
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
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27 August 2003

We will practise a bit of meditation usual. Place your body in a good physical position, upright and comfortable. On the basis of sitting comfortably and relaxed, the mind also needs to be put into a relaxed space. We need to work with the mind. It is no good placing the body in a good meditation posture but then not to work with the mind, not putting it into a good and positive space.

It is good to remind oneself repeatedly that attempting a transformation on the physical level is not enough – one needs to also transform the mind, and to become familiar with it.

Therefore, we need to stop the mind from engaging with external objects and instead bring it back home, focusing it within. We should not let the mind dwell on objects from the past, present or future. It shouldn't dwell on past memories, which would only disturb it. Likewise, we shouldn't let it dwell on present situations and external objects, the recollection of which will also disturb and distract the mind. Also, we shouldn't worry about future situations and objects, because that also distracts and agitates the mind. Rather than letting the mind engage with any of those three types of objects, we should focus it totally within.

We should place the focus of our mind internally. From within that space, we place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

I think it would be good if we all practised meditation daily. Meditating every day gives one's mind the space to be happy and relaxed. The mind is happy when one is meditating because it is not engaging with external objects. It doesn't experience the disturbance that would otherwise occur when it is engaged with external objects. Meditation is an occasion for the mind to be happy and unperturbed by our usual worries and problems.

One thing I would like to clarify is that, although we should not think about the past, present and future during this particular type of meditation, that doesn't mean we shouldn't think about the past, present and future on other occasions. When I say we shouldn't be concerned with what happened in the past, what is happening in the present, and what will happen in future during meditation, that is not intended as a 'blanket' statement. We should, for example, be concerned about our past actions – what we did correctly and what we did wrongly. We also have to check up our present day actions – which are wholesome and which are harmful.

Likewise, we have to be concerned about our future actions. I want to clarify this; otherwise you might get the wrong idea!

3.1.3. The actual way of listening to the teachings

The recognition that careful practise of the Dharma is the cure for the mental afflictions.

Now the fourth recognition – recognising that the careful practice of Dharma is the cure for the sickness of the mental afflictions.

We must practise carefully and sincerely the Dharma we have listened to, the instructions we have received. We must put these instructions or profound points carefully into practice, and apply them sincerely to our own mind. In such a way, they become the cure for our mental afflictions.

If we want to be cured of a sickness, we have to take medicine in accordance with the doctor's instructions. If we just place the medicine under our pillow, will that cure us of our sickness? If the doctor tells us we should take the medicine at certain times and we don't listen to him but do something different, we will not be cured of our sickness. Is the medicine at fault because it is not good enough? No, it is not the fault of the medicine. Or is it the doctor's fault? It is also not the fault of the doctor. Rather, the fault lies within oneself, because one didn't take the medicine according to the doctor's instructions.

Likewise, if we don't practise the oral instructions we have received from our teacher, the sickness of the mental afflictions won't be cured, and the fault again lies with oneself. It is not the fault of the teacher, nor is it the fault of the Dharma.

The sutra called *The King of Concentration* gives the same analogy. It says: 'If one has recognised one is sick, one will search out a proficient, capable doctor. Through his love and compassion for us, the patient, the doctor diagnoses our sickness and gives us plenty of potent and good medicine. However, if we don't take that medicine in accordance with the doctor's instructions, then whose fault is it if our sickness isn't cured? It is one's own fault. The fault doesn't lie with the doctor, nor does the fault lie with the medicine.'

Similarly, if one has received instructions on how to practise meditation and does not put those instructions into practice, not carefully and sincerely practising and persevering with one's meditation through joyous effort, then how will one get the fruits of meditation practice? Such a person will definitely not attain liberation.

Buddha said to his students: 'As long as you just engage in the practice of listening, and don't put into the practice what you have listened to, but just accumulate more teachings, you will not receive the benefit – you will not be liberated from your problems and there is nothing that I can do.'

Similarly, if a doctor gives a patient the correct medicine, but the patient keeps that medicine in a bag and doesn't get better, then there is nothing the doctor can do. Thus, the Buddha says: 'If you have to sincerely put into

practice what I have taught, through that you will attain liberation.'

We have to practise the Dharma by applying it to our mind. One has to mix the Dharma with one's mind.

As long as one behaves like the patient who accumulates the medicine in a bag inside a cupboard, and doesn't apply the dharma to one's mind, one will not be liberated from one's problems. One has to put the teachings into practice by mixing them with one's mind.

We all know how to meditate on patience and we all know how to meditate on love, so it is merely a matter of putting that into practice in the appropriate situations. If one receives harm from someone and doesn't put those meditations into practice but lets the mind be controlled by anger, one will want to retaliate with another harmful action and the mind will be overcome by harmful intent. Instead, if one mixes one's mind with the practice of patience and love it will diminish the harmful intent. In such a way the practice of patience and love becomes an antidote to the mental afflictions.

Of course, it is difficult at the beginning to completely mix one's mind with the Dharma. There will be always certain discrepancies and the mind will not be 100% mixed with the Dharma. However, by starting out with slow steps, one can slowly increase the amount of Dharma within the mind. Gradually, the mind will become more peaceful and happier because the disturbing and agitating mental states will diminish. The more one's mind becomes mixed with the Dharma, the less one's mind will be agitated and disturbed.

One shouldn't think: 'I have such strong anger that it would be impossible for me to reduce it'. That is not the right attitude. By taking it slowly, in small steps, one will be able to get rid of the delusions because the mental afflictions are not of one nature with the mind. Practising the Dharma will diminish very strong attachment, very strong anger, very strong pride, and so forth, and one will receive the benefit.

Otherwise, if one lets one's mind remain under the control of strong attachment, anger and pride, it will remain miserable and unhappy. One shouldn't feel that one couldn't remove anger, attachment and pride from one's mind. Anger is not of one nature with the mind, attachment is not of one nature with the mind, and pride is also not of one nature with the mind. Through Dharma practice, all of these delusions can be reduced and finally removed.

We all know through our own experience how transient the different mental afflictions are. Tomorrow, we may feel intense anger towards someone for whom we feel intense desire and attachment today; and, vice versa, we may desire a person tomorrow towards whom we are incredibly angry today. Thus, from our own experience, we can see that the afflictions are transient, even though they arise intensely at individual times.

We have all observed how a person we may feel strong desire for today can transform into an enemy overnight.

Your view of someone whom you may wish to (*Geshe-la laughing*) wine and dine tonight can completely change by the time you get up tomorrow morning. You could feel completely fed up with that person and not want to see them again. So, we can see how our liking for someone at a given time is transient.

Now, we can have some questions...

Question: I'm confused about what the nature of the mind actually is – if it's not anger and it's not attachment, what's left?

Answer: It is said that our fundamental consciousness is clear and stainless like a crystal. The fundamental consciousness has this nature of innate clarity. At the same time, it arises in the aspect of the different objects – different objects appear to that mind. That's why we say that the nature of the mind is 'clear and knowing', because on the one hand, it has this characteristic of clarity, and on the other hand, objects appear to that mind.

Question: But what appears to a mind that is not clear? How do we know if the mind is clear and knowing?

Answer: The more one pacifies the conceptual thoughts, the more the mind's clarity will become manifest.

At the moment, with the mind overcome by conceptual thoughts, we cannot see the clarity of the mind. However if, through our meditation, we subdue and diminish the conceptual mind, we will become aware of the underlying clear, primary, fundamental consciousness.

This experience only comes about when the conceptualising mind has been pacified. For example, someone practising calm abiding would be able to pacify the conceptualising mind and get an experience of the clear primary consciousness through that practice.

Student: But that's an experience rather than seeing.

Geshe-la: No – you can see the clear mind.

Student: So is it one mind seeing another mind?

Geshe-la: Yes, there is another clear, knowing consciousness that sees the clear, knowing consciousness.

During meditation, the consciousness remains vivid and clear through the force of concentration.

The primary consciousness depends on the various 'mental factors' for its existence – without these, the primary consciousness itself can't do anything. For example, the part of the consciousness that remains stable during meditation is concentration – because of concentration, the mind can remain stable. So, concentration is that part of the consciousness that remains fixed on the object and, through that, the rest of the mind becomes stable.

The primary consciousness by itself is not able to do anything without the various different mental factors. For example, while concentration holds the primary consciousness in one place, concentration by itself will not be able to engage in introspection. One needs the mental factor of introspection to determine how one's

meditation is going.

It is said that the relationship between the primary consciousness and the mental factors is similar to the relationship between a king and his various ministers. The king usually has an overview of his government, while the various ministers specialise in different portfolios. The king is able to get an overview by getting information from each of the ministers – this is similar to the relationship between the primary consciousness and the mental factors. The primary consciousness has an overview of the object, while the mental factors engage in specific characteristics of that object.

For example, when bliss arises in the mind during meditation, that bliss is not the primary consciousness but a mental factor that accompanies the primary consciousness. Similarly, when the mind involuntarily wanders off or is drawn to a particular object, it happens through the mental factor of intention.

If a king doesn't have good ministers, the government won't function well; in the same way, harmful mental factors can make the primary consciousness miserable. For example, if the primary consciousness is accompanied by strong attachment, this will cause distress to the primary consciousness. It's the same for the other mental factors.

It is said that our primary consciousness is like a clear mirror. If we hold a yellow colour before a clear mirror, the mirror will reflect yellow. If we hold another colour like red or blue before the mirror, the mirror reflects red or blue. It is like that with our primary consciousness and the mental factors. The primary consciousness will reflect the state of the mental factors.

If the mental factors are positive, the primary consciousness will also be positive. But, if the mental factors are afflictions such as anger or attachment, this will be reflected in the primary consciousness. We may feel calm and peaceful while sitting down in meditation but find that the mind again becomes disturbed when we get up from the meditation. This happens through the force of the different mental factors. Likewise if, at certain times we are agitated but later on feel happy, this is also because of the force of different mental factors.

Question: Does that mean that karma doesn't actually influence the primary mind, which is like a clear crystal?

Answer: Karma *is* a mental factor.

For example, when the eye consciousness perceives blue, it does so because the eye consciousness has been drawn to the blue by karma. The mental factor that draws the eye consciousness to an object – without the eye consciousness having any choice or freedom in the matter – is known as karma.

Question: So, is intention also karma?

Answer: **The mental factor of intention** is the definition of karma.

When we talk about karma, we talk about the mental factor of intention. When we generate in our mind the

intention of wanting to do prostrations, that is mental karma. When that mental karma or intention is translated into the action of physical or verbal prostration, it becomes the physical or verbal karma of prostration at that time. So, initially we have the mental karma then, at the time of the action, one has the physical or verbal karma.

Likewise, automatically, without consciously choosing to, one's mind will generate the thought, for example, that one is going to kill a certain sentient being. This is the stage of the intention of killing, which is mental karma. When the mental karma of killing is translated into the physical or verbal action of killing, at that time it will become the physical or verbal karma of killing – one could say something to cause the death or kill that being oneself. It is the same also for the other non-virtuous actions.

Contemplating this will help one get a feeling for karma. Reflecting on how one experiences the results of previously created actions is difficult, but reflecting on how one creates karma in the present is easier.

It is difficult for us to comprehend that what we presently experience is the result of previously created karma. For example, saying that our body or our aggregates are the effect of previously created karma is very difficult to comprehend. However, we can understand how we engage in different actions at the moment due to different intentions.

So, we can see how we create karma in the present. We can also see the beneficial effects of meditation – if we engage in meditation with a virtuous intention, we get a beneficial effect from the meditation. That is something we can observe. In dependence on this, we can generate an understanding of past karma and of the future result of karma, and so forth. Initially, one won't have an understanding of how past karma generates a future result. One has to increase one's faith slowly – it is difficult to have complete faith in the law of karma from the beginning.

By training one's mind slowly, one's understanding and conviction in the Dharma will increase. To have an instant understanding and complete faith in all the Dharma teachings is very difficult. However, by slowly familiarising one's mind with different aspects of the Dharma, one will generate a more complete understanding of the Dharma.

By contemplating a dharma topic, one will generate an understanding of it. When one does this in a relaxed manner, it is also very pleasant for the mind. One generates a greater understanding of the Dharma and gets more experience of the Dharma and so generates more faith. This is the wonderful way in which the mind works.

Also, one needs to apply the whole cannon of the Buddha's teachings to one's mind over a long period. For example, if someone has leprosy and has lost their fingers and hands, they will not be cured by applying a bit of medicine here and there. To be cured, they will need to

apply a great variety of medicines over a long time. Similarly, one will not be cured of the mental afflictions by just applying few methods a couple of times; rather, one has to apply the whole cannon of the Buddha's teachings over a long period.

If we know how to meditate on the antidote to attachment, but we don't know to meditate on the antidote to anger, then although we might reduce attachment in our mind, anger will arise because we don't know how to deal with it. In the same way, a partial application of the Dharma won't bring about a total cure.

If one practises the Dharma in a holistic, complete manner, rather than just practising a few aspects of the Dharma, although our practice might not be perfect from the beginning, perfection will be attained over time.

As was explained at the beginning, bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards, and placing it 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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