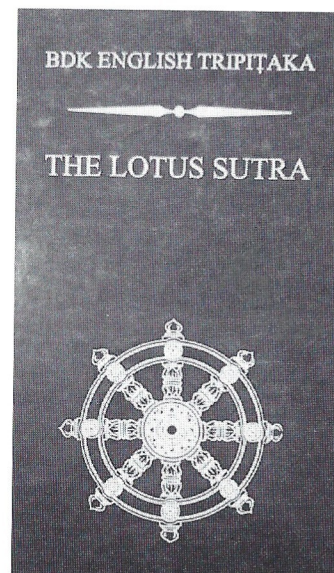


IN BUDDHA'S FOOTSTEPS

In Buddhism, there are three main branches – Theravada ("Teaching of the Elders"), Mahayana ("Great Vehicle"), and Vajrayana ("Vajra Vehicle"). Theravada Buddhism is the official religion of Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Cambodia. Mahayana Buddhism is the predominant tradition found in China, South Korea and Japan. Vajrayana is concentrated primarily in the Himalayan regions including Tibet, Bhutan and Mongolia. While all place great importance on the Four Noble Truths, there are also many differences in the teachings of each.

For example, in Tibetan Buddhism, Lamrim, the Stages of the Path, is followed. This can include 21 meditations, but some traditions focus on just 15 meditations. Japanese Zazen, or "just sitting", is central to the Zen Buddhist practice. It is the art of simply being present without trying to achieve a specific goal or reach a destination. "The Zen practice of just sitting doesn't help us to reach our destination. It allows us to stop having one." While Lamrim is fundamental to my walking meditations, over recent years I am also becoming more mindful of how I am evolving towards Zen – "Just see, don't elaborate. Don't think about seeing; don't judge what you see; don't hold on or push away; don't make it about you: just see, that's all". Lamrim is divided into the initial scope, middling scope and great scope. Of the 15 Lamrim meditations I use, five are of the initial scope. This is for a better rebirth. They focus on the value of your current life and the reality of impermanence.

The first meditation – Our Precious Human Life – "The purpose of this meditation is to encourage ourselves to take the real meaning of our human life and not to waste it in meaningless activities". A Buddhist would do this by practicing the Dharma (the Buddha's teachings) purely now. This can be done in many ways. It may be via meditation, practicing moral discipline, or exercising wisdom. A major part of my Dharma practice is to read scriptures. My main source is the delightful Lotus Sutra. My copy of the Lotus Sutra was translated from the fifth-century Chinese version by the scholar-monk Kumarajiva. It is one of the most important and revered texts in East Asian Buddhism. "With its vivid descriptions of cosmic events and large cast of characters, the Saddharmapundarika sutra (Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Fine Dharma) unfolds like a magnificent drama. Its twenty-eight chapters offer a combination of doctrine, teachings, stories, and parables, devotional practices, and portraits of the many buddhas and bodhisattvas that inhabit the world of the Lotus Sutra." In essence, the Lotus Sutra takes you on a journey that is both magical and exceedingly profound.



The second meditation – Death and Impermanence – "The purpose of this meditation is to prevent laziness of attachment, the main obstacle to Dharma practice." Our desire for worldly pleasures can have the consequence of devoting little or no time to our Dharma practice. By contemplating death, we begin to realise how limited our time is. Thinking "I will not die today" is deceptive. A mind that accepts "I may die today" directly eliminates our laziness of attachment. I appreciate that some may see meditating on their own death as morbid; I believe it to be freeing as it focuses the mind on that which is important. This brings a clarity and inner peace.

The third meditation – The Danger of Lower Rebirth – The purpose of this meditation is to encourage us to prepare protection from the dangers of lower rebirth. Although a lower realm can be that of an animal, a hungry ghost or a hell being, even a rebirth as a human being could be without many of the advantages we have in our current life; we may be born in a war zone or have no shelter and little food.

These are the first three of the fifteen Lamrim meditations that I practice. By meditating on the stages of the path, you learn how to eliminate the origins of suffering by abandoning and purifying non-virtue while accumulating virtue. In simple terms, your deeds become positive and thus your karma results in a positive rebirth.

The Lotus Sutra affirms the possibility of enlightenment for all. Some of those who embrace the Lotus Sutra refer to their practice as Lotus Sutra Buddhism.

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