

The Very Brief Stages of the Path by Todd Fenner
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Slightly Edited

Subj.: LamRim I
Date: 95-12-08 11:09:12 EST
From: Jamyang

First a little background: Literature on the Stages of the Path abound in Buddhism. It might be said that Shakyamuni's formula of hearing, reflecting, and meditation represents such an outline as well as the formula of discipline, meditation, and wisdom. The former are stages we should take regarding any teaching. That is, first we hear, read etc. Then we examine it with reason and experience. Shakyamuni said we should not simply take his teachings out of respect for him but rather test them as we would test the purchase of gold. Finally, we should meditate on them. Here meditation is samadhi. What this means is that after generating a particular mind from hearing and reflection, we make this an integral part of us through the power of concentration. For instance, we hear about compassion and attended many teachings on it. Then we reflect and mentally go through all the different reasonings such as 'all beings were once our mothers' and/or the 'exchange of self and other' when compassion dawns in us i.e. when we have generated the mind of compassion, we continually cultivate that mind till compassion is with us always, or at least more often than not. We do the same with refuge, renunciation, wisdom etc. There are varying degrees of concentration. But this is the general idea.

The latter formula is more broadly oriented, saying in essence, that without discipline, the conditions for meditation/concentration won't arise and that w/o concentration insight won't develop. Here, insight is not intellectual speculation but realization. However, if you examine your mind you will see that even intellectual speculation demands some degree of mental focus and that assumes your mind isn't so undisciplined that it can't do anything but flit from sense object to sense object, passion to passion. The Theravada master, Buddhaghosa outlines his Path of Purification along this latter scheme. The elements of the two sets of three mentioned above are assumed to be functioning in all path systems so even though they may not be mentioned explicitly they are there. Another outline taught by Shakyamuni was the outline of the 37 wings of enlightenment. These are the 4 foundations of mindfulness, the 4 restraints, the 4 bases of accomplishment, the 5 faculties, the 5 powers, the 7 limbs and the 8 fold path. Shakyamuni spoke of these shortly before his passing when asked to give a final teaching on the path.

In addition, the Prajnaparamita speaks of the stages of a bodhisattva. Asanga's massive Yogacarabhumi has sections on the paths of both those seeking individual liberation and bodhisattvas. The point is that the outlines of stages of the path appear throughout the history of Buddhism.

Subj.: LamRim ii
Date: 95-12-10 01:02:26 EST
From: Jamyang

The lineage:

The lineage of the Lam Rim teachings I am going to post about comes largely from Atisha (982-1055). Atisha was born in Bengal and quite early showed signs of being a prodigy. By the age of 21 it is said that he mastered many teachings including logic, received many empowerments and had visions of Hevajra and Vajra Dakini. He studied with Avadhutipa, a direct disciple of Naropa, for 7 years. After that period he decided to become a monk at the age of 28. He traveled and studied extensively and spent a good deal of time in what is now Indonesia. He became very renowned.

Eventually a King in Tibet, Jangchub Od invited him to come to Tibet in hopes of restoring morality to many of the monks of Tibet. Atisha did so, and in so doing founded the Kadam lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Atisha influenced and is respected by all the lineages of Tibet. The work 'Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment' which was written in order to answer some questions by the King became the basis for the Lam Rim tradition. Some of the key features of this tradition are

- * That there is one final vehicle
- * That meditation is necessary for wisdom
- * That both wisdom and method are critical for success
- * That moral discipline, i.e. any of the 7 pratimoksa vows established the basis for the Bodhisattva vow.
- * That the so-called lower trainings, rather than being replaced by the higher ones were the basis of the higher ones and training in the Mahayana and Vajrayana required resting on a strong foundation.

He delineated 3 classes of persons according to capacity and motivation.

- * The initial motivation consisted of those who wished to improve their lot in future lives
- * Those of middling motivation sought not mere improvement but actual liberation from samsara
- * Those of advanced motivation sought to liberate all other sentient beings as well and for that purpose, pursue the goal of Buddhahood.

This Lam Rim lineage passed into the Kagyu lineage via Gampopa(1079-1153) who wedded the lineages of Atisha, notably the vast lineage of Asanga and the profound lineage of Nagarjuna with the blessing lineage of Milarepa. It is this flowing together that became the Dakpo Kagyu and its offshoots including Karma, Drikung and Dukpa Kagyu. Lama Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), fused together many teachings of the lineages, including Kadam, Kagyu, and Sakya plus a close lineage received directly from Manjusri. He received the transmission of the Lam Rim from the Nyingma teacher Khenchen Namkha Gyaltzen.

Tsongkhapa wrote extensively on the Lam Rim including his great, middling and small expositions. In addition he wrote the sNgag rim chen mo, his extensive treatment of the stages of the Vajrayana path.

Subj.: LamRim iv
 Date: 95-12-10 14:42:23 EST
 From: Jamyang

What will and what will not be taught-

My intent is to present the teachings on karma, discipline (for lay people), the nature of samsara, impermanence, the preciousness of human rebirth, to cover the first two motivations, then bodhicitta and the first five perfections for the last motivation. the topic of wisdom will only briefly be discussed as it was in part discussed in the previous section on view.

Of the three motivations, the initial motivation comes from the desire to improve ones lot in a future life. This can mean a better human life or a life among the devas in a heaven of which there are many. Those who are concerned only with this life have been classically felt to not be included among those with dharma motivation. Classically also, other religions which teach virtue and various acts in order to be reborn in heaven are considered as belonging to this class. It may be argued that by way of motivation there may be in other dharmas persons belonging to the higher motivations and that such persons may in fact be sravakas, pratyekas and bodhisattvas. This appears to be so certainly for bodhisattvas and some texts speak of the possibility of arhats to be and pratyekas achieving their final goal while outwardly appearing to be a practitioner of other dharmas. However, this is beyond the scope of this presentation. It is also beyond the scope to discuss humanists who practice virtue and who may practice dharmic techniques but who deny future lives and see buddhahood as essentially a metaphor for a relatively peaceful one life.

Karma

The basic teaching in the initial motivation is about karma. Karma as a word means action but it is not just any action. It has the connotation of intent. So it can be said that karma is willed action. However since it primarily applies to beings who are not buddhas it is willed action tainted by the defilements. This action can take place via body speech or mind. The will in willed action can be extremely subtle, so much so that it is difficult to notice unless one has practiced mindfulness to an advanced degree. Likewise the defilements, mainly the three: delusion, attachment and aversion can be subtle in the sense that they are not

readily appearant to the unmindful. To the extremely mindful they are as noticeable as a hair in the eye. and to the unmindful as noticeable as a hair in the palm of a callused hand.

Because intent is involved, we have free choice. But once karma ripens we must experience the result. The result of karma is not technically considered karma although the word 'karma' in ordinary usage includes the result. Buddhism is not fatalistic then. There was a school of thought in India called the Ajivika that was completely deterministic. But this is not a tenet of Buddhism. When something happens to one, that is the result of karma, however one still has the ability to respond and with that ability creates a cause for either future benefit or harm. Admittedly, because of the habit to let ourselves be carried away we often chose a course of action that has negative results. The rules of virtue or discipline are intended to counteract that habit.

When we act, we create a cause that remains a potential until conditions for the ripening of that potential arise. When it does, the result of karma occurs. The result may occur quickly or ages from the cause. It may have a big result or a little result depending on the conditions. For instance, a seed of a plant is always the seed of that plant but conditions for growing may be non-existent, existent but poor etc. It is unlikely that karma for winning the lotto will ripen without buying a lotto ticket.

It is said that there are five factors that should be present for a karmic action to be complete and be assured of ripening. These are:

1. Tainted by the defilements
2. Intent
3. An object on which the intent is focused
4. Carrying out the intent on the object
5. A feeling of being happy about carrying out the intent.

an example: attachment to riches, an unguarded diamond, intent to take the diamond, taking the diamond and joy once it is in your pocket. this is the karma involving stealing. and it will have an effect.

Subj.: LamRim v
Date: 95-12-12 23:08:37 EST
From: Jamyang

Along the foregoing line of thought, Drikungpa Jigten Sumgon argued with regard to vows, it was wrong to think that because one did not take the upasaka vows such as no killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxicants that did not make it ok to do such things. If that were the case, then it would be better to not take any vows because then one could do anything with impunity. Vows, he said, are meant to guard virtue. when we take a vow we set up a dike if you will that inhibits us at the right times and so protect us. The full vinaya, he considered as really a more tight and better dike against non-virtue than the upasaka vows. They were not just a bunch of rules.

When Shakyamuni first taught, he ordained by just saying 'come with me'. The full vinaya developed as incidents occurred and Shakyamuni had to guide persons along a better way. Similarly, the bodhicitta vows protect against the loss of bodhicitta, the vajrayana vows against the degeneration of one's empowerments and blessings.

Karma is simple to explain in isolation but in actuality it gets complex because we are always creating causes. It can be mixed and usually is. An example given by the former Zong Rinpoche was that of a lazy but generous person being reborn as an American pet; a life of riley, but an animal nonetheless.

In accumulating wholesome karma and minimizing the unwholesome one has to be very careful and be very mindful. It is for this reason that some say the four restraints among the 37 wings to Bodhi which deal with accumulating virtue and minimizing and ridding non-virtue are placed after the four foundations of mindfulness. With the practice of mindfulness one can recognize the wholesome and the unwholesome and act accordingly. The lists given in various abhidharma treatises of mental states are used in practice to identify such states within one so that one can act accordingly. They are not meant as an exercise in metaphysical red tape!

Having said that, the question may arise: 'Is there a method for ridding causes already accumulated but latent?' The permanent solution is liberation and Buddhahood. until then however, and as a constant practice on the path one applies the four antidotes.

1. Confession or recognition of the problem
2. Regret, sincere please!
3. Doing something virtuous such as taking refuge, renewing vows etc.
4. Wish not to do the trouble causing act again

These four act in concert to allay the full result and burn the seed or create unfavorable conditions for its ripening. a birth in hell may only become a nightmare for instance. Specific actions also include prostrations while reciting the confession sutra, a practice of Marpa as well as a Gelug ngon dro practice; Vajrasattva, and others as well, included in Vajrayana. However doing these without the mind being based on the four antidotes won't have much power so the four antidotes are key.

This concludes the brief account of the teaching for one with initial motivation.

Subj.: LamRim vi
Date: 95-12-14 00:50:19 EST
From: Jamyang

Having learned about karma one should examine its implications. One's behavior affects one's future, one's speech and one's thought. For this reason, discipline and mindfulness are critical practices. Not killing leads to long life, not stealing to not being ripped off, generosity to wealth, patience to beauty, concentration meditation and puja along with the other virtues to rebirth in the god realms.

The Mimamsaka school of Hinduism believed that this was the best one could hope for. They felt that the Vedic rituals (as in rg veda etc. not saivism etc.) ensured a happy rebirth and so one continued in life after life in this way.

The intermediate motivation is generated by meditating on the implications of karma for the long term. after all, in the long run, karma is a never ending losing game. One simply cannot avoid suffering and misery forever one is bound sooner or later to slip up and fall and fall bad. Even a birth in the god realms as a god or goddess or where it is androgynous is not viewed as favorable because even there happiness is temporary, worse, because in the god realms, one is blissed out so to speak, one never works to build up further virtue and like living on one's savings account, though it starts out good, eventually it runs out. the gods pass away like all sentient beings and are reborn in lower realms, often in hell.

An example: a person works hard, makes a lot of money, quits and just spends, no investment. fun while it lasts but when the money is out one is one the street worse than when one started.

A desire to escape the whole system begins to evolve. One comes to meditate on the nature of suffering in three parts:

1. suffering of suffering
2. suffering of change
3. pervasive suffering

The first refers to direct acute misery - death, illness, homelessness, war, hell etc.

The second refers to misery that results from change -- winning a game, gaining that job, starting a relationship etc. all have great promise of happiness and for a while one is ecstatic and feels on top of the world. But it is temporary. one acts as though winning etc. will result in permanence of joy as in 'if I only got that I would the happiest person in the world'. But winning a game brings only temporary joy; that great job becomes just a job, and relationships, well, that first kiss doesn't last forever. even winning the lotto or becoming a world conquering monarch has its pitfalls.

The third refers to the capacity for all things to end up this way because we are always seeking the permanent in the impermanent, the pure in the impure, the self in not self, the mine in not mine. this view is mainly held by realized practitioners. when it is said that everything is suffering, this is the view that is meant. the realized practitioner is like a reformed addict who when seeing that drink or drug is reminded of the misery it led to rather than the joy its users take it for. In this case it is the addiction to samsara that must be broken. Taking pleasure in it is said to be like licking honey from the edge of a razor.

Subj.: LamRim vii
Date: 95-12-16 02:17:53 EST
From: Jamyang

It is said that the sincere seeker of individual liberation desires to leave samsara with the same fervor as one whose hair is afire wishes to put it out. How this is done is on the basis of discipline, concentration and wisdom. Discipline must be to a degree such that one has little distraction and good conditions for contemplation. although the outlines of the path vary in description in general it has been said that the sravaka principal practice consists of the development of the four foundations of mindfulness first perhaps serially but then together in concert and contemplates the dharmas in terms of sixteen aspects of the four noble truths. The sixteen are:

- * suffering : impermanence, suffering, empty and not self
- * origin: arising, appearance, cause, and condition
- * cessation: cessation, calm, excellent and definitive liberation
- * path: path, truth, obtaining, and release

Contemplating such, one meditates on each truth in two stages consisting of the development of non-fear and facility regarding the object of meditation, this being called 'patience' and then the knowledge that certain defilements have been abandoned, called 'knowledge'. In turn, these two stages regarding each truth are contemplated in relation to objects of the desire realm and then objects of the higher realms which are the realm of pure form and the formless realm. Thus the 16 aspects are meditated on in 16 stages, the sixteenth stage being generally considered entrance onto the path of seeing wherein the four truths are thus seen directly.

To illustrate:

suffering -- patience stage re desire realm
 knowledge stage re desire realm
 subsequent patience stage re higher realm
 subsequent knowledge stage re higher realm
origin etc. same as above

The attainment of the path of seeing eliminates certain of the defilements. Others must be eliminated via the path of cultivation. The principle defilements are: attachment, anger, pride ignorance, false view and doubt. These six can be divided into ten by subdividing false views into belief in a self, false view, holding to extremes, esteeming of views, and esteeming of mere ritual and ascetic practices. the ten can be further divided by various means including the realm in which they relate. The Abhidharmakosa thus counts 98 such defilements and discusses which are eliminated by the seeing and cultivation of the four truths in what realms. A full discussion is way beyond the scope here. My purpose in mentioning them is to illustrate that it is not necessarily a simple slam dunk affair and to point out that it is considered important to cultivate wisdom with absorption i.e. you need both.

To many Mahayanists, one of the differentiating points between Mahayana and Hinayana was the meditation on sunyata rather than the sixteen aspects of the four truths. However, to Chandrakirti and the Prasangikas both sravakas and bodhisattvas cultivate realization of sunyata and that it is only by such realization that even the Arhats can be liberated. The difference lay principally in the development of bodhicitta by the bodhisattva. Such motivation attended by the practice of the perfections enabled a deeper cultivation of wisdom such that obstructions to omniscience as well as liberation could be eliminated. I bring this up here to point out an important view that asserts that meditation on wisdom alone will cause

one otherwise a mahayanist to fall short and slip into the path of an arhat.

Thus ends the section on individual liberation

Subj.: LamRim viii

Date: 95-12-16 13:06:30 EST

From: Jamyang

The highest motivation grows out of the initial and the intermediate. That is, without the first two there cannot be the highest. Why? As Jigten Sumgon said in his famous gong chik (the vajra verses on the one intent), the difference between the large and small vehicle is bodhicitta the mind intent on full enlightenment. One can and some do, argue against the gong chik saying that there are a lot a differences in the vehicles, but what Jigten Sumgon said here really hits the nail on the head because all of those differences grow out of this very bodhicitta.

It is said that all beings want to be happy and no being wants to suffer. All the things we do as ordinary beings seeking fame, gain, avoidance of loss and fear, feeding the self cherishing mind eventually bring us down. Some, seeking more lasting benefit learn about karma and conduct themselves accordingly getting some benefit that is more lasting than before. Of those, some realize that simply doing this will not bring permanent benefit and seek to be liberated forever from the round of samsara, the ocean of pain and suffering. They use the laws of karma, not as an end in itself but to bring about conditions useful for practice. It is difficult to practice as a god or demi-god (actually very akin to the greek titans) because gods usually are too comfortable and the titans are too obsessed with the gods for having beaten them in battle. Animals by and large do not have the mental capacity to practice and are usually either enslaved or are caught up in pure survival. Ghosts are weighed down by misery and envy, never happy with what they have, seeing pure water as pus and blood, trying to feed an enormous appetite that is never satisfied. Beings in hell, experience the ripening of their actions of hate and out of control lust and greed, so they can't practice much.

As an illustration, think of how well you practice when your mind is filled with anger, thoughts of getting even etc. then imagine multiplying that many fold and you can get an idea of how the flames of anger become the flames of hell. Even in the human realm there are places without dharma, places in war or famine, under tyrants. There are humans who suffer extreme poverty, illness etc. However, some do come into contact with the dharma and have conditions conducive to practice. This last is termed a 'precious human rebirth'. It is precious because conditions are ripe for practice. However, who knows how long it will last. Death could come at any point, the miracle being not that we breath out but that we breath back in. A teacher here today could be gone tomorrow. Today's leisure could change into tomorrow's workload. Because of all these uncertainties and chances not to practice, one with dharma motivation conduct themselves to use karma to bring about and sustain good conditions for practice.

Beings seeking individual liberation, utilizing the merit they have accumulated then practice mindfulness and meditate on the four truths to gain the wisdom that liberates.

A person of high motivation, likewise uses karma to accumulate merit for good conditions, likewise seeks liberative wisdom, but the motivation in the high motivation changes from seeking liberation only for oneself and maybe a few others to seeking liberation for all beings. Having recognized the four truths as describing suffering and its cessation, one considers that all beings are in the same boat. Through out all times and all universes beings have sought happiness only to fail utterly in the end. Each of these beings at one time or another have been your dearest loved one, your lover, friend, child, parent. You grew up with these beings. Now you see that their attempts at happiness are failing. What is more, these same beings you loved, because of seeking happiness ignorantly may now be beings who are in hell, in the animal realm, be your enemy and so on. Because of realization of the four truths and because of the recognition of the plight of beings a desire grows to liberate them as well.

Subj.: LamRim ix

Date: 95-12-16 13:34:47 EST

From: Jamyang

But what to do? How does one liberate all other beings? It is very difficult and takes much skill, skill that even arhats do not have. Arhats may benefit many beings while alive and succeed in liberating many as well. However, on death, an Arhat passes into a state of cessation and cannot help. Further, as gifted as Arhats are, they do not have the depth of wisdom and the powers used by Buddhas to be of even more benefit. Since the desire to liberate all beings everywhere can really only be hoped to be fulfilled by having the abilities of a Buddha, one then vows to work toward enlightenment for the benefit of beings. That is bodhicitta.

It has been said 'the buddha causes beings to become liberated beings but bodhicitta causes buddhas'. Indeed, the only real cause of buddhahood is bodhicitta because the only purpose of buddhahood is to liberate and benefit beings. All the powers of the Buddhas their various forms, their pure lands, their retinues etc. are the result of the vast accumulation of merit combined with the deepening of wisdom that a bodhisattva works on with this deep and vast motivation which is pure selfless love seeking to benefit all others.

This is why, Atisha, in spite of high achievements in meditating on tantric dieties considered his most important teacher to be the one who taught him bodhicitta. This is why, that without bodhicitta, the best that one can do in Vajrayana is be reborn as a powerful demon. This is why there is such an emphasis in Tibetan dharma on checking one's motivation.

Buddhahood is not achieved by the desire to have a body of light, have a retinue, emanate countless displays or otherwise be nifty. It is achieved through the constant cultivation of bodhicitta. With bodhicitta, one will work to gain the necessary accumulations of merit and wisdom without it one won't.

Subj.: LamRim x
Date: 95-12-16 18:47:16 EST
From: Jamyang

There is said to be three grades of bodhisattva motivation.

1. Shepherd -- wherein like a shepherd who stays behind the flock until they get over the pass, the bodhisattva is so motivated that he/she is perfectly willing to stay in samsara until every last being is liberated no matter what hardship may result. This is the motivation exemplified by Chenresig(Avalokitesvara, Kuan Yin).
2. Ferryperson -- like the captain of a ferry, the bodhisattva seeks to take all beings at the same time. 'let's get liberated together'.
3. King -- like a king who leads, a bodhisattva first seeks skill by becoming a
4. Buddha and then leads. 'let me get liberated and get skill, then I can help'.

The strongest motivation is that of the shepherd, however eventually bodhisattvas must act like the king motivated simply because unless a bodhisattva has skill no one is going to be benefited.

The generation of the wish for enlightenment, aspiring bodhicitta, is the act which makes one a bodhisattva and begins the path of accumulation. The actual helping of beings, that is, the actual leading of beings to liberation, not just aiding in a myriad of other ways which a bodhisattva also does, is called engaging bodhicitta. Engaging bodhicitta is said by many to begin at the path of seeing, that is after the bodhisattva has a direct non-conceptual view of reality and so actually begins to rid defilements from the root and can also teach authoritatively from experience. Until the path of seeing, one meditates on reality via an image. This image, say the Gelug, can be very precise and accurate however, it is still an image and it is not the actual experience. Upon attaining the path of seeing, the bodhisattva actually begins the practice of the six perfections. They are called perfections because the conduct is done in conjunction with the knowledge of reality that comes from the path of seeing onwards. By doing thus, the obstructions to omniscience as well as the obstructions to liberation are eliminated.

This does not mean that the perfections should not be practiced beforehand, quite the contrary, they must be, only that they cannot be 'perfected' prior to the path of seeing.

Subj.: LamRim xi
Date: 95-12-17 11:35:57 EST
From: Jamyang

Generosity -- the first perfection

When a bodhisattva enters the first bhumi a great joy enters along with. Seeing the true possibility of liberation for the first time, no longer relying on just faith or inference, but on actual direct knowledge, that bodhisattva's grasping to objects including the self becomes as if mortally wounded.

The practice of generosity, which the first bhumi bodhisattva takes up as a principle practice has the effect of accumulating more of merit and wisdom. It is merit, because of the act of giving itself and wisdom because during the act of giving, the propensity of ignorant grasping, seeing the gift, object of giving, and the subject giver as being fundamentally different and experiencing a loss when giving is weakened still more and the opposite of ignorant grasping is further developed.

The practice of giving is divided into three with reference to the gift:

1. Material goods
2. Dharma
3. Protection

The bodhisattva practices all three according to skill and means. It is important to note that the 'perfection' in practice of giving does not equate to the actual elimination of poverty, ignorance, and fear of all beings. As Shantideva points out, if that were true, none of the Buddhas would have been perfected since there is still poverty, ignorance and fear. Rather it has to do with an attitude.

This attitude however, is not a mere lack of miserliness. Kamalashila argued for the point of view of Indian Buddhism in saying that giving had to be more activist; it had to consist in actual acts of giving via body speech and mind. This is true even when the act is primarily mental as in visualized offerings during a puja or sadhana. In this regard, it is also important to note that the bodhisattva's compassion is not a mere lack of intent to harm. The latter is something a Sravaka and Pratyeka have. A bodhisattva does something.

An illustration is that of a person fallen into a pit filled with filth. Passers by look and feel sorrow but a bodhisattva thinks nothing of jumping in and helping that person out. The bodhisattva's acts of giving are also not acts of giving like a fool. Giving must be done skillfully. The Bodhisattvabhumi of Asanga actually gets quite detailed about what is or what is not a proper act of giving from the view of the giver's attitude, the receiver of the gift and the gift itself. All these 'rules' however can be distilled into one major criteria. That is, will the gift bring about true benefit for all involved? If yes, then it is suitable. If no, then it is not.

Subj.: LamRim xii
Date: 95-12-17 13:20:53 EST
From: Jamyang

So what are examples of suitable and non suitable giving? The most common nowadays would be giving a gun to one intending to kill, a drug to an addict etc. are examples of non-suitable giving. The giving, if not benefiting ultimate happiness directly, such as giving food to the hungry, should not harm ultimate happiness. If you have a dharma book that is rare, which is benefiting you and helping your progress, it is ok not to give it to someone else until you have gained mastery over the book. This is different than grasping to the pride of 'What a fine library I have. People will be so impressed when they see what a dedicated dharma student I am.' Also, if a person who asks for the dharma book or teaching, is not a suitable person, i.e. such a person is not sincere, seeks to examine only to cause trouble etc. then most definitely one should not give the book or teaching. Also, even if such a person is sincere, but would be harmed by receiving a particular teaching such as on Vajrayana, emptiness etc. one should not give.

Shakyamuni, who knew the dispositions of all persons who came to him, did not, like many of us, just expound on everything he knew. Rather, the teaching was customized to the receiver so as to gain the most benefit. There were many persons who asked for all sorts of teachings that Shakyamuni just refused to give because it would not do them any good, and may actually harm them. Milarepa for instance, when he was a fairly new student, was not a suitable vessel for Dzogchen teachings. Even though he received such teachings no realization developed as a result. He had to go back to Marpa.

For Milarepa, even though Marpa seemed to be stingy with dharma and a cruel taskmaster, Marpa's giving of dharma to Mila was suitable because it fitted what Mila needed. Many of us nowadays don't take into account the recipient of dharma teaching like we would the recipient of a material gift. We hear about 'high' teachings and blurt them out all over the place, even denigrating 'low' teachings without a clue as to what is beneficial or not. The fact is, whether a teaching is superior or inferior does not depend on its title, renown, category in the canon etc. It depends on whether it actually benefits and that depends on the recipient more than the giver or the gift. Shakyamuni brought many to the path of seeing and even arhatship, by the use of seemingly trivial phrases such as 'death happens to everybody'. In such cases, the phrase, 'look into the nature of your own mind' allegedly a 'high' teaching, may have been useless and even harm the person if as a result the person thought, 'what kind of nonsense is this? I'll go elsewhere'.

Subj.: lam rim xiii
Date: 95-12-17 13:48:03 EST
From: Jamyang

The last post on the importance of the recipient of the gift might be construed by our wily self cherishing mind as an excuse to be stingy. So it is even more important that we cultivate mindfulness and recognize our motivations and limitations. Along the way, we will most definitely make mistakes big and small, but that should not stop us from trying. More on that in the section on the perfection of effort.

Now for the giver: first, giving is just that, giving. Giving, because one thinks 'this will get me good points' is not giving, it is an investment. Aryadeva in chapter V of the Catuhsataka says :

When one thinks that by giving gifts now
There will be a great result,
Receiving and giving are like trade
for profit.

Such persons will gain prosperity but not liberation. The bodhisattva thus cultivates giving without thought of reward. Lama Tsongkhapa lists a number of points to judge whether the giver is practicing correctly.

Incorrect practice :

- * with postponement,
- * just after causing hardship,
- * poorly after reneging on a pledge,
- * with pointing out what a kind person you are for giving,
- * in tiny installments when it is proper to give at once,
- * only after a lengthy amassing of wealth etc.

Correct practice:

- * with joy,
- * sincerity,
- * with respect to the recipient (not 'here it is you stupid lazy beggar') etc.

Granted, all this is difficult but we should start. The late Geshe Rabten suggested for some people that one start by taking a pebble and having the right hand give it to the left and vice versa.

Subj.: Lam Rim xiv
Date: 95-12-22 12:53:03 EST

From: Jamyang

Conduct/discipline/morality -- sila paramita.

rJe Tsongkhapa explains the perfection of conduct/morality and the cultivation of the attitude of non-harming.

As explained previously, the rules of discipline are intended as a guide on keeping oneself out of karmic trouble. The avoidance of the ten non-virtues and the taking up of the lay vows clearly demark a line of behavior that seeks to avoid harming others. In the perfection of such conduct, this extends to even giving offense.

In the conduct chapter of the Bodhicaryavatara, Shantideva criticizes those who use their toothstick improperly as well as other types of behavior considered rude in 7th century India. The idea here is not to say that we should, as buddhists adopted ancient Indian etiquette. Rather, it does say that we should be conscious of the rules in the environment we are in and work so as to not upset others.

Tsongkhapa points out that as with giving, the measure of success is not in the actual non-offense to everyone since that is impossible. A buddhist robe may offend a non-buddhist, Shakyamuni's conduct always drove his cousin nuts. In the cultivation of the attitude however, behavior will ensue that does minimize harm to others while serving to lessen self grasping and negative actions resulting in bad migrations.

Here, as with giving, there is a certain balance that needs to be maintained. The bodhisattva vows for instance demand that some vinaya rules be set aside when the greater good will result. However, all this demands mindfulness and wisdom. One should not simply take this clause in the bodhisattva vows like a loophole in the IRS Code. Shakyamuni in a previous life once took the life of a pirate in order to save the lives of 400 persons. It still resulted in a short time in hell. However, Shakyamuni was willing as a result of his love for beings to endure this.

Also, the rudeness and coarseness of the Siddhas are meant to help us and are not the result of a lack of mindfulness that lets self-grasping run wild. It should not be an excuse for us to just act goofy. Chetsang Rinpoche, current head of the Drikung Kagyu advised buddhists to fit in to society as best they could and be models of conduct rather than objects of ridicule. He told certain westerners who liked to run around like Tibetan shamans to be careful of scaring people and bringing about a negative view of dharma.

It is my personal view that awareness of this perfection, the knowledge of vinaya, bodhisattva vows, vajrayana vows etc. and how they all fit together in this perfection would go a long way to protecting both teachers and students from the scandals and abuses that have beset the sangha. Teachers who are not monks I believe should at least follow the lay vows and students should be aware that there are codes of conduct that can be applied.

Subj.: LamRim xv
Date: 95-12-23 12:33:17 EST
From: Jamyang

Patience --

Shantideva said 'There is no sin like anger, no virtue like patience' . He also said that one moment of anger can destroy eons of good merit. Often, in the west, we view anger in a neutral way as sometimes good and sometimes bad. In dharma , anger, - dvesa -- hatred and its subsets is always bad. The emotion only brings poison into our systems and creates the cause for a bad migration.

The chapter on patience in the Bodhicaryavatara is rather lengthy providing many meditations one can do in the event anger arises. Since the book is in English, I encourage all who are interested in the Mahayana to buy it and read it.

Anger, hatred must be recognized for the poisons they are. When someone insults you and you

let anger arise just who does it harm? Who is the person who can't eat, can't sleep, starts quarrels with loved ones, can't enjoy an otherwise perfect situation? Is it the person who insulted you or you?

If you are being harmed and can do something about it, there is no need to let this poison arise because something can be done. If there is nothing that can be done, how is this poison going to help?

If your enemy wants to destroy you what better way than to try and cause anger and hatred ? However, the arising of this poison does not arise of itself or solely because of your enemy. You have to cooperate. Without your cooperation, the poison cannot arise.

When anger does arise, it is important to recognize it. All too often 'venting' only cultivates the habit. Meditations such as the above help to defuse it and re frame it. Many also think that anger is necessary to accomplish things. Poison is never necessary. One can perform actions, even very assertive and fierce ones without this emotion. Granted, this poison and many actions have gone hand in hand for so many eons that we think that they are one. Not so. Learning to act in the world without any of the three poisons of lust, hate and ignorance is a key bodhisattva practice.

The subject of anger and patience is one that often requires very extensive treatment and discussion far beyond the scope of this presentation. So I request again that one get this work mentioned above. It has been translated by Stephan Batchelor as Entering the Bodhisattva's Way of Life. I spent three years in formal study and meditation of this book so it is not something one reads and tosses.

Subj.: LamRim xvi
Date: 95-12-26 09:12:53 EST
From: Jamyang

Anger has, like many buddhist terms, a very precise meaning. These meanings can be found in the abhidharma, in particular for our purposes, the Abhidharmasammuccaya of Asanga. Anger is defined as a mental factor, which in reference to its object, agitates the mind through being unable to bear it, or through intending to harm it. Patience, ksanti/zopa is the counter to this. It has become my experience that abhidharma, far from being a mere list of dry intellectual terms and categories is an invaluable tool in being able to train the mind. Why? Because its precision helps delineate the mental states that one encounters so that one can more easily recognize them and work with them. In the west, anger is often seen as a friend. For instance, it is seen as an energizer to overcome obstacles whether to study, win a game, right wrongs etc. It is not the energy that overcomes obstacles that patience is directed against. It is directed against harming and being unable to bear, not against study etc. It is sometimes a fine distinction but it is important in keeping one from going to extremes.

A bodhisattva must bear many things it seems. However, a regular being, reacting according to emotional habit simply keeps the wheel of samsara going. A bodhisattva must break away from this habit. Looking upon miserliness, reactive conduct, anger as enemies that keep us bound, the bodhisattva seeks to reverse these habits. The sravaka does as well, but the bodhisattva in seeking the welfare of others must try even more because there is more to do, more chances at encountering obstacles. So a bodhisattva, fearing result more than cause (it being the opposite for ordinary beings), when confronted with something unpleasant thinks that the old reactions of anger etc. is to be avoided.

Among the many meditations a bodhisattva does is the looking upon bad situations as an opportunity to accumulate merit. After all, reacting with anger is something that only agitates and results in negative karma. Reacting with forbearance accumulates merit and results in a calm to loving mind, long life, beauty etc. Far from being an obstacle, a beggar offers the opportunity to practice giving and so accumulate merit. Far from being a suitable object for anger, it is a situation suitable for rejoicing. Also, if a being causes you to be angry, that being is pointing out the faults of your self-grasping mind and so is to be respected as a teacher.

The Master Atisha used to have an attendant who was particularly obnoxious. When asked why he kept this person around, Atisha replied that the attendant was allowing him to practice patience. If you are in an environment where there are no ills, one has little chance to see if one's practice is making progress. As Geshe Rabten said, 'a field may look calm and peaceful but no one knows how many misquitos there really are until one walks through it.'

Subj.: LamRim xvii
Date: 95-12-26 22:29:41 EST
From: Jamyang

Effort -

Here it is virtuous effort or striving in the accumulation of merit and wisdom. This perfection cannot be emphasized enough. In Buddhism, it is by your own effort that liberation and enlightenment is gained. The Buddha though skillful cannot help at all unless you put forth the effort.

There is a story about a Lama who gained the power to remember past lives. One day while seated before an image of the Buddha he said he remembered long ago when the Buddha Shakyamuni and he were neighbors and when he was in fact much wealthier. The Lama went on to say that the big difference was that the future Shakyamuni put forth effort and did not waste his time, while he just diddled around.

Drikungpa Jigten Sumgon said that effort was the most important perfection for with effort all dharma can be accomplished and without, nothing could. Speaking of sutra and tantra, he said that even the sutra path could be accomplished in one life if enough effort were put into it. Asanga said 'The striving person is not overcome by enjoyments nor by defilement nor by weariness nor by the size of a reward'.

Shantideva divides effort into four types:

1. Armor like
2. Non-discouragement
3. Application
4. Non-satisfaction

The first is the courage to stick to the path until enlightenment no matter what hardship comes. The second is not letting setbacks and disappointments cripple one. My teacher Geshe Lhundup Sopa once told me to expect to fail and fall along the path. The difference in success depends on the ability to pick oneself up again. Application refers to practicing dharma with a mind of delight and joy. Lama Tsongkhapa compares this to children who play for hours on end without getting tired. Non-satisfaction means not being satisfied with accomplishments but continuing on to Buddhahood in full. For instance, a first bhumi bodhisattva has seen the truth nakedly but not being satisfied continues along the remaining bhumis.

Subj.: LamRim xviii
Date: 95-12-26 23:05:23 EST
From: Jamyang

The ways to sustain effort varies however it is said to be of four types of power:

1. aspiration/conviction/motivation
2. steadfastness
3. joy
4. rejection/suspension

The most powerful aspiration is that of bodhicitta. Even if you were to attain great accomplishments of concentration etc. without bodhicitta the power would fade. If one has problems in practice, the best advice is to get back to the basics and this in turn means regenerating ones motivation for enlightenment. Reviewing if one needs to, all the steps from refuge to renunciation to striving for others, not in a rote way but in a genuine way.

It is also here that pride is used. One must think that if the Buddha did it so can I. In general, modesty is considered a virtue but modesty to the point of thinking 'I am such a wretch. The others are so high. I will never make it' is considered a type of laziness.

Further, when practicing be steady. Forcing things may work in the short run but it is a bad strategy for the long term. Build up your practice bit by bit. Shore up your foundations. I don't know how many persons I know that come to dharma, get all excited, think they can do anything and plunge on in to things like 3 year retreats without any preparation. Then they either drop out in the middle of the retreat or afterwards thinking it a bunch of nonsense. Or persons of talent and good karma who experience visions and bliss very soon and then think they have it and move elsewhere.

(Here I want to add that the foundations, preliminaries, or ngon dro are *not* doing a bunch of prostrations and mantras, they are actually the generating of certain minds or consciousnesses namely, renunciation, bodhicitta, regret for wrongs, developing generosity and selflessness and true devotion. When the attitude thereby generated is stabilized vis a vis a collection of merit and wisdom (as opposed to a collection of numbers) then one has accomplished the foundations not before.)

The power of joy is as said before. Taking delight in virtue, in ones practice is one of the best things one can do. Renunciation is not an ascetic practice. It is the lifting of a great burden. Giving brings joy to the receiver and the giver. A traffic jam on the Hollywood freeway no longer brings sorrow but a delightful opportunity to practice. Foolish? For eons we have reacted in the ordinary way, yet look where it has gotten us. An ordinary person's foolishness is often the bodhisattva's wisdom.

Rejection/suspension means that one, knowing oneself through honest mindfulness, knows when to strive and when to rest or suspend effort. That is one knows one's limits and although the limits are expanding with practice they are not pushed to the breaking point. Rest when part of this effort is practice and not laziness.

Geshe Sopa advised me once ' you will have good days and bad days but not being overly excited nor discouraged then by constantly sowing the causes for enlightenment the effects will surely follow' .

Subj.: LamRim xix
Date: 95-12-27 23:38:35 EST
From: Jamyang

An important part of effort is also following the right path. By this, I mean a path that is right for you. This doesn't mean 'feels good' although that can happen. Right path means a path that brings benefit.

Finding the right teacher takes even more. Particularly in vajrayana, the teacher is so important that one should not pick lightly but only after some testing. The Dalai Lama says a lot of testing. One's teacher may not be famous or have a high title. Two things are necessary, a qualified teacher and a qualified student. My suggestion is to do a bit of learning combined with practice of the basics: mindfulness, meditation on the four truths, and bodhicitta until one has matured a bit in dharma, before committing oneself to a teacher in a way like that demanded in the Vajrayana.

A lot of people get burnt because of getting caught up in someone's charisma or fame and forgetting the basics. Some things to keep in mind are that not every one in robes or with a title is infallible or even good. Questioning is good and right. Buddhism has rules of conduct that apply to teacher as well as student. Using common sense things like this will go a long way to avoid trouble.

Also, whether a path is quick or slow depends on the student more than the path. Many of the so-called 'higher' teachings can result in abandonment of the path and dharma much less merely create obstacles. In such a case the student may progress quicker if first introduced to the 4 truths rather than Mahamudra. Also remember that Shakyamuni brought many to the path of seeing

and even Arhantship by seemingly trivial statements such as 'everybody dies' and that the Dzogchen teachings Milarepa got resulted in a delay in his enlightenment. For this reason one should never disparage any of the Buddha's teachings as being 'too low' or 'meant for the dummies'.

This doesn't mean to go to the extreme of not practicing the 'higher' practices either. If with mindfulness and honesty one has checked and found that one's foundations are stable one should definitely do them. With regard to traditions. Some persons are of a type that benefit from many perspectives and some just get confused seeing all the seeming differences as contradictions. Eventually, though, one must commit to a core practice. One doesn't win a horse race by constantly changing horses.

Subj.: LamRim xx
Date: 95-12-28 11:45:07 EST
From: Jamyang

Concentration

When Shakyamuni left the palace he went to various famous teachers seeking the key to liberation and learned concentration meditation up to its most rarefied levels. It was not the key to liberation however. Insight fueled by concentration's power proved to be the key. Nonetheless, concentration was seen as an important tool, indeed, except for a few schools, nearly indispensable. The reason is simple. In order to generate true insight we have to generate concentration because our normal state, prone as it is to either flit from object to object as the passions arise or to fall asleep if the passions do not arise is simply not stable enough to achieve even a deep conceptual view of insight much less the direct view. Thus concentration meditation and insight meditation need to go hand in hand. Asanga, defining meditation says it is the focusing of a virtuous single area of thought that is mundane or supramundane and preceded by hearing and examining. This is true whether the focus is in the category of concentration, insight or the two together. The achievement of concentration/calm abiding - shamatha or samadhi is done by striking a balance in the mind between scattering and sinking while focusing on an object of thought, that is a mental object, until one can remain so concentrated for an indefinite time and one achieves a strong degree of mental suppleness so that it takes little or no effort. This last is very important as one should be able to have such control that one can go to another object of meditation or leave the state and do one's business without disruption. I have heard some who having practiced watching the breath become quite adept at it and claim to have achieved calm abiding. However, when asked to substitute let's say a guru tree for breath, they can't do it. This is not considered calm abiding because they lack the factor of mental suppleness.

Briefly stated: scattering is the tendency of the mind to flit from object to object uncontrollably and sinking is a dullness or lack of energy that eventually causes the loss of the object via sleep. Usually scattering is a bigger problem in the beginning and sinking in the end. Sinking is particularly insidious because it mimics one pointedness and can generate a pleasant sensation. However it only mimics one pointedness because it is dull and *can't* move and its pleasant sensation is akin to resting.

Subj.: LamRim xxi
Date: 95-12-28 23:28:04 EST
From: Jamyang

A formal teaching on shamatha in Tibetan Buddhism often covers nine different stages of abiding from first directing the mind to an object, to bringing it back after distraction, to being able to counteract sinking, to being able to be one pointed indefinitely to calm abiding itself which is marked by incredible suppleness, bliss and clarity. In the teachings one is taught different characteristics for each stage and different techniques used for advancement

This may be needlessly complex for this post. The main point to remember is to relax when the mind is distracted and scatters, using the power of memory to bring back the object and when sinking begins and one notices dullness and mental sluggishness to be more energetic. It is

like tuning a stringed instrument. Too tight or too loose is no good.

Shantideva barely mentions these techniques at all in the Bodhicaryavatara. What he does talk about is the need for a conducive environment and motivation. With enough motivation, it becomes doable in the NYC subway in rush hour. There is no magic trick to it. Drikungpa Jigten Sumgon used to say that meditation was not meditation but habit. So if you know how to cultivate a habit you know how to cultivate meditation. This is why set times and places are recommended. Geshe Rabten used to say that in the beginning one should keep the session short, quitting at its peak rather than when the mind declines. If one did the latter, one would find oneself beginning to hate sessions because of association with great effort and strain. If the former, one would associate sessions with accomplishment and joy.

If one seeks to accomplish samadhi, one should get personal training. This is because everyone is a bit different and not all techniques are applicable to everybody. Sometimes one needs to be forceful and sometimes one needs to relax. Recommending one to one who needs the opposite is a big mistake. Also different personalities are suited to different objects of meditation. Some need very simple objects, some very complex ones. As a result, even though a teacher might first tell you to count your breath and relax the mind, one needs in fact to be in touch with this teacher and be honest with yourself and the teacher about what is happening so that the teacher can adjust the meditation. Without this interaction, you are cheating yourself and fooling the teacher.

Subj.: LamRim xxii
Date: 95-12-28 23:46:35 EST
From: Jamyang

When calm abiding is achieved and the first dhyana is attained, one feels as through one could count atoms, the bliss is a flood of bliss.

- * The first dhyana is characterized by: investigation, examination, joy, bliss, and one-pointedness. Because of the presence of investigation and examination, Lama Tsongkhapa recommends this dhyana for the cultivation of insight through analysis.
- * The second dhyana has joy, bliss, and one-pointedness.
- * The third has bliss and one-pointedness
- * The fourth has pure one-pointedness.

The difference between investigation and examination and between joy and bliss is the difference between approach and being there. Like seeing an oasis in the desert and enjoying it.

These four dhyanas belong to the realm of pure form. The sense realm has been left behind.

- * There are four formless dhyanas as well.
- * The first is attained when the object is eliminated and one just meditates on the space it occupied.
- * The second when one just meditates on the consciousness cognizing what had been the space.
- * The third when even that is gone and there is nothing at all
- * The fourth when there is not even nothing but neither perception nor non-perception.

This last is called the pinnacle of the world. It is very important to remember that as rarefied formless states are, they are most definitely not the goal and are generally to be avoided. Strong cultivation of these states without accomplishing the path of seeing can result in rebirth in a trance state lasting eons where nothing is accomplished whatsoever. Remembering the names and characteristics of these states helps to understand the trepidation many teachers have to teachings that emphasize 'nothingness', 'just consciousness' 'space' etc. Such terms when applied to emptiness meditation, Dzogchen, Mahamudra etc. mean altogether different things but it is easy to fall into the formless trap and trap it is.

Subj.: LamRim xxiii
Date: 95-12-29 16:45:48 EST

From: Jamyang

How does one join the analytic meditation with the concentration? Essentially one analyzes with the power of concentration. Lama Tsongkhapa argues vigorously in his Lam Rim Chen Mo that one can use reason to analyze while in the first absorption. That is, absorption need not be a state wherein nothing happens. Sometimes while training, thoughts are discouraged. Sometimes one cuts them off. Sometimes, one lets them arise and pass away without cultivation. However, in the union of analysis and concentration one must analyze. The degree of analysis varies. In some methods one simply notices what is happening. In the Theravada methods, one notices the arising and passing away of the dharmas and through that awareness discovers impermanence, not self and so on. In Mahamudra, having focused on the mind itself, one searches for the nature of the mind asking, what color, what shape etc. One does something similar in the mind section of

Dzogchen. Using Madhyamika techniques of reason one uses either syllogisms or consequences such as the reasoning of the one and the many.

The Gelug does the following:

- * ascertainment of the way the ordinary self is conceived.
- * stabilizing that idea
- * using consequences to explore if that idea is something truly established.

The Gelug say if one is going to get rid of a mistaken notion, that is 'negate it', one must have some sort of idea of what the mistaken notion is. This notion is the 'negatee'. So one purposely generates a situation in the mind where the 'self' arises clearly. This may include remembering someone insulting one or an incident where one is praised. To the Gelug, this notion after much analysis is the notion of inherent, independent existence. When the notion is successfully negated it is negated in such a way that nothing replaces it. This is called a 'non affirming negation'. An affirming negation is one where another idea arises in place of the object negated. For instance: fat devadatta does not eat in the day, implies devadatta eating at night. On the other hand: 'brahmins don't drink beer' does not imply anything other than what they don't drink. To the Gelug, this type of negation is essential to avoid the reifying of emptiness. For instance, in negating defilement one might replace it with purity and think that pure mind is truly established. More worrisome however is that one might think it is nothingness which is truly established and come to the conclusion that the practice of no thinking taken literally is what is meant.

Such a method as the Gelug use is slightly different than a simple search for a self among the aggregates or a true nature of the mind in that the Gelug will be active in setting up the notion of self first. It boils down to method rather than view.

When the self is negated and one has generated a conceptual image of emptiness one then uses increased strength of focused concentration to burn away as it were this image and realize emptiness directly. The method is based partly on the epistemological theories of Dignaga and Dharmakirti. According to them, one knows something via direct perception, inference or yogic direct perception. The first is what happened in the first moment of a sense consciousness perceiving something. The second is used to ascertain what is hidden in the former. Inference does not have to be formal or even discursive, it is rather automatic. In the case of regular direct perception everything is presented to the consciousness, including its true nature of being impermanent, not self etc. however this is not usually ascertained. In the second, the true nature may be ascertained but only indirectly via an image. This image is what is meant by concept. In is in the third category, that of yogic direct perception, that one perceives and ascertains fully without benefit of an image. There are all sorts of nuances here but basically this is it.

Subj.: LamRim xxiv

Date: 95-12-29 17:04:14 EST

From: Jamyang

A word about samadhi: it is essentially a state of concentration wherein the subject/object distinction is no longer viable. It is described as being like water poured into water. The methods described above are used for the realization of emptiness and the gaining of the path of seeing. However, similar methods are employed along the entire path from taking refuge on up. For instance in the generation of bodhicitta, one generates the mind using various reasons

then stabilizes it using focused concentration and begins to not only stabilize such a mind but expands it. When one speaks of entering the samadhi of bodhicitta it means that the great love and compassion, the motivation to become a buddha for the benefit of all beings is such that the meditator is that bodhicitta. One is that great love. This is true strength of resolve and is the last leg on the learning path of hearing, examining and meditation. On the path of meditation/cultivation one expands the insight one gained on first entering the path of seeing, not only by formal concentration sessions but throughout all ones activities. The various perfections of giving, conduct etc. aid this expansion throughout ones entire being, ones entire stream, permeating wholly and completely. In this way one gathers the two accumulations and becomes a Buddha.

Subj: LamRim xxv
Date: 95-12-29 19:12:42 EST
From: Jamyang

The five paths are:

1. accumulation
2. preparation
3. seeing
4. meditation/cultivation
5. no more learning

In the Mahayana the path of accumulation begins with the generation of bodhicitta. One then begins the accumulation of merit and wisdom, always striving in some way to do this. Opportunities for practice of generosity, conduct, patience, effort, concentration and wisdom are not to be passed up. Wisdom here is necessarily conceptual.

The path of preparation begins when the accumulation has reached a point wherein one is well practiced in the above and has a good conceptual view of emptiness. As long as one does not have direct perception of emptiness, one relies on the strength of faith and devotion. At this level one is still an ordinary individual but has gone beyond the spiritual poverty of those not on the path and possesses samadhis, dharanis, freedom from various obstructions, even supernormal abilities.

The following is from Kamalshila's first volume on the Stages of Meditation: The four approximations of separation from defilements are 1) external objects having diminished, the light of understanding shines dimly. This is called 'heat' and the 'samadhi of obtaining the light'. 2) when this light of understanding has come to shine brighter this is called 'summits' and is termed the 'samadhi of trimming the lamp'. 3) When it shines very brightly because one abides in the non apprehension of the object i.e. pure consciousness, this is the approximation of real separate called 'patience' and is the 'samadhi of the one trend' 4) When understanding of the subject gives way to non-dual understanding (if no object then no subject) this is the highest worldly realization and is the 'samadhi of the immediate' because from it one can enter into understanding of reality at this point. Up to now the level of practice is termed 'aspiring'.

The path of seeing and the first bhumi is reached with the initial full attainment of the faculty of cognizing the reality of emptiness of self and dharmas. The first level is called the 'joyous'.

Subj: LamRim xxvi
Date: 95-12-29 19:35:29 EST
From: Jamyang

1st level still -- Although the bodhisattva understands reality, as long as he/she cannot abide in the mindfulness which prevent falling into small transgressions of conduct one remains on the first level.

On the 2ne level, called the stainless, transgressions of conduct are not made. But as long as one cannot enter into all the worldly samadhis and cannot retain the meaning of all ones studies one remains on the 2ndlevel

The 3rd level, called the luminous is so called because of the brightness of wisdom. One retains the meaning of all one's studies and patiently endures all worldly pain. But as long as one cannot constantly practice all the wings to enlightenment without rest one remains on that level.

The 4th level, is called the flaming, because the flames which burn defilement blaze, having attained unstoppable practice. However, one does not yet in meditation hold the wings via method, that is, one still has a tendency to incline toward nirvana.

The 5th level is called hard to purify because of the attainment of that hard to obtain quality. However, one cannot remain in the samadhi of the signless because of remnant uneasiness in the analysis of the world.

When one can so stay, one is in the 6th level called the facing. One meditates abiding in dependent arising. However, although so abiding, one cannot do so without break.

When one can do so without break one attains the 7th level called 'that which has gone far'. Here the perfection practiced is the perfection of 'method'. Although constantly abiding in the signless, one cannot do so without effort.

When it becomes effortless, one attains the 8th level called the 'unmoving' and cultivates the perfection of the vow. Here some say, the bodhisattva catches up to the full Arhat and Pratyekabuddha in terms of wisdom though not of course in method. Although one abides constantly without effort in the signless, one cannot yet teach in all the various languages and modes of all sentient beings.

Subj: LamRim xxvii
Date: 95-12-29 19:52:11 EST
From: Jamyang

When one can teach in all languages and modes to all sentient beings one attains the 9th level called 'good discrimination', practicing the perfection of power. However, one still cannot display the buddha fields, retinues, apparitions, the qualities of a Buddhas resources etc. and bring all beings to maturation.

When one can one obtains the 10th level called the 'cloud of dharma' practicing the perfection of gnosis (jnana, ye shes). However one cannot bring about the gnosis that is perfectly free of any residue with respect to each and every possible dharma.

When one can so do, one attains the level of a Buddha. It is the total fulfillment of every excellent quality, the limit of the levels as there are none beyond it. As even the Buddhas could not describe the immeasurable different aspects of the attributes of this level, what need is there to say that one like myself cannot.

There are many descriptions of the ten bhumis. These were described from the point of view of accomplishment of the faculties. The path of cultivation begins immediately after the path of seeing and of course the path of no more learning is Buddhahood itself.

So ends the brief discourse on the lam rim with the exception of a few words on vajrayana in the next post.

Subj.: lam rim xxviii
Date: 95-12-29 20:21:31 EST
From: Jamyang

The vajrayana path is considered a subset of the Mahayana. As such, the foundations of renunciation and bodhicitta are key prerequisites. In addition, some knowledge of emptiness is also required. The emptiness in Sutrayana and Vajrayana is the same, but the methods differ. Vajrayana utilizes the method of bringing the result onto the path. This has the practical effect of bringing in the practice of deity yoga. There is some question as to whether the first tantra set of kriya has deity yoga however in the general kriya texts, the Susiddhi Tantra, it says there is. There are numerous other little issues concerning exact definitions of tantra and the divisions therein however, in brief tantra can be defined as above.

Many persons have the idea that offerings, visualizing dieties, saying mantras etc. are unique to Vajrayana. Not So. Those are all practiced in Sutrayana as well. In general, self generation as deity is unique to tantra and requires empowerment. As for the divisions of the tantra sets, they are arranged according to the degree of internalness of the practice and the subtlety of the consciousness utilized.

Although I cannot, because of vows, disclose specific practices or indeed go much beyond what I have already said, I want to clarify a certain point. That is, many think that the Sutra should be dumped when one practices the Vajrayana. Not so. Too much in the Vajrayana assumes knowledge gained in the Sutras. Vajrayana is additive, it doesn't replace. At the risk of disclosing too much I will also say that even the abhidharma categories, the 37 wing to enlightenment, the skandhas etc. play important parts in tantric meditation. Consequently, if one wants to do the meditation and not simply recite a sadhana, one should devote some time to the sutras and shastras. Without it, far too much seems just arbitrary and mere poetics in tantric practice. I personally believe that the current trend of not studying and just going to empowerments for blessings will bring about the degeneration of tantra into something like what happened to the Christian eucharist/mass.

Sarva Mangalam.

Precious bodhicitta, where it hasn't arisen may it arise.

Where it has arisen, may it not decline but grow ever fuller.

By the virtue of writing, reading this teaching may all beings be brought to the state of Vajradhara,
may the dharma take solid root in the west and may no obstacles arise to its practice and flourishing.

On the intermediate stage of the path of accumulation, it is certain that we will reach the path of joining in the very next lifetime. On the greater stage of the path of accumulation, it is certain that we will reach the path of joining within the very same lifetime. The Lesser Stage. The root text says: The applications of mindfulness may we engage in! This indicates that on the lesser stage of the path of accumulation, we meditate mainly on the four applications of mindfulness. The final two stages of acceptance and supreme attribute, from which we are sure to reach the path of seeing in the very same lifetime. The root text says: Warmth and summit and so on may we enter in! First a little background: Literature on the Stages of the Path abound in Buddhism. It might be said that Shakyamuni's formula of hearing, reflecting, and meditation represents such an outline as well as the formula of discipline, meditation, and wisdom. the former are stages we should take regarding any teaching. That is, first we hear, read etc. Then we examine it with reason and experience. In accumulating wholesome karma and minimizing the unwholesome one has to be very careful and be very mindful. It is for this reason that some say the four restraints among the 37 wings to Bodhi which deal with accumulating virtue and minimizing and ridding non-virtue are placed after the four foundations of mindfulness. These 'second' stages, it should be noted, depend very much on the depth and thoroughness of the initial contemplations. They are the natural outcome, they proceed organically from one to the next.

3 The Natural Order of the Stages of the Path

There is an organic relationship between the different aspects of the spiritual path. Just as a house needs walls, floor and roof to be a house, or better yet, a body needs heart, lungs, organs of digestion, brain, skin, and so on in order to be a body- these depend on each other, in the same way the different aspects of the spiritual path depend on each other for a person's complete development, and even. The various stages of the path are presented so clearly and systematically that they can be easily understood and are inspiring to put into practice."

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