

LAM RIM VISUALIZATION

Begin the meditation by visualizing yourself in a dark forest, thick with trees. You are lost, confused, feeling hopeless and anxious. You see no way out.

This represents your countless past lives, and that part of this life before you met the Dharma. Think about what life was like then, how difficult it was without any direction about how to improve your life and what to do to make things better.

Suddenly a path appears before you, at the end of which is light. You follow this path to the opening in the forest and emerge into a clearing.

This is one of the places where you can begin to meditate on your great fortune. You have, through the good karma collected by you in this and past lives, finally found a way out of the confusion and hopelessness and now have a rare opportunity.

You see that you are on a shore, on the banks of a body of water. You look over the water to land on the other side. There is a castle there. Standing on the shore in front of the castle is the Lama. They sees you and becomes very happy, waving to you and smiling. They enters into a boat, pushes off, and begins crossing over the water. They are coming to you.

As the Lama approaches, meditate on what the Lama is for you, and the qualities and qualifications of a Lama. Rehearse the four steps of Lama devotion: developing faith in Them, how to serve Them in your thoughts, how to serve Them in your deeds, and developing reverence for Them by remembering the kindnesses They have shown and continues to show you.

See the Lama reach the shore you are standing on. They helps you into the boat and then takes the helm. You travel over the water toward the far shore, where the castle is.

The boat represents your present incredibly fortunate life, endowed with the freedoms and opportunities. Meditate on the section of the Lam Rim outline having to do with recognizing your “leisure and fortune,” contemplating how very important they are, and how hard they are to find. Think about how you are free now from births in undesirable realms, how you are free from serious handicaps (mental and physical), etc.; and how fortunate you are to have been born into a place and time where the Dharma has been taught and preserved, and how unbelievably fortunate you are to have come into contact with authentic teachings, the Lama, etc.

The water represents the ocean of *samsara*, of suffering and its causes (that is, our own perpetuation of our suffering). You have the rare opportunity in this life to end this suffering. Look into the water and see that blind turtle, emerging from the bottom of the ocean once every hundred years, who has “by chance” surfaced into the middle of a golden hoop. Get happy here about your incredible good fortune.

The Lama guides the boat to the far shore, in front of the castle. They helps you out of the boat and helps you climb the stairs toward the door of the castle.

Here reflect again on how you owe EVERYTHING to your precious Lama. They are literally rescuing you from certain interminable suffering and repeated death. The Lama is helping you in every possible way; They are indeed the “source of all your good.” They will remain at your side, guiding you, at every stage of the path. Throughout the whole of your visualization, remember to look over and see the Lama at your side at every point. The Lama is always there, and the Lama leads you through every step of the Path.

Enter a yellow door into a small triangular room.

The yellow door and smallness of this room are meant to remind you that you have reached the point of the Lam Rim concerning the Steps of the Path Shared by Those of the Lesser Scope. Reflect on what that

means: these are people practicing the Path out of fear of lower rebirths (as an animal, hungry ghost, or hell-being).

You enter into the apex of the triangle. There is a coffin with a glass lid. The Lama bids you to look. You see yourself as a corpse.

Here is where you insert a death meditation: death is certain, the time of death is uncertain, and how at death nothing but Dharma can help. Convince yourself that you will die today. Try to develop a strong sense of how Dharma should be your highest priority, a sense of urgency about practicing Dharma, and some sense of renunciation regarding the things of this suffering life, which will be of no use to you whatsoever at the time of death.

In the coffin, on the left side of your dead body, are nasty, ugly, black scorpions, spiders, snakes, and other repulsive things.

The ugly things on the left represent your negative karmic deeds which, left unattended, could very well result in a lower rebirth. Meditate on the lower realms (animal, hungry ghost, and hells), the kinds of sufferings such beings must endure, the complete absence of opportunities in such births to progress spiritually, and how this is where you will end up with such negative karma. Try to develop a deep concern about your future, and especially about the next life.

Scoop up with your arms the ugly scorpions and so forth from the left side of your corpse and carry them to the upper left corner of the small triangular room. There visualize an eternal fire. Throw the lethal black mass of repulsive things into the fire and watch as the fire consumes them entirely.

While you are visualizing this, meditate on the four forces of purification: refuge, confession and regret, the power of destruction which is the promise to abstain from doing (for a definite period of time) the misdeed in the future, and the antidote power or make-up activity you will dedicate to atone for the misdeed. Think about how it is possible to purify karma, but also what it entails.

Return to the coffin. On the right side are beautiful jewels and gems. Gather up the jewels from the right side and carry them to the upper right corner of the triangular room. There you see a robe. Take up the robe, mix the jewels into it, and then put on the jewel-bedecked robe, which you wear throughout the remainder of the visualization.

The robe represents refuge. Here is where you meditate on refuge and the Three Jewels – the reasons for taking refuge, the places in which to take refuge, what you must do to take refuge, and how to act once you have taken refuge. Think about what “taking refuge” really means and how it can help you.

The gems represent good karma, which is what will save you from lower rebirths. Here is where a meditation on karma goes, which is designed to help develop faith in the truth and importance of karma. Reflect that upon death your karmic deeds will go with you and will determine the rebirth you take. Meditate on the four laws of karma: karma is fixed or definite (a virtuous cause must lead to a good result, and vice versa), karma expands, karma not committed cannot bring a consequence, and karma when committed must bring a consequence. Resolve to act with urgency to stop negative karmic actions (and to purify those you already have committed) and to collect only good karma from now on, and reflect on how taking refuge will help you do this.

In the center of the upper part of the triangular room you see a green door. Your Lama opens it and guides you through it.

You have now progressed into the section of the Lam Rim called “Training the Mind in the Steps of the Path Shared with Practitioners of Medium Scope.” This is the “Hinayana” or way of “enlightened self-interest.” Recall what that means: “Beings of the medium capacity act to avoid rebirth in *samsara*, to avoid suffering and to become personally liberated forever.” Here one develops the wish to obtain freedom from all suffering realms and learns how to gain the path to freedom or *nirvana*.

You enter a corridor or hallway flanked on both sides by windows. Outside you see all the things you are attached to: your possessions, money, career, people to whom you are attached, your pleasures, your own body, the city you live in, the food you crave, etc. See them all decaying, dying, turning to junk, or fading into nothingness.

This is the “hallway of impermanence.” Meditate here on the nature of *samsara*, of this kind of suffering life, and especially try to develop a sense of wanting an alternative to it – a state wholly and permanently free from suffering in all its forms. Recall the three kinds of suffering (the “suffering of suffering,” the “suffering of change,” and “pervasive suffering”). Meditate on the eight kinds of suffering: the suffering of being born, of getting old, of getting sick, of dying, of having to encounter things we don’t like, of having to lose things we do like, of trying to get what we want and not being able to, of having a mind and body of this sort which must suffer. Especially remember that even the apparent pleasures of this kind of life are doomed and inevitably bring pain -- like licking honey off a razor blade – and try to gain a sense of renunciation, of rejecting the belief that these ephemeral things can bring true and enduring happiness.

The hallway leads into another room (without a door). This is a bit larger than the triangular room. The walls are made of mirrors; your image is reflected back to you from every side. The room is filled with tipsy pedestals on top of which are extremely fragile glass objects; you must navigate very carefully through the room to avoid breaking things.

The slightly larger size of the room is meant to recall to mind the fact that you are still in the Steps of the Path Shared with Practitioners of Medium Scope. The mirrors represent the fact that your reality is an exact reflection of your karma; that your karma and mental afflictions are in fact the cause of your suffering.

Meditate on the specific causes of suffering: the various mental afflictions (desire, anger, pride, ignorance, destructive doubts), the ten non-virtuous actions (killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, useless speech, being unhappy about others’ happiness, being happy about others’ suffering, and wrong view), ignorance about one’s own nature, belief in one of the two extremes (essentialism or nihilism), belief that one’s wrong views are the best, belief in excessive spiritual practices, and belief in a wrong world-view. Recall again that suffering is caused, and that therefore by removing its causes suffering can end.

Meditate especially on the interaction between karma and emptiness. Remember how your karma is projecting your reality onto the blank screen of emptiness, and how the “movie” you are forced to see could be completely blissful if you created the right causes (i.e., permanently ended all mental afflictions).

The tipsy pedestals and fragile glass objects represent the care you must take to get out of this suffering kind of life. Think here about the “three trainings” of morality, meditative concentration, and wisdom. Resolve to keep your morality spotless, especially the “freedom” or *pratimoksha* vows that are designed to end our mental afflictions, and thus our suffering. Meditate on those vows. Resolve to keep your book well! Resolve to perfect the training of meditative concentration by meditating EVERY DAY. And resolve to perfect the training of wisdom by continually persevering in the attempt to thoroughly understand and put into your own practice the teachings of emptiness.

At the upper end of the room of mirrors is a blue door. Your Lama leads you to it, opens it, and accompanies you through it into the next room.

The blue door symbolizes the entry into the Steps of the Path Shared with Practitioners of the Great Scope.

The room is six-sided (hexagonal) and larger than the previous two rooms. In the center is a censer of burning incense. The smoke and fragrance of the incense pervades the whole room.

The larger size of the hexagonal room reminds you again of the fact that you are now meditating on the steps of the Path distinctive to the Mahayana or “Greater Vehicle.” The incense in the middle represents

“how to develop the Wish for Enlightenment (*bodhicitta*),” “the Wish in the form of a Prayer,” or how to think like a *bodhisattva*. The incense smoke pervading the rest of the room means that this way of thinking is to infect all one’s actions as a *bodhisattva*. The meditation here, as you stand in the middle of the room, is on the two principal ways of generating *bodhicitta*. The first is the seven-step cause and effect method: having equalized friends, neutral ones, and enemies, 1) reflect first that all beings have been your mother in countless past lives; 2) think of what your mother in this life has done for you, and realize that all beings have done the same for you countless times; 3) develop a sense of gratitude and a wish to repay all mother beings for their kindnesses; 4) generate a sense of deep love for these beings, like the love parents feel for their only child (a wish to make them happy); 5) then notice that at present these mother beings are suffering and feel a sense of great compassion for them; 6) next realize that it is your own personal responsibility to help them, and then reflect on how little you can do at present; 7) then end with the realization that the only way to really help these suffering mother beings is become enlightened as quickly as you possibly can (i.e., generate *bodhicitta*). The second principal way of generating the Wish is called “exchanging self and others.” Here you can meditate on the various mind trainings known as *lojong* and on *tong len* or “giving and taking” practice.

In the corner at the lower left part of the room is a table with a wrapped gift on top of it. Inside the package is a dollar bill, a heart of gold, a pair of hands in a protective gesture, and a Dharma book. In the corner at the lower right part of the room is a table with a bonsai tree, with roots, trunk and branches. In the middle left part of the room is a still pool of pure water at the bottom and in front of a raging waterfall. In the middle right part of the room is a window looking out at children energetically at play.

The items in the the room represent the first four of the six perfections, which are covered in the Lam Rim under the heading of “the training in the deeds of a *bodhisattva*” – i.e., how to act as a *bodhisattva* once you have the Wish. The present in the lower left corner symbolizes the perfection of giving, and its contents represent the four types of giving: money = the giving of material things; the heart of gold = the gift of love; the protective hands = the giving of freedom from fear; and the Dharma book = the gift of the Dharma. The bonsai tree in the lower right corner is the perfection of ethics; its roots are the freedom or *pratimoksha* vows, its trunk is the *bodhisattva* vows, and its branches are the secret or tantric vows. The waterfall and still pool of clear water represent the perfection of patience or forbearance: not getting angry (still pool) under even the most trying of circumstances (waterfall). The window opening out to the children at play symbolizes the perfection of joyful effort or zeal: being happy and stoked about tirelessly practicing the Path.

In the top left corner of the room is a microscope, and in the top right corner is a huge diamond. Having stopped in front of the other items, when you get to the microscope you take it over to the diamond. You place the diamond underneath the microscope and examine it closely.

The microscope in the upper left corner of the room represents the fifth perfection, the perfection of meditative concentration, which culminates in the attainment of one-pointed concentration, quietude or calm abiding (*shamatha*). The diamond in the upper right corner symbolizes the perfection of wisdom. Bringing the microscope to the diamond and examining it is meant to recall to mind the goal of meditation: to hold the mind one-pointedly as it investigates the nature of ultimate reality (the combination of *shamatha* and *vipashyana*), leading to the direct perception of emptiness.

Reflect here also on how the perfections are “perfected”: by realizing the emptiness of the doer, the deed, and the thing or person for or upon whom the action is done (e.g., the giver, the gift, and the recipient). Insert here an emptiness meditation here (e.g., the “*mahamudra*” meditation in which one contemplates six different “flavors” of emptiness: the emptiness of permanence, of a controlling “self,” of accidents, of things having the qualities and values you impose on them, of things coming entirely from their own side apart from your perception of them, and of things existing in any other way other than as projections forced upon you by your karma).