
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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We can practise some meditation as usual. Seat yourself in a good meditation posture.

As we said last time, the meaning of meditation is to familiarise and acquaint the mind with positive, wholesome, correct mental states. It is important for us to be able to switch the mind from distorted mental states to accurate and correct ones. If we are unable to reverse the mind from distorted mental states, then these mental states will hinder us in this life as well as in future lives.

The mental state of laziness, for example, is an obstacle for attaining happiness both in this life as well as in future lives. Even in this life, we well know that one is not able to attain a state of happiness if one is lazy. Laziness is the state that hinders us from achieving our goals. The Buddha said that whoever has laziness does not have the Dharmakaya.

Therefore, we need to reverse the laziness that arises in the mind and generate joyful enthusiasm for what one is doing. Just as we need to reverse the mind from attachment when it arises, and instead generate a positive and virtuous state of the mind, likewise when laziness arises within the mind, one needs to first stop that state of mind, and then generate joyous enthusiasm for what one is doing.

If one is overpowered by laziness, it will be impossible to achieve one's aims. The function of laziness is to make one not accomplish ones aims. Laziness causes us to accomplish nothing. For example, if we have ignorance, another distorted mental state, we need to reverse the mind from ignorance and instead generate wisdom. But that won't happen if the mind is overcome by laziness. Attachment and anger also arise through the power of laziness. Some people say that ignorance is bliss, so they strive to remain in a state of ignorance, thinking they are happy, but actually the idea that ignorance is bliss is another distorted state of mind. One has to generate wisdom, and in particular one has to overcome laziness.

Whenever we engage in an activity, but then stop doing that action, it is because of laziness. Laziness is that part of our mind that causes us to give up. So you can see that it is related to our lives.

Rather than letting laziness remain within our mind, we should generate joyful enthusiasm. If one is enthusiastic and joyful about what one is doing, one will be successful in achieving both one's worldly and Dharma aims. However, by just following laziness, one won't be able to be successful in either worldly terms or Dharma terms.

So, first, one has to generate joyful enthusiasm in one's

mind; generating the virtuous mental state of joyous enthusiasm is the practice of Dharma. Then, one familiarises the mind with that state, and this is meditation. You can see that the practice of meditation is not something foreign to us; it is something that we normally do in one way or another. When we hear the term meditation, we shouldn't think of it as something foreign or unknown to us.

Now you might be asking: 'Yes, it would be good to have joyful enthusiasm, but how can I generate it?' We generate joyful enthusiasm by contemplating the qualities and benefits of the result one is aiming for. By being aware of the qualities and benefits of the result, naturally one will become enthusiastic about achieving that aim.

If we are aware of the benefits of an action, viewing it as something that will bring us happiness, we will naturally want to engage in that action. For example, if we view an object with attachment or the attainment of that object as something that will bring us happiness, we would not need much prodding – we are unstoppable in trying to accomplish the aim of attaining the object of our attachment! In the same way, if one sees the benefits of an action, naturally one will want to engage in that action.

With mindfulness, one directs one's actions of body, speech and mind towards virtue; with introspection, one investigates whether one's actions of the body, speech and mind are still positive and virtuous or are not. Here, the object of mindfulness is enthusiasm; with mindfulness, we try to keep that enthusiasm in our mind. Then, with introspection, we check up on that enthusiasm, whether the mind is still enthusiastic or not. In order to stay enthusiastic we reflect upon the benefits of having enthusiasm and upon the disadvantages of being lazy. In this way, we can practise joyful enthusiasm with the help of mindfulness and mental introspection. One can also apply this technique to other practices.

Keeping this in mind, we sit in a comfortable and relaxed posture. Then, we investigate the mind, seeing whether it is under the control of distorted mental states or not. If the mind is not calmly focused internally, but is under the control of distorted mental states, we must reverse the mind from those distorted mental states and focus it within. We have to identify the distorted mental state and remove the mind from that state, focusing it internally.

After having focused the mind totally within, place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath, letting the mind become one with the breathing. Meditate in this manner for a few minutes on the coming and going of the breath. (*Pause for meditation*)

It would be beneficial if you meditated like this regularly, in order to identify what it is that causes you suffering and what makes you happy, so that you can protect your happiness. If one has all the good outer conditions for happiness still feels unhappy inside, that is not really a worthwhile state of affairs.

3.2.3. How to think and act when teaching

Last time, we talked about the thoughts and actions with

which the Dharma has to be taught. We almost completed the [appropriate] mental state with which to teach the Dharma. We talked about the five recognitions, and that the teacher should meditate on love for the students. A person who explains the Dharma should meditate on love for the students, having already recognised the students as patients, wishing them to be free from their sickness and wishing them to have happiness. Love is the wish for others to be happy.

Then we said that the person explaining the Dharma shouldn't have jealousy, wondering whether there are better Dharma teachers around. For example, a teacher may hear that someone else has given a good teaching and generates jealousy in his or her mind towards the other person and thinking: 'Now I'm going to give an even better teaching than that person!'. As I have already mentioned, one has to be careful about jealousy, because jealousy makes the mind unhappy.

Here, the object of jealousy doesn't have to be another teacher, it could also be a student. It is possible for the anxious thought to arise in a teacher's mind: 'Through my teaching, perhaps my students will develop even greater understanding and wisdom than I, and perhaps they will become superior in their understanding and realisations'. This type of jealous thought could also arise in a teacher's mind.

One also has to abandon such a thought, because one teaches the Dharma on the basis of love and compassion for the benefit and welfare of the students. That is how the Dharma should be taught. Also, the students will recognise whether the Dharma teacher is teaching with the motivation of their welfare, or whether he or she is teaching with impure and selfish motivation, and they will react accordingly.

Love and compassion is important as you can see. Among you are students who teach the Dharma themselves, and there are teachers who lecture in schools and so forth. So, now you know how you to teach – you have to teach with the thought of love and compassion for your students.

The teacher should also abandon laziness. The laziness referred to here is the laziness of not wanting to teach the same Dharma material again and again. As a Dharma teacher, one has to say the same thing over and over again, hundreds of times. It is also possible for the teacher to be overcome by the laziness of not wanting to keep teaching the same thing. This type of laziness has to be abandoned. If the teacher is lazy, the students also become lazy.

As a teacher, one should not praise oneself and highlight the faults of others. The teacher also shouldn't be stingy with the Dharma. It is possible that a Dharma teacher may not want to explain the more profound and significant points to students, and just give the students superficial explanations, avoiding the more profound and significant Dharma teachings. This also has to be abandoned.

Actually, regarding material things, when one has gives

something away, one won't have it any more. However, it is not like that with the Dharma – one does not lose the Dharma when one teaches it! However, that distorted thought of stinginess of regarding the Dharma can arise, and that has to be abandoned.

In fact, the more one shares one's qualities with others, the more those qualities will increase. Also, if a teacher has love and compassion from the outset, the thought of stinginess with the Dharma won't arise. However, if a teacher doesn't have love and compassion, the thought of being stingy with the Dharma can arise.

Also, those teaching the Dharma shouldn't seek to attain food, clothing and so forth as a result of giving teachings, thinking: 'If I teach the Dharma, people will make offerings to me and I will get invited to dinner, or I will become very famous and well known'. This type of thought should be abandoned.

Regarding this point, I often say to the ordained community that it is good if one familiarises oneself with the Dharma and practises meditation before ordination. Then, when one is ordained, one can teach meditation purely and properly to the laypeople who come and ask for teachings. If one proceeds in this manner, there is no need to remind the laypeople that one needs to eat or drink, because the laypeople will naturally anticipate the needs of the monk or nun and will provide what they need.

In this way, a mutual beneficial relationship can be established between the lay community and the ordained community. If the lay community is happy with the teachings they receive from the ordained community – if the teachings are taught in a pure and proper manner – naturally the lay community will want to offer something to the ordained community, which they can do by providing food, clothing and other material things.

However, if the lay community is not happy with the ordained community, the ordained community is forced to voice its needs. We can observe this today, for example, in some Christian monasteries, where the monks and nuns have to completely rely upon themselves – there is not very much support from the lay community.

I think it would be very good to have this mutually beneficial relationship between the ordained community providing Dharma teachings and the lay community providing materials to the ordained community. I'm advising you to do so! (*Laughter*)

If there is mutual liking between two parties, those two parties will naturally want to help each other. If parents are fond of a child, they don't feel any problem in providing material support for that child. However, if the parents are unhappy with the child, they are not so forthcoming with their money!

It also depends on how much love and compassion one has for the other party. Everyone has love and compassion, so we should make use of our love and compassion and put them into practice. If we don't act with love and compassion, we can find oneself in a

situation where few people will feel affectionate towards us; we will find that we are greatly disliked by many people. However, if one bases one's actions on love and compassion and puts them into practice, one won't find oneself in that situation.

One should view the merits one accumulates through teaching and explaining the Dharma in order to attain both the enlightenment of others as well as one's own enlightenment as the ingredients of, or necessities for, one's happiness.

If you don't receive praise and applause for your Dharma teaching, you shouldn't feel discouraged and sad. Rather, you should think that the merits you have created by teaching the Dharma in order to lead your students to enlightenment and in order to attain enlightenment yourself are the ingredients for your happiness, particularly the happiness of enlightenment. So, even if you are not praised and applauded after having given a teaching, you shouldn't feel: 'I haven't really given a good Dharma teaching, I haven't accomplished anything, I haven't accomplished any purpose', because the merits you have created are the ingredients of the happiness of achieving your aims.

Now you know how to establish the correct mindset for teaching the Dharma. Next time, we will begin the next point – how to teach the Dharma in action...whether one has to teach the Dharma frowning or whether one has to teach the Dharma smiling, and so forth.

We have time for some questions.

Question: Geshe-la, can you actually teach the Dharma to people of other religions?

Answer: Yes, you are allowed to teach the Dharma to practitioners of other religions. Actually, that point comes a bit later in the text – to whom you can teach the Dharma and to whom you cannot to teach the Dharma. But you are definitely allowed to teach it. For example, the Buddha in his kindness taught the Dharma to practitioners of non-Buddhist practitioners.

Previously, in India, there was a custom of debate contests between Hindus and Buddhists. The custom was that a particular Hindu teacher would challenge a Buddhist monastery and there would be a debate between that Hindu group and the Buddhists. Whoever lost would have to join the other's group! (Laughter)

This was very good, because they approached each other's differences from the point of view of logic and analysed each other's point of view from the point of view of logic. In this way, they could resolve which point of view was superior.

The first five disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha were non-Buddhists. They had at one time been companions of the Buddha, with whom they had practised austerities. At one stage in his life, the Buddha had been meditating for six years, practising austerities and eating almost nothing. But he started to eat a moderate amount of food again, and his friends became disgusted with him, saying he had given up his austerities. After the Buddha had attained enlightenment, the five disciples were in Sarnath

[India] and saw the Buddha approaching them. They resolved among themselves not to get up and show any respect to the Buddha because he had given up his austerities. But as the Buddha came near them they naturally showed him respect and became his disciples. Of course, they had had a relationship with the Buddha for many lifetimes before that.

Question: Geshe-la, at the end of the teaching, when we concentrate on Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra, do we focus on the sound or on both the visualisation and the sound of the mantra?

Answer: It's all right if you just focus single-pointedly on the actual sound of the mantra.

If you like you can also do a visualisation, in which you actually visualise the Buddha. At the Buddha's heart, you visualise the seed syllable HUM surrounded by the six syllables of the mantra. Then, during the recitation of the mantra, you can visualise that light rays and nectar from the seed syllables flow down and enter you and purify your obscurations and so forth.

Question: When you are reincarnated, can you be reincarnated as animals and can animals be reincarnated as humans?

Answer: Yes, that's possible. For example, there was once a pig that went around a stupa and because of the merit created by going around the stupa, in the next life it got reborn as a god in the Divine Realm of the Thirty-Three Gods. (Laughter) So, that is one of the benefits of circumambulating a stupa. That pig involuntarily created merit by going around the stupa and through that merit was reborn in its next life as a god in the Divine Realm of the Thirty-Three Gods.

(Some clarification from Geshe-la) Actually, the pig was chased around the stupa by a dog! (More laughter) Even though the pig didn't have the motivation of wanting to create merit, it involuntarily created merit because of the power of the stupa. There are many stories like this.

There was, for example, a god who, when he was about to die, could see through his clairvoyant powers that he would take a rebirth as a pig in the next life. So, he took very strong refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha at the time of death, because he became afraid of being reborn as a pig in the next life. Then he attained rebirth in an even higher god realm.

These different rebirths are possible because of the potentials of the white and black karmas that we accumulate in our mindstreams. Although rebirth as an animal is the result of black karma, as an animal it is still possible to accumulate some virtuous karma through which one can be reborn again in the human or a higher realm. Likewise, human rebirth is the result of virtuous karma, but by creating black karma, one can be reborn in a lower realm as an animal.

Question: Geshe-la, I have a stupa at home. Can I circumambulate this, or is it better to do circumambulations in Tara Institute?

Answer: If you like, you can use the stupa at home. When you don't have much time, you can circumambulate at home, but when you have a bit more time, you can come here to Tara Institute, because there are many holy objects.

Same student: Is it OK to walk around the block [here at Tara Institute] or just walk around the stupa in the corridor? At times, I walk around the block a few times. Is that OK or should I do [the circumambulations] in the actual grounds of Tara House?

Answer: You go around the block! (Laughter) You can go around the block visualising that there are countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas present and that you are circumambulating them as you walk around the block. Then, because you have to walk further and it is physically more demanding, you're also purifying more physical negative karma.

Question: Geshe-la, when we do prostrations to you at the start of the Dharma class three times, should we visualise or contemplate anything such as Tara at your heart?

Answer: The visualisation that you can do when you prostrate is that, when you place the hands at your crown, you are receiving the blessings of the bodies of all the Buddhas; then, when you place the hands at the throat, you are receiving the blessings of the speech of all the Buddhas; and then, when you place your hands at the heart, you are receiving the blessings of the minds of all the Buddhas.

Thinking that you are receiving the blessings of all the bodies of the Buddhas at your crown; the blessings of the Buddhas' speech at your throat; and the blessings of the minds of all the Buddhas at your heart places the seed or potential in your mindstream to actually achieve the body, speech and mind of a Buddha.

As was explained at the beginning, place the mind internally, withdrawing it towards the inside. Then, when you recite the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha, place the mind single-pointedly on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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