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.

---

[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.

---

[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?