
Commentary on the Condensed Graduated Path to Enlightenment

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We will practise a little bit of meditation as usual. Sit in a good meditation posture.

Looking at one's situation and the purpose of practising meditation, at the moment one is under the control of one's mind, and one's mind is under the control of the disturbing thoughts.

If one leaves the mind under the control of the disturbing thoughts then it will have a harmful impact on one's life. Therefore, one has to look after one's mind, which means one has to oppose the disturbing thoughts. Letting the mind remain under the control of the disturbing thoughts will disturb and agitate the mind and cause one to be mentally and physically unwell; one could even get physically sick.

Leaving the mind under the control of the disturbing thoughts means that one is not in control of the mind and that it is not serviceable or pliant. However, if one can oppose the disturbing thoughts and bring the mind under one's control, it will become pliable and serviceable and will do whatever one wants it to do. One's life will then become easy.

Therefore, one should think that definitely one must oppose the disturbing thoughts and definitely one must get rid of the mind that is not serviceable (or pliant); one must make the mind serviceable and take control of it away from the disturbing thoughts.

Leaving the mind under the control of the disturbing thoughts will lead to suffering. The mind that is under the control of the disturbing thoughts doesn't experience happiness. We can observe this for ourselves – even if we are in a good material situation where we could quite easily be happy, some kind of unhappiness will overshadow the mind. Because of certain mental states, happiness seems unreachable and elusive, and unhappiness seems to arise within the mind, overshadowing any happiness. This is because of the disturbing thoughts that take away the opportunity for inner happiness.

One way in which the conceptual mind makes one unhappy is by creating the appearance that what one has is not enough. The conceptual mind creates the idea that the conducive conditions one has in life are not enough, and because of this one experiences unhappiness; or [the conceptual mind creates the idea] that what one has is somehow unstable and will be easily lost and creates unhappiness in that way. By creating these various

ideas, the conceptual mind brings unhappiness and generates fear within the mind.

If one doesn't subdue or oppose such thoughts, one won't experience happiness because such thinking will not give us the opportunity to experience happiness. Therefore, one should generate the motivation that definitely one has to at least reduce this type of thinking.

By pacifying such conceptual thoughts, the mind will abide internally naturally. Otherwise, if one doesn't pacify them, these thoughts will take away our experience of happiness, and even rob us of the happiness of sleep. Sleep – the experience of entering a state of mental equanimity – can be beneficial; there is a certain type of happiness that comes about through sleep. However, one will not experience even that happiness if one's mind is under the control of the disturbing thoughts. Therefore, one definitely should have the motivation that one will pacify those disturbing thoughts.

When the mind generates those coarse conceptual thoughts, they disturb the mind. Even if one is not asleep, but sitting in a relaxed manner, if the mind is not agitated by coarse thoughts it is relaxed, subtle and undisturbed, which is refreshing, even though one isn't sleeping.

However, if coarse thoughts arise within the mind this can't happen. In this case, the mind will be agitated and disturbed and will be rigid like a dead tree, the branches of which cannot be bent. In the same way, one's mind becomes rigid when it is under the control of coarse thoughts. Therefore, one should generate the motivation that definitely within one's lifetime, one's aim will be to overcome and pacify those coarse conceptual thoughts and make the mind more subtle and relaxed.

The coarse conceptual thoughts we are talking about are mainly those thoughts that are occupied with external objects, with the external world. Pacifying such thoughts will bring peace to the mind.

Certain types of mental anguish and suffering arise because of contact with external objects. We know from experience that remembering or thinking about certain external objects will create suffering and anguish in the mind. However, as long as the mind doesn't remember these objects, it will be undisturbed. So, when one pacifies the part of the mind that engages with outer objects, one will also pacify the thoughts that occupy themselves with outer objects. As a result, the coarse conceptual thoughts will be pacified, because the coarse conceptual thoughts are those that occupy themselves with external objects. When they are pacified and there is no mental preoccupation with external objects, the mind will naturally abide internally and will generate a certain type of happiness.

To achieve a state that is not preoccupied with external objects, one meditates on the coming and going of the breath. The coming and going of the breath is a suitable object of meditation for this purpose, because it doesn't

have any colour or shape. With the motivation of meditating in order to oppose the conceptual mind and experience inner happiness, you take the coming and going of the breath as your meditation object. You don't just place the mind partially on the coming and going of the breath, but focus it 100%. We will meditate in that manner for a few minutes. (*Short pause for meditation.*)

Then generate the motivation of bodhicitta, thinking: 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and in order to accomplish that aim, I am now going to listen to this teaching on the graduated path to enlightenment'. Your motivation is always important, whatever action you may engage in.

Having this motivation is important, because it will inspire one to practise what one has learned. Having this motivation, one listens to these teachings in order to be able to practise so that one can achieve the aim of enlightenment; [this motivation] will inspire one later – when one has listened to and understood the teachings – to also put them into practice. That is the function of motivation – it propels one in to engage in an action. Otherwise, one could make the mistake of not practising; although one may have listened to the teachings, one would not put them into practice because of lacking that motivation.

So, one should have this strong motivation that the Dharma is the one thing in the world that will help one to subdue the mind. Therefore, one will make it one's life's goal to put the Dharma into practice.

1. The greatness of the author to illustrate the purity of the source of the teachings.

As we mentioned last time, the whole text [i.e. Lama Tsong Khapa's Condensed Lam Rim or *Graduated Path to Enlightenment*] is divided into four outlines, the first of which explains the greatness of the author to illustrate the purity of the source of the teachings.

In general, these instructions are the instructions of the Ornament of Clear Realisation by the Venerable Protector Maitreya. Specifically, since this text is the Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment, its author is also the author of this text.

This means that, in general, the teachings of the *Graduated Path to Enlightenment* are the teachings of the *Ornament of Clear Realisation* by Lord Maitreya. Specifically this particular teaching is the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* – which was the Lam Rim prototype – and the author of the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* was Atisha.

Therefore, this outline is saying that, while the actual author of the *Condensed Graduated Path to Enlightenment* – the text we are going through – is Lama Tsong Khapa, because all the major Lam Rim texts are commentaries on and based on the prototype Lam Rim – the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* – in a general sense, one can say that the author of the text is actually Atisha, who was the author of the prototype Lam Rim.

It is important to keep in mind that the Lam Rim or *Graduated Path to Enlightenment* teachings were not

invented by Lama Tsong Khapa nor were they invented by Atisha, but they were teachings that came down in an unbroken continuity from Shakyamuni Buddha.

If one has generated an understanding of the Lam Rim teachings, then regardless of whether a teaching has the title Lam Rim or not, all teachings will appear to one as Lam Rim teachings.

Of the different teachings of the Buddha, the supreme teachings are the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras. Why are the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras the most important teachings of the Buddha? First, because explicitly they elucidate the path of the profound view.

The small, medium and great Perfection of Wisdom Sutras explicitly elucidate the path of the profound view and implicitly explain the stages of extensive practice, the method path.

So, the small, medium and great Perfection of Wisdom Sutras explicitly elucidate the path of profound view and implicitly explain the path of extensive practice. Those two lineages [wisdom and method/extensive practice] have come down to us from Shakyamuni Buddha through Maitreya Buddha and Manjushri.

The lineage of the profound view was passed on by the Buddha to Manjushri, and then from Manjushri it was passed on to Nagarjuna down to the present day. The lineage of extensive practice was passed on from the Buddha to Maitreya Buddha, and then from Maitreya Buddha on to Asanga, and then from Asanga to the present day.

So, the two lineages of the profound view and of extensive practice were passed down through Nagarjuna and Asanga. And, Atisha, the author of the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, became a holder of both lineages. He received the lineage of extensive practice and also a sub-lineage of extensive practice called the lineage of the great waves of extensive practice, from his lama, Serlingpa. The lineage of the great waves of extensive practice was passed on by Manjushri to Shantideva and concerns itself with the development of bodhicitta through the method of exchanging self and others.

He received the lineage of the Profound View from a lama called Avadutipa. So, Atisha became a holder of the three lineages [profound view, extensive practice, and great waves of extensive practice].

Additionally, Atisha received the tantric lineage of the Buddha's teachings. In such a way, he became the holder of the complete lineage of the Buddha's teachings. On the basis of being the holder of the complete lineage of the Buddha's teachings, he composed the prototype Lam Rim text called the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*. This text that Atisha composed was like the result, the fruit of his knowledge and experience.

Going back to this outline explaining the greatness of the author, here normally one explains Atisha's life story, but maybe we can leave out. If you are interested in Atisha's biography, you can read it for yourself. In brief, there are three stages of his life: the way he took birth in a good family, the way he generated qualities on the

basis of that rebirth, and the way he benefited the Dharma after having generated those qualities.

2. The greatness of the dharma in order to generate respect for the instructions

After the outline explaining the greatness of the author comes the second outline explaining the greatness of the Dharma. This is done by explaining the three characteristics and four greatnesses.

Characteristics

First, the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* has the characteristic of containing all the subjects of the Buddha's teachings; it is a complete summary of the whole canon of the Buddha's teachings – both sutra and tantra are present within this text. So, it has the characteristic of completeness, of possessing all the subjects of sutras and tantras, all the instructions given by the Buddha.

Secondly, it is composed from the point of view of practice, of subduing the mind of the disciple, and it is a teaching that one can practise easily; it is very accessible.

Thirdly, it is also a teaching endowed with the two lineages of Nagarjuna and Asanga. Since the author received these two lineages from the two great teachers Serlingpa and Avadutipa, he based this teaching on those two lineages.

Next time, we will continue on from that point. Do we have a question?

Question: Geshe-la, how did Buddha get the wisdom to give those teachings and was it written down in his lifetime?

Answer: Regarding the first part of the question – how the Buddha generated the wisdom to be able to give those teachings – the Buddha generated the wisdom to give those teachings by practising the Path.

By practising the Path and gradually developing his mind, the Buddha could develop the wisdom to be able to give those teachings. Just like everyone else, he started out as a normal person, and then by developing his mind, he was able to generate the wisdom to be able to give those teachings. He wasn't enlightened from the beginning but started out as a normal person.

It is important that one relates this point to one's own life. Since the Buddha started out as an ordinary person and became enlightened by practising the Path, one could also do the same. As an ordinary person, one also has the opportunity to practise the Path and become enlightened, like the Buddha. Since the Buddha was an ordinary person just like us, if the Buddha could do it, then we can also do it. If the Buddha were enlightened from the beginning, such an opportunity would not be open to us.

Regarding the second part of the question, there may be some debate about it, but at the time of the Buddha, his teachings were not written down but only existed in the memory of his direct disciples. His direct disciples were highly attained practitioners who had developed the faculty of faultless memory, or dharani. After the Buddha had passed away a council was convened to

ensure the purity of the teachings. Here the individual Arhats recited with perfect recall the teachings they had heard from the Buddha. That is why sutras always begin by saying: 'I heard at such and such a time, at such and such a place...' and so forth – the authors recited from perfect memory those teachings. Because the different Arhats had heard different teachings, they each had a different teaching to contribute, and all of these teachings were collected at the council.

Today, we have an unbroken lineage of the oral teachings of the Buddha, but there is no unbroken lineage of written teachings, because at the time of the Buddha, the disciples whom the Buddha taught – even sometimes using just a few words – were able to extract deep meaning from those words. So, if the Buddha said just a few words about impermanence, the disciples were able to comprehend impermanence, and from that understanding of impermanence they would automatically go deeper to an understanding of selflessness and so forth. So, there was no need for them to write any commentaries on the Buddha's teachings or for the Buddha to compose commentaries. Yet, because the disciples possessed the faculty of faultless memory or dharani due to their realisations, we have the lineage of the oral teachings of the Buddha today.

There is some dispute about whether written teachings existed at the time of the Buddha, but maybe we have to say that they did exist at the time of the Buddha.

The reason why we have to say that there were written teachings from the time of the Buddha is because at the time of the Buddha, there were two kings, one called Bimbi-sara who was very rich, and kind Udrayana, who was poorer. King Udrayana gave a very precious gift to king Bimbi-sara, who wasn't sure about how he could return the kindness, so he consulted the Buddha. The Buddha advised him to give king Udrayana a particular drawing. The drawing the Buddha advised him to present to his friend was the Wheel of Life. Following the instructions of the Buddha, the drawing of the Wheel of Life was done and below that some lines were written that the Buddha wanted to have there. Therefore, those who assert that there are written teachings from the time of the Buddha say it is because of that reason, because of those lines.

As explained at the beginning, bring the mind back home, focus it internally, and then place it single-pointedly on the sound of the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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