
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
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We can meditate for a bit as usual. Please sit comfortably but upright in an appropriate posture. On the basis of this, generate a mind that really wants to meditate.

Then you need to turn the mind inwards, stopping it engaging external objects and focusing it completely inwards. Leave your mind a little in that non-conceptual state. Then, when you find that the mind is trying to escape to the outside, from within that non-conceptual space, place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. Here the placement should not be dualistic, with the mind over here and the meditation object over there; rather, the mind should enter the breathing and the placement should be single-pointed and vivid. We can meditate in that manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

It would be good if you were to cultivate a daily meditation practice to achieve some inner happiness, an inner refuge, because although we need external wealth, if that external wealth is not complemented by mental happiness, it may not provide us with true happiness. If our external wealth did not increase our disturbing thoughts, there would be no problem. However, if our external wealth increases our disturbing thoughts, we have a problem, and we will not be able to experience proper happiness.

It's important that we develop a meditation practice for our mind to become clearer and more relaxed. After we have achieved such mental inner relaxation, clarity and happiness through our meditation practice, we may find certain types of thoughts arising that disrupt that happiness. For example, a couple may be in a situation where they have a child and are happy just to be at home and go to work, living a family life and looking after the child. They may feel very content and happy, until they think about younger couples who don't have children and are not so housebound, and who can go off in the evenings to movies and so forth. As a result of such thoughts, the initial happiness the couple experienced is gone.

We need to protect the mind from such thoughts. Such thinking is a sign that we did not have enough wisdom: we need to make sure right from the beginning that what we are doing is the right thing to do. When discontented thoughts arise, they disturb our happiness, so it's important to protect the mind from them. We need to recognise that we can be quite content in a more 'housebound' family situation and then recall that conscious choice we have made, holding onto the happiness we experience, and not letting our mind be disturbed by thoughts of discontent that might arise by

thinking about what other couples can do.

4.2.2.1.2 The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.1 Training the mind in the stages of the path of the small capable being

4.2.2.1.2.1.1 The actual way of training in the motivation common to the being of small capacity

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2 Relying on the methods for achieving happiness in future lives

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1 Training in going for refuge

Last year, we completed the advice pertaining to the individual refuge objects and then we started the common advice on going for refuge. This had six outlines and we reached number five: On the basis of remembering the benefits going for refuge three times in the morning and three times in the evening

On the basis of remembering the benefits we should go for refuge three times in the morning and three times in the evening. Here then naturally the question arises what the benefits of going for refuge are. For this reason Lama Tsong Khapa lists them under this outline even though in other Lam Rim texts they are listed separately.

This is yet another example of the kindness of the Buddha teaching the dharma in a logical and comprehensible way that accords with our mind and our way of thinking. So it becomes impossible to say "no" to the Buddhadharma because of the skill with which it is taught is so convincingly!

1. You will become a Buddhist.
2. You will become the basis for the different types of vows.
3. Your previously accumulated non-virtuous karma will be purified.
4. You will accumulate vast amounts of merit.
5. You will not fall into the lower realms.
6. Humans and nonhumans will not be able to obstruct your actions.
7. You will be able to accomplish everything through one thought.
8. You will be able to attain enlightenment quickly.

Regarding the first benefit, there are two different views of what constitutes a real Buddhist. Some say that in order to be a real Buddhist, we need to accept the four white views of Buddhism, the four seals of Buddhism, but here according to Atisha, a pure Buddhist is defined by having pure refuge.

So, the distinction between a real Buddhist and a non-Buddhist is whether that person has a pure refuge. Pure refuge is defined by having single-pointed faith in the objects of refuge – in the Buddha as the teacher, in the dharma as the actual refuge proclaimed by the Buddha and in the Sangha as those who we can take as a pure example. Any action we engage in on the basis of pure refuge will be pure Buddhist dharma. We are not necessarily saying that the action will otherwise be non-virtuous, but that for an action to be Buddhist dharma, it

has to be based on pure refuge.

Regarding the second benefit, as Vasubandu said, pure refuge becomes the basis for any of the different types of vows.

A layperson without any type of vows but having taken pure refuge is referred to as an Upasaka with only refuge. The reason is that the pure refuge in that person's continuum acts as the basis for taking any of the different sets of Buddhist vows, such as the male and female novice vows, the vows of a fully ordained monk or nun, the vows of an intermediate nun and so forth.

One reason that pure refuge acts as the basis for the different sets of vows is because to have pure refuge we need to fear the suffering of samsara in general and the lower realms in particular, and we need to have faith in the triple gem's ability to liberate us from those sufferings. To generate fear of the sufferings of samsara and the lower realms, we need to have an understanding of those sufferings and an understanding of those sufferings will naturally bring about the thought of renunciation, of wanting to attain liberation from those sufferings. On the basis of renunciation, we then take the different sets of ordination vows. This is why pure refuge acts as the basis for the different sets of ordination vows.

It is good to think carefully about whether you are a pure Buddhist or not, and then to decide to be a pure Buddhist by understanding the benefits.

The third benefit is that refuge purifies previously accumulated non-virtuous karma. To illustrate this, we will mention a story from the sutras. Once, a being called Lha'ibu who lived in the Realm of the Thirty-three Gods could, through clairvoyance, see that the next life he would take was to be the life of a pig. He became distressed. Indra, one of the higher gods, perceived his distress and asked him why he was so worried. Lha'ibu replied that he had foreseen his rebirth as a pig, and asked Indra to rescue him from that rebirth. Indra replied: "It is not in my power to rescue you from lower rebirth, but if you take refuge in the triple gem, they will be able to rescue you". So Lha'ibu took refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and as he passed away, instead of being reborn as a pig, he was reborn in Ganden.

After Lha'ibu had passed away Indra, who also possessed a certain level of clairvoyance, looked around to see where that god had been reborn but couldn't see him anywhere. So he went and asked the Buddha where that god had been reborn. The Buddha answered that the god had been reborn in the higher realm of Ganden, which is why Indra was not able to see him. So instead of being reborn as a pig, Lha'ibu had been reborn in an even higher realm, and this came about through the power of taking refuge, which purified the karma that would have otherwise have caused him to take rebirth as a pig.

Thereupon Indra proclaimed: "Whoever takes refuge in the triple gem will not be reborn in the lower realms, but instead will take a rebirth as a human or as a god." Indra was probably an emanation of the Buddha.

The lesson here is that non-virtuous karma can be purified. We are always accumulating non-virtuous karma, but the non-virtuous karma that we continually accumulate will not be purified by worrying about it. Worry will not purify our non-virtuous karma! I am repeatedly asked, "How can I purify my karma? How can I change my karma?" Here is the answer – by taking refuge.

So the main practice for purifying non-virtuous karma is refuge. By taking refuge, we will be reborn in one of the happy realms, such as the human realm, and we will purify our non-virtuous karma. Refuge is the supreme method to both accumulate merits and purify non-virtuous karma. We have to relate this awareness of the importance and impact of taking refuge to our practice.

This brings us to the fourth benefit – by going for refuge, we will accumulate limitless amounts of merit. If the merits we accumulate by going for refuge were to be given form, the whole of space would not be enough to hold it because it would be limitless. Here we mean limitless in the context of being uncountable. If one had clairvoyance, of course the amount of merit would be countable: it's like referring to the drops in the ocean as being countless, but that's only because we do not have the ability to count them.

So the first benefit of refuge is that through it, we become a Buddhist. The definition of being a real Buddhist is that one has pure refuge. Then refuge acts as the basis for the different sets of vows, because on the basis of wanting to be liberated from suffering, we then take the different vows. And through refuge, we can purify our negative karma and accumulate vast amounts of merit. Refuge is an easy method to purify non-virtuous karma and accumulate vast amounts of merit.

These are the different points we covered today, which you should try to retain.

Do you have some questions?

Question: Why is it said to be better for westerners like us to say prayers such as the refuge prayer in Tibetan rather than English?

Answer: You should recite them in Tibetan so that you learn Tibetan! (Laughter)

To take an example, at the beginning of the Lama Chopa (Guru Puja), refuge is recited in Sanskrit even though the rest of the Lama Chopa is in Tibetan. This is because Sanskrit is a very special language in which the Buddha taught most of his teachings, so to recite the refuge in Sanskrit at the beginning of the Lama Chopa brings a special blessing to the mind and leaves a potential on the mind to make a connection with that language in which the Buddha taught.

The four-line refuge and bodhicitta prayer is also in Sanskrit. If you were to recite it in Sanskrit, it would bring even greater blessings to the mind. However, reciting it in Tibetan is still special, because it is a special prayer that was composed in Tibetan by Atisha in the context of bringing Buddhism from India to Tibet. So reciting it in Tibetan – the language it was composed in –

might bring a greater blessing than reciting it in English.

The Tibetan prayer is also something we can all recite together. After we recite it, you go your way and I go my mine, but karmically it is significant that we have something that we can all recite together.

You have to extract the pure meaning and purpose from these things.

Question: Is there a specific mantra that can help with extreme cases of fear and anxiety which can come about when one wants to control an outcome?

Answer: In certain cases it might be better to refer to the non-verbal mantra of meditating on selflessness. Meditating on selflessness without reciting anything might be very effective for the mind.

Of course verbally reciting mantras such as the Tara mantra has great benefit. Focusing the mind single-pointedly on Tara, making a request to Tara and reciting the mantra has a positive benefit in subduing fear and overcoming danger. However, psychologically fear arises from very strong self-grasping at the time of the fear so, through meditating on selflessness, you can lessen the sense of self and thus the fear.

Also, the fifth benefit of refuge is being protected from interference by humans and nonhumans. There are many stories with regard to this point.

We can stop here. It is quite hot, so now you can relax. As was explained earlier, turn the mind inwards and place it single-pointedly on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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