Chapter 12 The Precepts of Refuge

4' The stages of training in the precepts after taking refuge

(This 4' follows the 3' in Chapter 11 page 50) This is the 4th topic under refuge - What do you do once you have taken refuge. Things to do and things to avoid. Here are presented the special trainings (or precepts) to observe. Two branches - Compendium and oral traditions.

a" How they appear in the Compendium of Determinations

Eight trainings arranged in two groups

1" The first set of subdivisions

(a) Rely on excellent persons

In order to practice Buddha's teachings, you must rely on a wise and proper teacher - without him/her you will not know what to do to reach your goal.

When you find a proper teacher who can guide you on the path, you rely on him in the same way that you would depend on the Buddha. Therefore saying, "I take refuge in the Buddha" means that you revere your spiritual teacher as your guide on the Buddha's path. It is the disciple's responsibility to find and rely on a spiritual teacher. This effort must come from your side.

(b) Listen to the sublime teachings and

(c) Contemplate them properly

The second and third trainings are to listen to the holy Dharma and to think about what you have heard in order to establish it in your mind. The holy Dharma is the words of the Buddha as they are recorded in the sutras, as well as the teachings of those who received his instruction in a continuous, unbroken line of descent. You should listen to whatever is suitable for you from these pure sources.

To contemplate the Dharma correctly means to take it seriously with the intention to practice it. The Buddha said it can also mean analysing the Dharma to see if you can find any faults in it. By thinking about the teachings you accustom your mind to them. This builds up your defences against the inner enemies—the mental afflictions.

Practice of these two methods—listening to the holy teachings and getting rid of all mental afflictions—is the real meaning of taking refuge in the Dharma: the scriptures and realisation of their meaning.The Dharma of realisation is the real protector: it directly gets rid of all mental afflictions causing suffering.

After you take refuge your practice is to apply what you have learned from the teachings and thereby generate the realisations—the actual Dharma—in your mind. Saying, "I take refuge in the Dharma" refers to both the scriptures and your comprehension of them.

(d) Cultivate a practice that conforms with the teachings

The fourth training is to do whatever is conducive to attaining Nirvana. Working/ practicing with others can be very useful, though sometimes solitary is necessary.

2" The second set of subdivisions

(a) Do not let your sense faculties become distracted

You will not be able to take refuge properly if your five physical sense organs and your mind are constantly undergoing excitement and agitation. The mind follows after the physical senses, so when you carelessly let your senses run to every object that attracts them, the mental afflictions (footnote 1 page 32) of ignorance, hatred or aversion, attachment or desire, jealousy, pride or ego, ignorance of karma, doubt easily arise. Then your mind becomes more distracted and the cycle continues with still more mental afflictions.

Serious practitioners want to stop this cycle because they are worried about the results of karma and want to make progress on the path. Once you see that your mind is distracted by sense objects is a problem you have two lines of defence. The first is to try preventing the sense faculties from wandering toward attractive or repugnant objects. Stop turning your mind to them. If you can restrain your senses in the first place, then the mental afflictions will not arise.

Awareness is the second defence in preventing the mind falling under the power of mental afflictions. Use mindfulness become aware of heading to desire or aversion.

Different levels of attainment require different practice. We are now advised not to let ourselves become distracted by objects that cause mental afflictions. Later, when you have firm understanding. At that stage, those objects can strengthen and sharpen your wisdom. But now, while your mind easily strays and falls under the power of those objects, it is best to stay away from them. That will eliminate the wandering mind. This is good advice.

(b) Take up the precepts correctly

The foundation of practice is taking vows. The Buddha, like a skilful doctor, prescribed certain precepts as the basis for progress on the path. Vows are a commitment to do certain things and not to do others. You make this promise to the buddhas, bodhisattvas, the Sangha, not just your own teacher. The power of an intentional commitment makes the act of doing a practice much stronger. If you have taken a vow to do particular things and avoid others, then those actions will produce more powerful positive results. It also follows that if you break that vow the results of your action become more dangerous.

You should take the vows that you can keep and not make promises you are unable to keep for the time being. Check your own ability. If you find that you can take vows and keep them, they are suitable for you. You begin with lower precepts concerning gross actions and when you can keep those purely you can add the next level.

You need to be careful. Don't over commit. These are serious commitments. If you do not do what you have promised, the negative karma you create will be much stronger and cause you many difficulties.

You should take vows that suit your level of practice. Do as much as you are able. You can do trials; eg one-day Mahayana precepts — bodhisattva vows taken for just one day — or every morning for a month. This kind of practice is very valuable.

These precepts form the basis of your training. As lay practitioners you can take the life-long lay vows and the higher, more complicated bodhisattva and tantric vows.

(c) Be compassionate toward living beings

A buddha's intention is to protect all beings from every kind of suffering; every single sentient being is always under his kind care. Thus the Buddha's path is that of compassion; all the teachings and rules are based on the principle of not harming others. This is the essential doctrine. Therefore, when you take refuge in the Buddha it means that you, too, should be compassionate toward other living beings. You should avoid harming any other being and cultivate a kindhearted attitude as best you can.

This does not mean you should have the fully realised attitude of a true bodhisattva right now. But you should always be aware of this precept so you can avoid accidentally or unnecessarily injuring other beings, even insects.

You should always consider whether there is a way to avoid doing harm. Sometimes there are negative actions that you cannot help doing, but most circumstances are not like that. You must not injure others as a sport or game. If a harmful activity is avoidable or unnecessary it should be shunned. Even if you don't have strong sympathy for certain beings, not harming them is always the right thing to do. You should not cause them any suffering. Try the best you can to be kind.

Awareness of this precept is fundamental to making any positive change. By taking refuge in the buddhas and recollecting the teachings, you can refrain from harmful negative actions. This will bring great merit and positive potential. It is a great practice.

(d) Strive to make periodic offerings to the Three Jewels

You should pay respect to the Three Jewels every day. For example, whenever you eat you can create merit by remembering the Three Jewels and making a gesture of offering to them before you touch the food.

We need to accumulate great merit to counteract our powerful negative predispositions. The reason we honour the Three Jewels with these actions is to purify our body, speech and mind. The Jewels do not need our worship but we need it. So in this practice we make symbolic gestures to remind ourselves of the actual Buddha.

b" How they appear in the oral traditions

These are the oral teachings that have been passed down in Tsongkhapa's lineage — where lineage refers to transmission through a line of teachers.Much of the advice presented here by Tsongkhapa refers to the instructions that the founder of this lamrim tradition, Atiśa, passed to many great Kadampa teachers and famous yogis. Their way of practicing and their tradition was carried down to us in oral sayings.

1" The precepts related to the individual Jewels

(a) The proscriptive precepts (what you should not do)

There are three parts to the advice on what you should not do:

- You should not go to other gods for refuge
- You should not indulge in any harmful thoughts or actions toward other living beings
- You should not associate too much with those holding wrong views

◦ Once you take sincere refuge in the Buddha you should avoid seeking protection from other sources — they cannot offer you the highest teachings leading to freedom from samsara.

◦ The second proscriptive precept is that once you take refuge in the Dharma you should always avoid harming other sentient beings. The foundation of the Dharma is nonviolence. So if you take refuge in the Dharma your relationship to all beings should be based on the principle of not harming them. You must always be aware of these things. If, by some circumstance, you do wound another being you should not feel joy or pride, you should feel remorse and resolve that in the future you will never do anything like that again. Or, strongly resolve that you will stop that kind of action. If your mind is resolute, your physical and verbal actions will follow.

You should avoid showing disrespect to even one four-line stanza of the scriptures. Books of Dharma should be respected - put neatly on shelves, never on the floor, thrown away, stepped on or over, sat on or bundled with shoes. If you do something disrespectful to a text, you should feel ashamed.

◦ Once you take refuge in the Sangha you should not associate with those who hold to extreme wrong views. When you reach the ārya stage, you have a refuge that nobody can shake because it is made firm by realisation of the Four Noble Truths. But until you attain that level, you can become confused by those who mistrust the Dharma. Avoiding too much association with those who hold wrong views is one way to protect your refuge. You do not need to see these people as enemies, rather you should have compassion and concern for them.

(b) The prescriptive precepts (what you should do)

There are also three prescriptive precepts that advise us on the positive side of what we should do.

Treat images of the Buddha with respect
Honour the writing of the teachings
Revere members of the community

◦ You should have the same reverence for images of the Buddha as you do for the Buddha himself. These images are not merely art objects; they are reminders of the Buddha when he is not present. When you take refuge in the Buddha you place your trust in his knowledge, compassion and power. You have confidence that he has the capacity to lead you and all other sentient beings to the highest goal. The Buddha's primary goal is that all beings have happiness. Worldly and ultimate happiness arise from virtuous activity which arises from teachings given by the buddhas. Therefore the buddhas should be honoured as proper guides and teachers. When you take refuge in the Buddha think beyond the Buddha himself; paintings, statues, stupas and other images are treated with the same respect.

◦ You should not joke about or deride an image of the Buddha. All images of the Buddha deserve respect regardless of shape, colour, artistry, or material, if they are ugly or beautiful, valuable or cheap, made of gold, silver, stone, clay, or wood. Avoid showing them disrespect in any way. In fact the sutras say that there is great merit in creating your own images out of your devotion to the Buddha. Images of the Buddha represent the highest field of honour—the Buddha himself.

Karma note. There are three factors that determine the positive or negative quality of an action. First there is the nature of the action itself; second, there is the intention that motivates the action; and finally, there is the power of the field of action. Even a small action done towards a powerful field such as the Buddha or Sangha can yield great effects. For example, if you find a Buddha statue thrown out in the trash and rescue it and put in a place of respect. From its own side an image doesn't have a need to be in a place of honour, on a beautiful altar with offerings in front of it. The virtuous action of respecting such an image is done from your side in order to produce merit. The practice of faith and taking refuge are made deeper in this way. [Story about monk with hideous body and beautiful voice - brought about by dishonouring a Buddhist statue by many harsh words during construction yet honouring the statue and feeling remorse when completed.]

◦ The behaviour required when you take refuge in the Dharma. The actual Dharma is the realisations and cessations that free you from all the causes of suffering. The Dharma also refers to the scriptures that explain how to practice. We have to learn how to attain realisations. It is through the scriptures that we come to understand the actual Dharma. Therefore the scriptures are worthy of the highest respect.

Scriptures are treated like this not because they are expensive or beautiful but because they contained the invaluable teachings. You cannot put a price on the

explanations you find there. It is through the teachings contained in these texts that sentient beings can be liberated. Losing one is a greater loss than losing millions of jewels. You should avoid selling any scriptures as ordinary merchandise to make money. Give text away rather than sell them. Do not throw them out. Both are called forsaking the holy Dharma in the sutras and will bring you unhappy results in the future. A little bit of money costs you much future potential.

These principles depend on your motivation when handling any situation. If you have a clear understanding of your motivation you can do many things that might otherwise be prohibited. But acting heedlessly will create powerful negative karma.

> We are treating the scriptures as if they are something to be kept around for amusement. Not respecting the Dharma and the teacher who explains it is the cause for wisdom to degenerate. We have enough stupidity now! Let's not accumulate the cause for more ignorance. If we get any stupider what will we be able to do?

◦ What you should do when you take refuge in the Sangha. The term Sangha refers to anyone who has the marks of a renunciate—a shaved head and the three garments of ordination—designated by the Buddha when he established the order. Your respect should extend beyond the person to those symbols because they also represent the Sangha. Just as we honour an image of the Buddha or a stupa as a representation of the Buddha, these religious garments and other religious objects such as bells, drums and so forth are not simply ordinary objects; each has its own meaning and special spiritual significance. You should remember what they represent and respect them by putting these things in a high place. This will produce a special kind of merit resulting in your future respect for the proper sources of refuge. In this way the benefits will continue and increase.

You should respect someone who wears the robes that symbolise the higher qualities of the Sangha. What matters is your actions; your behaviour will bring you either negative or positive results regardless of the attributes of the other person. Though you may harbour some doubt about whether a particular Sangha member actually possesses those higher qualities, you should not despise him or her. You cannot tell whether or not he or she is a bodhisattva. You have to be especially careful when you are acting in relation to a bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas are dedicated to helping all beings; in a sense, they represent all sentient beings. Therefore whatever you do to a bodhisattva is done to all sentient beings. As a result, the power of that particular positive or negative karma will be increased many thousands of times. This is an area where you always need to be conscientious because the relationship of karma and its results is so subtle and it isn't always evident whether or not someone is a bodhisattva.

◦ It is dangerous to act negatively towards anyone. Because you do not know what type of field you are planting a karmic seed in, you cannot predict what kind of crop it will bring. You do not know what magnitude of negative karma you are creating. You should be very careful about how you think about and act toward others. You cannot assess someone's depths from what shows on the surface.

Treating others the same way that you treat your own group is a great Dharma practice. The essence of Buddhism is to help others. A harmful attitude or action is the opposite of the Dharma. You should avoid splitting people into groups and belittling anyone or thinking of them as enemies. It just creates negative karma. Always show and have respect for all other people, groups or beings.

Do not get in anyway proud of your achievements in study, meditation, practice or knowledge of the Dharma. Arrogance/superiority. Nor look down on anyone else's knowledge or abilities. Egotistically believing that you have qualities that other people lack is the root of all carelessness. If you feel as though you are the best you will look down on all others. Lack of consideration and respect for others is an evil attitude. It will lead you to act carelessly and engage in all kinds of other negative thoughts and actions. Ignorant pride is the opposite of actual Dharma.

If meditation retreat leads to haughtiness, it will lead to even more obscurations — arrogance and not caring about anyone else. The medicine has become poison.

Pure, true Dharma practice mostly arises in terms of the way you deal with others. Therefore the recommended process is to train yourself before you try to change others. If you really want to check for faults, start by looking at yourself. Criticise your own harmful actions and attitudes rather than accusing others of bad things. Talk to yourself, saying things like, "You did it again today. When you met that person you used sharp, nasty words. You were disrespectful." Only when you are truely free of faults can you give any advice to anyone else.

2" The general precepts common to all Three Jewels

(a) By recalling the distinctions and good qualities of the Three Jewels, go for refuge again and again

Not blind faith.

Regarding taking refuge in the Buddha, first you ask yourself, "Why am I taking refuge?" You take refuge to attain freedom from all kinds of suffering and misfortune. Attaining the goal of emancipation or enlightenment is the purpose of taking refuge. To achieve such a lofty goal you need to rely on someone who has already realised that goal and knows the method to achieve it in detail. That person can show you the way.

> Having left behind other teachers,
> I take refuge in you, O Lord.
> If one asks, "What is the reason?"
> You have all good qualities and no faults.
>
> To the extent that I think about
> The systems of the non-Buddhists,
> To that extent my mind
> Develops faith in you, my protector.
>
> Their minds are ruined by faulty tenets
> Established by those without omniscience.
> Those with such distorted ideas
> Cannot even see you, the faultless teacher.
>
> Your teaching causes fortunate ones
> To obtain happiness through that which is joyful.
> Therefore, O lion among teachers,
> We come to rely upon your scriptures.

It is useful to read those verses regularly, or memorise them and think about their meaning. If your trust is based on good reasons and sound understanding, then your praise of the Buddha will be sincere. It will grow into firm, strong faith. That will lead you to take actual heartfelt refuge in the Three Jewels. Relying on a source of protection with conviction is what taking refuge really means.

(b) By recalling the great kindness of the Three Jewels, strive to worship them constantly and offer the first portion of your food and drink

The actual kindness of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is that they give us what we want: the highest goal. Of course, this does not mean that they hand nirvana to us like a free gift. The Buddha taught others the method that he used himself to complete the path to liberation from suffering. The Dharma is the great method that can benefit all sentient beings. And the Sangha are the followers who carried on the teachings and made them available to us. When realisation of this dawns on you, you will genuinely appreciate the kindness of the Three Jewels of refuge. With this awareness you should always make a great effort to worship them.

From their side the Three Jewels do not need offerings; they do not come to us in order to eat or receive something. Offerings are gestures of our respect and trust in them; it is a way to demonstrate that we are following them wholeheartedly.

Thanking them for your good fortune — repaying them for their great kindness. They are leading you and other beings to the highest goal. You make a gesture of thanks. Imaging the buddhas and bodhisattvas in front of you, think about how kind they are and make offerings of thanks.

How do you do this? What kind of offering? Accompanied by what thought?

(i) The practice of making offerings - how

(1') Worshiping the Buddha's body

Refers to making offerings to the actual body of the Buddha when he was alive.

(2') Worshiping a stupa

Certain objects that represent him, such as a stupa, can be honoured.

(3') Worshiping directly

Worshiping the Buddha or stupa when they are actually present in front of you. When the Buddha was alive in front of you, you could perform various offerings - robes, food, etc.

(4') Worshiping indirectly.

When the object of reverence is not present you worship from a distance in time or space, or build a stupa or create an image of the Buddha. When you make an offering to the limitless buddhas of the three times and ten directions, all those Buddhas have same nature—once they attain buddhahood, they are indistinguishable. Ie, you worship all the buddhas in common. In their final nature the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are all the same. The bodhisattvas' goal is to achieve enlightenment and their function is to help other sentient beings. To achieve this, they take different manifestations if it will benefit an individual they can appear as a Buddha, Sangha member, stupa, Dharma scripture, ordinary individual. Other manifestations of perfect wisdom are the stages of the path, realisations and cessations.

All Three Jewels are manifestations of the Buddha's perfect wisdom—and hence all Three are the same in their perfect final nature. Ie, worship one === worship all.

So there are three general ways of worshiping: directly, indirectly and with the recognition that their final nature is indistinguishable. You can create great merit by directly worshiping the Buddha when he is present. It is not so easy to cultivate powerful feelings of devotion when you are at a distance from the object of veneration; it is much easier when you are right in the presence of a holy being. When you worship the Buddha when he is not present the merit you create is even greater. Merit created from the third form of worship is much greater still. When you worship one of the Three Jewels it is important to recall that, in terms of their perfect nature, each one is the same as all the countless buddhas throughout limitless space and past, present and future time. Worshiping with that thought will bring the greatest merit.

(5') Worshiping with your own actions

The difference between making offerings and charity is based on the recipient. Making offerings is a form of worship directed to higher beings such as buddhas, bodhisattvas and teachers. The recipient of a charitable donation is an object of compassion or pity, such as the poor, the sick and the needy. But whether making offerings or giving charity the merit is greater if you do it yourself.

It is important to be respectful. The words you speak when making the charitable gift should be kind and spoken kindly—with an earnest, respectful and kind attitude.

(6') Worshiping by causing others to do it

You might not have the resources to give but encourage others to give; you might give another person the gift to give to a third party; you might get a person to do something beneficial along with you. Each has more merit than the previous one.

(7') Offering wealth and honour

Making offerings and showing respect to the buddhas, the Three Jewels, or a spiritual teacher will greatly increase your merit and result in good circumstances in the future. Of course while you are still trapped in samsara you need virtuous karma. You also need merit for the attainment of a buddha-field at the time of buddhahood.

Wealth can be cash, clothes, food, bedding, seats, cushions, medicine, incense, flowers, music, etc.

Honour - rising, prostration, two hands together.

(8') Extensive offerings

Continuously over a long time. Defined by 7 qualities: Materials (larger amount, high quality); process of offering (direct, indirect, done by yourself, have another do it); motivation (earnestly from your heart with strong, joyful devotion - no reluctance).

Dedicate any virtue to attaining enlightenment in order to help all beings.

(9') Unafflicted offerings

Your motivation for worship should not be mixed with attachment, hatred, pride, or any of the other mental afflictions. You should not get others to worship or make offerings for you from contempt, carelessness, or laziness; you should do it yourself. You also should not practice in the hope that you will gain wealth or favour from powerful people. You should pay respect with devotion, maintain an undistracted mind and perform your actions carefully.

Offerings should be appropriate to the exalted nature to whom you are offering — not unpleasant or harmful. Should be beneficial and pleasing.

The field to whom you are making offerings does not need these things; your offering is solely for the purpose of creating virtue to accumulate merit. It is primarily a mental action; the purpose of physical actions such as making offerings and gestures of respect is to develop a positive attitude of mind.

Admiring others' achievements and virtue enables you to share in the positive potential they generate. In some cases, the merit can be even greater than the merit

collected by those who actually did the action. This practice of celebrating others creates the causes for attaining the highest enlightenment.

> For collecting a great tide of merit with little effort,
> Rejoicing in others' virtue is said to be supreme.

In contrast, it is not at all helpful to think, "They have so much. They can make such wonderful offerings, but I don't have anything." Instead of feeling jealous of others' accomplishments you can create great waves of positive energy by rejoicing in the virtues of others. Actually, producing that admiration can be a little difficult. It requires being well versed in Buddhist teachings and controlling your mind. Until you reach a certain level of peace, it is difficult to feel earnest admiration for the meritorious actions of someone else. Once you get to where you can rejoice in their activities, there is no limit to the merit you can accumulate. You should make an effort to produce this kind of joy, in the virtue of others.

You can also create enormous merit by mentally offering unowned objects. There are many things that are not owned by any particular person: wildflowers, fruit, trees, oceans and all natural things in the world. Anyone can mentally offer these beautiful things to the buddhas for the benefit of all sentient beings.

(10') Offerings of accomplishment

This supreme form of worship is to do exactly what the Buddha taught. The thing that will most please the buddhas of the 10 directions is to take their teachings to heart and accomplish them. They will be very, very pleased if you accomplish their aim by liberating yourself through spiritual practice.

It does not please them if you do not act according to their advice, but merely make offerings to them.

The purpose of worship and offering—the meaning of pūjā, the Sanskrit word for worship—is to please. Therefore the daily prayer known as the Guru Puja says that the best offering is practicing in accordance with what your teacher has advised.

Antidotes

The Buddha, the great doctor, gave us a graduated path of practice; the Dharma has many different doses and levels of medicine. You cannot use all of these antidotes at once; to take effect, they have to be taken in sequence, one after the other. This medicine has to circulate in your mind. All afflictions are mental. Buddhist practices involve training the mind, which you can do while working, eating, or walking. You don't need to be cross-legged which is not enough. If you have a good grasp of the teachings, you can fit your practice into every worldly activity: contemplating the 4 limitless thoughts, the 4 conclusions of the Dharma, the 3 refuges, the 6 perfections; apply yourself to the discipline of ethics, the 37 factors conducive to enlightenment[12];

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[12] The "37 factors conducive to enlightenment" are the qualities or practices that lead to the realisation of liberation. These factors are essential for practitioners to cultivate in order to progress along the path towards awakening. They are categorised into 7 groups, known as the "7 Sets of Enlightenment Factors." Each set contributes to the development of wisdom, ethical conduct, mental discipline, and other qualities necessary for spiritual awakening. Aim to cultivate and develop these factors through meditation, ethical behaviour, and other spiritual practices.

1. **Four Foundations of Mindfulness**:
   - Mindfulness of the body
   - Mindfulness of feelings or sensations
   - Mindfulness of mind or consciousness
   - Mindfulness of mental objects

2. **Four Right Efforts**:
   - The effort to prevent the arising of unwholesome states.
   - The effort to abandon unwholesome states that have arisen.
   - The effort to cultivate wholesome states that have not arisen.
   - The effort to maintain & enhance wholesome states that have arisen.

3. **Four Bases of Spiritual Power**:
   - Desire or intention
   - Energy or effort
   - Consciousness or mind
   - Investigation or analysis

4. **Five Faculties**:
   - Faith or confidence
   - Energy or effort
   - Mindfulness
   - Concentration
   - Wisdom

5. **Five Powers**:
   - Faith
   - Energy
   - Mindfulness
   - Concentration
   - Wisdom

6. **Seven Factors of Enlightenment**:
   - Mindfulness
   - Investigation of phenomena
   - Energy
   - Joy or rapture
   - Tranquility
   - Concentration
   - Equanimity

7. **Eightfold Path**:
   - Right view
   - Right intention
   - Right speech
   - Right action
   - Right livelihood
   - Right effort
   - Right mindfulness
   - Right concentration

inquire into the profound topic of **emptiness**; or the 4 activities to gather disciples (see page 37 footnote 8).

That list is a general collection of the important practices that make up the worship of accomplishment. To get there, you have to study each of these elements and make them part of your life over a long period of time.

Four limitless thoughts

The way to contemplate the four limitless thoughts while milking a cow is to start by thinking about your own problems and cultivate compassion, love, equanimity and joy in relation to yourself. But then you start thinking about the cow. Consider her kindness in giving you milk. Feel for this cow's many problems such as ignorance, heat, cold, insects and so forth. Think about how wonderful it would be if this cow could be free of all her suffering and have genuine happiness. If you can produce this feeling for the cow, why not for all other sentient beings. You can certainly make your mind think in this way; it is not impossible. If you train your mind correctly can change in unbelievable ways.

Four Dharma Conclusions

You can recollect the four Dharma conclusions at any time in your daily life. These four points summarise the essential teachings of the Buddha.

First, all composite things are impermanent. Whatever exists as the result of causes and conditions is transitory.

Second, all contaminated things are miserable. All samsaric phenomena are contaminated in that they are created by karma and the mental afflictions; they are therefore subject to and are in the very nature of misery and suffering. Suffering pervades the body because of its conditioning by karma and mental afflictions.

Third, all phenomena are empty of inherent, absolute, or independent existence. All existing things lack a permanent, absolute self or soul. But just such an independent, inherent self is what we have in mind when we talk about "I." However, that self does not exist as we perceive it. This misconception of the true nature of self is what we call egoism, wrong view, or ignorance. Wisdom is recognising that the self is actually empty of that independent existence.

Fourth, nirvana is peace. You can identify many different levels of peace, but the Buddhist way of defining it is passing beyond sorrow and misery. When you have completely gotten rid of all suffering and eliminated its causes from the root, then you have peace. That is nirvana.

Don't just repeat these four conclusions blindly. Our ordinary perception of ourselves and the world is mistaken. It is actually the opposite of these four points. To get rid of these mistaken views you have to realise the truth. How do you do that? **First**, get a rough idea of these right views by examining the logical reasons behind them. **Then**, with more thinking and meditation, you can obtain an inferential knowledge of these truths. **Finally**, using your understanding as an instrument, you can gain the direct realisation that cuts the mental afflictions that are the opposite of these truths.

The process just described pertains to the other topics as well. Just saying the words of refuge or listing the perfections is of limited benefit. In the beginning when you hear the words emptiness or śūnyatā, you have no idea what they mean, so instead of cutting ignorance you may actually be producing it! But even before you have a precise understanding you should think, "This has something to do with eliminating the causes of suffering." First you learn, then you investigate various approaches to grasp the how, why and so forth. Eventually you understand the meaning through inferential knowledge. Then you try to develop that understanding fully by joining it to single-pointed meditation. Your meditation becomes clearer and clearer until finally, without thinking of reasons, you experience direct realisation.

Ethical Conduct

If your mind wants to go one way but your senses are pulling another way it will not work. Therefore you practice ethical conduct; this puts your behaviour in line with the mental training you are trying to pursue. The Buddha made the vows or rules of conduct in order to provide the necessary environment for effective mental training.

Regularly check your behaviour and mind to see what they are up to. Spy on them. If they are wandering from the standard of ethical self discipline, restrain them again.

Thirty-seven factors of enlightenment (footnote 12 page 74), the six perfections (footnote 7 page 36) and the four ways of gathering disciples (footnote 8 page 37) are your ethical practice. When you are on the Mahayana path, your motivation is to attain buddhahood in order to help other sentient beings. In order to attain buddhahood you

have to become perfect in every aspect; the practice of the six perfections develops your mental continuum into buddhahood.

Seriously practicing from the heart to order to bring the teachings into your mental continuum is the offering of accomplishment. If you cannot do any of the other forms of worship, just do the worship of the teacher. This means you give your spiritual teachers what they truly want—for you to practice what they teach. This is the highest offering you can make to the buddhas.

Attitude while making offerings

1) Think that there is no higher field of virtuous qualities than the Three Jewels. The way you behave toward the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha will magnify the karmic effect of whatever you do. The object, or field, of an action is essential in determining the merit of any action.

2) Think that there is no higher benefactor than the Three Jewels. The benefit that comes from the Three Jewels has no limit; they can bring you both temporary happiness as well as the highest attainments right up to buddhahood.

3) Think that the Three Jewels are superior to all ordinary beings. The Three Jewels are the helpers and protectors of sentient beings.

4) Think that the Three Jewels are extremely rare.

5) Unique

6) Think that every perfection, accomplishment and blissful quality is produced by the Three Jewels of refuge.

It is excellent to devote even an hour twice a month to listening, thinking and reflecting on the teachings with a focused mind.

Something that you have to do two or three times every day is eat and drink. So whenever you are about to consume something, you should offer the first part of the food to the Three Jewels without fail. You can easily collect a great amount of merit with little effort. Most of these practices are mental, so nothing prevents you from practicing all the time. There is nothing stopping you from thinking virtuous thoughts while you are eating, walking, working, sitting, standing, or talking.

Small problems will not disturb you and you will be able to bear whatever great tribulations you encounter. Externally it may appear that you are facing difficult problems, but mentally you will be joyfully getting on with your practice.

Once you establish real confidence based on a reasoned understanding of your goal, the path leading to the goal and the teacher who guides you on the path, then you will be able to overcome any obstacle in your religious practice. If you use this opportunity to plant the seeds of buddhahood the results will be freedom from all faults, obscurations and suffering.

There will be no limit to the result of actions you do with buddhas as your object. Why do actions taken with respect to buddhas have much greater results than actions with ordinary objects? One reason is that buddhas have attained the highest achievement of perfection. Also, buddhas have taken responsibility to free all beings from misery and suffering. Therefore if you try to harm them, it is the same as injuring all sentient beings; if you help them, you are assisting all sentient beings. It works the same for bodhisattvas since they are also acting entirely on behalf of other beings.

You should exert yourself all the time to worship the Three Jewels of refuge. Meritorious actions performed with the Three Jewels as their object always bring pure, good results. By taking refuge, making offerings and performing acts of devotion, you create positive potential that enhances your ability to make progress on the path.

If you are having trouble studying or meditation, you need to accumulate merit. You should resort to relying on the power of the spiritual field.

Extraordinary qualities cannot be attained without cause. And results always springs from causes that are commensurate—small causes will not bring great results. So although we cannot conceive of those high qualities, it is extensively taught in the sutras and tantras that every aspect of the highest perfection has come from causes and conditions that you create in your practice. Therefore there are many tantric methods for making offerings so that you can quickly accumulate the merit that becomes the causes of the perfected qualities you desire.

If you lack an understanding of where you are going and how you will get there, your practice will be slack, weak and irregular. (Following blindly without clear understanding of what you are doing or how to do it.)

(c) Establish other living beings in this practice by considering them with compassion

To the extent that you are able you should help others to see how the Three Jewels can save us from all kinds of misfortune. You should lead them to take refuge in the Three Jewels; guide them to an understanding of the nature of the Buddha and to trust him based on that understanding. You should help them to understand what the Dharma means and how it can protect them. And in a similar fashion you should teach them about the Sangha and how they assist you on the path. Out of compassion you should lead others to appreciate the Dharma as much as you can.

Your motivation is very important when you are teaching the Dharma. It is essential that you act out of a compassionate intention to alleviate others' suffering. We tend to want everyone to be on our side and doing the same kind of religious practice we do. However, an action based on this type of motivation will not be good; if it is not motivated by compassion it will not be helpful to you nor will it be helpful to others.

To really do Mahayana practices they must arise from great compassion. Every Mahayana action is directed toward others with compassion, not with some kind of selfish or egotistic attitude.

What of not proselytising?

(d) Whatever activity you engage in and whatever your purpose, make offerings and supplications to the Three Jewels, forsaking any other worldly method

After you have taken refuge in the Three Jewels you should rely on them entirely as your source of protection. Whenever you need assistance in any kind of activity for any purpose you should make your requests to the Three Jewels. You should avoid methods that are contrary to the teachings. Because you have taken refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and trust that through them you will attain the final goal of emancipation, you should not do anything contrary to the ethical principles of the teachings.

Any practice that in some way harms other beings is contrary to the Buddhist teachings. The basis of the Buddha's ethical instruction is to not harm others.

(e) After you have understood the benefits, go for refuge three times in the day and three times at night

(i) The benefits as they appear in the Compendium of Determinations

(a') The first set of four

(1') You will obtain vast merit

The buddhas are complete and perfect in every way with qualities beyond ordinary thought. The same is true for the sacred Dharma and Sangha. This particularly refers to ārya Sangha, those Sangha members who have reached the supra-mundane path.

If you sincerely take refuge from the heart and practice the advice of the buddhas, you can achieve all your goals—from the smallest temporary goal in samsara up to the highest achievement of buddhahood. How can you measure such benefits?

(2') You will obtain both joy and supreme joy

Contemplate what it means to be a buddha. What is his function? How did he become a buddha? What does a buddha do? Once you are familiar with his perfect qualities, you recognise that he is worthy of being a refuge in every respect. This can also be applied to the Dharma and Sangha. Eg, consider what the Dharma means, its function, qualities and nature. What does it mean to you? How is it used? What is its result? From that analysis you develop trust in the Dharma and want to pursue it.

Recollecting means recognising the qualities, worthiness and value of the objects of refuge. Trusting them means that based on understanding you take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When you trust the Buddha you think, "He is my perfect guide. His advice is only for my benefit and emancipation." You will then do what he recommends. Practicing the Dharma is to always fight against wrong thoughts, negative actions and the mental afflictions causing all misery and trouble.

(3') You will obtain concentration and (4') You will attain purity

Taking refuge in the Three Jewels also leads to attainment of meditative stabilisation and perfect purity. The two trainings—the development of meditative stabilisation and the realisation of wisdom—will free you from the mental afflictions and their results. These are the centre of the Dharma; you will reach emancipation from suffering by uniting them. The third and fourth benefits of taking refuge are attaining the union of meditative stabilisation and wisdom. From this union you obtain freedom from samsara.

(b') The second set of four - from the tradition of special oral instructions

(1') You will have great protection

See later ??

(2') You will reduce, extinguish and totally annihilate all obscurations derived from incorrect belief

Incorrect beliefs come from admiring inferior teachers, erroneous teachings, or harmful friends and companions - all leading you away from emancipation and accumulating negative karma.

By taking refuge in the Three Jewels, you can diminish and purify the accumulation of negative actions that arise from that wrong thinking. They may even be eliminated from the root so that you completely end them.

(3') You are counted among excellent persons who genuinely accomplish the sublime

Someone whose actions of body, speech and mind are pure. Someone who lives according to his or her trust in the perfect teacher, practices the correct Dharma and is inspired by the ārya Sangha.

No one need tell you and you don't need to go around saying it. Best not to even think it or you'll get proud and arrogant.

(4') You please and attract your teachers, religious companions and the deities who take joy in the teaching

When you engage in practice properly the buddhas and bodhisattvas will be pleased and rejoice.

(ii) The benefits as they appear in personal instructions

In general, the benefits of taking refuge cannot be measured. But it is helpful to make a list in order to think about the results of taking refuge. Asaṅga and the great teachers of his lineage passed on their experience and advice in this regard. These saints and yogis gave a description in eight categories of the benefits of refuge.

(a') You are included among Buddhists

This explanation will help if you ask yourself, "Am I a Buddhist?" In general, there are a number of ways to make the distinction between a Buddhist and a non-Buddhist. One distinction is in terms of a person's philosophical view. Viz a Buddhist is someone who believes in the four seals, or Dharma conclusions. These four points summarise the essential teachings of the Buddha:

1) All things produced from causes and conditions are impermanent;
2) All things contaminated by karma and the mental afflictions are in the nature of suffering;
3) All phenomena are empty of an inherently existent, independent self;
4) Nirvana is peace and freedom from all samsaric causes and conditions.

Alternatively, in the Lamrim Chenmo, Tsongkhapa follows the tradition of the great elder Atiśa and his teacher, the Indian pandit Śāntipa. According to these two teachers, the dividing line between Buddhists and non-Buddhists is a high level of faith in the Three Jewels. When you take refuge you are showing great faith in the Three Jewels and therefore are a Buddhist. If you do not have that trust then you are a non-Buddhist. Further, Śāntipa and Atiśa said that as well as sincerely taking refuge in the Three Jewels, a Buddhist does not renounce that refuge. Ie, you do not mentally or verbally deny the Three Jewels after you have taken refuge in them. Ie, if you have taken refuge in the Three Jewels you are a Buddhist if you do not give up that refuge.

Tsongkhapa says that to become a Buddhist you first have to take refuge in the Three Jewels from your heart. When you take refuge you enter the Buddhist path and hence you become a Buddhist. If you do not have that level of belief, then regardless of the virtuous activity you engage in, you will not belong to the Buddhist community. Even if you shave your head, wear yellow robes and behave with perfect ethics, you still will not be a Buddhist. Taking refuge places you within the Buddhist religion.

(b') You become worthy to uphold all vows

Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is the foundation of the Buddhist vows. There are several levels of Buddhist vows: the eight levels of the prātimokṣa vows for individual liberation, the bodhisattva vows and the tantric vows. Based on your trust in the Three Jewels, you can take various vows in order to reinforce your virtuous actions and to make your practice stronger and purer.

(c') You reduce and eliminate previously accumulated karmic obstructions

Taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha creates powerful virtuous karma that pushes aside and takes the place of prior non-virtuous karma. Some negative

karma is attenuated and some is totally extinguished. At the time of death, the positive karma from taking refuge is predominant and it protects you from birth in lower states.

When you take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha from the heart, the causes of being born into lower rebirths are diminished and eliminated.

(d') You will accumulate vast merit

(Explained above in (i) (a')

(e') You will not fall into the miserable realms

See (c')

(f') You will not be thwarted by human or nonhuman hindrances

When you go for refuge to the Buddha,
And to the Dharma and the Sangha,
You will see with wisdom
These four noble truths

Suffering, the cause of suffering,
The complete transcendence of suffering,
And the bliss of the eightfold noble path
That leads to nirvana.

This is the principal object of refuge;
This is the supreme object of refuge.
If you rely upon this object of refuge,
You will be freed from all suffering.

When beings take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, they will be freed from samsaric suffering. They will also be freed from the cause of all suffering. They will reach the cessation of suffering; they will pass beyond sorrow. Leading to that state is the method consisting of the noble eightfold path. This training in the four noble truths brings permanent happiness and true freedom from all misery.

By taking refuge, you look with wisdom to the profound reality of the four noble truths and try to realise them. First you see the depth and universality of suffering and the source of all suffering. Once you realise suffering and its cause you ask, "What is the method of gaining freedom from these two?" The answer is found in the second two truths: freedom from suffering is the truth of cessation and the method that leads you there is the truth of the path. Through your understanding you practice this path that leads to freedom from suffering. Thus, by depending upon the Three Jewels you can be completely saved from samsara. A source of protection that brings you to this kind of freedom is the highest, supreme object of refuge.

(g') You will accomplish everything you wish

Before undertaking any religious activity or virtuous action you should take refuge in the Three Jewels, worship and make offerings to them. After taking refuge, pray to be able to accomplish your task. You may then achieve your task quickly and easily.

(h') You will quickly achieve buddhahood

Taking refuge alone will not immediately bring buddhahood, however as a result of taking refuge you can be born with the extraordinary leisure of a special human life with all possible good qualities.

Your proper practice will gradually make all obstacles to practice vanish; and you should achieve a 'good' rebirth with the chance of meeting the refuge objects again; you will study and practice this extraordinary Buddhist path. Then, by training in the special higher path, it will not take a very long time for you to attain enlightenment.

Importance of the eight categories of (ii)

Knowing these benefits, you should take refuge in the Three Jewels three times in the morning, three times around noon and again three times in the evening. By doing this you express your trust and confidence in the Buddha, his teachings and those who follow his teachings. You recollect them, think about their value and then go to them for refuge. This is a very important practice.

(f) Maintain your refuge and do not forsake the Three Jewels, even in jest or if it costs you your life

The sixth and last, of the common trainings is that you should not give up your refuge in the Three Jewels, even for the sake of your life.

The Three Jewels are both direct and indirect antidotes of suffering. Giving up refuge in the Three Jewels means pushing aside those helpful methods. Merely saying you give up your refuge for worldly purposes will have bad results.

Fully appreciating these reasons makes it easy to keep from giving up your refuge. So it is important thing to understand the reasons. Just blindly thinking, "I will never say this. I will never give up," is not enough; no matter how many times you say it, it will not work. Therefore it is imperative to learn about the Three Jewels' qualities and functions and how they lead you to your goal. With firm trust rooted in a deep understanding, you will not want to give up your refuge no matter what happens. You should fix this understanding based on clear reasons in your mind again and again.

The path was taught by the Buddha; you only need to study it and follow it. It is based on the truth, so in the end you will not fail.

Review

There are precepts related to each of the individual Three Jewels and to the Three Jewels in common.

The precepts common to the Three Jewels are:

1) By recalling the distinctions and good qualities of the Three Jewels, go for refuge again and again;
2) By recalling the great kindness of the Three Jewels, strive to worship them constantly and offer the first portion of your food and drink;
3) Include other living beings in this practice by considering them with compassion;
4) Whatever activity you engage in and whatever your purpose, make offerings and supplications to the Three Jewels, forsaking any other worldly methods; ✘
5) After you have understood the benefits, go for refuge three times in the day and three times at night; ✘
6) Maintain your refuge and do not forsake the Three Jewels, even in jest or if it costs you your life. ✘

The instructions related to each of the individual Three Jewels are divided into what should be abandoned and what should be practiced. Each of these two topics has a precept related to each of the Three Jewels, so there are six precepts related to individual Jewels. The trainings in what should be abandoned are explained in the sutras.

1) When you take refuge in the Buddha you should forsake taking refuge in worldly gods and non-Buddhist teachers whose teachings are contradictory to the Dharma. ✘
2) When you take refuge in the Dharma you should avoid harming other sentient beings. ✘
3) When you take refuge in the Sangha you should not take as companions those whose behaviour is contradictory to the Dharma. ✘

The latter three of the six individual precepts explain what you should do from the positive point of view.

1) When you take refuge in the Buddha you should always have trust, faith and respect for the Buddha. Further, you should honour images, statues, or paintings of him. 👎
2) When you go for refuge to the Dharma you should express your esteem for the Dharma in all of its forms: both the Dharma of realisation—the path and the cessations—and the scriptures that describe the path. Mindful that you cannot put a price on the explanations that you find in the scriptures, you should honour religious texts and not treat them as ordinary merchandise to sell for profit. 👎
3) Having gone for refuge to the Sangha, you should honour all its members and the symbols of ordination. Here Sangha refers to monks and nuns who have explicitly given up family life and are supposed to be purely practicing the teachings — including the indicators of the status, such as their robes, or even a piece of religious garment. 👎

If you transgress some of these precepts, you will not completely lose your refuge, but it will degenerate. Breaking some others indicates that you have given up your refuge. One view says that the six marked with cross ✘ indicate those that you must not violate. Another view is that those six plus the last 3 (marked 👎). Best not violate any of them.

How does one actually take refuge? To have true refuge you first need to hear the teachings, study and analyse them to become certain that the Three Jewels are

worthy objects of refuge. This is based upon both fear of future suffering and on awareness that the marvellous qualities of the Three Jewels can solve the problems of samsara and protect you from fear. You have to establish both vivid concern for your future problems and confidence that the Three Jewels have the power to save you from those problems. When you have faith that the Three Jewels provide the only way to escape from samsara and reach highest nirvana, you take actual, real refuge.

Keeping these vows and precepts will shield you from creating the causes of long, hard and painful suffering. Understanding this, you should work on holding the Three Jewels as your refuge. You should make every effort to avoid transgressing the precepts of refuge. This is the heart of the matter. It is very, very important.

Taking refuge in the three jewels is the main gateway to the teachings of the Buddha. When you have truly taken refuge, you are relying on the full majesty of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. From taking refuge your way of thinking and acting and your entire lifestyle, will become more and more positive. It will be easy to generate virtuous qualities and difficult for the virtues you already have to degenerate. Your positive qualities will increase more and more.

Generally speaking, there are three steps follow when you are sitting, trying to generate thought of taking refuge in the three jewels. There are three levels, depending on the capacity (scope) of the person.

The three steps of taking refuge for the person of small spiritual scope.

This type of person seeks spiritual refuge out of fear that after this life he or she will be born into the great misery of a lower rebirth. The main goal of such practitioners is to be born in a higher, more peaceful samsaric rebirth as a human or a god.

1) In order to take refuge in the Three Jewels with this motivation, the first step is to contemplate the suffering of the lower rebirths. You contemplate these in as much detail as you can. You should awaken the feeling you would have if you came face to face with that experience. The first step is to imagine that you are there, in the wretched states described in the teachings.
2) The second step is to respond to the thought that "everything is ok". Ask yourself, "Okay. Right now I am not in that position, but do I have any assurance that I will not go there? Am I sure that will not happen? Am I certain that I have not created the causes that will send me there?" Here you think about the causes for birth in the bad migrations. What kind of physical, verbal and mental actions will cause you to be born in a lower rebirth? What kind of karma will bring you a happy and better life? Then you examine yourself; what type of causes have you created? You check, "Do I have more positive karma or negative karma?" You may find that your dominant mental attitude has been desire, attachment, anger, conceit, pride, jealousy, or ignorance. If the majority of your actions have been driven by such tendencies you may find that most of your actions have been negative.

   Thinking like this can bring you down to earth. You then question, "Although I am practicing the Dharma, is it pure practice or a mere pretence? What is actually going on in my mind while I am doing these practices? Am I sincere or am I just deceiving myself?" When you find yourself in this situation you may feel like you have nothing reliable to hold on to. It looks as though all roads lead to a lower rebirth. Real fear should arise if you find that you possess the causes for bad migrations. The thought, "Right now I have this high rebirth, but all the causes and conditions are in place so that after this life I will definitely go to a terrible, suffering state," has to produce terror. That is the point of the second step.
3) When that fear arises in your heart you think, "There is a way to be saved from those sufferings. If I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha right now, it will prevent me from having to face such experiences." With that sincere and deep appreciation for the Three Jewels you begin seriously to take refuge in order to prevent those sufferings. Now you've reached the third step—rejoicing that you are still alive and haven't gone to those suffering states yet. Now you have something powerful on which you can rely; the Three Jewels can protect and save you. Then you think, "From now on, I take refuge in the Buddha as my protector and guide. His teaching is the real saviour—a true method to save me from those sufferings. From now on, to the best of my ability, I will take these teachings seriously and put them into practice because they are the antidotes to the causes of misery."

These three steps are the way to take refuge with firm conviction. This is the skilful way to take refuge from the heart. This way of taking refuge will work. You can sit for several hours contemplating these things in order to produce this attitude.

Continuous effort of intense application

It may seem unbelievable that the motivation and wisdom developed from this path of mental practice could become the ruling influence over your mind. But it is possible because the more you think about something the more powerful and spontaneous it becomes until finally it completely dominates your mind. Śāntideva said, "There is nothing whatsoever that is not made easier through familiarity."

The function of meditation is to become accustomed to something. It may take a large amount of time and energetic effort, but with practice the mind can be trained. It is possible for your entire personality and all your actions to become completely guided by this practice.

If you develop this attitude of refuge until it is powerful there is no question about the result. You will be inclined to do nothing other than positive actions; you will always be straightforward and maintain a compassionate attitude toward others.

There are actually two types of effort that must be combined to make a practice effective: **intense application and continuous effort**. Intense application is doing a practice very energetically. Sometimes we try very, very hard to do something for a day or so. We practice so hard we don't even have time to eat. But the next day or the next week the practice is completely forgotten. That pattern is ineffective because although it has intense application it does not have the continuous effort. You need both together. Continuous effort is especially important. Little by little you have to keep applying yourself; it is the continuity that is important for development.

Each of the lamrim meditations requires a certain amount of time and effort. You will succeed if you apply yourself consistently and give each stage the time it requires.

This kind of effort to practice depends on a solid foundation—a good understanding. You will be happy and secure if you know what you are doing. Otherwise, if you do a practice without knowing why, how it works, or where are you trying to go, you will experience hesitation and confusion.

We are studying and trying to put what we learn into practice. This process of training the mind may be slow, but it is the right way to go about it. You will have a happier life. You will be more confident at the time of death.

At death you will have no regret because you will know that your life was spent meaningfully. The best outcome for a practitioner is to actually know where he or she will go in the next life; highly developed spiritual persons know what their next life will be like. But even if you do not know what will happen to you after death, it is excellent if you are able to say, "I did everything that I could." Even this small level of security is wonderful. This is why it is very important to make a continuous effort not to transgress the precepts of refuge.

The path that cuts the torment of cyclic existence
Is what I have taught to you.
The Tathāgata is the teacher,
But you must undertake to follow it.

You have to understand what the Buddha taught and put it into practice. The Buddha has shown us the path that cuts the misery of cyclic existence; he taught the way that we can protect ourselves. But you have to do it yourself. The actual protection is the Dharma.

Persons of Intermediate Scope and Greatest Scope

The motivation of those of **intermediate spiritual scope** is to become completely free from samsara. Practicing the Dharma with this motivation brings you to realise that the whole of samsara is in the nature of suffering. You use your realisation of the four noble truths to cut the very root of samsara—the mental afflictions and ignorance. In that way you are saved from falling into cyclic existence at all.

Those with the **greatest spiritual capacity** are motivated to protect and save not only themselves, but all other beings as well. Their practice combines the realisation of emptiness with bodhicitta, universal love and compassion. Through the various bodhisattva practices they become the protector of all others. They do not abide in a small, selfish goal of personal peace; they become beneficial to all sentient beings.

Dharma Jewel is the protection and needs continuous effort over a long time

Although each of these different spiritual levels has its own path and its own goal, in every case the Dharma Jewel is the actual protection.

Now the Dharma Jewel can be viewed in two aspects:

- the Dharma Jewel at the time of the cause and
- the ultimate Dharma Jewel.

The realisations that lead you toward enlightenment and the cessation of the mental afflictions brought about by those realisations together make up the Dharma Jewel at the time of the cause.

When these realisations and cessations are complete and you have the highest level of every attainment, you have the Dharma Jewel that belongs to buddhahood. This is a buddha's special qualities of omniscience, perfect compassion and fulfilment of the ten perfections. Together these are the final or ultimate Dharma Jewel.

These highest perfected qualities do not just suddenly happen. They do not arise instantaneously and simultaneously. It does not work that way.

In the early stages of your practice you try to remove a few of the more superficial faults and mental afflictions. Beginners like us just try to accomplish some of the positive qualities taught as antidotes to the faults that are easiest to remove. This is a process of gradually reducing the negative side and building up the positive side.

In that way you reach different levels until finally you have completely eliminated all faults from their root and achieved the perfection of all mental and physical qualities.

When you take refuge in the Dharma Jewel your practice is to achieve virtuous qualities and eliminate non-virtues. Doing this properly is the practice of the Dharma.

Tsongkhapa says you must master the distinction between virtuous and non-virtuous actions and their respective results. Only then can you correctly abandon negative actions and take up the virtuous side. Without a clear understanding you might mistake what is to be gotten rid of and what is to be adopted.

If you just think about virtuous and non-virtuous actions and their results, you will not eliminate the causes of lower rebirth. You may consider these topics for a very long time and develop great fear of suffering rebirths in the future, but if you do not act according to what you have learned you will not be freed from your fear. To help yourself you must try to accomplish virtue and get rid of negative qualities.

> After death, there is no assurance you will not be reborn in one of the unfortunate states,
> But it is certain that the Three Jewels of refuge can protect you from their terrors.
> Therefore, you should take refuge very firmly,
> And you should never violate the precepts.
>
> Moreover, this depends on practicing what is to be adopted and avoiding what is to be rejected,
> Having thoroughly considered black and white actions and their results.
> I, a yogi, have practiced that way.
> You who seek liberation, please cultivate yourselves in this manner

You have no assurance that you will **not** be born into lower rebirths after you die. It is terrifying to consider the suffering and disasters you will face if you are born into those realms. If you want to be protected from this fear and suffering—not just temporarily, but forever—then you must understand that the only protection is the Three Jewels: the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. You must rely on them with your body, speech and mind. You must make them the centre of your life; the Three Jewels must become the foundation of all your activities. If you do that then you will follow in the direction that these three lead you.

When you seek protection from the Three Jewels, you are going for refuge to a spiritual rule—the law of cause and effect. The Three Jewels do not make this rule; the Buddha just showed how this natural law actually works. He explained what kinds of causes produce what kinds of effects. The Dharma encompasses this natural law. It teaches the process of causation: when you have a positive goal and act affirmatively to achieve it there will be positive consequences. The opposite is also true: when you act contrary to your positive goals you will get negative consequences. Therefore you should think about the relationship of cause and effect, the two types of action and their respective results. Only when you have a clear understanding of which actions are negative, which are positive and the kinds of consequences each of them produces, can you can act in accordance with the precepts.

Without this understanding and practice there is no protection and no emancipation. Your emancipation depends on practicing what should be done and avoiding what should be abandoned. There is no other means of protection. The protection that these Three Jewels provide is something you actually have to create yourself. You have within you the power to protect yourself. If you do not build up that kind of protection nothing outside can save you.

Tsongkhapa tells us not to violate these precepts. By taking refuge your religious practice and everything you do can be brought under the power of the Three Jewels. It can be done. It is definite that there is no other way to become free of fear. This is the way the Three Jewels protect you. You should take this advice seriously.

Conclusion

What we have been studying are the methods to bring us happiness in our future lives. The lamrim tradition is not concerned with how to find happiness in the present life. Dharma practice is not directed toward how to enjoy this life; its concern is beyond this life. In a sense, the Dharma almost advocates that you avoid the pleasures of this life. Those who seek only enjoyment in this life are chasing after very small, temporary and unreliable kinds of happiness.

The Dharma emphasises looking into the future to prepare for the life that will come after death.

According to the lamrim tradition, the method to find happiness in future lives has two parts:

- taking refuge and
- trusting in karma and its results.

The actual method that brings happiness is

- following the Dharma teachings.
- The gateway to those teachings is taking refuge.
- Therefore in the beginning your main task is to learn where you should look for guidance,
  - who is qualified to be a protector and
  - how to take refuge.
- First you have to understand what the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha mean.
- Based on that understanding you have to develop confident faith in their ability to guide you in the right direction.
- Then based on that faith you have to rely on them from the heart.
- Then you proceed to work under their guidance.

According to the lamrim tradition

- it is not sufficient to take refuge merely with words.
- You need to actually do what should be done and avoid what should not be done;
- actually following the instructions and precepts is practicing the Dharma.
- In order to do that
  - you have to understand positive and negative karma and their results.
  - Therefore the next topic in the Lamrim Chenmo is karma.

Karma - an introduction

Action and its results is a one of the most difficult of all the Dharma topics. It is one of the key trainings on the path to both higher rebirths within samsara as well as the door to ultimate liberation from cyclic existence. If you do not understand karma and its effects you cannot practice accordingly and all the roads to higher rebirth and complete freedom will be blocked.

In order to protect yourself from rebirth in the lower realms you must keep yourself from engaging in non-virtuous thoughts and actions.

If you have that trust you can properly engage in the practice of casting off the negative and building up the positive. Understanding and trusting this relationship is one of the keys to Buddhist practice; it is the foundation for all the Buddhist goals.

The root of all happiness is trust in the causality of karma.

Every positive experience—all the good things of this world up to the bliss of highest buddhahood—is the result of virtuous activity. The foundation for acting virtuously is deep and confident trust in the general process of causality. This kind of trust based on understanding is called the mundane right view.

If you do not have a clear understanding and a firm trust in karmic causation, you are not on the path as it was taught by the Buddha.

You have to work as hard as you can with your body, speech and mind to achieve your primary goal:

- freedom from all samsaric suffering.
- After the first step of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha,
- you must develop confidence in the heart of the Buddha's teaching—karma and its results.
- In order to reach your goal of liberation you need to behave, live and practice in accordance with the basic laws of karma:
- positive karma will bring the happiness for which you are striving while

- negative karma will only lead to more suffering.
- Once you understand and trust in the action of karma you will naturally make living according to those guidelines the core of your practice.

From now, you should make a considerable effort to study and meditate on the Lamrim to this point. Take your time and be thorough.

However, if that is all you do it is nowhere near enough.

You should make considerable effort to make all the Lamrim steps and practices an integrated part of your daily life. It is like being sick but refusing to take the powerful medicine in your possession—how can that excellent medicine help you?

The instructions you find right here in this lamrim method are the essential and most effective heart of the teachings. They have been gathered together from many sutras and from great teachers and yogis who taught what they learned from their own experience. These teachings have the potential to greatly help everyone who sincerely practices them. You should focus on each subject as you read the many details and various examples in the Lamrim Chenmo and this commentary. Think about each point step by step, contemplate what you have read and meditate to bring these ideas into your mind. If you do this daily and you do it continuously over a long period of time, it will be very helpful.