
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. Please sit upright and relaxed.

After having placed the body in a good posture, one also needs to train the mind properly in pure and positive ways. It is important that we analyse our way of thinking – as well as investigating our actions of body and speech, we must also analyse our way of thinking.

When we investigate the mind, if we find that it has fallen into wrong ways of thinking, it would not be OK to just leave it like that. We should be very careful about the distorted, wrong ways of the mind. If we find that the mind has fallen into a wrong state, we shouldn't leave it there, because we have already left the mind in such wrong states many times in the past, so we must take great care when this occurs.

So, if it is not a good thing to leave the mind in those wrong states, we need to have a method with which we can change the mind. What object should we focus the mind on in order to change it?

If we just leave the mind in a distorted mental state such as anger, nothing good will come of it: it will just cause more disturbance for oneself, and even make the body sick. So, one definitely can't leave the mind in such disturbed, wrong states. If the mind is angry, we shouldn't let it remain focused on the object of anger, but we should rather reverse the mind from that object and place the mind on an object that calms down and pacifies the anger. In such a way, one will subdue the mind. This is how meditation should be practised, in a way that is beneficial for one's mind.

One can receive great benefit from a correct way of thinking. If one can free the mind and not let it remain in disturbed and wrong states, but rather place it in beneficial and good states, one will receive much benefit.

If one lets the mind remain in a disturbed, distorted state, there is no benefit for oneself: it even robs one of sleep. We know that when the mind is disturbed, one can't even sleep properly.

To stop engaging with outer objects, first place yourself in a good, upright and comfortable meditation posture. Then focus the mind internally, not letting it engage with external objects, but rather focusing totally within. Then, after having focused the mind in this way, place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. We will meditate on the coming and going of the breath for a few minutes. *(Pause for meditation.)*

If one meditates in this way again and again, and if one again and again investigate one's mind to see whether it

is going in a positive or a harmful direction, one will benefit greatly.

4. How to guide the disciples with the actual instructions

Now we have arrived at the fourth major outline – how to guide the disciples with the actual instructions. This is subdivided into two main points – 4.1. The root of the path - proper reliance on the spiritual friend and 4.2. The sequence of training ones mind after having relied properly on a spiritual friend.

In order to progress along the path, one needs to initially rely upon a spiritual friend, who is the root of the path. This has two sub outlines, 4.1.1. How to generate certainty and 4.1.2. How to strive - in brief.

In order for even a single quality to be generated in the student's mind and in order for even a single fault to be eliminated, one needs to rely on the root of all happiness and goodness, which is the holy spiritual friend. It is very important that one relies upon a spiritual friend.

Even in ordinary life, the company we keep has a great influence on us. So, if the company we keep has many faults, it is likely that we will adopt those faults. On the other hand, if our friends have many good qualities, it is likely that we will adopt those qualities. Even in our practice, the aim is to become free from all faults and to generate all good qualities. One should therefore try to keep company with those who help us achieve that aim.

A good way to relate to others is to adopt their good qualities but to try not to adopt their faults. It is alright to conform to other people's good qualities, because in such a way we, too, will generate these qualities. However, it would be unskilful to conform to other people's faults, because we will end up having those faults ourselves.

There is this story of two friends who lived in the same village. One of them used to drink lots of alcohol and gamble, while the other one lived a pure lifestyle, practising the Dharma and so forth. Then, the one who drank and gambled went to stay with a geshe in a monastery, while the other friend who had a purer lifestyle went to Lhasa, where he fell in with people who drank and gambled, and so forth.

Later, when they met again, the roles were totally reversed. Because he had been living with a geshe, the person who used to drink and gamble had adopted a pure Dharma lifestyle. However, by falling in with the wrong crowd in Lhasa, the other friend who had lived the pure lifestyle adopted their habits and had started to drink and gamble.

Similarly, if someone who is normally not an angry person starts living with another who is habitually angry, it is quite possible that the person who is normally not angry will start getting angrier more often. Of course, it could also be the other way around.

So, one has to take great care to control the influences in one's life; if one allows oneself to be influenced by wrong things, one's qualities will diminish and one will receive a great loss.

Even in an ordinary worldly context, we can see how the company we keep can have an impact on our life. Therefore, we should always rely on our own wisdom. We should first develop the wisdom that understands what is beneficial and what is not, and then follow that wisdom, stopping ourselves going in certain directions and not following those paths.

This is why the spiritual friend is so important. The **first** point here (4.1.1. How to generate certainty) deals with the definition of a proper spiritual friend. It gives a list of characteristics that define a proper spiritual friend. In such a way, we will become clear as to what type of person we should rely upon.

The **second** point deals with the definition of the disciple. After having first identified the nature of a proper spiritual friend, the text then goes on to identify the nature of a proper disciple.

The **third** point in the text deals with how the disciple should rely upon the teacher, while the **fourth** point deals with the benefits that arise from properly relying upon a spiritual friend.

The **fifth** point deals with the faults of not relying upon a spiritual friend. In ordinary worldly terms, if we don't rely on a teacher or someone else with knowledge, we will not generate any good qualities. Likewise, in the Dharma context, by not relying upon a spiritual friend, we will end up not knowing what has to be practised and what has to be abandoned. This is one of the shortcomings of not relying upon a proper spiritual friend.

The **sixth** and last point is a short summary of the above points.

There are different definitions given in the various sutras for the spiritual friend – for example, the spiritual friend according to the Vinaya system, or the spiritual friend according to the Tantra system for tantric practitioners. Here, in this text, the definition of a spiritual friend is given from the point of view of a teacher qualified to teach the Graduated Path to Enlightenment, the Lam Rim.

In a best-case scenario, the spiritual friend will have ten qualities. In the next-best-case scenario, the spiritual friend will have five qualities, and then in the worst-case the spiritual friend should possess at least three qualities. We will get into that more next time.

It is important that one approaches the subject of the spiritual friend with a proper understanding. One might think: "Now I have to rely on someone, but it is not quite clear who that someone is supposed to be". This will become clear when the ten qualities of the spiritual friend are explained.

This subject of the spiritual friend has to be approached with proper understanding, and in a logical way. Usually if we are told something, our mind immediately searches for supporting reasons, asking: "Why? What is the reason for that?"

Do you have some questions?

Question: Geshe-la, in the Heart Sutra, is Avalokiteshvara a different person to the bodhisattva mahasattva?

Answer: When it says, bodhisattva mahasattva, 'bodhi' refers to enlightenment because a bodhisattva is someone who has enlightenment of self in mind; he or she is a mahasattva because that enlightenment is then dedicated for the benefit of all sentient beings.

So 'bodhi' is enlightenment, the state of a Buddha, a bodhisattva is someone who aims for the enlightenment of self. Then he or she becomes a mahasattva because the enlightenment of self is dedicated for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Question (lengthy, with some clarification between student and translator): Is the mind the cause of our physical existence? Because once the mind is withdrawn from the body, there is no life in the body. Through dependent origination, through the coming together of the entire universe, is there a point where the mind and body might relate to one another at the atomic level, where the mind is a condition for matter or existence? Is there a relationship?

Answer: Atomically based phenomena have their own causes upon which they rely. For example, the lamp has a cause, which is then preceded by another cause and so forth.

Same student responds with point that, in the process of progressive analysis, is there an "end to dependent origination"?

Answer: Do you mean, how far or how deep can you go? You won't arrive at the level where you will find a partless particle. Even if you go down to the very subtle levels, you will not arrive at a partless particle. There will always be parts, but this becomes subtler, something you can't see directly. But you won't arrive at a partless particle.

Some of the lower Buddhist tenets assert the existence of partless particles, saying that all forms are an accumulation of partless particles. However, the higher tenets don't accept that.

For example, even if you arrive at a very, very tiny unit it will, for example, have a direction or orientation – an east, a west, a north and a south. So, there are already four parts of that unit. This characteristic will probably always be there if something is atomically based.

Likewise, space has parts because there is a north space, a south space, and so forth. That's why a plane can fly from the south to the north, because space has those different parts of south, north, west and east. If space did not have those different parts, planes could not fly from east to west or from south to north.

When we talk about parts, you don't have to think in terms of something that you can divide, piece by piece, a collection of different units hanging together that you disassemble. A thing can have parts simply by having directions, for example having north, south, east and west directions. So, already the object has parts.

We cannot divide space, but still space has parts.

Likewise you can't divide emptiness but emptiness has parts.

Further point from student about whether emptiness is conditioned or unconditioned.

Answer: Emptiness is unconditioned, it doesn't have causes.

Another response from same student.

Answer: It looks as if you think that if something has parts, it has to have causes and conditions – it's not like that. You shouldn't think that having parts is confined to only impermanent objects. Permanent objects also have parts. For example, the mind doesn't have atoms, the mind is not atomically based, but it still has parts.

Question from another student: Geshe-la could you offer some advice to those people undertaking the Nyung Na retreat this weekend and could you say something about the benefits?

Answer: The benefits of Nyung Na are the benefits of keeping pure morality. All the benefits that I explained for the Mahayana precepts arise when one does Nyung Na.

Also, the benefits just eating one meal on the first day or then no meals at all the second day, and of taking the vow to do that purifies many karmas that would otherwise cause one to experience the sufferings of hunger and thirst.

So, by undergoing those difficulties, you should think that you are purifying karma that would otherwise cause you to experience the sufferings of hunger and thirst and the sufferings of dying because of lack of food, drink, and so forth.

You should do the Nyung Na with the attitude that you are doing it to purify many non-virtuous karmas to be able to benefit sentient beings and in order to attain enlightenment for the benefit of sentient beings. By doing the practice, even though the two days are very difficult, one will also see a change in one's mind – the mind will be clearer and so forth.

Question: Geshe-la, what are Pratimoksha vows? We've been studying *The Foundation Of All Good Qualities* and the author talks about Pratimoksha vows. I can't find any explanation of Pratimoksha vows.

Answer: The Pratimoksha vows refer to the vows of individual liberation. So, you have the male and female Upasika vows (Lay vows), the vows of male and female novices and the vows of fully ordained monks and nuns.

Pratimoksha means individual liberation. They are called individual liberation vows because by practising them, one will become liberated; in order to attain liberation oneself, one has to practise these vows. So, one won't become liberated from other people keeping these vows – if one wants to obtain liberation oneself, one has to practise those vows.

This emphasises the importance of morality – if one has good morality, it is the root of the Dharma.

Question: My question relates to morality. In our society,

our community, public forms of morality seem to have boundaries that shift constantly. Does Geshe-la see some sort of problem between moral flexibility, if you want to call it that, and being a spiritual teacher or a spiritual friend? What's the relationship between those two things in our society? I guess, to put it simply, how rigid should one be in certain points of morality being a spiritual friend?

Answer: I can't quite see the relevance between one and the other. The first of the ten qualities of a Mahayana teacher is to possess the higher training of morality. That will come next time, when we discuss the ten qualities of a spiritual friend. The first quality refers to the quality of morality. The second quality relates to the practice of concentration and the third quality relates to the practice of wisdom. But what happened to your question? *(Laughter)*

Same person continues: Well, that partially answered my question...

Answer: If that partially answered your question then that's good already. *(Laughter)* There is a saying that if a question is almost answered, then the question is answered. *(More laughter)* It is explained in the Vinaya teachings that if one has almost answered a question, this counts as having answered the question.

The questions were very good, thank you very much. I don't know if my answers were sufficient, but the questions were very good and thank you very much.

As was explained in the beginning, focus the mind internally, withdrawing it from external objects and then place it 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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