

The Greatness of the Teachings

- a. The greatness of realizing that all of the teachings are free from contradiction
- b. The greatness of apprehending that all the scriptures are special instructions
- c. The greatness of easily understanding the conquerors intent.
- d. The greatness of naturally ceasing serious misdeeds.

Here, the teachings we are referring to are specifically the lam-rim teachings presented by Atisha in The Lamp for the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment.

This text has 3 distinctive qualities:

1. Comprehensive - includes all of the stages in sutra through tantra
2. Easy to Put into Practice - easy to put into practice because there are step by step instructions
3. Superior System - adorned with the teachings of the 2 masters Nagarjuna and Asanga

Presenting the greatness of the teaching in order to engender respect for the instructions.

When you practice the lam rim you will understand how all the teachings fit together in a coherent system. When you see this you won't make the negative actions of abandoning any parts of the dharma / path, which brings negative karma.

Now lets look at these 4 in great detail

a. The greatness of realizing that all of the teachings are free from contradiction

The first great quality is it leads to realizing the non-contradictory of all the teachings.

Everything the Buddha taught is to lead a disciple to liberation which is presented in the 4 noble truths:

1. What must be understood - understand suffering
2. What must be eliminated - eliminate the cause - karma and the afflictions
3. What needs to be manifested - manifest the cessation - when mental afflictions / karma are completely and permanently eliminated. This is in fact liberation
4. What needs to be cultivated - cultivate the path - the means to stop karma and afflictions

Because all the teachings whether on their surface they are sutrayana, tantrayana, etc. are all to lead beings to the state of enlightenment, there is no contradiction between them.

All of the teachings are not contradictory because they lead beings to the state of enlightenment.

The goal of a bodhisattva is to help all beings achieve emancipation. Since bodhisattvas take responsibility of helping all 3 types of disciples accomplish their goal, they must train themselves in all 3 paths. Without knowing all of the aspects of those paths how could they help those disciples progress along it? To help others you must know it yourself. You cant clarify for others what is obscure to you.

Bodhisattvas understandings of these 3 paths are the primary methods they use to help others. Since that is their goal, bodhisattvas always teach without distortion or error.

Bodhisattvas should generate and understand all of the paths, whatever constitutes the path of the shravaka, pratyekabuddha, and buddha. Furthermore they should fully accomplish those paths.

Buddha

There are 3 levels of realization that are the central realizations of these 3 paths according to *Ornament of Clear Knowledge*:

1. Shravakas - wisdom that realizes the selflessness of persons
2. PratyekaBuddha - emptiness of the duality of subject and object
3. Buddhas and Bodhisattva - all phenomena lacks true existence; they are empty of inherently existent self

The complete path is composed of 5 consecutive paths:

1. accumulation
2. preparation
3. seeing
4. meditation
5. no more learning
6. During **accumulation and preparation** you generate a thorough understanding of the type of realization appropriate to your practice.
7. On **path of seeing** you directly realize that wisdom with a non conceptual understanding
8. On **path of meditation** you fill out the understanding you have already produced by eliminating what is to be abandoned - the mental afflictions and by cultivating and bringing to complete the realizations

In this way we have a three stage accomplishment:

1. developing understanding during the paths of accumulation and preparation
2. direct realization during the path of seeing
3. fulfilling the realization during the path of meditation

On the path of seeing the realization is complete, but their full capability is to be cultivated and brought to fruition on the path of meditation. Also the elimination of the mental afflictions is not complete. These mental delusions are gradually eliminated on the path of meditation until at last buddhahood is achieved.. the path of no more learning.

The Mahayana has:

- **common** - common to hinayana, refuge, dependent origination, etc
- **uncommon paths** - unique to mahayana, bodhichitta, 6 perfections, etc

So how can these practices be cast aside and said to be contradictory?

The goal of a bodhisattva is buddahood which is a state where ALL faults are eliminated and all good qualities are accomplished.. so they need get rid of faults and accomplishments that are contained in the hinayana as well!.. not just some in the mahayana

Tsongkhapa says the nature of the Paramitayana is 2 fold:

1. thought - the motivation to bring your thoughts under the power of bodhichitta
2. action - practicing the 6 perfections

All of the practices of the paramitayana are included under these 2.

The paramitayana path is the foundation of a tantric practices. It is on the basis of bodhichitta and 6 perfections that certain tantric practices are added. **Without that base there is no pure tantric practice. Therefore those that practice the tantrayana must practice bodhichitta and the 6 perfections.**

The perfection vehicle is the basic fundamental path common to both sutra and tantra vehicles

In conclusion, Tsongkhapa says that the lam rim tradition presented in *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* condenses all of the essential points of sutra and tantra into a method to lead a single individual to perfect enlightenment. The inclusion and integration of all the scriptures enables you to understand that they are all equal and do not contradict one another. Thus the lamrim tradition possesses the great virtue that it leads you to realization that all the teachings are without contradiction.

b. The greatness of apprehending that all the scriptures are special instructions

If one has listened to many teachings but is still bereft of the Dharma, the failure is caused by not recognizing the scriptures as special instructions.

Tsonghkapa

What you learn from teachings is exactly what you should put into practice. What you practice is what you should learn about.

All of the Buddhas teachings are included in 2 aspects; scriptures and realizations.

Scriptures teach the system of practice and the way to engage in those practices. They explain everything; the goals of the practice, how to accomplish the goals, how to meditate, and so forth. **Once you know what to do, you set about doing it.**

Realizations refer to the actual practices to accomplish the goals laid out by the scriptures.

These 2 should be seen as the cause and the result. The scriptures seen as the cause.

Whatever you understand from study and reflection should be practiced in meditation - not something new.

The special method for making all scriptures appear as special instructions is analytical meditation.

The conviction that all these scriptures are the supreme instructions completely dispels the wrong view that believes these sutras tantras and their commentaries have no intrinsic relevance to practice.

c. The greatness of easily understanding the conquerors intent.

The scriptures are so vast it would be hard to grasp the purport of these teachings on your own.

The purpose of practicing the lam rim method is to help you quickly and easily comprehend the true meanings of the scriptures.

How does this work? Atisha organized the path into 3 scopes. He explained in detail each step of those paths. **As each topic comes up, a student studies the explanation, contemplates it, and realizes it.**

Without the focus sense of the lam rim teachings it would be hard to see the meaning of all of the scriptures.

With the binoculars of the lam rim method you can see all of the important features of the path and how they fit together. This is why we say that the lam rim tradition has the special quality of enabling you to easily grasp the buddhas intent.

d. The greatness of naturally ceasing serious misdeeds.

Great wrong doing is negative or evil karma. One of the most powerful misdeeds is repudiating the Dharma.

What is repudiating the Dharma? It is believing that some of the buddhas teachings should be practiced, but other should be cast away.

This one taught for the sravakas, and that one taught for the bodhisattvas, repudiates the dharma. By saying "this one is taught for the pratyekabuddhas", one repudiates the dharma. "This one is not a training for the Bodhisattvas", one repudiates the dharma.

From one perspective - It's true that there are differences between the teachings. Different teachings are directed to trainees at different levels.

But from another, this is misguided partiality. It is misguided because all of the teachings equally deserve our respect since they were taught for the purpose of guiding some individual to the state of buddhahood.

The problem comes when you misunderstand the way in which the teachings are different. If you think their different make one better than the other, your partiality may lead you to repudiate the teaching that you see as inferior. **This is a subtle distinction.**

Be very careful about this, because the karma of repudiating the Dharma is said to be worse than destroying stupas and killing arhats

The predominate for is easy to fall into.. you:

1. make discriminating judgments about the different levels of the scriptures
2. then develop partiality
3. then decide not to study or practice those that you feel are inferior

Since this constitutes such a grave negative karma, you should make every effort to avoid it.

How do you avoid this?

The most effective method is to gain confident understanding of the first 2 'greatnesses' of the lam rim tradition.

When you realize the importance and greatness of all of the different parts this kind of heavy negativity naturally and spontaneously melts away. You don't need to make any special effort to get rid of it. It is in this sense that the lam rim possesses the greatness of naturally preventing misdeeds.

Now that we have a proper appreciation for the lam rim tradition we are ready to explore how to

listen and how to explain those instructions.