
The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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As usual, we will begin with a few minutes of breathing meditation together.

This lamrim text says we should refer to Je Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise* and the *Middling Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* with regard to the three standard outlines of the lamrim teaching. These three outlines are: the greatness of the author, the greatness of the Dharma, and how to listen to and teach the Dharma.

The greatness of the author and the greatness of the Dharma

Here, the author refers to Atisha, as it was he who wrote *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* which is the root or main source for all of the lamrim teachings. The Dharma in the context of the second outline refers to Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*.

The four special qualities of the Dharma, as described in the lamrim texts, characterise the qualities of Atisha's *Lamp for the Path*. In last week's teaching, we briefly touched on each of these four special qualities. The first quality is to understand that all the Buddha's teachings are non-contradictory. The second is that all the Buddha's teachings are personal instructions to be put into practice. Thirdly, easily discovering the intention of the conqueror Buddha. Finally, the Dharma automatically prevents great faults.

Regarding the third special quality of the Dharma of easily discovering the intention of the Buddha: the intention of the Buddha is to lead all beings to achieve their temporary and ultimate goals. So, the implication is that the lamrim teaching systematically arranges all the teachings of the Buddha, stage by stage, to enable people to follow the path in accordance with the small, middling and great mental capacities of beings. Understanding this will make it very clear that the Buddha's intention when giving discourses was to fulfil the temporary and ultimate needs of all beings.

Without relying on the lamrim, it is very difficult to recognise that the Buddha's teachings are non-contradictory and personal instructions, which are the first two special qualities of the Dharma. If we don't recognise these, we will then end up with a very confused and distorted understanding of Dharma. For example, we will see contradictions between the Buddha's sutra and mantra teachings and we will become very confused and critical of the Buddha's teachings on the Three Vehicles: the Hinayana and Mahayana and so forth.

However, the Dharma in the lamrim has the special quality of realising the efficacy of all the Buddha's teachings in benefiting others, according to an individual's capacity and needs. This shows the great extent of the Buddha's skill and knowledge in leading all beings. Otherwise, some may think their path is higher and more advanced because they follow the Mahayana path, and out of pride they disparage or despise Hinayanists. Furthermore, there are Sutrayana and Mantrayana followers of the Mahayana, and those who follow the latter may consider themselves on a more advanced path than followers of the Sutrayana. Moreover, within the Tantrayana, there are four classes, and those who

follow the higher class may despise those following the lower class. Such disputes and disparagement evidently existed before Atisha came to Tibet, and one of the main reasons for Atisha coming to Tibet was to eliminate such divisions within the followers of Buddhism and to clear up misunderstanding and conflict with respect to all aspects of the Buddha's teachings. With this objective in mind, Atisha composed *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* which is a famous text characterised by the four special qualities of Dharma that were mentioned above.

How to listen to and teach the Dharma

This topic is endowed with two types of greatness in terms of the quality of the Dharma itself and the quality of the author. Many of you have already heard the lamrim teaching on the proper manner or way of listening to and teaching the Dharma, however, I will briefly go over it for the sake of those who haven't heard it before.

The benefits of listening to and studying the Dharma are mentioned to encourage us to develop a genuine interest and motivation to learn the Dharma. If we have a strong interest and motivation, we will develop a greater force of enthusiasm and thereby accomplish what we want to accomplish. For example, pursuing conventional education makes a huge difference to our success if we have a clear knowledge of why we are studying and what benefits we can derive from it. The more we know about the benefits and purpose and what is to be gained, the greater our interest, motivation and enthusiasm in achieving what we want to achieve.

Verses about Listening (Śrutivarga) says,

Through listening, you come to know the phenomena;
Through listening, bad actions are reversed;
Through listening, the meaningless is abandoned;
Through listening, nirvana is achieved.

The first line: *Through listening, you come to know the phenomena* is saying that, as a benefit of listening to the Dharma, you will gain a sense of discrimination of phenomena, knowing what action to adopt and what action to reject. The second line: *Through listening, bad actions are reversed* implies that, based on the sense of discrimination, you will then practise the morality of refraining from negative actions. The three baskets or the three collections of the Buddha's teachings imply the basket of Vinaya or moral ethics. The third line: *Through listening, the meaningless is abandoned* implies the basket of sutras or the collection of teachings on concentration. Based on good moral practice, you will overcome coarse distractions and tune your mind into removing all the obstacles to meditation, such as mental sinking and excitement, and achieve a single-pointed state of concentration, of abiding your mind on a virtuous object as long as you wish. The fourth line: *Through listening, nirvana is achieved* implies the basket of Abhidharma or metaphysics pertaining to the training of wisdom. Through gaining the wisdom of realising selflessness, you will attain nirvana, the state beyond sorrow, or liberation.

The study of subjects such as history, language and so on is essentially to stimulate thoughts and ideas and to gather new information more oriented to outer material development. However, Buddhist knowledge is oriented towards developing our mind and becoming a better person. So, unlike conventional learning, it is important that we have the right mental outlook in our approach to Buddhist learning and practice.

Our knowledge and practice of Buddhism won't have a positive effect on our minds and our life unless we have the

correct mental attitude. For example, if we have a wrong mental attitude when listening to the Dharma, then instead of applying what we learn to our inner continuum, we will use it to assess how much the speaker knows. This approach will be of no benefit to us.

We have a saying that someone who is very ignorant and has never heard the Dharma before can be subdued by the Dharma. On the other hand, it is very difficult to tame someone who has heard the Dharma many times before and doesn't put it into practice. To illustrate this, there is the analogy of how new leather can be easily softened by butter, but the leather bag used to store butter is very difficult to soften by butter. It is even more detrimental if our knowledge of the Dharma ends up as a cause to increase the mental afflictions within us.

For example, if we take pride in our Dharma knowledge, we will look down on those who seem to have less knowledge than ourselves, feel competitiveness towards those who seem to have equal knowledge, and become jealous of those who seem to have greater knowledge. Consequently, whatever Dharma knowledge we have gained has become a cause to increase the mental afflictions and hence will have no meaning or benefit to us. Yet, those with a little knowledge will benefit a lot from the Dharma if they apply it to their mental continuum.

Relating to listening to the Dharma, one sutra says, 'Listen well, the best way and hold it in your mind'. Here, *listen well* implies that when listening to the teaching we must direct our mental attention to the Dharma. If we lose our attention to something else, then the Dharma won't enter our minds. *The best way* implies that when listening to the Dharma, we must have the right motivation or intention so that our understanding is not tainted by mental afflictions such as desire, hatred, pride and so forth. The best outcome is to generate the bodhicitta mind of wishing to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit other sentient beings as our motivation. For this reason, we recite the bodhicitta prayer before beginning to listen or teach the Dharma, cultivating the thought, 'I must achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings and that's why I am studying the Dharma'. *Hold it in your mind* advises us that even if the Dharma enters our mind and is not corrupted by any wrong mental attitudes, it will be of no use if we don't hold or retain it in our mind.

Therefore, after listening, we cannot afford to lose or forget what we have heard. We must mentally reflect on, revise and discuss what we have learned with others. In this way, the Dharma will stay in our mind, and we can further develop it.

The patient, the medicine and the doctor

Moreover, as part of the manner of listening to and teaching the Dharma, we should cultivate a recognition that: we are like a patient, the Dharma is like a medicine and the Dharma teacher is like a doctor. However, we may doubt the validity of this point by thinking, 'Why would I consider myself to be a patient because I am not sick?' True, we may not be suffering from a physical sickness, but we are suffering from the sickness of the three poisonous minds, and we undergo unending suffering and pain as a result. So, from that point of view we are all like a patient suffering from a chronic mental illness.

It is also wrong to think that the three poisonous minds do not cause us to suffer or experience pain. We do undergo suffering, but we generally don't acknowledge or recognise how we are perpetually disturbed, distressed and tormented by the three poisonous states of mind. We can consider

various situations we may face, such as being obsessed with something very difficult to obtain, resulting in much frustration, despair and suffering. There is also the situation of feeling hatred towards someone who has been nasty to us.

Sometimes the emotional and mental turmoil we experience because of mental afflictions is more severe than physical sickness. So, we can clearly recognise these mental problems as some form of sickness. Just as we need the right medicine to cure a physical illness, we need to recognise the Dharma as the medicine to cure the illness of the three poisonous minds.

We can also compare this to a chronic illness that can't be overcome by taking the medicine once or twice or occasionally. Similarly, we have been suffering from the three poisonous states of mind such as ignorance, desire or hatred not only in this life but over countless lifetimes, and the Dharma is the medicine that can cure us of this illness. Like chronic illness, we need to apply the Dharma not once or twice but practice it for a long period of time repeatedly.

Furthermore, it is important to receive the correct diagnosis and prescription of medicine by ensuring that our doctor is an expert in the medical field. Likewise, we need to rely on the perfect Dharma teachers, like our own trusted spiritual guides or spiritual gurus. We learn from our teachers about the spiritual path and the practices we should engage in. By relying on our Dharma teachers, we gain knowledge of the Dharma which is like medicine. After that, we must put the Dharma into practice, just as a patient needs to take medicine precisely as prescribed by the doctor.

The unique thing about the Dharma is that it must be applied to our mind and our mental continuum, otherwise it is of no benefit to us. If we don't wash the dirt away from our face that we see in the mirror, there was no point in using the mirror in the first place. So, the Dharma is like a mirror and whenever we listen to it, we need to relate it to our mind, and based on our knowledge and understanding, we then apply it in our practice accordingly.

I encourage anyone who is studying the lamrim text to be aware right from the beginning of what you are learning, and try to remember and retain that knowledge to ensure a thorough understanding. As we move forward and progressively gain more knowledge, unless you comprehend it from the start, it will continue to become more confusing and much harder to develop.

Let's leave it here. Thank you.

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