Chapter 15 Cultivating Ethical Behaviour

3' Having contemplated the principles of karma, how to engage in virtue and desist from non-virtue

We now consider how to engage in those actions that are beneficial and how to turn away from those that are harmful.

a" A general presentation

The Buddha taught that the root of all virtue is the conviction, the confident faith, that virtuous actions are the pathway out of suffering and toward stable happiness. Analyse what kind of life you will experience as a result of performing virtuous deeds, and comparing that to the kind of life you will experience from non-virtuous deeds, you will develop a strong conviction and resolve to do virtue.

You need firm understanding and conviction in the Dharma and certainty about the cause and effect of karma—the cornerstone of all the Buddha's teachings. In Buddhism we postulate three types of objects of knowledge - phenomena[17]. When we examine them closely, we find that all phenomena (including sentient beings) lack ultimately real nature and do not actually/ultimately exist; yet their karma exists and will ripen—virtuous or non-virtuous. This cause and effect relationship of dependent arising (see chapter 21)[18] is not contradictory to the ultimate nature, or emptiness, of all beings. There is no contradiction between the ultimate emptiness of all phenomenon and their dependent nature of arising due to causes and conditions. The nature of emptiness and the nature of dependent arising are perfectly compatible. If things were absolutely real, then they could not change; they could not be created or destroyed and therefore the cause and effect of karma could not function. It is because things are not ultimately real, but have a dependent nature, that they are able to function, to arise and disintegrate due to causes and conditions. This is the correct way to understand the compatibility of emptiness and dependent nature.

- [17] **Manifest phenomena**. These are objects we can know by means of direct sense perception—by seeing, hearing, etc.
- **Slightly hidden phenomena**. These are objects which cannot be directly perceived, but can be known through inferential knowledge, by the way things relate to one another, and by the deductive power of logic. For example, when we see smoke rising on a hill, we can infer that there must be a fire there, even though we can not perceive the fire directly with our eyes. The fire is a slightly hidden phenomenon in the sense that it is hidden from our visual perception, but nevertheless can be known to us through the power of logical reasoning. We use logic and the scientific method to understand many things about the physical world, such as the way matter consists of molecules and atoms, that disease is caused by microbes, etc.
- **Extremely hidden phenomena**, the most hidden objects, are the most difficult for ordinary people like us to know. Extremely hidden phenomena include things like the details of karma and the nature and qualities of the buddhas. Karma is especially hard to know directly when a cause and its effect are not both present in one discernible span of time. For example, during this life you do some activity, and by that action you plant a seed of potential in your mental continuum. Then, at some time in the distant future—possibly many lifetimes from now—that seed comes to fruition and produces a certain result. Unless you have supernatural knowledge, it is impossible to see the connection between that cause and that effect directly, because the process takes place over many lifetimes. Because it is an extremely hidden phenomenon, it is very difficult to develop complete understanding and certainty about the action of karma. Until you have higher realisations, such things can only be known by depending on scriptures, by trusting in the Buddha's knowledge and words.

[18] **Dependent arising**, also known as **dependent origination** is a fundamental concept in Buddhist philosophy. It is the understanding that all phenomena arise in dependence upon other phenomena: nothing exists in isolation or has an inherent, independent existence.

This principle is best encapsulated in the famous formulation: "When this is, that is; this arising, that arises; when this is not, that is not; this ceasing, that ceases." It illustrates the interconnected and conditional nature of all things in the universe. Each event or phenomenon is both a result of preceding conditions and a condition for the arising of future phenomena.

Dependent arising is often explained through the Twelve Nidanas (links or factors), which describe a chain of causes leading to rebirth and suffering, encompassing the cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth (samsara). The chain starts with ignorance (avidya) and progresses through various stages including volitional formations, consciousness, name and form, the six senses, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, and finally old age and death.

Understanding dependent arising is crucial for understanding the Buddhist perspective on the nature of reality, the source of suffering, and the path to liberation. By understanding the interdependent nature of all things, one can let go of attachment, craving, and ignorance; the roots of suffering. This insight is central to the path leading to enlightenment and the cessation of the cycle of rebirth and suffering.

For the Buddha's teachings on karma see the book 'Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish'. This is a main source of karma teaching.

The correct understanding of karma is called the worldly right view or the ordinary right view. This view recognises that virtuous actions result in happy experiences and non-virtue results in suffering. This Dharma formula illustrates this connection: "From generosity comes wealth, from ethical conduct comes a happy rebirth, from patience comes beauty, from persevering effort comes determination, and from meditative stabilisation comes peace." Some people are naturally born with wealth, or with beauty, or with a determination to complete whatever they begin. The Buddha teaches us the types of causes that lead to these results. Though we cannot directly see the actions in a previous lifetime that led a person to be born wealthy etc, the Buddha's teachings help us can understand the karmic cause that led to that result. He does see all of these causes and results, and taught these details to us in order to benefit sentient beings.

Tsongkhapa says that you should have a confident understanding of the dependent nature of things—of virtuous and non-virtuous karma and the kinds of results they bring. If you base your practice on this certainty, and then day and night keep watch on your three doors of body, speech, and mind, evaluating each thought and deed according to whether it will bring you happiness or suffering in the future, then you can prevent rebirth in a lower realm. However, if you set out with no expertise in the concepts of cause and effect—if you have just a smattering of knowledge but you treat the whole matter carelessly, allowing your physical, verbal, and mental actions to run free—then you are surely opening the door to the lower rebirths.

When you compare your behaviour to the standards found in these teachings on karma and ask yourself, "How much is my action in harmony with the Dharma?" you may find that your behaviour is almost totally out of line. When you examine your own mental continuum and your own actions in light of these teachings, it is wise to be honest with yourself. You should recognise that your actions are rarely in accord with the teachings, and, in fact, are the opposite of what you should be doing. You should be wise and realise and acknowledge this.

"Immature" or childish people are not concerned with the long-range future. Like children, they only care about the things that are right in front of them and seek immediate gratification. When something attractive appears before them, they have to have it; blinded by their present desire. The truly wise person acknowledges that immature quality in himself or herself. At the very least, you should strive to understand the Dharma, and investigate whether your own mind and your own behaviour are harmonious with the teachings. For most of us, there is a great gap between the way we normally behave and the way the Dharma advises us to behave. If you let your thoughts and action do whatever they will without examination, without studying the Dharma and trying to conform your life to the teachings, then that gap will grow wider and wiser.

The point of this practice is to learn from the teachings and recognise how your own actions depart from that standard. You need to hear, study, and learn the teachings on karma; then you must look toward your own daily actions and thoughts, with the intention of bringing them into harmony with those teachings. Once you do that, you can begin to make progress on the path.

To break through the mind's habitual patterns and weaken the grip of powerful afflictions, you have to develop new ways of thinking. You do this by concentrated meditation on the deeper understanding gained from the teachings. You focus repeatedly on the reasons for changing your mind and your behaviour. By means of this type of analytical meditation, gradually your habitual ways of thinking and acting come under the power of your Dharma understanding.

You begin to see how your thoughts and deeds are not in harmony with the teachings; the true path to happiness. When that realisation arises strongly, the pure practice of the teachings begins. You become more attentive to what you are doing and you make the effort to correct your own actions. Slowly your life comes closer and closer to the Dharma. Without meditating on these points change will be difficult.

How do the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the Dharma have the power to destroy suffering? They lead you to stop creating new causes of suffering. For the incomplete negative causes you have already created, they teach antidotes to reduce the results that will ripen from that karma. They show you how to produce powerful positive causes that will create conditions in which negative karmic seeds will not ripen. By teaching such methods the buddhas and bodhisattvas lead you out of suffering.

Unwholesome karma has this quality of confusing us. When creating such karma we act out of a feeling that this will bring something good; of benefit oneself. But the true results do not come right away, so we are not thinking, or even aware of them. When they do come, the suffering can be deep and intense, but because of the time lag we do not link the deeds we thought would help us with the suffering caused.

On the other hand, it makes perfect sense to engage in those actions that will bring joy and happiness when their seeds ripen.

> If you are afraid of suffering,
> If you find suffering unattractive,
> Do not perform non-virtuous action
> Openly or even in secret.
>
> Whether you have performed non-virtuous actions,
> Or whether you are performing them now,
> Even if you try to run away,
> You will not escape from suffering.

Don't be foolhardy or reckless in thinking that you can behave any way you like. Don't be so presumptuous as to think you understand all the consequences of your actions, because the details of the cause and effect relationships of karma and dependent arising are so subtle.

"The Buddha said that whatever faults or miserable conditions you experience should not be blamed on an inauspicious place or on the construction of some building; rather, it is simply that by doing a certain action you were born into these circumstances." People are always looking for some external cause to blame when things go badly for them. It never occurs to them that they are experiencing the results of their own previous actions. The Buddha never puts the blame anywhere else: he always explains that by doing certain kinds of actions in the past you were born here and now and you have to go through this kind of experience. He never explains a person's experience any other way than by referring to their karma.

b" In particular, how to purify by means of the four opponent powers

Most beings are continuously creating negative actions because of the power of karma and the **six afflictions** (See footnote 1, page 31 of First document).

Even when you are sincerely practicing the spiritual path, your mind is not completely purified until the end of the journey. When such faults arise you should not disregard them as if they did not matter, or leave them to ripen without any attempt to purify that negative potential. As soon as such downfalls occur, you should try to cleanse or destroy these negative karmas by applying the appropriate remedies. The kind Buddha taught many different methods to purify negative actions.

Just as there are different levels of virtuous and non-virtuous actions, there are different levels of antidotes to non-virtue.

1. **Three levels of vows**, which are themselves powerful countermeasures to non-virtue: prātimoka vows, bodhisattva vows, and tantric vows. In the prātimoka vows, there are eight levels of vows, including lay vows, one-day vows, novice vows, and vows of a fully ordained monk or nun.

   With the bodhisattva and tantric vows we also have vows to steer us away from actions that obstruct our progress on those paths and guide us in a positive direction.

   All of these are methods to counter faults, to restrain yourself from committing harmful deeds in the future. Taking a vow means that you recognise that certain attitudes and actions are harmful, and you commit yourself to cleaning up and preventing those actions in future. All of these vows and precepts at the different levels of practice are methods of counteracting and preventing negative karma.

   When a person who has taken a vow violates that vow it is a downfall--fallen into a bad situation for the future. Each level of vows includes methods to remedy such downfalls. It is because of our own actions that we fall into disastrous situations, and it is by our own actions that we pull ourselves out of those circumstances. Ie, the negative karmic seeds we have planted may not be permanent; they can be removed--purified if you use the proper method and make the proper effort.

   The method of purifying that downfall is explained within the context of the vow itself. Each of the three systems of vows has its own methods for rectifying

downfalls—usually centred around special rituals. When you take one of the vows you should learn these methods and then apply them whenever it is necessary.

2. For actions at odds with the six afflictions but not covered by vows or before you took vows, or to purify non-virtuous actions by those who have not taken vows, apply the four powers; explained in the Sutra Giving the Four Teachings where the Buddha tells Maitreya that by making use of these four powers, all negative karma you have accumulated can be subdued, mitigated, and completely destroyed: the powers of remorse, antidote, turning away from faults, and reliance.

If you practice these four powers to counteract negative karma, there is no non-virtuous action that cannot be purified. Even if you have committed great negative actions, if you have enough time and energy to apply these opponent powers seriously and intensively, even those grave negative potentials can be destroyed completely. Even if you are not able to destroy a karmic potential from the root, you can suppress it so that it is not able to bring its result in the near future, or you can mitigate it so that its result is very mild. There are many different levels at which this practice can be effective, but the point is to interrupt the ripening of harmful results.

Remember that karma that is both done and accumulated is called **definite karma** (see section (ii) page 34). Its results are certain to be experienced because it was motivated by a strong intention and fully carried out with a concentrated effort. Such actions are definite karma because in general there is no way of avoiding their consequences. They will definitely bring their results. However, if you properly and sincerely apply these four powers, you will able to subdue or destroy even definite karma: those actions which were both done and accumulated. Since this is true of definite karma, obviously it is also true of **indefinite karma**, which is much weaker.

1" The first power: remorse

This is profound regret for negative actions you performed in the past. Afflictions drive you to act in harmful ways. Your mind is so habituated to attachment, malice, and a basic misunderstanding of your true nature and every day you accumulate more and more non-virtue. Just imagine the wealth of misdeeds you must have collected during those innumerable lives when you totally lacked this level of understanding--all the negative karma accumulated since beginning-less time must be limitless.

You must begin by seeing the fault of your harmful action and produce genuine remorse. Out of that sincere sense of regret you must resolve that you will not repeat that action in the future, and then you have to apply a strong antidote (2nd power)

Until you acknowledge the fault, you cannot regret it. If you lack the remorse power, the remaining three powers will be weak and ineffective.

Once powerful remorse arises about your own past negative deeds, you are ready to seek out and apply an antidote.

With your new understanding of samsaric causality and its beginning-less nature, you can infer that you must have already created a mountain of non-virtuous karma. Think of your present life and the motivations and kinds of actions you perform every day. Ask yourself, "From the time I woke up until the time I went to bed, what kinds of actions have I done today?" Carefully thought shows that your time is filled with negative actions. If you don't check up, you will not recognise this problem.

That is only one day of your present life. Even now, while you are practicing the Dharma, you know the difference between right and wrong and you are trying to live a virtuous life—making every effort to act intelligently and beneficially, afflictions still drive you to act in harmful ways. Your mind is so habituated to attachment, malice, and a basic misunderstanding of your true nature and every day you accumulate more and more non-virtue. Just imagine the wealth of misdeeds you must have collected during those innumerable lives when you totally lacked this level of understanding--all the negative karma accumulated since beginning-less time must be limitless.

Because you may not be aware or remember these harmful actions, one way to produce a heartfelt sense of remorse is to think about and meditate on the painful consequences that this mountain of negative potential will produce. Contemplate how this vast accumulation of negative potential will bring forth the three types of suffering results: fruitional results, results corresponding to their cause, and environmental results. These contemplations will lead you to a profound regret for all of these actions. That sincere remorse is the first of the four powers of purification.

Tsongkhapa tells us that when you are actually putting these four powers into practice, you can cultivate remorse through two different confession rituals.

Tsongkhapa used the short ritual we call the Confession to the Thirty-five Buddhas—from the Sutra of the Three Aggregates. (see Appendix)

Remember that, unlike in many other religions, the Buddha is not a god who decides on the nature of sin and sits in judgment of your actions. No Buddha can take away your negative karma in the same way that someone can pull a thorn out of your foot. But during his career as a bodhisattva, the future Buddha made a special dedication of his vast merit with the prayer, "In the future, when I become a buddha, may all beings who call my name be purified of their negative karma, and by this blessing may all good things come to them." By the power of this dedication you can receive those blessings by reciting, with faith, the names of these thirty-five buddhas in order to purify your negative actions.

If you cannot do such an elaborate visualisation, with all the thirty-five buddhas arrayed in front of you, you can do this purification practice in a simplified form. Imagine Śākyamuni Buddha alone, as a representative of all these buddhas, with all their power united in him, and then continue with the confession practice.

The key point in this purification practice is to generate the four powers sincerely in your own mind; that is the most important thing.

For any of these methods to be effective, these four powers must be produced in the mind. You must begin by seeing the fault of a harmful action, and based on that you must produce genuine remorse. Out of that sincere sense of regret you must resolve that you will not repeat that action in the future, and then you have to apply a strong antidote. These powers must be based on a foundation of trust and confidence in the Three Jewels of refuge. Without these four powers, which actually transform your mind, merely inviting the buddhas and asking them to do something to help you will not work. The buddhas did not create your negative karma and they cannot purify it for you. It is up to you to do the work of turning your mind in the right direction.

Summary. The power of remorse is a strong attitude of aversion, renunciation, and opposition to the negative action you have committed. Once you see the dangerous consequences of what you have done, you feel profound regret and you resolve never to do that again. But until you see the faults and disadvantages of an action, you will not regret it. Producing sincere remorse depends on the study of karma and its results. The better you understand the cause and effect of karma, the more effective will be your application of the four powers of purification. If you lack this first power of remorse, the remaining three powers will be weak and ineffective.

2" The second power: applying antidotes

The antidotes to non-virtuous actions are meritorious practices such as meditation, prostrations, and the recitation of mantras and prayers.

You are ready to do whatever it takes to save yourself from the consequences of your action. You will look for a good doctor with an effective antidote and take it.

When this same kind of powerful remorse arises with regard to your own past negative deeds, you are ready to seek out the antidote and to apply it when you find it. The power of applying the antidote offers various methods that can counteract the poison of our past non-virtuous deeds. In this section six types of antidotes are introduced, but this is not an exhaustive list; there can be many other methods. These are six examples presented according to the sutras and according to Śāntideva's Compendium of Trainings.

1. Relying on the profound sutras.

The first type of antidote relies on scriptures such as the Perfection of Wisdom (or Heart) Sutra. By reading, memorising, listening to teachings, or explaining to others these sutras, you can purify negative karma. The main subject of these sutras is emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality. Therefore, praising, reading, or hearing these texts has the power to purify negative karma.

In Tibet, even among lay people, this kind of practice was common. Many families would keep the twelve volumes of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras in their house and they would try to recite the text out loud once a year. If they could not read it themselves, they would invite monks from the local monastery to visit their house and recite the texts while the family sat respectfully and listened. This would take several days. This kind of practice is recommended in the sutras themselves: reading such holy texts—the words of the Buddha—or listening while someone else recites them, plants positive karmic seeds on your mental continuum, and it has a special power to purify negative seeds.

2. Having an interest (confidence) in emptiness.

The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras address the wisdom that realises emptiness, the ultimate nature of phenomena. The realisation of emptiness is the supreme weapon cutting out all negativities from the root.

Ultimately, all negative mental states and actions arise from ignorance—not knowing the truth. Realisation of the truth severs the root of ignorance, and hence severs all negative karma that stems from that ignorance. This is why the best antidote, the direct antidote, the ultimate weapon against negative karmic seeds, is the realisation of emptiness.

The mere suspicion that ultimately things are empty of inherent existence has the power to shake the foundations of cyclic existence. It is the first glimpse of the truth, and opens the way to the direct realisation of emptiness, which destroys the karmic seeds that cause our suffering. Only the fortunate ones, those with a great accumulation of merit, will be able to produce this doubt about the ultimate mode of being, this suspicion that things lack inherent existence. Those with little merit will never even think about this.

Those fortunate ones who study, think about, analyse, and meditate on emptiness will begin to suspect, "Maybe things are not as solid as they seem. Perhaps, ultimately things are empty of inherent existence." Even this much suspicion that the teaching on emptiness may be true can lead to the complete purification of all negative karmic seeds and the obstacles to liberation.

"Having an interest in emptiness" means having confidence and conviction that emptiness is indeed the ultimate mode of being of the self and of phenomena. You gain this conviction by studying the Perfection of Wisdom and other sutras, the commentaries of the great masters such as Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, and by applying your own analytical wisdom to comprehend the meaning of emptiness. Then you meditate on that meaning until you gain a direct realisation of it. Even if you do not yet understand the meaning of emptiness, you should try to have faith that this teaching of the Buddha is not mistaken. You should aspire to understand it in the future, and expect that you will eventually gain the full realisation. "Having an interest in emptiness" means approaching this profound teaching with that kind of positive attitude, rather than thinking, "This does not make sense."

Of course emptiness, śunyatā in Sanskrit, is essentially pure, primordially pure. Therefore, the afflictions, the obscurations within the mind, have a dependent nature—they are temporary, involuntary, created by causes and conditions. They are not intrinsic or inseparable aspects of mind, but are like clouds that pass over and temporarily obscure the mind. In its ultimate nature, one's own mental continuum is naturally, primordially pure from the beginning. Contemplating and meditating on that empty and luminous nature of ultimate reality and relying on the primordially pure nature of mind is also one of the methods of purification.

3. Relying on recitation.

This refers to purification by means of reciting certain mantras in the context of special rituals. The most common mantra of purification in tantric practice is the one hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva. (See appendix.) Those who have received an initiation into the practice of Vajrasattva can use this method.

Whether you recite the Confession to the Thirty-five Buddhas, or use the tantric method of the one hundred–syllable mantra of Vajrasattva, the important thing is to practice these rituals in the manner in which they were taught, and to apply them diligently and from the heart. When you practice recitation properly and sincerely, it has the power to purify all the powerful negative potential you have amassed over many lifetimes.

How long do you have to recite such mantras and prayers? Until you see a certain kind of sign or indication that your negative karma has been purified. Before you enter onto the tantric path, or undertake any grand virtuous endeavour such as a meditation retreat, you should prepare by purifying negative karma. You do this by entering a special preparatory retreat to practice a purification ritual, such as that of Vajrasattva. For how long do you have to do this preparatory purification practice? Until there is some sign of success.

Your purification is having some success if you dream any of the following: vomiting bad food; drinking such foods as milk or yoghurt; seeing the sun and moon; walking in space; seeing a blazing fire; being able to subdue a water buffalo; being able to subdue a dark or demonic person; seeing a Sangha consisting of bhikus or bhikuṇīs; seeing a plant which produces a milk-like substance—perhaps milkweed; riding on an elephant; climbing to the top of a mountain or a high throne supported by lions; or

listening to Dharma teachings. The point is not to get attached to these auspicious signs and feel superior if you happen to have a dream like this. These signs have meaning only if you are engaged in an intensive purification practice, and if the signs appear with some frequency. Until that happens you should continue to work energetically to purify past negative karma.

4. Relying on images

Once you have generated sincere faith in the perfected qualities of the Buddha, want to show respect to the Buddha's body, speech, and mind. One method to do that is to create images of the buddhas in the form of statues, thangkas, tsa-tsas, and other representations of their body, speech, and mind. When it is done out of faith, the physical activity of creating such images is an effective method of purification, especially of bodily negative karma.

In Tibet it was common before embarking on a major tantric practice, such as a three-year retreat, to make many tsa-tsas—small clay images of a meditational deity—as a means of purification. A practitioner would make one hundred thousand of them, using a mould to stamp them out.

5. Relying on worship

This includes a variety of spiritual activities through which we honour and demonstrate our respect for the buddhas. The central practice is making offerings of various substances to the buddhas, and to images that represent the buddhas. For example, you can offer clothing to a statue of the Buddha; or pure water, as when we offer water bowls on the altar every day; or you can offer just one flower. What you offer does not matter as much as the attitude with which you offer it, because the statue does not need any of these things. The purpose is to advance your own spiritual development by purifying past negative actions and accumulating the positive potential of merit.

6. Relying on names

This is related to the third method, "relying on recitation," and it refers to reciting, hearing, and remembering the names of the buddhas and great bodhisattvas. The practice of reciting **Oṃ māṇi padme hūṃ**, the mantra of Avalokiteśvara, was practically universal in Tibet. The effectiveness of these syllables to purify negative karma comes from the dedication that Avalokiteśvara himself made.

All six of these practices are effective methods of purifying past karma when they are based on a deep understanding of the perfected qualities of buddhahood. You need to know the nature of a buddha's activity—wisdom, compassion, and power—and how all of a buddha's actions are for the sake of other beings. When your practice is based on that understanding, then building images or reciting the names of the buddhas can be of great benefit to yourself and others.

3" The third power: turning away from faults

The power of turning away from committing those same misdeeds in the future "I will never do that again."

The third power is the resolve to avoid performing unwholesome actions in the future. Having understood the disadvantages of collecting negative karma, you make a decisive commitment to restrain yourself from doing any of the ten non-virtuous actions. (See Appendix) This resolve is rooted in your understanding of the consequences of each of these harmful actions, and leads to a very concentrated determination to avoid them in the future. This resolution may be expressed out loud.

If you see the faults of your previous bad actions and you feel sincere regret, and based upon that you resolve that you will not repeat those actions, that resolve, that turning away, has the power to destroy many non-virtuous karmic seeds. The Sun Essence Sutra teaches that such well-grounded restraint can destroy whatever unwholesome karma you have created, as well as the afflictions, and obstacles to the Dharma. Whether you did these actions yourself, caused others to do them, or merely rejoiced in seeing them done—all these previously created non-virtues can be destroyed by this power of turning away from non-virtue.

However, if the resolution to refrain from non-virtue in the future is not made with sincerity, it becomes mere words. For example, according to the prātimoka vows bhikus have a ritual of confession twice each month. All the Sangha members at a monastic institution gather together to reflect on what negative actions they have done during that month. In the course of the ritual they confess to each other the downfalls they have committed. During the ritual each monk or nun responds to the question:

"Have you seen your own misdeeds?" Responds, "Yes, I have seen them." Then the next question, "In the future will you refrain from them?" Response: "Yes, I will refrain."

When you are making this kind of confession, if the words come from deep in the heart—if you are thinking with sincere regret about your actions and genuinely committing to avoid them in the future—that is the real confession. However, if in your heart there is no real remorse and no genuine resolve, then your confession is nothing but words.

To reflect on our past deeds, at the end of every day you should recall your actions: which ones were on the unwholesome side, which ones were beneficial, even examining what kind of dreams you had that night. This was a famous practice of the great Kadampa masters. You can sit at the end of the day with a pile of stones and recall your activities for that day. When you see a virtuous action, you put a white stone on the table. When you see a non-virtue, put a black stone. If there are no black stones at all you may feel quite pleasant.

If you are a serious practitioner, you will keep your body, speech, and mind pure and clean. Since afflictions like attachment, hatred, jealousy, and pride are so deeply ingrained in your mind-stream, and are always ready to rise out of habit, it is difficult to put a stop to negative behaviour all at once. If you cannot completely stop a bad habit, you can at least resolve to lessen it as much as you can. For example, at the time of confessing and applying the antidotes you can resolve, "Instead of being prideful ten times a day, I will gradually reduce the number. The point is to make a decision that you will improve in the future, and then follow through with that resolve. In this way you reduce negative actions and the positive antidotes are strengthened.

You should look into your own situation and make a judgment about which behaviours you can stop completely and which you can only gradually reduce. Making the decision that you will eventually stop is the most important thing. This strong resolve depends on the first power: remorse. It requires you to see that activity as a fault, and to regret doing it. The strength of your resolve to turn away from an action will ultimately depend on the strength of the regret you feel for having done it. And all of these four powers of purification depend on a lucid understanding of the cause and effect of karma. You can recite the Sutra of Confession a thousand times each day, but without an understanding of the benefit and harm of virtue and non-virtue you will merely be saying the words.

4" The fourth power: foundation, basis or reliance

Since you have created a negative cause that may have very severe consequences, you look for a basis of protection, someone you can rely on to protect you from the results of your negative actions. The most reliable source of refuge and protection is **the Three Jewels**.

In order to succeed in this practice of purifying past negative karma and refraining from it in the future, you need to base your efforts on a source of reliance and reinforce it with other supports. The basis of reliance is taking refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. In fact, merely taking refuge in them with heartfelt trust and a willingness to rely on the Three Jewels will itself purify many negative karmas.

Because the Buddha's teaching is always pure and free of any causes of unwholesome action, when you take refuge and place your trust in the Dharma, the way of the Buddha, you are placing yourself in reliable hands, and you will be following a path that leads only to virtuous actions and happy results. By trusting in the Sangha you choose companions who share your aspirations. Your central relationships and friendships are with people who are also striving to perform virtue and purify non-virtue, and this too has a powerful influence on how you lead your life.

So the Three Jewels of refuge are the first support of your practice of purification. **The second support is meditation on bodhicitta.** Bodhicitta means wanting to attain the highest goal of buddhahood in order to help other sentient beings. You want to help them because you see how they are trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of misery perpetuated by their own misunderstanding, attachment, and hatred. You see how these mental afflictions produce wrong action, and how this cycle of afflictions and harmful action causes their lives of misery to go on and on.

You empathise with their suffering and want to help them—to rescue them from the mire of cyclic existence and lead them to perfect buddhahood. To do that, you know that you must first obtain enlightenment. This is what bodhicitta means: wanting to save all other living beings by quickly becoming a perfect being oneself—wanting to attain the perfect wisdom, compassion, and power of a buddha so that you can be of immeasurable benefit to all beings. Before then, your help will be quite limited.

The altruistic mind of bodhicitta is itself a powerful tool to remove negative karma. Bodhicitta has that kind of power because negative karma comes from harming other beings and taking pleasure in their suffering. Bodhicitta is precisely the opposite attitude—the wish for all living beings to have the highest happiness. Such an attitude of course has great power. Therefore, **meditating on bodhicitta, together with taking refuge in the Three Jewels, constitute the power of reliance**.

Antidotes to 'extinguish' bad karma

The Buddha taught many ways to purify negative karma in general. Among these, the complete antidote requires that all four of these powers are fully accomplished—all four must be working in harmony. Under those circumstances, with these four fully actualised, you can destroy many mountains of negative karma.

There are several other mechanisms by means of which the purification of negative karma can take place.

1. The first way to purify non-virtues is that powerful negative karmic seeds, which have the potential to create a horrible rebirth, are transformed into causes of a birth that is not so bad. Ie, the harshness of the negative results can be lessened.
2. A second possibility is that you are born in a lower realm, but you do not experience the pain and suffering of that realm.
3. The third mechanism by which purification can work is that the karma to be born in a suffering rebirth ripens into nothing more than a headache in this life. Ie, heavy karma that could have had disastrous results is so attenuated that it yields only a small discomfort.
4. Finally, the need to experience suffering for a long time can be reduced to a very brief encounter with that suffering.

There is no way to know for sure how the process of purification will operate, because it depends on a variety of factors: whether the purification was done with all four powers complete, how intensively it was done, and for how long it was done. The essential point is that whatever unwholesome action you have done can definitely be purified. There is no negative karma that cannot be purified. All unwholesome actions are temporary events, created by one's own mind and body. If you apply the proper antidote they can be removed. Some of them can be destroyed from the root. Others may be pushed into the far distant future. Others will not meet the conditions to bring forth their results. And some will be attenuated, so the results will be less intense, shorter in duration, or reduced to insignificance.

However, it says in the sutras and in the Vinaya that "karma can never be lost, even in one hundred eons." In other words, karma will not fade away and ultimately you have to experience the result. How is it that the purification of karma by this use of antidotes does not contradict the scriptures?

The answer is that the sutra is talking about karma to which you have not applied an antidote. If you have not purified a karma to any degree by means of the four powers, then that karmic seed will certainly yield its result, no matter how long it takes. But if you have cultivated the four powers as an antidote, you can destroy the seeds and prevent negative results. This is true even of 'definite karma'.

This is the view of the Mahayana system: no matter how powerful a negative karma may be, if the proper antidote is applied, it can be purified.[19]

These points are explained by Haribhadra in his *Long Explanation of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines*:

> Whatever has the nature of diminishing when it is brought into the proximity of the antidotes can be permanently extinguished by the antidotes. Ie, downfalls that occur out of arrogance, even such powerful negative actions as wrong view, which are obstructions to the holy Dharma, can be utterly extinguished.
>
> You should understand such statements from scripture as, "no karma at all will be lost, even in one hundred eons," as referring to karma for which the antidotes have not been cultivated. If that were not the case, it would contradict reason and contradict many sutras.
>
> You should understand the statement "there is karma that will definitely be experienced" as referring to karma to which you have not applied antidotes.

Non-virtuous karmic seeds diminish in proportion to their exposure to correct antidotes like the four powers. Whatever has that nature can be completely eliminated.

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[19] The Vaibhāika and other Hinayana schools disagree and say that the most powerful negative karma, ie the five automatic transgressions, cannot be purified during the life in which they are committed.

If you apply the antidotes with sufficient intensity for a long enough time, the seeds of non-virtue can be totally expunged.

One's own negative karma can be removed gradually, in proportion to the effort you put into cultivating the antidotes. Ultimately, it can be completely eliminated.[20]

By this reasoning it is clear that when the Buddha says that "karma that cannot be destroyed" he means karma that has not been touched by correct antidotes. When the Buddha speaks of "karma that will definitely be experienced" because it is complete in both motivation and action, he means only that the results of such karma will definitely be experienced if the karmic seeds have not been touched by antidotes. And "karma that is not definite" is karma that is itself weak because it was originally performed in an incomplete way. It may or may not yield results, regardless of whether or not it is affected by antidotes. In short, **karma that cannot be purified does not exist. Even karma that is called "definite" in the scriptures can be purified when a sufficient countervailing antidote is applied.**

We can see that confession, remorse, restraint, resolve, and the practice of countervailing meritorious practices weaken the capacity of non-virtuous karmic seeds to bring forth their results. Once karma has been damaged by these antidotes it will not be able to yield fruit, even if it meets the necessary conditions. This is the same as what happens when you plant a seed in the ground. If the seed rots, is burned or eaten by birds, then no matter how much water, fertiliser, or sunlight there is, a sprout will not be produced.

Just as virtuous practice can destroy negative karma, certain negative actions can destroy the results of virtues you have created. One powerful destroyer of virtuous seeds is the wrong view that denies the cause and effect of karma. This view denies that virtue leads to happiness and non-virtue leads to suffering, and holds that there is no experience after this life, so any kind of practice for the sake of future lives is therefore nonsense. This kind of wrong view cuts the roots of virtue.

The other powerful destroyer of virtue is anger and hatred toward other sentient beings. Even one moment of anger or hatred directed toward a bodhisattva will destroy the merits you have generated during many eons of virtuous practice. Śāntideva says in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*:

> Whatever wonderful practice
> You have accumulated over thousands of eons,
> Such as practicing generosity and worshiping the buddhas,
> Will all be destroyed in one moment of anger.

In Bhāvaviveka's *Blaze of Reasons* it says:

Wrong view and malice weaken virtuous karma. Antidotes such as regret, restraint, and confession weaken the force of non-virtuous karma. In such cases, even when the conditions are met, since the capacity of the virtuous or non-virtuous seeds has been damaged, how could they bring forth results? Since all the necessary conditions have not come together, the time to maturation is changed [i.e. is made longer]. How can one say they have not been thoroughly pulled out from the root?

"By adhering to the holy Dharma, non-virtuous karma that is certain to be experienced as a suffering rebirth will instead be experienced in this very life as an inconsequential result." And, "Moreover, due to these antidotes, the karma to be born in a lower rebirth will become a mere headache."

If the question is raised: "If the result is a small headache, how can you say that the seed has been pulled out from the root?" the response is: "The fully complete results of such non-virtuous karmas would be to experience the sufferings of the hell realms. However, [because of the antidotes] one does not even have to experience the most subtle pains of hell. In light of that, how can one say it has not been pulled out by the

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[20] This is the same logical argument that Dharmakīrti uses in his Commentary on the "Compendium of Valid Cognition" to prove that enlightenment is possible. Liberation, the complete exhaustion of suffering, is possible. The reason is that the cause of suffering is karma, and the cause of karma is kleśa, the obscuring afflictions, which are themselves rooted in ignorance. Is that root destroyable or not? Does that root have an antidote or not?

The answer is yes. It is the nature of ignorance and all the afflictions that arise from ignorance that they naturally diminish as they come into proximity with, or are affected by, their antidotes. The more and more the antidotes are cultivated and applied, the weaker and weaker the afflictions become. That is their nature. And whatever has that nature can ultimately be completely removed. Therefore, there can be the total cessation of ignorance, of the obscuring afflictions, and thereby of suffering. Giving emancipation.

root? But since such minor results as a headache in this life do arise, how can one say that this karma is utterly without any results?"

Not everything is extinguished

Bhāvaviveka is saying that when karmic seeds are damaged by effective antidotes, their full results cannot arise, even when the other necessary conditions are met. The central point here is that **by applying the antidotes you can essentially destroy the ability of negative karmic seeds to ripen into their full, potential, negative consequences**. You have not yet pulled out the seeds from the root—that is done only by realisations on the path of seeing and the path of meditation. But you have weakened those seeds so that they will only yield very minor results, or their results have been put off to the far distant future.[21]

Therefore, even if you make a great effort to accumulate merits, if you do not guard against the great destroyers of virtue such as hatred and wrong view, the virtuous seeds you have collected will not be able to bring their results. You must create merits. And you also must protect those virtuous seeds by avoiding destructive forces such as hatred, and by repairing non-virtues you have already accumulated by applying antidotes such as the four opponent powers, confession, etc.[22]

Usually it is quite difficult to change a result once it has ripened. However, before the result ripens, it is easy to prevent it from happening. The method to prevent unpleasant results from ripening is what we are talking about here. When that method is applied properly, you can purify any karma, no matter how heavy. That is what the Buddha meant by this statement.

There are many different factors that interact to determine how a purification practice will affect the ripening of karma. In general, by the combination of confession and restraint, by making a firm resolve, "From now on I will never do this again," negative karmas can be purified without any painful result left to be experienced.

However, this does not mean that you should think, "Okay, I will go ahead and do a little bit of this unwholesome action, because later I can apply the four powers and purify it." That way of thinking is no good. Even when negative karma is purified without remainder, there is a great difference between creating negative karma and then purifying it, and maintaining pure action from the beginning.

What is the difference? The *Bodhisattva Levels* by Asaṅga says:

> When a root downfall occurs, by taking the bodhisattva vows it is possible to repair the infraction. However, **it will not be possible to attain the first bodhisattva level in that lifetime**.

If you break a vow with a root downfall, you can recover that vow by means of purification; you will not experience the suffering result of that downfall, such as being born into an inferior life. That part can be remedied by purification. But during that life you will not be able to obtain the first bodhisattva level, the first bodhisattva bhūmi. Even though the main result of your downfall will not have to be experienced, there is still a residual bad effect: achieving the first stage of an ārya bodhisattva is pushed off into the future, which also pushes buddhahood into the distant future as well.

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[21] We can see examples of this kind of karmic ripening in the lives of people around us. Eg, in Tibet we would come across a very serious religious practitioner who spent his whole life practicing virtue, and yet his life seemed to be one continual mishap. His property would get stolen or destroyed in a fire, he would be plagued by chronic medical problems, and his life seemed to be one misfortune after another.

People would always ask, "How can so many bad things happen to such a pious and virtuous person?" Once you understand the dynamics of karma, you see that that person may have committed some very heavy negative karma—karma with the potential to ripen as rebirth in a terrible suffering realm. But he had prevented that severe result from coming about through the practice of purification. The small problems he meets in this life are insignificant compared to what he would have experienced if that negative karma had not been purified. In our Mahayana practice we even say prayers that our non-virtuous seeds may ripen quickly as a result of our practice. And when they do, we are happy to meet adversity because we see it as an auspicious sign that our practice of purification is working.

Then there is the opposite case: people who spend their whole lives acting in evil ways and harming others, but during that lifetime they encounter nothing but success and good fortune. That is not a good sign! Right now, in this life, they are enjoying the results of some small merits. But when all that is finished—when they come to the end of this life—they will meet the results of the karma they have created.

[22] Interestingly, it does not say that it is completely impossible, but only that it is very difficult to purify or overcome that previous karma by applying an antidote. We can imagine a rare circumstance in which a person was born blind but later, as a result of virtuous practice, recovered his or her sight.

The *Sutra Gathering All the Threads* says:

> Mañjuśrī asked the Buddha: "Bhagavan, if someone, under the influence of a non-virtuous friend, were to do something such as abandon the Dharma, how, Bhagavan, could such a person be liberated in this lifetime?"
>
> The Buddha responded to youthful Mañjuśrī thus: "Mañjuśrī, if you confessed your misdeeds three times a day, every day for seven years, it would be purified. It will then take at least ten eons to attain the path of patience."

Here the Buddha is saying that even though you are able to purify the main result of that heavy karma, it will take a very long time to attain a higher realisation. For example, it will take at least ten eons to attain the stage of "patience," which is a name for the third of the four levels of the path of preparation.

Therefore, the meaning of complete purification is that the negative karma is totally purified of its capacity to ripen into suffering results. **However, the creation of hindrances to the development of the higher realisations is not purified.** Performing negative actions will push such high realisations into the distant future, so it is very important not to create negative karma in the first place. Thinking, "It does not matter because I can purify it later" is incorrect.

For this reason, noble beings do not intentionally engage in even the slightest misdeeds, even at the risk of losing their lives. In any case, holding onto this life is not such a big concern for ārya beings. Life is bound to end sooner or later, so losing one's life is not a big deal. But they would never do anything to delay the attainment of realisations on the path. If there were not this difference between being pure from the beginning and purifying negativities by means of confession, then āryas would not need to act in this way.[23]

Hatred and Wrong View

Based on this understanding, you should make a strong effort not to commit negative actions. You should understand karma and its results, be aware of what you are doing, and maintain pure conduct from the beginning. Of course, if something bad happens that you can't help, then you should apply this method of purification.

As the *Collection of Indicative Verses* says:

> People who practice non-virtue and do not gain merits,
> Who stray from the Dharma and hold to sacrilegious ways,
> Who possess non-virtuous karma—they will fear death,
> Like someone setting out on a great river in a rotting boat.
>
> People who practice merits and avoid non-virtue,
> Who practice the Dharma, the system of the holy ones,
> They will never fear death,
> Like sailing to the far shore in a sturdy boat.

This body can be an excellent boat to cross the river of cyclic existence, or it can be a leaky boat, which will fall apart as soon as it sets sail. If you do not use this body for virtuous, meritorious action, then it will be like the boat that breaks apart. And once it breaks up, it will sink into the deepest realms of suffering. That is why those who turn their body into a rotten boat have every reason to fear death. But those who accumulate merits by following the teachings of holy beings know that they can safely sail to the far shore of samsara, so at the time of death they have nothing to fear. Therefore, do not turn this precious body into a rotten, sinking boat. Do all that you can to develop the excellent qualities that can carry you to freedom.

We find this point in the *Collection of Indicative Verses*:

> Although of logical arguments they don't have much to say,
> Those who practice the Dharma following what it says
> Who eliminate attachment, hatred, and ignorance,
> Attain the fortune of virtuous practice.
>
> Those monks who enjoy being conscientious,
> And view carelessness with fear,
> Draw themselves out of bad rebirths,

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[23] We can see analogous situations in the world: hands, legs, or eyes that have never been injured are better and stronger than those that have been broken or damaged and then restored through medical treatment. Few have the thought, "Okay, I will do this very dangerous trick and break my leg, because with medical treatment I can recover." Limbs that have been broken are never quite the same as they were before; there is always some residual fault.

Like an elephant pulls itself out of the mud.

Those monks who enjoy being conscientious,
And view carelessness with fear,
Shake off all non-virtuous actions,
Like the wind shakes leaves off the trees.

Nāgārjuna says in his *Friendly Letter*:

If you yearn for higher realms or emancipation,
Then please become accustomed to the right view.
For those people with wrong views, though they practice well,
All their results will include unbearable suffering.

Here Nāgārjuna is advising his friend, the king. He says that whether you wish to attain a higher rebirth in your next life, or seek final liberation, you must cultivate the right view. As I have mentioned before, there are **two kinds of right view**. The first is the ultimate right view: realising the emptiness of inherent existence. But here we are talking about conventional right view, which refers to trusting in the cause and effect of karma, realising that virtuous karma brings happiness and non-virtuous karma brings suffering. Nāgārjuna urges the king to cultivate his understanding of karma and to develop complete trust in the cause and effect relationship.

For those people who fail to do that—who hold stubbornly to the wrong view that there is no karma, no life after this one, and no such thing as liberation—they will create karma that will only result in suffering in future lives. They may appear to be doing some positive actions here and there, but their purpose, intention, and view is going completely in the wrong the direction, so those actions will not be wholesome. **The root of good results is this right view.**

What Nāgārjuna is saying here is that it is indispensable, **absolutely fundamental, to base your practice on this proper view of dependent arising and the cause and effect of karma**. You must begin with an accurate understanding of wholesome and unwholesome karma as it is explained in the buddhist teachings; you must understand the natures of the two types of karma (positive and negative), how they arise from obscuring afflictions, and what kind of results they bring. Developing confidence and faith in this view of karma is indispensable for achieving any of the attainments of the three Buddhist vehicles. All the goals that beings aspire to—happiness and pleasure in this life, a high rebirth in the next life, liberation from cyclic existence, or the highest enlightenment of buddhahood—depend on this view of causality.

You should base your understanding on the explanations that Tsongkhapa has given us here. Then you can extend your research to other scriptural sources that discuss the relationship of karma and its results. Some of these texts are the *Mindfulness of the Excellent Teaching*, the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*, the *Hundred Actions Sutra*, the *Hundred Bodhisattva Stories*, and certain sections of the Vinaya that also have stories explaining various details of karma. These are the main texts that explain these topics, and there are many other scriptures and commentaries that can deepen your understanding. Studying these, meditating on what they teach, listening to teachings, and learning from others will all contribute to your understanding, and finally you will achieve a stable, enduring certainty in these teachings on karma.

Once you have that stable certainty, which does not fade in and out under the influence of others, it will change your actions. You will not be distracted or bothered by what other people say, because you know that you are going in the proper direction. This is something that you should hold as having the greatest importance, because all of your future practice depends on this.

Chapter 16 The Attitude of a Person of Small Scope

b) The measure of the attitude of a person of small spiritual scope

Matches a) in Chapter 9. Second part of 1) Training the mind in the stages of the path shared with persons of Small Scope

In Chapter 8, we established that there are three levels of spiritual beings: the person of small scope, the person of intermediate scope, and the person of great scope. Everything discussed so far is part of training the mind in the stages of the path shared with persons of Small Scope. This training begins with seeing that this precious human rebirth has great potential, and if we use it properly we can achieve virtually any goal we seek. Then we contemplate that although this life is wonderful, it is impermanent—we are sure to die, and that death can come at any time. If we do not use this life wisely and create positive causes for a happy rebirth in the future, this great opportunity we have in our hands will have been wasted.

We meditate on the various sufferings that beings have to experience in the lower realms in order to generate concern, and even fear, that we might be born there. When that fear arises, the question we must ask is: "What can I do to protect myself from birth in those suffering realms?" The answer is to take refuge in the Three Jewels, because they have the power to protect us from such a suffering future. Once we have taken refuge and turned to the Buddha and his teaching for safe direction, we need to follow his instructions concerning karma and its results. That is the practice that will save us from falling into a lower rebirth—the main goal of the being of small scope.

All of these stages of the path are taught in the context of the being of small scope, but they are integral to the paths of the two higher scopes as well. Hence, they are called the steps of the path shared with persons of small scope. As Nāgārjuna emphasised at the end of the previous chapter, gaining the correct understanding of karma, and living our lives in accordance with that understanding, is the indispensable foundation of all progress on the path. With that discussion we concluded the actual training to develop the attitude of the person of small spiritual scope.

Now we ask, "How do you determine when you have actually acquired the attitude of the being of small scope? What is your attitude like at this point?" This topic serves as a kind of test to measure whether you have attained this attitude or not. You may discover that you have not even reached the level of the inferior being yet, because you find that the required thought has not yet arisen in your mind.

In the past you always had an interest in this life. You have achieved the attitude of the person of small scope when these priorities are reversed—when your highest concern is acquiring a good rebirth in your next life, and your interest in the affairs of this life become secondary. When concern for what will happen in your next life spontaneously and naturally dominates your thoughts and actions, then you are on the path of the person of small scope.

At that point your attitude is similar to that of a man who has arrived in a city he is merely visiting and planning to move on. Although that person will deal with the basic concerns of living in that city, his mind and energy will be focused mainly on the place he is going to next, because he is planning on staying there for a long time.

You were brought to this life by previous karma, and now that karma has ripened; there isn't very much you can do to change it. This is the time to turn your attention to your future life, because that is something you really can control. If you do not take the right steps now, you could wind up residing in a very unpleasant place for a long time.

Once your priorities are reversed, all activities for the benefit of this life become incidental; your main job is to prepare for the future. When that reversal becomes the spontaneous nature of your mind, the actual attitude of the being of small scope has arrived. Until then you are an inferior spiritual being or lower.

Even when that spiritual attitude takes hold in your mind; you have to stabilise it. You have to continuously apply yourself to diligent practice in order to maintain this thought; otherwise you may lose it again. All of the details of the Lamrim Chenmo we have discussed so far—all of the meditations, reasonings, and exhortations—lead to this goal, this transformation of our attitude from concern for this life to focusing our energy on preparing for the future. You reach this first plateau on the path to enlightenment when this change in your scope becomes the fundamental motivating force in your life; not just mere words. Everything so far has been building toward this: the first major step that will lead us to the highest path.

c) Clearing up misconceptions concerning the attitude of a person of small spiritual scope

Need for excellent body, wealth, intelligence, good companions

Now we have to clear up some misconceptions and misunderstandings about the topics we've been discussing so far. In general, the scriptures urge us to turn away from the so-called "glories" of cyclic existence: the various desirable objects of samsaric life such as wealth, fame, physical beauty, and so forth. This teaching can be misunderstanding. Some may think that it is improper to strive for a higher rebirth with an excellent body and abundant resources because such a rebirth is still within cyclic existence and these attainments are therefore merely worldly goals.

Recall that you are pursuing two types of goals: temporary and ultimate. You can strive for certain objects because you require them temporarily, while your ultimate goal may be something quite different.

Although your ultimate goal is freedom from cyclic existence, you still must strive for an excellent body, wealth, intelligence, etc, because it is only by means of a succession of excellent rebirths, with the opportunities they afford to pursue the Dharma, that you can finally attain your ultimate goal. Emancipation or highest enlightenment will not come in one moment. You have to spend many lifetimes training the mind, accumulating virtuous causes, and eliminating obstacles. In each of those lives it is important to have good conditions for practice. Without the temporary opportunities you gain from having an excellent body, resources, companionship, surroundings, etc, you will not succeed in your ultimate purpose, which is to attain the definite good of liberation. Therefore, it is essential to seek these samsaric glories. In order to obtain emancipation you have to train your mind, and the body is the support of the mind. For example, wealth enables you to sustain your body and pursue your practice without being distracted by other worldly concerns. These worldly advantages actually enable you to pursue the path with freedom and diligence.

"High status" usually refers to birth as a human or deva. However, such excellent qualities are also qualities of buddhahood. Even from the ultimate point of view, the qualities of an excellent body, resources, and companionship—are not objects to be abandoned. and need not be classified as belonging solely to samsaric existence. All these qualities are not lost when you attain buddhahood, but are realised in their purest and most perfected forms.[24]

Six perfections

We summarise the practices that make up the core of the Mahayana path as the *six perfections*, to be explained in detail in the latter volumes of this series.[25]

What the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* and other scriptures are saying is that these first four perfections accomplish the qualities of high status, but these qualities are not just aspects of cyclic existence; in their perfected forms they are in fact attributes of a buddha. Those who strive for the omniscience of perfect enlightenment practice these four perfections intensively, for a very long time, and in an extraordinary manner. They are aspiring to the fruit of these practices: the extraordinary qualities of high status, which are the buddha's perfect body and its attributes. Even the great bodhisattvas, practicing the perfections in the most powerful way for many eons, strive for these exceptional qualities.

These qualities of high status are not just samsaric ideals that should be abandoned. These qualities are tremendously beneficial.

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[24] When you gain full and completely perfected buddhahood, you obtain the high point of those qualities. The excellent qualities of a life of high status are not just samsaric attachments, but in their perfected forms are the attributes of the *form body* (*rūpakāya*) of a buddha. Buddhahood endows you with bodily perfection and the splendid environment of a buddha's pure land. This buddha-field naturally produces all the resources associated with vast wealth and so forth. The companions and retinue of a buddha—in his *saṃbhogakāya*, or *enjoyment body*—are similarly of the highest quality: a host of ārya bodhisattvas.

[25] The first four of these perfections (pāramitā) are the cause for attaining a buddha's *rūpakāya*, or *body of form*. The first is the **perfection of giving**, which becomes the cause of attaining the unlimited resources of the buddha-field. The second is the **perfection of ethical conduct**, which becomes the cause of the buddha's perfect body. The third, the **perfection of patience**, becomes the cause of the buddha's perfect retinue. The fourth **perfection is persevering effort**, which becomes the cause of a buddha's perfect activity; this means that buddhas act spontaneously in the most meaningful way, and whatever activity a buddha undertakes is brought to the best possible completion. (The last two perfections, concentration and wisdom, result in the *dharmakāya* or *truth body* of a buddha, whose nature is perfect knowledge, or omniscience, and freedom from all obscurations.)

Pure Ethical Conduct and Vows

Concerning the achievement of the ultimate goal, the definite good, Śāntideva says in Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds:

> Relying on the boat of a human body,
> Free yourself from the great river of suffering.

In order to reach the far shore, beyond the ocean of suffering of samsara, you have to rely on the boat of a human body; you require the vehicle of a human life. Not just one. You will require an unbroken succession of many lives that are conducive to this practice of striving for enlightenment—achieve this kind of body in life after life. You have to continuously accumulate causes to obtain this excellent vehicle in the future.

In order to possess such a body in your next life, you have to create the causes for it during this lifetime. The preeminent cause for such an excellent body is **pure ethical conduct**. Ie, ethical conduct is the root of the path. Ethical conduct is the foundation of all good qualities. That is why it is so important to practice virtuous behaviour. Once you have achieved another high rebirth, you can continue to practice toward the highest goal. The basic cause, the foundation, is ethical conduct. You should take vows to the extent you are able and protect those vows as best you can.

You need to be born in a higher rebirth and you need to obtain all the necessary qualifications. If you have some but lack others, your progress will be impeded. To the extent that you lack any essential qualities, your practice will be less fruitful. To make rapid progress on the path, all the conducive conditions must be assembled.

In order to obtain such a fully qualified body, it is not sufficient to take and keep the precepts of the novice monk or nun, which are incomplete. You must enter into and observe faithfully the bhikṣu vows: the prātimokṣa vows of the fully ordained monk or nun. You may add the bodhisattva vows. In order to complete the path much more rapidly, you can add the tantric vows. To obtain all qualities needed, the minimum is the complete prātimokṣa vows, with those precepts the foundation of your training.

Some object to this and argue: if you are maintaining ethical conduct in order to obtain a higher rebirth, you can achieve that by taking the eight precepts of the one-day ordination vows for a layman. As these are sufficient to obtain a human life, why bother with the complication and difficulty of full bhikṣu vows? Also, as the ultimate purpose of the prātimokṣa vows is to obtain arhatship which you can attain as a layperson, on the basis of having taken the upāsaka, or lay, vows, why bother with the bhikṣu vows, which are much more difficult to maintain with no additional benefit?[26]

Tsongkhapa says that the different levels of the prātimokṣa vows are like stepping stones, each set leading to the next higher set, and this progression culminates in the full ordination of monks and nuns. The lower sets of vows, the one-day vows or the layperson's vows, are not the complete vows of individual liberation; they are stages one passes through on the way to that completion—full ordination.

The lower vows form the foundation for a progressive practice. For example, once you become confident in maintaining the eight precepts of the one-day vows, you may feel ready to take the ten precepts of the novice monk for life. Thus you progress higher and higher. The important thing to make every effort to keep all the precepts of whatever level of vows you have taken. You take the complete set of vows, and you guard all the vows you have taken as carefully as you can. Building upon each level, you can reach the culmination by taking the full ordination of a monk or nun.

Conclusion for Small Scope

We have completed the section of how to train the mind in the path that is common to the small scope. You should try to integrate with your own mind each of the topics we have covered. The Lamrim Chenmo is a step-by-step method that enables you to study, think about, analyse, and meditate on each point progressively. This method has the power to transform your mind, to change your attitude toward your life.

You should try as hard as you can to contemplate and meditate on these points. This will create a solid foundation for all other practices, and will be very useful to you in this life and throughout all future lives. If you put your effort into this, it will make your time here much more meaningful and beneficial.

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[26] To clarify: recall that within the prātimokṣa vows—the vows of individual liberation—are eight levels. Lay vows for men and women, novice vows for monks and nuns, vows for probationary nuns, full ordination vows for monks and nuns, and one-day ordination vows for laypeople. The arguments here are that you can achieve the temporary and the ultimate goals of the prātimokṣa vows—obtaining a higher rebirth and attaining arhatship—by basing your practice solely on the lower sets of vows, which are easier to keep. Therefore, why bother to take the vows of full ordination, which are the most difficult to maintain?