of medium capacity has given up any desire for any state in cyclic existence and wishes to attain personal liberation. Such a being has turned his or her back on the happiness of cyclic existence. That's why this attitude is superior to beings of small capacity, who have not turned their backs to the happiness of cyclic existence, but have only turned their backs to the happiness of this life.

However, because these beings have only turned their backs to the happiness of cyclic existence but have not turned their backs to personal individual liberation, such a being's attitude is still inferior to the Mahayana practitioner. This is why they are referred to as beings of medium capacity.

In *Lamp to the Path* where it says: "Having turned one's back on the happiness of cyclic existence...", it is in effect referring to the truth of suffering, the first noble truth. This line is saying that such a practitioner has turned away from suffering. In the second line: "The entity that reverses one from negative karma...", negative karma refers to the truth of the origin of suffering, the second noble truth. The entity that reverses one from the truth of origin is the truth of the path. So, the first two lines refer to the first, second and fourth noble truths. The third line: "Aspiring for a mere individual peace..." refers to the third noble truth of cessation.

The liberation that the being of medium capacity aspires to can either be the liberation of a hearer arhat or the liberation of a self-liberated arhat. These are two types of Hinayana practitioners, or practitioners of the small vehicle. This vehicle is referred to as small not for the purpose of putting it down, but because when it is compared with the Mahayana vehicle, it is smaller from the point of view of aim as well as purpose.

The purpose of practising the small vehicle is primarily to benefit the individual, which is a smaller purpose than that of the Mahayana practitioner, who works for the welfare of all sentient beings. Also, the aim of the small vehicle practitioner is smaller because the aim is liberation free from the afflictions and their seeds, which is lesser than complete enlightenment free from the two types of obscurations.

So, because this path is smaller, both from the point of view of purpose as well as attainment, it is referred to as a small vehicle. However, by itself it is not small at all. It only becomes small when it is compared with the Mahayana path where the purpose is the welfare of all sentient beings and the aim is complete enlightenment.

Question: In my studies of Buddhism, I was always under the understanding that everyone was equal. The idea that the person of small capacity is inferior to the person of medium capacity, I feel that is a contradiction with what I had learned before.

Answer: In Buddhism, there are teachings that describe the different stages of the path. This shows the kindness of the Buddha, because it shows how he looks after his students by guiding them according to their level.

For example, when parents put their children into school, they wouldn't put them immediately into university unless they were crazy. If they really have the welfare of the child at heart, they will first put him or her into prep or first grade. Then the child will progressively develop and will move on to second, third and fourth grade and so forth, progressing gradually to university.

This is similar. Sentient beings have different aspirations and aims. Some will say: "For me it is good enough if I have a good next life, and I don't want to concern myself with anything more". Then there are practitioners who say: "That it is not quite enough for me; I want to become free altogether from cyclic existence. If I am free from cyclic existence, that will be good enough for me". They don't see any kind of happiness in cyclic existence. Even if they were to have a happy next life, they see that ultimately that would not give them happiness, so they want to be free of cyclic existence altogether.

Then there are practitioners that say: "Even if I become free of cyclic existence, it is not enough, because all other sentient beings are still suffering in cyclic existence". One needs to work for the welfare of all sentient beings. Naturally, there are different disciples and different students have different aspirations, so the Buddha gave different teachings to fulfill those different aspirations of practitioners.

We will discuss this more later on but anyway, that was a good question.

Question: Some months ago, you gave some indication about how one should start meditating on emptiness. You suggested that one should meditate on the self, then try and wipe out the self if I understood it correctly. I wondered what the next step was after that.

Answer: Once you have realised selflessness, that alone is not sufficient. You need to meditate on the realisation of selflessness. You need to meditate further on it and you also need to combine it with method – bodhicitta and compassion – so that you can practise wisdom and method together.

Question: From time to time, Tara Institute has a course for people who are interested in visiting aged people. Could you speak on what the value is to the people who are visited and to those who do the visits?

Answer: Whether the people being visited get any benefit from your visit depends on the person who is visiting and what they're doing.

The merit of helping somebody who is sick or miserable is regarded as one of the greatest things that you can do. The merits you create benefit you, because if you accumulate merits, you'll be able to achieve your aims. By making merit, your aims will be achieved, and if you treat the person nicely with compassion and love, they will also be happy and you will increase your love and compassion, your practice of patience, which makes you

a better person and makes it easier for you to make others happier.

The sick person will feel that they are being looked after, so it will put them at ease and alleviate their mental suffering. Otherwise, when they feel that they're not being looked after, it adds to their unhappiness. I have personal experience of that. I helped one person once in India when I was 23, and the person said it really helped him, because initially when he was in hospital, he felt that he would rather die than be in hospital, but through my help he felt that he could go on living. He told me that he had five relatives but none of them had helped him properly.

Sometimes, one may inherit something because that sick person may want to give it to you! There's a story of a person who inherited money after helping a sick person, and was very surprised when he inherited it because he didn't have any intention of inheriting it. The Buddha himself looked after sick monks. It is one of the responsibilities of an abbot to look after his monks. The responsibility of an abbot is to look after the monks and not sit on a high throne.

Focus the mind internally and then place it on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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