
The Condensed Lam Rim

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We can start off by meditating as usual. Sit in a comfortable meditation posture.

When you sit in a good, relaxed meditation posture, you stop unsuitable actions of the body. Next, you have to also subdue unsuitable actions of the mind.

Whether one feels happy or not depends on one's mind. Therefore one has to protect one's mind – our mental happiness depends on us doing this. What methods can we use to harness and protect our mind? Mindfulness and introspection are the two methods we use in meditation. With mindfulness, we can keep the mind continuously on a virtuous object. With mental introspection, we are able to investigate whether our meditation is correct or whether harmful influences are disturbing it. The two major obstacles to good meditation are mental excitement and mental sinking.

So, the two main methods that facilitate good meditation are mindfulness and introspection; and the two main obstacles to good meditation are mental excitement and mental sinking.

The object of the meditation should be visualised very clearly; it should be in the nature of light. It should also have a certain heaviness. So, it should simultaneously have a certain heaviness, yet possess clarity, as if it is made of light.

The reason for visualising the meditation object with both clarity and a certain heaviness is to help overcome the two obstacles of mental excitement and mental sinking. Visualising the object as in the nature of light, with a certain brilliance, overcomes mental sinking. At the same time, visualising the object as possessing a certain heaviness overcomes mental excitement. If, for example, we have something heavy on our head, we find it difficult to move. Similarly, visualising the object with a certain heaviness can make it more difficult for the mind to move away from that object.

The object is visualised at the level of one's eyebrows. If we visualise it any lower, it will cause mental sinking. If we visualise it higher up, it will cause mental excitement. That is why the object is visualised at the level of one's eyebrows. We can also sometimes imagine that the meditation object is like a hat that covers the 'head' of one's mind – this helps us overcome the scattered mind.

One should also not think of one's mind being 'over here' looking at the meditation object 'over there', but one's mind should actually become one with, and absorb into, the meditation object – there should be no duality.

The meditation object can be anything, but here, it is the

coming and going of the breath. We allow the mind to enter the meditation object, which is not an external phenomenon, but a reflection of an external object that appears in the mind. This is what one focuses on and this is why one talks about an internal meditation object. The object one concentrates on is not an external object, but the mental reflection of the object that arises within the mind.

For example, if you tried to meditate on this clock, you would find it quite difficult. The mind would not remain stable and undisturbed with regard to the external object. However, if you meditate on the mental reflection of the clock that arises within the mind, you will find that this helps you to have a stable and undisturbed meditation. By concentrating on the mental reflection of the object, the mind naturally abides internally.

It is very useful to count the breathing mentally. When you count the breathing mentally, you concentrate on the internal movement of the breath. If you concentrate on the external movement of the air, that again has the effect of slightly distracting the mind.

So, on the basis of sitting in a good, comfortable meditation posture, withdraw the mind from external objects and from disturbing thoughts that distract the mind towards those external objects. Instead, focus the mind internally. Then, from within that space, focus the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. (*Short pause for meditation.*)

Please generate a positive and virtuous motivation. Last week, we started to talk about the method of listening to and explaining this Dharma that is endowed with the two greatneses. Regarding the way of listening to the Dharma endowed with the two greatneses, the first outline [or sub-heading] was contemplating the benefits of listening to the Dharma.

Listening is the supreme method that helps one overcome ignorance, in the same way that the light of a lamp dispels darkness. However, an outer lamp can only dispel outer darkness, not inner darkness. Inner darkness has to be dispelled by wisdom, and wisdom is generated by listening.

For example, in the context of impermanence, first one has to listen to teachings on the meaning of impermanence. [An analogy given in the teachings is that of a vase.] The meaning of the vase as an impermanent phenomenon is that it is momentary – the momentariness of the vase is its impermanence. By contemplating this – the momentariness of the vase – one will generate a mental image of the vase as impermanent. Slowly, that mental image will become stronger and more vivid, until the point at which one will actually realise the impermanence of the vase. The same [process] also applies to other topics [of the teachings], such as selflessness.

Listening is the lamp that dispels the darkness of ignorance. Through listening, one generates wisdom. Whether one is young or old, one does not have to endure the suffering of ignorance. All one has to do is to

engage in the practice of listening, and through that one can generate the wisdom that dispels the darkness of ignorance.

Let's say one has a storeroom in which one has stored a great many things and one goes into the room to try and see what is there. If the room is dark and you don't have a lamp then, even if you have good vision, you won't see anything. In order to see what is there, one needs to have a lamp that illuminates the room. Likewise, wisdom is like the person's vision or eyes in that analogy – even if one has intelligence and wisdom, if one lacks the lamp of listening, then one's intelligence and wisdom will be of no use. If one lacks the illuminating lamp of listening, one will not be able to comprehend the important points of the path, or what has to be practised and what has to be abandoned, and so one won't be able to practise the Dharma.

This is the meaning of the line 'listening is the supreme lamp that illuminates the darkness of ignorance'. When we talk about illuminating the darkness of ignorance, we are not talking about illuminating some outer darkness but we're talking about an inner process of dispelling inner darkness.

Also, listening is the supreme possessions or wealth, because it is something that cannot be taken away and stolen by thieves. One's wealth of listening cannot be stolen. The qualities that one possesses are much more valuable and much more convenient than outer wealth, because they cannot be taken away by thieves, so one doesn't need to worry about them being stolen. Also, wherever you go, you can easily take those qualities with you. Taking our outer possessions with us when we travel can be quite difficult, and sometimes it is not possible. Even when it is possible, there are lots of worries about those possessions being stolen or damaged. However, one's inner wealth, inner qualities, cannot be taken away, and one can easily take them on a journey.

These qualities include morality, restraining the mind from non-virtue; generosity, or having a generous mind that freely gives; patience, or not being agitated; single-pointed concentration; and the wisdom understanding karma and delusions. These internal qualities are incredibly precious and special.

One's happiness depends upon positive mental states and one's unhappiness arises from unsuitable mental states. By understanding this and applying this understanding to the mind, we will receive great benefit.

Our internal qualities cannot be stolen by thieves and do not get used up or wear out. They don't become depleted through use, but actually increase and become refined [the more we use them]. External wealth depletes through use and we have to generate greed in order to accumulate external wealth. Greed is the method for accumulating external wealth. If someone has a good job but is not greedy, they will never have much money; but, if someone has a good job and on top of that is greedy, he or she will be able to accumulate a great deal of money. However, regarding our internal qualities, we don't need to exert greed, because our internal qualities don't

become depleted through use, but rather increase and become refined the more we use them.

A person who possesses many qualities is usually regarded as a good, useful, beneficial person within society. We normally don't regard someone as good, just because they have lots of money; rather, we look at their qualities. Also, a person who has many qualities will easily find success in life.

Actually, one should try to accomplish both internal and external happiness. Normally, worldly people want to attain only outer material happiness, so they engage in methods with which they can build up outer material happiness so that they can enjoy physical happiness. We talk about physical or worldly happiness on the one hand, and mental happiness or Dharma happiness on the other. One should strive to achieve both of these happinesses. The conducive condition of outer physical happiness is accomplished by engaging in the various methods and means for attaining that happiness. One also has to practise the Dharma in order to achieve internal Dharma happiness. In such a way, one's life will be endowed with both types of happiness.

By keeping a wealth of inner qualities, one's inner happiness won't get lost. We need inner happiness because if we don't have inner happiness, regardless of whether we experience outer happiness or not, we will be unhappy. Even if we experience outer, physical happiness, if we lack internal happiness we will still feel unhappy.

A person who lacks internal happiness and tries to generate inner happiness through outer, material means will not be successful. Instead of trying to generate happiness from within, there are people who try to bring inner happiness from the outside, and that is not possible. When someone who lacks internal happiness and tries to achieve internal happiness through external means experiences difficulties or is in trouble, they generate a lot of worry and feel stressed because there is nothing they can do about it. They try to achieve inner happiness through external means and that doesn't work, so when they become sick or when other problems happen, they generate a lot of worry and become very unhappy.

I'm still not finished with the benefits [of listening to the Dharma endows with the two greatneses] – there are still more important points to come. But, for tonight, maybe you have some questions.

Question: I am hopeless at trying to meditate with my eyes open. Can you give advice on how to do that?

Answer: You probably did not start out meditating with your eyes open, so if it doesn't harm your meditation, there is no problem with having your eyes closed.

Staring at an object is not going to generate concentration, because we generate concentration on the basis of mental consciousness, and not on the basis of the sense consciousnesses. For example, if we stare at another person, that is not going to help at all!

We meditate with our mental consciousness and when our mental consciousness becomes engaged in

meditation, our sense consciousnesses are disengaged anyway. Normally, it is recommended to have the eyes open – not completely open and staring ahead at some object, but rather directing your gaze down a bit, with your eyes half closed. So, the eyes are neither completely closed nor completely open and staring ahead, but half closed.

The reason for not having the eyes fully open and staring ahead is that it could cause mental excitement to be generated. If having the eyes fully open and looking ahead doesn't cause mental excitement, there is no fault in doing it, but generally the advice is not to do it so that one can avoid generating mental excitement. Likewise, the reason for not closing the eyes completely is to avoid generating mental sinking. When we close our eyes, naturally a certain darkness is generated within the mind.

So, for those two reasons, it is said to have the eyes half open. But if it doesn't harm your meditation to have them closed, you can do that, or you can slowly try to have your eyes half open and it may develop with your meditation over time.

Question: *Geshe-la, I was once instructed to visualise the meditation object at my heart. You just said to visualise the meditation object at the level of the eyebrows. Can you please comment on this?*

Answer: It doesn't matter. There are different types of instructions – visualising the meditation object in front, visualising the meditation object not the physical heart but the mental heart at the centre of one's chest, visualising the meditation object in one's hand or at one's navel, or one's crown...there are different traditions.

For example, meditating on one's lama is done either [visualising the lama] in one's hand, at one's heart or on one's crown.

I've already mentioned a story about visualising the lama above one's crown. There was a meditator who misunderstood the instructions, and he thought he had to visualise himself on the lama's crown (*laughter*), but since his teacher was bald, he found it difficult to sit on top of the lama's crown and he kept slipping! (*More laughter*) Actually, this came about because that meditator had very good visualisation. When we have very good visualisation, what we visualise appears to us as very real and vivid.

Question: *I've got a problem with pain when I try to focus on the meditation on the breath. How can I not think about that so much and just concentrate on the breath?*

Answer: Probably you are blocking your breath, which you should not do. If you block your breathing when you meditate, it can cause pain when you try to breathe. It is sometimes good to do deep exhalations that start [deep down] in the stomach – you imagine exhaling all your tension and so forth.

Having obstructions in one's breathing and in one's psychic nervous system can cause pain during meditation. Especially as beginners, we are not able to take a very deep in-breath that stays for a long time, but immediately the breath goes out again.

So what else? What do you meditate on?

Questioner responds: Buddha visualisation, breathing...I have arthritis in my legs, that's what distracts me.

Answer: If you experience pain during meditation because of arthritis, you can meditate on taking and giving [i.e. tong-len practice for generating bodhicitta] – visualise taking on the suffering of all sentient beings and absorbing it into the self-cherishing mind. You can think about how self-cherishing is the cause of sickness and so forth.

Another meditation that may be beneficial is visualising, as you breathe out, that all your mental afflictions, ignorance, attachment, anger, all non-virtuous karmas, obscurations, sicknesses and so forth are expelled in the form of black light. Then, as you breathe in, you visualise that you are breathing in the blessings of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the form of white light, which completely fills your body-mind continuum.

If you combine these visualisations with the coming and going of the breath, your meditation becomes an uncommon, uniquely Buddhist breathing meditation. Otherwise, meditating on the mere coming and going of the breath is not a specific a Buddhist meditation, but one that we can also find in other traditions.

Question: *Geshe-la, how often should one meditate to get the full benefit, should it be more than once a day or how often?*

Answer: It's not really a question of the amount of time, but rather a question of the quality of the meditation. There is no benefit in meditating for a long time if you don't have a clear visualisation or clear focus on the object. It is better to have a short meditation that is very clear and well-focused than to do lots of meditation that are unclear and scattered and so forth.

If you start off with a short meditation of good quality, then that quality with which you started will be carried through as the length of your meditation practice gradually increases over time.

As was explained at the beginning, withdraw the mind from the disturbing thoughts that distract the mind towards external objects and focus it internally. Then, place the mind single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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