

The Importance of Lam-Rim and the war against delusions

After being in retreat for 15 months, a student wrote to Lama Zopa Rinpoche for advice. This is Rinpoche's reply:

[You are making] the best progress, because you see lam-rim deeper and deeper. This means that your retreat is benefiting your mind: your goal is to achieve enlightenment in order to enlighten all sentient beings. This is actually the only reason to live one's life. Having this motivation, then whatever one does, walking, sleeping, talking, even having breakfast of Vegemite or French fries, is meaningful.

So I think you have very deep realization of how samsara is terrible, only nothing but suffering that you have already experienced numberless times, and to continue to reincarnate in this samsara again is something incredibly unbearable, disgusting. One feels not only the suffering of pain, or the suffering of change, rather the totality of the nature of suffering. Then one sees also pervasive compounded suffering – how the aggregates are in the nature of suffering constantly.

Also what we perceive as happiness often comes about as a result of committing negative actions, and this continues by leaving seeds of delusion, from which more delusion arises, and from that more negative karma arises, and this causes constantly the continuation of compounded suffering. So the more you see this – how being in samsara is like being in a fire and the suffering of that, or like drowning in a septic tank – the more one feels how unbearable this is. This, then, is a very good basis for developing samatha: One feels disgusted at the delusions, feeling they are very terrible, very deceiving; particularly attachment, which is like a poisonous snake that kills you immediately.

But even if one is bitten by all the snakes in the world, and even if one dies, still one is only separated from one's body in this life. It doesn't prevent one from being liberated, or being enlightened, or generating virtuous thoughts. Just being bitten and dying doesn't cause one to be born in the lower realms: That is not the condition that causes that. It is delusions that cause one to be reborn in the lower realms. From delusion one creates negative karma, and that is the cause. So you can see that delusion is more dangerous than

an atomic bomb, because delusions harm you, and harm numberless sentient beings: This is what has been harming you in the past already. If one doesn't eliminate this, then it will continue to harm sentient beings, directly and indirectly, forever, besides harming oneself.

The more one realizes the harm that delusions cause, the better the foundation for shiné. Fewer distractions such as attachment, and scattering thought, mean fewer disturbances for shiné. It is so easy to achieve shiné. One's mind becomes more content, and then comes more realization of renouncing delusion, and how samsara is in the nature of suffering, so one's mind becomes more peaceful.

The other thing is that the more one realizes renunciation to samsara, and the harm of delusions, the more one is able to also look at other sentient beings who are suffering (like you) and you feel others' suffering so clearly. This is how one's compassion gets stronger; then it is very easy to generate bodhichitta, which leads you to enlightenment, and leads you to enlighten all sentient beings. This has skies of benefit.

Still try to develop renunciation, compassion, bodhichitta and emptiness by having a strong feeling in the beginning of your sessions, strong lam-rim, even for five minutes. If one doesn't get to practice like this, then you should have a feeling even stronger than having lost billions of dollars!

The *real* enemy

Normally in this world, by being able to defeat many countries you are regarded as a hero. However, as I've mentioned before, when you have to suffer the karma of this in future lives, for eons and eons, how can that person be regarded as a hero, who is now suffering inconceivably in the hell realms? That person, who is suffering unbearably for however many number of years, is not a hero at all.

But for the lam-rim meditator, there is no question that each day you defeat delusions. All one's happiness, every day, moment to moment, right up to enlightenment of all sentient beings, comes from your lam-rim realizations.

The problem is what we do: We follow what self cherishing wants, what attachment wants. Ignorance trusts that it is truly existent. This is what doesn't allow one to have realizations on the three principles of the path – guru devotion, etc.

What I am saying is: Defeat the delusions every day, as soon as they happen, even if you can only do it once a week, or once a month. Someone who can do this is actually the greatest victor, the greatest winner. Normally those who are called great champions are warriors, who kill hundreds of thousands and millions of people. But they never defeat the inner enemy: delusions. In fact, they always follow that, their whole life.

The meditator is a warrior

So here you can see the huge difference: The lam-rim meditator is making war. Just as war is happening in Iraq, the meditator is making war towards all one's delusions, making war in the world of one's mind, making war and trying to defeat the real enemy: delusions.

By actualizing the lam-rim path and totally defeating the delusions, trying to eliminate even the cause of every delusion, the negative imprints, the seed, only then are you totally free forever from all the delusions, from the samsaric suffering, from the oceans of each realm's suffering and all the outside enemies. You have no enemies, because you have no cause to receive harm from others, forever. You are the greatest champion, to be able to enlighten numberless sentient beings, who are in each realm and to bring to peerless happiness.

The one who has sacrificed one's life to meditate on the lam-rim is doing the real work for world peace. By taming your own mind, this brings peace in the world, to numberless sentient beings; this is what brings light in their hearts and in their lives.

It is good to think about this every morning when you get up, to remember this: that you are working for world peace, that you are dedicating, giving this to sentient beings and that you will continue working for others, by practicing meditation on the lam rim. Not only during the sessions, but also in the break time, while you are washing, going to the toilet, whatever action you are doing, remember this.

Your motivation is to benefit everybody in this world, every single sentient being in this world including your family, Muslims, the terrorists, all the people who are violent, who are torturing others, and who are suffering, those who are sick, those dying today, the millions of people who are dying of cancer etc. You are benefiting everyone, every fish, every shellfish, every animal living in the water, on the beach, every single fly, all those people suffering in Africa, who are chopping up human beings, the tribes who are chopping other people on the table, making others so terrified, killing and raping others.

Also remember this when you are taking bodhisattva vows. Every day during guru puja and other practices, remember that this is how you are benefitting, even when you chant one mala of "OM MANI PADME HUM," even just a few mantras, make sure you do them with bodhichitta motivation to all sentient beings. Do every mantra recitation, every meditation for everybody, everything you do in your house or outside, when you see a bird, when you're walking, do them with bodhichitta motivation; then you are benefiting others.

By meditating on the lam-rim, practicing the lam-rim, and defeating the delusions, even though suffering doesn't get stopped right away, by taming the mind this creates precedence. Then every time you don't follow your delusions, every time you defeat even for one minute, two minutes,

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every time you meditate on dependent-arising, looking at things in emptiness, every time you don't follow ignorance, or you don't follow grasping at truly existence, it will lead after some time to total cessation of the cause of suffering – karma and delusion.

By actualizing the path, directly perceiving emptiness, and as a base renunciation of samsara and developing the mind, in this way you are able to offer so many other qualities and be able to benefit others, able to liberate others from the cause of suffering and then lead them to enlightenment: each day, by practicing Dharma, guru devotion, three principles of the path and, on top of that, tantra, practicing pure appearance and especially bodhichitta.

In every motivation, generate bodhichitta, every time, then everything you do leads definitely to enlightenment, having all the qualities, all the realizations, perfect understanding, omniscience, perfect compassion, perfect power and to be able to perfectly liberate all sentient beings and bring to enlightenment and spontaneously, without any effort to be able to do perfect works for sentient beings, to liberate them from all the sufferings of samsara and bring to enlightenment.

This is how by practicing the lam-rim one is able to benefit every single sentient being. If you can do this, it is amazing. Normally people think that becoming king of a country or defeating other countries is something unbelievable, but in reality if you don't renounce the cause of suffering, it is nothing. You are removing the cause of suffering each time when you do lam-rim meditation. At the beginning, develop bodhichitta motivation, compassion, to cease the cause of suffering and to not experience suffering forever. Every minute sentient beings stay in samsara it is unbearable. This is the practice, every day, every minute meditate especially on the lam rim, especially now you are in an isolated place, free from distractions.

Anybody, including yourself, who dedicates their life to achieve lam-rim, guru devotion (which is the root), three principles of the path, common and uncommon two stages, with the goal to liberate numberless hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, suras and asuras from the

three minutes, etc., that you don't follow the delusions by practicing patience, or renunciation, by not following desire and so forth,

oceans of suffering of each realm and to bring to enlightenment, this is what I regard as the most important thing in the world.

Even great scholars that know everything by heart, even if they know the entire Kangyur and Tengyur by heart, great pandits, who know all about the four traditions, also Bonpo, Muslim, Christianity, Hinduism, all the different religions, those people having so much knowledge but not practicing, not meditating on the path, not practicing Dharma, which means overcoming delusions and trying to destroy delusions, which are the enemy of oneself, the one enemy, the inner enemy of oneself and enemy to all sentient beings – their life does not have so much meaning, their life is empty. If they are not practicing, then it's like their mind becomes like a library, but that's all. But this is not making one's mind useful, even for liberating oneself, besides achieving enlightenment for all sentient beings. It is not even using the knowledge to achieve good rebirth in the next life, or to not be reborn in the lower realms, which is the minimum. So one's life is totally empty; it's like you collect all the medicine, and store it up, but you don't take it when you are sick. Or you buy all the food in the world and don't eat it and you die of starvation.

For the lam-rim practitioner, being able to defeat anger, being able to defeat attachment even one time, in one year, is better than winning the Olympics a billion times. Here being able to defeat one negative imprint plants the seed back in one's mental continuum – it becomes one less negative karma.

Otherwise if you do not defeat it, then from that negative imprint delusion arises again and again, and then one has to circle in samsara continuously, experiencing the sufferings and experiencing the suffering results for so many lifetimes. So from that one negative karma one experiences hundreds of thousands of lifetimes of suffering, and also one does the same action again each lifetime, so many lifetimes are repeated. But you don't have to experience it like this, you are free. Whereas an Olympic champion, even they win a billion times, but don't have even this benefit, and if they win and it is done with attachment, pride or clinging to this life, then it is all negative karma, so actually it brings them closer to the lower realms. ☸

With much love and prayers
Lama Zopa

Scribe Ven. Holly Ansett, November 2006 at Kachoe Dechen Ling, California.