

## Chapter 8 Three types of Persons

This discusses the progression through the stages of the Buddhist path in the context of the Lamrim teachings which classify practitioners into three scopes based on their spiritual aspirations and capacities and have sequential paths for each.

### Small and Intermediate Scopes:

These paths form the foundation for the development of bodhicitta (the mind of enlightenment) and are essential for all practitioners. They involve cultivating ethical behaviour, understanding impermanence, recognising the effects of karma, and developing emancipation from the suffering of cyclic existence (samsara).

- **Small Scope:** Focuses on achieving a favourable rebirth through ethical behaviour and avoiding negative actions. Practitioners aim to prevent non-virtuous deeds and engage only in virtuous activities.
- **Intermediate Scope:** Aims for complete liberation from samsara. Practitioners meditate on the Four Noble Truths and engage in the Three Trainings (ethical conduct, meditative stabilisation, and wisdom).

### Great Scope (Bodhisattva Path):

The Great Scope involves developing the great compassion characteristic of Bodhisattvas and aspiring to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings. It includes the practice of the six perfections and single-pointed concentration.

- **Bodhicitta:** The heart of the Mahayana path, bodhicitta is the altruistic intention to become enlightened to help all sentient beings. Developing bodhicitta requires contemplation of the benefits and a deep sense of responsibility toward others.
- **Wisdom and Method:** The path to Buddhahood requires a balance of method (compassionate activities) and wisdom (understanding emptiness)—both are necessary to achieve complete enlightenment.
- **Meditative Practices** To achieve wisdom requires an understanding of emptiness, practitioners must engage in single-pointed meditation and investigate the true nature of self and emptiness of phenomena, overcoming misconceptions about the self or "I."

### Progressive Path:

The Lamrim emphasises a step-by-step approach, beginning with practices suitable for those of Small Scope, moving through the Intermediate Scope, and finally engaging in the teachings and practices of the Great Scope.

- **Cultivation of Merit and Wisdom:** Alongside developing bodhicitta, practitioners need to purify negative actions, accumulate merit and achieve realisation of emptiness.
- **Tantric Path:** For those who are ready, the text also touches upon the tantric path (Vajrayana), which involves special initiation and practices that can lead to quicker progress but require a strong foundation in the earlier stages and more difficult vows.

### Ethical and Meditative Practices:

The text underscores the importance of ethical behaviour, meditative stabilisation, and wisdom throughout all stages of the path. And the necessity of a proper Dharma teacher and being a receptive student.

The Lamrim's structured approach ensures that practitioners develop a comprehensive understanding and experience of the Buddhist path, allowing for a transformation that leads from self-centred concerns to the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. This summary encapsulates the integrated and sequential nature of the Lamrim teachings, underscoring the need for gradual progress through the stages of spiritual development.

## Chapter 9 Mindfulness of Death

This chapter emphasises the critical importance of remembering the impermanence of life as a foundational Buddhist practice. The contemplation of death serves as a potent tool to motivate practitioners towards spiritual diligence, recognising the transitory nature of human existence and the urgency of Dharma practice.

The text systematically outlines how to develop a genuine awareness of death through various contemplations and reflections:

1. **Impermanence and Death's Certainty:** The practitioner is encouraged to meditate on the unavoidable fact of death, acknowledging that life's duration is both limited and unpredictable. This meditation is meant to dismantle the false feeling of security in the permanence of life and to highlight the constant, inevitable approach of death. The text advises reflecting on the fact that no condition or circumstance, such as youth, health, or wealth, can prevent death's arrival.
2. **The Unpredictability of Death:** The text elaborates on the uncertainty surrounding the time of death, emphasising that death can occur at any moment, without warning. This section of the teachings is designed to counteract complacency and procrastination in spiritual practice by instilling a sense of urgency and immediacy.
3. **The Sole Benefit at Death:** In this contemplation, practitioners are reminded that at the time of death, nothing will be of benefit except their Dharma practice. Friends, wealth, and even one's own body cannot prevent death and none can accompany the individual into the afterlife. The only support will be the virtues and spiritual practices cultivated during their lifetime.
4. **Cultivating Mindfulness of Death:** The Lamrim provides methods for integrating death awareness into daily life, advising practitioners to meditate regularly on death's certainty, its unpredictability, and the fact that only spiritual practice is of ultimate benefit. This practice aims to shift one's priorities from worldly concerns to Dharma practice and to live each day with the understanding that it could be one's last.
5. **Benefits of Cultivating Mindfulness of Death:** By maintaining awareness of death, practitioners are likely to lead more meaningful lives, characterised by less attachment to temporary pleasures and greater commitment to ethical behaviour and spiritual growth. Dropping interest in the pleasures of this life and concentrating on preparing for the next life. The mindfulness of death helps to align one's actions with Dharma principles, ensuring that time is used wisely and that one is prepared for the moment of death whenever it may come.

The chapter emphasises that understanding and accepting the reality of death is not to induce despair but to inspire a diligent and meaningful approach to life and spiritual practice. It is a reminder to prioritise the cultivation of positive karma and spiritual advancement over transient worldly achievements and pleasures.

This contemplation on death is intended to catalyse a profound internal transformation, guiding the practitioner toward a life of virtue and Dharma practice, ultimately preparing them for a peaceful death and a favourable rebirth. The teachings in this chapter encourage an immediate and sustained effort in spiritual practice, with the recognition that every moment is precious and an opportunity for spiritual advancement.

## Chapter 10 Reflection on one's future life

Reflection of one's future life emphasises the importance of understanding the potential consequences of one's actions, particularly in terms of rebirth in the six realms of samsara. This chapter is an extension of Buddhist teachings on karma and the afterlife, aimed at encouraging practitioners to adopt virtuous behaviours and develop mindfulness regarding the inevitability of death and the uncertainty of future rebirths.

The text divides possible rebirths into two general categories: **lower migrations (bad rebirths) and higher migrations (good rebirths)**. It explains that individuals do not choose their next life consciously; instead, their rebirth is determined by the actions they have performed in their current and past lives and karma they have accumulated. The teachings stress that negative actions can lead to rebirth in one of the three lower realms: the hell realms, the realm of hungry ghosts, or the animal realm, each characterised by various forms of suffering.

The chapter elaborates on the conditions in these lower realms:

1. **Hell Beings:** Suffering in the hell realms is intense and can last for vast periods (eons). The text describes various hells, such as the eight hot hells and surrounding hells, where beings endure extreme forms of torture and agony due to their previous negative karma.
2. **Hungry Ghosts:** Beings in this realm suffer from insatiable hunger and thirst, unable to find or consume any sustenance due to obstacles created by their previous actions driven by greed and desire.
3. **Animals:** This section describes the suffering of animals, highlighting their exploitation and mistreatment by humans and other animals. It points out that animals suffer from ignorance and lack the opportunity to engage in Dharma practice.

The Lamrim Chenmo advises practitioners to contemplate these sufferings deeply to instil a sense of fear and urgency that motivates Dharma practice. Understanding the reality of suffering in lower realms and the role of accumulated negative karma in leading to such states is crucial for developing a genuine desire to avoid non-virtuous actions and engage in virtuous ones.

The text encourages continuous reflection on the nature of samsara and the sufferings inherent in it. This contemplation is presented as a powerful motivator for seeking refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) and committing to a path of ethical conduct and spiritual practice. It stresses the importance of using one's current human life, a precious opportunity, to practice virtue and purify negative karma to secure a favourable rebirth and ultimately achieve liberation from the cycle of rebirths.

By detailing the suffering of the lower realms and emphasising the karmic causality leading to such states, the Lamrim Chenmo aims to awaken practitioners to the realities of samsara and encourage them to prioritise their spiritual development in this life. The teachings serve as a stark reminder of the impermanence of life and the urgent need for Dharma study and practice to attain higher rebirths, liberation, and ultimately, enlightenment.

# Chapter 11 Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

This chapter outlines the reasons, objects, method, and commitments of taking refuge with the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Such refuge is the gateway for individuals to formally enter the Buddhist path—essential for Small Scope.

## Reasons for Taking Refuge

The chapter begins by discussing the motivations for seeking refuge. Recognising the suffering inherent in the lower realms and wasted years in the cycle of samsara prompts individuals to seek a method to avoid negative rebirths. The primary motivation for individuals of Small Spiritual Scope is to secure a string of favourable rebirths and ultimately achieve liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Refuge is a gateway.

## Objects of Refuge

The objects to which one goes for refuge are:

1. **The Buddha:** The ultimate guide, the Buddha is the one who has attained complete enlightenment and is free from all mental afflictions. He also provided the teachings. The text highlights the Buddha's unique qualities, such as fearlessness, expert guidance, boundless compassion, and spiritual achievements.
2. **The Dharma:** The Dharma includes the Buddha's teachings, commentaries on those teachings and the actual realisations that arise from practicing those teachings. It serves as the true protection against suffering by providing the methods to eliminate mental afflictions and achieve emancipation.
3. **The Sangha:** The Sangha refers to the community of practitioners who support and guide each other in Dharma practice. They are exemplars who embody the teachings and provide assistance to fellow practitioners on the path to enlightenment.

## The Method of Taking Refuge

Taking refuge requires understanding the unique qualities and functions of the Three Jewels. Practitioners are encouraged to develop a sincere and heartfelt commitment by:

1. Recognising the distinct attributes of each Jewel.
2. Understanding how they can assist in overcoming suffering and give a path to liberation and enlightenment.
3. Cultivating devotion and respect based on their unique qualities and contributions.
4. Practicing in a manner that aligns with the teachings and guidance provided by the Three Jewels.

## The Commitments of Taking Refuge

Upon taking refuge, practitioners agree to uphold certain commitments and precepts, which reinforce their dedication and guide their behaviour:

1. Respect and follow the teachings of the Buddha.
2. Integrate the Dharma into one's life through study, practice, reflection and realisation.
3. Support and engage with the Sangha, contributing to a community of practice and mutual assistance.

The chapter stresses the importance of continuous effort and sincere application in Dharma practice. By taking refuge in the Three Jewels, practitioners commit themselves to a path that leads away from samsara and toward ultimate freedom and enlightenment. This commitment is not just a formal ceremony but a profound transformation of one's life and aspirations, guided by the wisdom, compassion, and power of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

## Chapter 12 The Precepts of Refuge

After taking refuge in the Three Jewels—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—practitioners in Tibetan Buddhism are expected to adhere to certain precepts and vows, reflecting their commitment and guiding their conduct. These vows are to help maintain and deepen the practitioner's refuge in the Three Jewels, shaping their path towards enlightenment.

### Precepts Related to the Buddha:

#### 1. Proscriptive Precepts:

- Avoid taking refuge in worldly gods or following non-Buddhist teachers whose teachings contradict the Dharma. Forsake other sources of refuge that do not lead to the ultimate freedom from samsara.

#### 2. Prescriptive Precepts:

- Develop and maintain a deep respect for the Buddha. Trust, faith, and reverence should be directed towards the Buddha as the guide to enlightenment.
- Honour representations of the Buddha, such as images, statues, or paintings, acknowledging their symbolic significance and the teachings they represent.

### Precepts Related to the Dharma:

#### 1. Proscriptive Precepts:

- Refrain from harming sentient beings. Since the Dharma emphasises nonviolence and compassion, actions should align with these principles.

#### 2. Prescriptive Precepts:

- Treat all forms of the Dharma with respect, including both the teachings themselves (the path and cessations) and the scriptures that describe them. This includes proper treatment of Dharma texts and materials, understanding their invaluable contribution to the path to enlightenment.

### Precepts Related to the Sangha:

#### 1. Proscriptive Precepts:

- Avoid close association with individuals whose behaviour or beliefs contradict the teachings of the Dharma. This protects one's own practice from harmful influences.

#### 2. Prescriptive Precepts:

- Show respect and honour towards all members of the Sangha and the symbols of their ordination and commitment. This includes monks and nuns who have dedicated their lives to the practice of the Dharma.

### General Precepts Common to All Three Jewels:

- Maintain your refuge and do not forsake the Three Jewels, even in jest or if it costs you your life.
- Continually recall the Three Jewels to strengthen your refuge and commitment.
- Acknowledge and respond to the great kindness of the Three Jewels by striving to worship them constantly and by offering the first portion of your food and drink.
- Practice compassion towards all living beings, including them in your spiritual journey.
- Engage in activities that honour the Three Jewels.
- Regularly reaffirm your commitment to the Three Jewels, ideally three times during the day and three times at night.

The precepts are a practical guide for living according to the values and teachings of Buddha, ensuring your actions are aligned with your spiritual goals. Violating these precepts can lead to very poor outcomes. Adherence strengthens one's connection to the Three Jewels and supports the journey towards enlightenment. These guidelines help practitioners accumulate merit and wisdom on their spiritual path.

## Chapter 13 The General Characteristics of Karma

This chapter emphasises its certainty, magnification, persistence, and individual nature. It establishes the foundation for ethical conduct and spiritual development within the context of Tibetan Buddhism.

**Certainty of Karma:** Actions inevitably lead to corresponding results. Virtuous actions lead to happiness and positive outcomes, while non-virtuous actions result in suffering and negative outcomes. This principle, akin to the law of cause and effect, ensures that acts of kindness and generosity foster future happiness, whereas harmful actions engender suffering. Karma cannot be extinguished—except by applying antidotes.

**Magnification of Karma:** The teachings reveal how minor actions can produce significant and sometimes unexpected consequences. This magnification principle highlights the importance of mindfulness in every action, thought, and word, considering their potential amplified effects over time and many lives.

**Karmic Consequences and Rebirth:** The chapter details the ten non-virtuous actions (killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, idle chatter, covetousness, harmful intent, and wrong views) and their specific negative results in this and future lives, showing the direct impact of one's actions on one's experience of reality.

**Interplay of Actions and Results:** Emphasising personal responsibility in the karmic process, the text asserts that you experience the results of your own actions and not anyone else's. Actions performed will bear results and will not disappear until they come to fruition under the right conditions.

**Ethical Conduct and Right View:** Understanding and practicing ethical conduct according to karmic principles are highlighted as crucial for spiritual growth. The Right View involves comprehending the nature of reality, including karma and rebirth. This lays the groundwork for ethical decisions and behaviours.

**Practical Application:** The document advises practitioners to reflect continually on their actions and their potential consequences. It encourages the active cultivation of positive qualities such as compassion, patience, and generosity to establish a beneficial cycle of karma that aids personal development and contributes to the welfare of others.

**Subtle Nature of Karma:** The chapter concludes by acknowledging the complexity and subtlety of karma, which operates beyond ordinary human perception and is fully comprehensible only to a Buddha. This acknowledgment serves as a reminder of the profound and often enigmatic nature of karmic law.

This is a foundational discourse on karma, illustrating its critical role in shaping one's path toward spiritual enlightenment. It offers practical guidance for navigating the complexities of ethical conduct and emphasises the importance of virtuous action, mindfulness, responsibility, and compassion in one's spiritual journey.

## Chapter 14 Varieties of Karma

This dives into the intricate details of karma, specifically focusing on the ten non-virtuous actions and their nuanced implications for practitioners on the path to enlightenment. This chapter expands significantly on the foundational understanding of previous chapters, emphasising the profound impact of karma on an individual's journey through samsara and towards ultimate liberation.

### The Ten Non-virtuous Actions

The Buddha condensed all negative actions into ten principal categories, split among actions performed by the body, speech, and mind. Understanding these actions and their results is crucial for practicing ethical conduct, as it helps practitioners recognise which actions to avoid and which to cultivate:

#### 1. Three Physical Non-virtues:

- **Killing:** Deliberate termination of a life. The action becomes complete when the being dies due to this intentional act, leading to severe karmic consequences.
- **Stealing:** Taking what has not been freely given, with the action culminating once the thief considers the item their own.
- **Sexual Misconduct:** Engaging in inappropriate sexual activities, with actions judged based on consent, relationship status, and societal norms.

#### 2. Four Verbal Non-virtues:

- **Lying:** Speaking untruths with the intent to deceive others. The karma completes when the listener understands and believes the lie.
- **Slander:** Using words to create discord between individuals, with completion upon the listener's comprehension and the resultant discord.
- **Harsh Speech:** Speaking words meant to hurt others, with karma completing upon the listener's understanding and emotional hurt.
- **Senseless Speech:** Idle chatter or meaningless talk that leads to distraction and misunderstandings.

#### 3. Three Mental Non-virtues:

- **Covetousness:** A strong desire to possess what belongs to others, culminating in a firm resolution to acquire the object of desire.
- **Malice:** Wishing harm or ill will towards others, with the karma completing upon firmly resolving to act on these harmful intentions.
- **Wrong View:** Rejecting fundamental truths of Buddhism, particularly regarding karma and rebirth, which becomes complete upon full adoption of these erroneous beliefs.

### The Impact and Magnitude of Karma

This section provides a nuanced exploration into the factors that make certain karmic actions heavier or lighter and the role of intention and context in shaping the results. This analysis is vital for practitioners to gauge the gravity of their actions and to navigate their spiritual journey with mindfulness and precision.

#### Distinguishing Heavy and Light Karma:

Karma's weight can be influenced by several factors:

1. **The Role of Thought:** Actions performed under the influence of strong desires or aversions are deemed heavier. Eg, actions driven by intense hatred or desire carry a more substantial karmic weight compared to those conducted with a milder intention.

2. **Nature of the Action:** The manner in which an action is performed can significantly impact the karma's weight. The text uses killing as an example: karma intensifies if the act is done with joy, extensive planning, or in a particularly cruel manner.
3. **Absence of Antidotes:** When negative actions are not countered or neutralised by virtuous deeds, their karmic impact deepens. Regular engagement in activities such as taking one-day ordination vows or practicing meritorious acts can serve as antidotes, mitigating the severity of negative karma. (See Chapter 15)
4. **Contextual Factors:** The chapter discusses how the environment, the object or the recipient of the action, and the agent's qualities can amplify the karmic impact. Actions performed towards highly meritorious beings (bodhisattvas) or with malicious intent towards virtuous individuals result in more substantial karmic repercussions.

### **Understanding Levels of Afflictions:**

Our actions (and resulting karma) are influenced by varying degrees of mental afflictions or negative emotions, known as "kleshas" in Sanskrit. These afflictions include ignorance, attachment, anger, pride, jealousy, and doubt.

1. **Ignorance:** This is the root affliction, a misperception or misunderstanding of the nature of reality. It's the fundamental confusion about the nature of the self and phenomena, seeing them as inherently existent when they are not. Actions done out of ignorance, without awareness of their ethical implications or misunderstanding their consequences, contribute to the cycle of suffering.
2. **Attachment and Desire:** This level of affliction involves craving, clinging, or excessive desire towards objects, people, or sensations. Actions motivated by strong attachment or desire can lead to harmful outcomes, such as stealing due to coveting another's possessions or lying to gain favour or material benefits.
3. **Anger and Aversion:** Actions influenced by anger, hatred, or aversion can lead to violent outcomes, such as harming others physically or verbally. This level of affliction often results in clear and immediate negative karmic results, impacting both the perpetrator and the victim.
4. **Pride and Jealousy:** These afflictions can lead to actions that harm oneself and others through disdain, arrogance, or competitiveness. For example, pride may prevent an individual from acknowledging their faults and apologising, while jealousy might drive one to undermine others' success.

### **Affliction's Impact on Karma:**

The level of affliction involved in an action determines the karmic weight or intensity of that action. Actions performed with:

- **Higher levels of affliction** have more severe and immediate negative consequences.
- **Lower levels of affliction** might result in less immediate or less severe results but still contribute to the cycle of samsara.

Actions fuelled by multiple afflictions, or performed with intense affliction, are heavier and more destructive. The impact is not limited to the person performing the action. It extends to those affected by it.

The concept encourages you to become more mindful of your mental states and motivations. By understanding how different levels of afflictions influence your actions, you can work towards reducing these negative emotions through meditation, ethical conduct, and cultivation of positive qualities like compassion and wisdom, which in turn, leads to creation of positive karma and advancement along the path to enlightenment.

### **Results of Karma:**

Karma manifests in various results:



1. **Fruitional Results:** These are the main consequences of karmic actions, primarily influencing the type of rebirth one experiences. Actions with different levels of afflictions lead to rebirth in realms associated with corresponding levels of suffering or happiness.
2. **Corresponding Results:** These mirror the nature of the karmic action, such as experiencing poverty as a result of stealing or a short life due to committing killing. This principle underlines the "what you give is what you get" aspect of karmic results.
3. **Environmental Results:** The chapter also touches upon how virtuous and non-virtuous actions can influence one's environment, leading to living conditions that reflect the nature of one's accumulated karma.

### **Transformative Power of Understanding Karma:**

The comprehension of karma's intricacies can profoundly transform a practitioner's approach to life and spiritual practice. Recognising the detrimental consequences of negative actions and the benefits of virtuous deeds motivates one to live ethically and to pursue spiritual development diligently.

1. **Incorporating Karma into Practice:** You are encouraged to apply understanding of karma by avoiding harmful actions and engaging in virtuous ones, reflecting a conscious effort to shape your future experiences and spiritual progression.
2. **Meditative and Reflective Practices:** The text suggests integrating the principles of karma into daily meditation and reflection, fostering a mindset that prioritises ethical conduct and compassionate action.
3. **The Broader Impact:** By understanding the vast implications of one's actions through the lens of karma, individuals are likely to develop greater empathy, reduce selfish behaviours, and contribute positively to their environment and the lives of others.

In summary, this chapter delves into the complex dynamics of karma, highlighting the importance of intention, the nature of actions, and the context in which they are performed. By understanding the nuanced mechanisms of karma, practitioners can make informed choices that lead to beneficial outcomes, align with ethical conduct, and progress on the path toward enlightenment. This detailed exploration elucidates the principles governing karma and also provides practical guidance for integrating these insights into one's life and practice, laying a solid foundation for spiritual growth and the attainment of ultimate liberation.

## Chapter 15 Cultivating Ethical Behaviour

Cultivating ethical behaviour is a core aspect of Buddhist teachings and a fundamental step in one's spiritual development. This chapter shows how individuals can engage in virtuous actions while turning away from harmful behaviours, emphasising the need for understanding karma and its results in fostering ethical conduct.

### Engaging in Virtue and Desisting from Non-virtue

Buddha's taught that the root of all virtue lies in the conviction that virtuous actions lead away from suffering towards stable happiness. By analysing the outcomes of virtuous versus non-virtuous deeds, you develop a strong conviction to engage in virtue. The foundation of this process is understanding and conviction in the Dharma and of karma.

This section also introduces the concept of the three types of phenomena: manifest, slightly hidden, and extremely hidden. This classification helps practitioners understand the levels at which karma operates and the subtleties involved in its functioning. The text underlines that although all phenomena, including karma, lack an ultimately real nature, they still function according to the principles of dependent arising and cause and effect.

### Purifying Negative Karma with the Four Powers

Purifying negative karma can be achieved through the practice of the four powers: remorse, applying antidotes, turning away from faults, and reliance (foundation). These methods allow practitioners to cleanse accumulated negative karma from past actions.

1. **Remorse:** a feeling genuine remorse for past negative actions is crucial— reflecting on the harmful consequences of one's actions and resolving not to do them again.
2. **Applying Antidotes:** This involves engaging in activities that counteract the negative karma, such as reciting sutras, developing an understanding of emptiness, and practicing meritorious actions like prostrations and mantra recitation.
3. **Turning Away from Faults:** Making a strong commitment not to repeat negative actions in the future based on the understanding of their harmful results.
4. **Foundation (Reliance):** Relying on the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) for guidance and support, and developing bodhicitta, the altruistic intention to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.

### The six antidotes

1. **Relying on the Profound Sutras:** This involves engaging with Buddhist scriptures, particularly those that focus on the Perfection of Wisdom or emptiness. By reading, memorising, listening to teachings, or explaining these sutras to others, you can purify negative karma. The act of engaging with these texts helps plant positive seeds in one's mental continuum due to their profound subject matter and inherent purity.
2. **Having an Interest in Emptiness:** Realisation of emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality, is a direct antidote to all forms of negativity by severing the root of ignorance, the primary cause of suffering and negative karma. Even a slight understanding or suspicion that phenomena might be empty of inherent existence can significantly undermine samsaric foundations and lead to the purification of karmic seeds.
3. **Relying on Recitation:** This refers to the practice of reciting specific mantras or prayers, particularly those associated with purification, such as the hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva. Reciting these mantras, especially within the context of rituals designed for purification, helps cleanse negative karma accumulated over lifetimes.
4. **Relying on Images:** Creating or venerating images of the Buddha; statues, thangkas, or tsa-tsas (small clay images), when done with faith and respect, is an effective way of purifying negative karma. This practice reflects respect for the Buddha's body, speech, and mind and contributes significantly to one's spiritual development.

5. **Relying on Worship:** This includes making offerings to the Buddha or representations of him, like offering water, flowers, or light. The value of these offerings lies not in the materials themselves but in the attitude and devotion with which they are offered, leading to the purification of past negative actions and the accumulation of merit.
6. **Relying on Names:** Reciting, hearing, or remembering the names of Buddhas and great Bodhisattvas, like the practice of reciting the mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum" associated with Avalokiteshvara, purifies negative karma. The effectiveness of this practice is rooted in the powerful dedications made by these enlightened beings to assist all sentient beings in purifying their negative karma.

These six antidotes provide a comprehensive approach to purifying negative karma. They offer multiple avenues for practitioners to engage with purification practices according to their inclinations and capacities. The successful application of these antidotes is predicated on the sincere generation of **remorse** for past negative actions and the resolve to avoid them in the future, plus a profound trust and reliance on the Three Jewels. By integrating these practices into daily life, practitioners can gradually cleanse their negative karma, transform their minds and advance on the path to enlightenment.

### Importance of Vows

Vows are a foundation of the path toward enlightenment. Ethical conduct is the root of all good qualities and essential for achieving higher rebirths. Maintaining pure ethical conduct through vows enables the practitioner to accumulate the necessary causes for attaining a conducive human body in an unbroken succession of future lives. Ethical behaviour is a vehicle for traversing the path toward the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

Successive levels of vows follow progressive stages of ethical and spiritual development:

1. **Prātimokṣa Vows:** These vows pertain to individual liberation. They include lay vows, novice vows, and full ordination vows—the minimum. Each level is a stepping stone to the next, guiding practitioners from basic ethical conduct to profound commitments. The prātimokṣa vows serve as the groundwork for higher spiritual attainments.
2. **Bodhisattva Vows:** These vows address the Mahayana goal of achieving enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. They guide the practitioner in developing and maintaining the altruistic intention of bodhicitta and involve commitments that avoid actions hindering this altruistic path.
3. **Tantric Vows:** For those practicing Vajrayana Buddhism, tantric vows introduce an even higher level of commitment. These vows are designed to accelerate the path to enlightenment by incorporating advanced meditation techniques and rituals.

### Importance of Taking and Keeping Vows

Each vow is a commitment to refrain from harmful behaviours and to cultivate positive qualities. Taking and maintaining vows instills a sense of moral discipline and awareness, essential for purifying negative karma and cultivating virtue. Keeping vows is fundamental to spiritual progress. Breaking vows is a spiritual downfall leading to adverse karmic consequences. However, using the powers and antidotes can purify even this karma.

Vows are not mere rules but a dynamic framework for ethical and spiritual growth. They help practitioners cultivate a pure mind, avoid negative karma, and engage actively in creating the causes for enlightenment. The higher the level of vows one upholds, the more profound the commitment to ethical conduct and spiritual development.

Meticulously keeping vows strengthens one's practice and accelerates progress on the path. Avoiding negative actions and actively engaging in positive deeds transforms one's life into a path toward enlightenment.

### **Ability to Minimise Even Severe Karma**

These purification practices have the potential to minimise even the most severe karma, (which appears to contradict the Buddha's teachings that karma can never be extinguished). This apparent contradiction is resolved through a deeper understanding of karma and the effects of applying antidotes. Although once created, negative karma can lead to dire consequences, application of antidotes can significantly modify its impact. These antidotes transform potential outcomes of negative actions in several ways:

1. Transforming severe consequences into less severe ones, thereby lessening the harshness of the results.
2. Allowing one to experience a lower realm without the associated suffering.
3. Converting severe repercussions into minor ones, eg transforming a rebirth that could have been in a suffering realm into a minor headache in this life.
4. Reducing the duration of suffering from a long time to a brief encounter.

These modifications depend on factors like the completeness of purification, intensity, and duration of applied antidotes. The concept here is that no negative karma is beyond purification; the severity and manifestation of its results can be altered.

### **Resolving the Apparent Contradiction**

The apparent contradiction arises from the Buddha's assertion that "karma can never be lost even in one hundred eons," ie every action's result must be experienced. However, this statement refers to karma that has not been addressed by any antidote. Untreated karma will indeed bear its full results, regardless of time.

Purification of karma through practices like the four powers (remorse, antidote application, turning away from faults, and reliance) does not negate this principle but provides a nuanced understanding. When these antidotes are applied effectively, they can: destroy karmic seeds, delay their fruition, prevent the conditions for their results, or diminish their intensity and duration. Although untreated karma will unfailingly yield its results, karma subjected to effective antidotes can be altered, delayed, or weakened. This does not contradict the Buddha's teachings.

### **The Importance of Correct Application**

The sutras emphasise that only untreated karma is unchangeable and will inevitably ripen. In contrast, karmic seeds exposed to proper antidotes like remorse, ethical restraint, and positive actions can be significantly weakened or entirely eliminated.

It's essential to note that while purification practices offer a way to mitigate and transform karma, they are not an encouragement to commit negative acts with the intention of purifying them later, because not all karma from the action is extinguished and could mean a much later enlightenment for you after many more rebirths.

### **Ethical Conduct as the Foundation of Spiritual Growth**

The chapter concludes by reiterating the importance of ethical conduct as the foundation for all spiritual progress. By understanding the profound implications of karma and its results, and by engaging in the continuous practice of purification and ethical behaviour, practitioners can steer their lives away from suffering and towards enlightenment. The text underscores the necessity of maintaining vigilance over one's actions, constantly aligning them with Dharma teachings, and actively working to close the gap between one's behaviour and the ideals of the path.

# Chapter 16 The Attitude of a Person of Small Scope

## The Attitude of a Person of Small Scope:

This chapter clarifies the initial steps on the path, focusing on recognising the value of human life and its impermanence; contemplating the transient nature of life and the inevitability of death, which leads to the realisation that one must act promptly to ensure a favourable future rebirth, avoiding the potential sufferings inherent in lower realms.

## Key practices include:

1. **Contemplating Life's Preciousness:** Acknowledging the rare and precious opportunity presented by human life offering the potential to achieve spiritual goals.
2. **Meditating on Impermanence and Death:** Realising that life is fleeting encourages prioritising spiritual practices over concerns of daily life—chasing pleasure....
3. **Reflecting on the Sufferings of Lower Realms:** Generating a mindful awareness of the suffering experienced in lower realms motivates one to avoid negative karma.
4. **Taking Refuge:** Understanding that true protection from suffering is found by taking refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.
5. **Understanding and Practicing Karma:** Acknowledging the importance of ethical behaviour guided by an understanding of karma and its results.

The chapter underlines that the transformation of one's priorities—from focusing primarily on this life's concerns to prioritising future lifetimes (achieving a good human rebirth)—is indicative of adopting the attitude of a person of small scope.

## Misconceptions Concerning Small Scope:

The text addresses common misunderstandings regarding the pursuit of favourable future rebirths. While the scriptures advise renouncing samsaric "glories," this doesn't mean neglecting the pursuit of conditions conducive to spiritual practice. Good health, resources, and a supportive environment are necessary for Dharma practice, contributing to both temporary well-being and ultimate spiritual goals.

It's stressed that while ultimate liberation is the final objective, securing a series of favourable rebirths with the necessary conditions for Dharma practice is crucial for making progress toward this goal. Therefore, seeking samsaric benefits like good health, wealth, or a high status is not contradictory to spiritual pursuits; rather, these conditions facilitate continuous practice and progress on the path.

## Pure Ethical Conduct and Vows:

The chapter emphasises that ethical conduct forms the foundation of all spiritual progress. Pure ethical conduct, particularly through the observance of vows, is highlighted as the preeminent cause for obtaining a favourable rebirth. These vows range from lay vows to full monastic ordination (bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī vows), each level acting as a stepping stone to higher ethical standards.

The text clarifies that although lower vows are part of the path, full ordination vows offer a more comprehensive framework for ethical conduct, significantly contributing to one's spiritual development and the attainment of liberation.

The emphasis on ethical conduct, understanding karma, and prioritising future lives establishes the groundwork upon which the entire spiritual path is built, ensuring meaningful progress in this life and beyond.