

Meeting Summary for Demo Rinpoche - Neverending Lamp of Liberation: A Modern Lam Rim

Session 7

Jun 10, 2025

Lam Rim session topics

- Avoid hell rebirth.
- Avoid hungry ghost rebirth.
- Avoid animal rebirth.

Summary

- Session 7 began with a focus on Buddha's teachings about taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, emphasizing the importance of transforming one's heart through practice rather than seeking external changes.
- The discussion covered key Buddhist concepts including impermanence, rebirth, hell realms, animal and hungry ghost realms, with detailed explanations of their characteristics and implications.
- Rinpoche ended with teachings on meditation practices and the importance of creating time for spiritual development despite a busy lifestyle, emphasizing the power of mindfulness and emotional control in purifying karma.

Refuge in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha

Demo Rinpoche explained the meaning and importance of taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha during teachings.

- He emphasized that listening to teachings should be done with the intention of transforming one's heart through practice, rather than seeking blessings or hoping for external changes or "blessings from the sky."
- It means recognizing that your mind can change things.
- Rinpoche explained that we rely on sangha because we need help from others.
 - Sangha are those who hold true to Buddha's teachings in the absence of a fully enlightened being.
- He discussed how taking refuge involves recognizing the interdependence of all beings.
- Without including others in the scope of our practice, we will not get anything.

Buddhist Concepts of Rebirth and Impermanence

In the previous session, Demo Rinpoche taught on the Lam Rim topics regarding wondering what happens after death and contemplating the bardo. The teaching focused on the concept of impermanence and rebirth in Buddhist philosophy.

- Rinpoche explained that meditating on impermanence is not about enjoying the present life but rather about understanding the continuity of consciousness after death.
 - He said we don't just die like a butter lamp that runs out of fuel.

- The body remains but the mind continues.
- He described four types of rebirth, each with different conditions for existence:
 - from mother's womb
 - egg
 - heat & moisture,
 - and spontaneous as in the spirit realm

Four Periods of Samsara

Rinpoche described the four basic periods of samsara:

1. Death
 2. Bardo
 3. Birth (when the spirit enters the body)
 4. Life
- Rinpoche emphasized that life technically begins before birth, with the spirit entering the body on the first day of life
 - Rebirth is determined by karma, with human and heavenly realms considered positive outcomes while hell, hungry ghost, and animal rebirths are negative.
 - As a side note, Rinpoche said that the bardo being is almost ready for the next life and resembles the form they are going to look like in the next life.
 - If you are born as a human being that is good enough reason to celebrate.

Understanding the Hell Realm

Rinpoche said the birth in the hell realm is the result of anger.

- Rinpoche explained that non-virtue can lead to negative emotions and a stronger karma that can manifest as signs of Hell realms before death.
- He emphasized the importance of meditation on the suffering of beings in the hell realm, rather than like watching it on a TV show.
- He recommended that contemplating one's potential future suffering can increase compassion and understanding of renunciation.
 - Rinpoche told how when Buddha was in the hell realm in a previous life, his feeling of compassion for a fellow being's suffering was enough to free the Buddha from the hell realm.
 - Feeling empathy for those suffering beings is good, but don't push it.
 - It means you understand how it feels
 - When someone is punished you feel sad
 - But when they say it's your turn, you have a different feeling and your body shakes
 - Don't think it's the other person. Think it could be you.
 - Think "I could end up there if I don't do well."
- Rinpoche said the obstacle to renunciation is thinking that we will be reborn as human all the time.

- Being human is not that safe.
- Rinpoche's talk also touched on the circular nature of Samsara and the 18 different types of Hell realms:
 - Eight hot levels
 - Eight cold levels
 - Plus two outside the realm.
- He described it as a big prison, with a reference to Gelek Rinpoche crying for three days when he heard the teaching on the sufferings of the hell realm.

Hell Realms

Demo Rinpoche discussed the concept of hell realms in different religious traditions, even in Korean TV shows. He said that reality does not depend on religion.

- He explained that hell is not a place of punishment but a consequence of one's karma, emphasizing that good actions lead to positive outcomes while negative actions can lead to suffering in hell realms.
 - If you treat people really well, that won't create the causes for rebirth in the hell realm, because similar causes bring similar results
- The type of hell realm is reflective of the suffering one caused others
 - A smashing hell realm is a result of killing
 - Denial of dharma can take you to a cold realm
- The journey is not long because you don't need a mother or egg
 - Death is like going to sleep
 - Bardo is like a dream
 - Then you wake up in a realm
- Some think that if we die it will be ok.
 - No. Karma will continue until exhausted according to Nargarjuna.
- Rinpoche also highlighted that hell can manifest anywhere not just in a specific location, even in a small cup.
- The duration of time spent in hell depends on the completion of one's negative karma.
 - Understand that harmful actions bring harmful results
 - Such karma doubles until purified
- Refuge is how you think
 - Believe in karma
 - Believe your mind can change things
 - It makes karma weak because you are not sustaining it
- He concluded by stressing the importance of understanding karma and the mind's power to change one's destiny, rather than relying on religious beliefs alone for salvation.
 - Being nice to a god doesn't save you

Animal Realms

The discussion focused on the Buddhist concept of animal realms, particularly comparing animals and hungry ghosts in terms of intellectual capacity and suffering.

- A lot of bad karma results in rebirth in the hell realm
 - Less bad karma leads to the animal realm
- Rinpoche explained that animals have lower intellectual capacity than hungry ghosts, making it difficult for them to learn and understand Dharma.
- He described various examples of animal suffering, including those raised for meat and those born in captivity, emphasizing that even seemingly happy animals often experience significant suffering.
 - There is a lot of killing or being killed
 - Some are beaten by their owners
- He concluded that animals have limited opportunities for happiness and contentment in their realm.
 - Being born as an animal is like a closed book.
 - You can wait for eons

Hungry Ghosts

Rinpoche next focused on the concept of hungry ghosts, describing them as intelligent beings who suffer from unfulfilled desires and possess wealth but cannot use it.

- Rinpoche compared hungry ghosts to stingy people who hoard resources without sharing
- Rinpoche compared them to Golem in Lord of the Rings
- He also told about a rich man from Tibet who acted like a hungry ghost by taking others' leftovers.
- Hungry ghosts can have magical powers like reading minds but they cannot get what they want
- They have three obstructions
 - Outside: they see food and water being protected and they are scared to approach
 - Inside: They see food and water as blood and puss
 - Painful: They can't swallow because their throats are extremely constricted
- Rinpoche concluded with the observation that while stingy behavior is undesirable, it is better than being unable to spend money on oneself at all.

Avoiding the Lower Realms

Rinpoche emphasized that understanding these realms serves as a warning about the consequences of negative actions, similar to how legal systems deter crime by outlining penalties.

- We can't see the hell or hungry ghost realms but we do see the suffering of the animal realm
- He encouraged us to reflect on their own lives and the importance of purifying karma through mindfulness and emotional control.
- There is hope if we can learn to avoid the causes

Prioritizing Meditation in Busy Lives

Rinpoche urged us to focus on meditation practices and the concept of making time for spiritual development despite a busy lifestyle.

- He emphasized that people can create time for what they prioritize, regardless of how busy they are
- He highlighted that practice can be done anywhere without needing to change locations or identities.
 - Be who you are
- He quoted Gelek Rinpoche saying you can shave your head and go to the Himalayas but still come back as the same old ground hog
- Think that being born as human is fortunate
 - According to Nargarjuna, we can use our human life to cut the causes that lead to lower realms
 - It connects us to the leisure and opportunity we need to practice
 - But we cannot be sure what's next
- We need to distinguish virtue from non-virtue
 - Bad karma needs strong negative emotions to germinate
 - If I train my mind to be comfortable and stable, I won't let negative emotions arise.

Q&A

- During the Q&A session Rinpoche discussed the concept of 49-day period of the bardo, explaining that these represent a human lifespan rather than a specific number of days
- He also discussed the possibility of achieving liberation or nirvana without rebirth but said that one could remain for eons in meditation but until the negative emotions are eliminated through purification, negative karma would result in rebirth.
- Rinpoche responded to a question about how much awareness does a bardo being have by stating that some can remember past lives but most don't know it's the bardo.
 - It's like a dream. If you know you are dreaming, you can do something. But most of the time we don't.
 - If you recognize you are in the bardo, you can manipulate your karma.