
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
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We will meditate for a little while as usual. Sit in a good and upright posture.

Meditation means to familiarise the mind with a virtuous meditation object and to focus the mind on that object. However, at the moment, the mind is under the control of the delusions and, as we ourselves are under the control of the mind, we are actually under the control of the delusions, which makes our life very difficult.

So, since we are under the control of the mind, and the mind is under the control of the delusions, we need to meditate. This is why meditation is important. If the mind were under our control – or even if we were under the control of our mind but it was calm and stable – it wouldn't be such an issue. However, since our mind is under the influence of the delusions and we are under the control of the mind, we need to meditate in order to free the mind from the delusions.

We need to identify which particular delusions are controlling the mind, and then we need to meditate on the antidote to those particular delusions. If one were able to subdue the delusion that was most prominent within one's mind, the mind would become more stable and peaceful and one's life would also become more stable and peaceful.

Therefore, we can meditate for a little while. On the basis of seating ourselves in the correct meditation posture, we have to take care that the mind doesn't fall under the control of the delusions. Instead of letting the mind fall under the control of the delusions, we have to focus it internally.

Then, after having focused the mind internally and not letting it engage with external objects, place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. The mind should enter the coming and going of the breath, becoming one with it. Here it is also important that the meditation object appears clearly to the mind. If one doesn't have a clear sense of the meditation object, it will be difficult to focus on that object single-pointedly. We can meditate in this manner, on the coming and going of the breath, for some minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

I think it would be good if you could regularly meditate in such a manner, because it is very beneficial if you can train your mind in patience, so that the mind doesn't become agitated by small problems. Initially, one trains the mind in patience, so that it doesn't become agitated by small problems. This is beneficial in itself, because if we cannot control the mind when we have small

problems, quite often it will get out of hand, triggering disturbing thoughts, negative thinking and the conceptualising mind, which will become very difficult to stop. So if one can at least be patient with small problems, this is very beneficial.

Our daily practice should enable us to deal with all the small problems we encounter, because in the course of a day, we will be faced with many small conditions that can agitate the mind. We continually encounter small problems, disturbances and things we don't wish for, all of which can act as conditions for disturbing the mind. If we are able to practise patience with such conditions, and are able to refrain from being agitated because of those conditions, our life will be that much more peaceful and happier.

When we go through life, we always have to rely on others. It's not as if we can live our life totally independent of others. Since we have to interact with others, and since we rely upon others for our happiness, livelihood and so forth, it is important that we also have an attitude of benefiting other people and having consideration for them.

Other people's minds are just as changeable as our own. Our own mind is not always the same – sometimes we are happy, sometimes we are unhappy, sometimes we are angry, sometimes we feel strong attachment, sometimes the mind is pacified, sometimes there's lots of pride and so forth. The same situation applies to others. However, if we don't keep this in mind and allow the other person's behaviour to become the cause of not having a harmonious relationship with them, we will lose a lot of happiness. This is an important point, because one has to interact with others and live together with others, so one has to also practise patience with them.

4. How to guide the disciples with the actual instructions

4.1. The root of the path - proper reliance on the spiritual friend

4.1.1. How to generate certainty

4.1.1.1. The definition of a proper spiritual friend

Last time, we went through the different points outlined at the beginning of the Lam Rim – such as the way the disciples must to listen to the Dharma, the way of explaining the Dharma...and now we have come to the chapter about proper reliance on the spiritual friend. Initially, the text enumerates the qualities that a qualified spiritual friend should possess.

There are different definitions given in the different categories of teachings regarding what qualities a spiritual friend should have. We have the definition of a spiritual friend according to the Vinaya teachings, dealing with ethics; we also have the definition of a spiritual friend according to the Tantra tradition; but here we deal with the definition of a spiritual friend as a spiritual teacher who is qualified to teach the Lam Rim.

In the best-case scenario, this teacher should have the ten

qualities outlined in the Mahayana sutra, *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras*. In the next-best-case scenario, the teacher will have a minimum of five qualities. However, it is very difficult to find a spiritual teacher who has those ten or five qualities, so in a least best-case scenario, the spiritual friend should have a minimum of three qualities.

Since one cannot subdue another person's continuum if one's own continuum is not subdued, the first quality the spiritual teacher should have is the quality of being subdued. The continuum of a spiritual friend should be trained in the three higher trainings. When we talk here about the quality of being subdued, we are particularly referring to the continuum of that person being subdued by the three higher trainings – not just being subdued through any kind of realisation or understanding, but being well subdued through the three higher trainings.

Here, we can use the analogy of a person afflicted by leprosy helping another person who is also afflicted by leprosy. If the person with leprosy was cured through the recitation of a particular mantra, that person could help another person by giving them the same mantra. But first that person would have to be cured of the leprosy. Otherwise, if someone afflicted by leprosy gave other people a mantra, saying: 'This is the mantra that will cure you of leprosy', that person would not appear to be qualified to make that claim. Similarly, one's own continuum must be subdued by the three higher trainings if one wants to teach the three higher trainings.

Here, the text lists the quality of being subdued, pacified and deeply pacified, which the spiritual friend should have:

- a) Subdued - the distractive actions of the body and speech are subdued through the higher training of morality;
- b) Pacified - meaning that the conceptualising mind is pacified through the higher training of concentration;
- c) Deeply pacified - meaning that the mind is deeply pacified through the higher training of wisdom that pacifies the afflictions, particularly the root affliction of self-grasping.

In general, morality or ethics are defined as the mind of restraint, concentration refers to the single-pointed mind, and wisdom refers to discriminative awareness.

Examples of the higher training of morality would be the different vows that belong to the category of individual liberation. The concentration of calm abiding would be an example of the higher training of concentration. And the wisdom realising selflessness would be an example of the higher training of wisdom.

The difference between the training of morality and the higher training of morality is that the higher training of morality is held by pure refuge. If one's practice of morality is held by pure refuge, it becomes the higher training of morality, because morality that is held by refuge is superior to morality that isn't. The same applies also to the other two higher trainings.

Practising the higher training of morality or ethics initially pacifies the mind a great deal, because by stopping harmful actions of body and speech, the disturbing thoughts associated with those actions will stop naturally. The mind will be more stable and undisturbed, and remain more internally.

Through the higher training of concentration, one can pacify the conceptualising mind by attaining single-pointed concentration. Here, the two main obstacles to attain fully qualified single-pointed concentration are mental excitement and mental sinking, which one overcomes through the practice of single-pointed meditation.

One then overcomes the very subtle mental distractions – the delusions, particularly the delusion of self-grasping – with the higher training of wisdom. With the higher training of wisdom, one can overcome even the most subtle delusion, that of self-grasping. In such a way then the mind becomes completely pacified.

At the root of all of this is the higher training of morality. The higher training of morality forms the basis of the higher trainings of concentration and wisdom. When riders want their horse to go quietly in a particular direction, they will gently pull on the bit in the horse's mouth, so that they can guide the horse to where they want it to go. Likewise, morality – refraining from non-virtuous actions – stops us going in a harmful direction, and in this way, provides the basis for the other two higher trainings.

The essence of the practice of morality or ethics is to refrain from harming others. We can see why morality forms the basis of the Buddha's teachings, because abandoning giving harm, practising non-harmfulness, is the basic Buddhist practice on which all other practices are built. Without abandoning giving harm to others, all the other practices will not develop.

So, the first quality of being subdued refers to being subdued through the higher training of morality.

The second quality of being pacified refers to the mind being pacified through the higher training of concentration. If we rely upon the two 'helpers' – mindfulness and introspection – we can prevent our body, speech and mind from going in a harmful direction, and rather direct them to a virtuous direction. Through mindfulness and introspection, the mind is pacified and can calmly abide internally, single-pointedly. This becomes the higher training of concentration.

When we say the mind is totally pacified, this refers to the mind being pacified by the higher training of wisdom. In dependence upon calm abiding, which results in mental pliancy, one practises discriminative analytical meditation into the ultimate nature of phenomena. This then becomes the generation of the higher training of wisdom.

Therefore, first of all, a qualified spiritual friend should possess the qualities of having achieved the realisations

of the three higher trainings. However, having those qualities of realisations of the three higher trainings alone is not sufficient. The qualified spiritual friend should also be endowed with the quality having a wealth of scriptural knowledge. This means he should have listened to many dharma teachings and be knowledgeable in the scriptures and in quotations. Why? Because one needs to be able to give the disciples material that they can meditate upon and that they can contemplate and study. This is the fourth quality of the spiritual teacher.

We already talked about the higher training of wisdom, which was qualified as the wisdom that investigates the ultimate meaning. Here in the text, the next quality enumerated is that of 'strongly realising suchness'. So question arises why does the text again mention '... strongly realising suchness'?

The reason is that when one talks about the higher training of wisdom, it is usually sufficient to realise the selflessness of person, or the selflessness of phenomena according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika or lower tenets would still qualify as having the higher training of wisdom. However, when the text says 'having realised suchness strongly', this refers to the quality of having realised the subtle selflessness of phenomena, or, not necessarily having realised suchness with a valid cogniser, but having some pre-valid-cognition understanding of suchness, and being able to convey the meaning of suchness with logic and quotations to the disciples.

So, now we have five qualities: the first three qualities of possessing the three higher trainings; the fourth of being well-versed in the scriptures and having a wealth of quotation; and the fifth quality of strongly realising suchness.

Next comes the quality of having superior qualities, or having more qualities than the students. One should rely upon a teacher who possesses more qualities than oneself. If the teacher has fewer qualities than oneself, one won't progress and might even regress. And if the teacher has an equal number of qualities to oneself, one also can't progress. To be able to improve and progress, one needs to rely upon a person who has superior qualities to oneself.

In the sutra, it says that if we rely on someone with fewer qualities and less merit, we will degenerate; and if one relies on someone with equal qualities, one will remain where one is. However, by relying on someone who has superior qualities, one will also attain superior qualities. Therefore one should always rely upon the Buddha.

These six qualities that we have gone through are the six qualities concerned with the actual state of the teacher. The next four qualities are needed by the teacher to actually be able to properly guide and subdue the disciples. It is said that those four qualities are like the hand, which relies upon the arm and shoulder of the first six qualities.

So, just having those six qualities concerned with one's

own realisations is not enough for someone to be a qualified teacher. One needs to be also proficient in skilful means, through which one can guide disciples. It is said in the sutra by the Buddha himself that an Able One can't wash away the negativities and sufferings of sentient beings like washing away dirt with water. Also, a Buddha cannot transfer realisations to a disciple. Only by showing suchness and truth to the disciple can the spiritual teacher enable the disciple to become realised and liberated.

Only by teaching the Dharma to disciples can a teacher liberate them. The Buddha could only liberate his disciples by showing them unmistakably the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha couldn't wash away the truth of the origin in the mind of the disciples; he could only help the disciples overcome the truth of origin within their minds by showing them the truth of the path, showing them the truth of cessation, and so forth.

One needs to be able to skilfully teach and guide disciples along the way in order to liberate them, and for that, one needs to be proficient in the four qualities with which one can accomplish the welfare of the disciples. Just having realisations for oneself alone is not enough. I shall explain those four qualities next time.

Do you have a question?

Question: Sometimes I know that my actions have harmed other people, but from my side, I feel I haven't done anything wrong. From their side, they have been a bit upset with me, but I haven't done anything from my side that was meant to be harmful towards them. Is my action still moral? Is it their perception that made them upset towards me?

Answer: No, that would not harm your morality. Also, there are different types of morality.

Even if, from your side, you have no motivation to disturb your friends or to harm them, if what you say is harmful to them, there is some small fault because you have become a condition for them to be offended, for how they perceived it. So, although you might not be motivated to say something harmful, because you said something that they saw as harmful, there is some small fault there.

This is something one has to very careful about. For example if you just throw a rock behind you without looking, thinking that no-one's there, and it hits someone and that person dies, you would have a certain responsibility, even though there was no motivation or intention from your side. A case could be brought against you and you probably would have to go to prison! (*Laughter*)

Another example is a father who doesn't drive carefully and who has an accident in which his children die - he might still have to go to prison. He didn't intend to kill the children, of course, but because of his carelessness, he still had to go to jail.

Question: Geshe-la, would you explain the meaning of the hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva?

Answer: I can, but it's a little bit much. (*Laughter*) Also, it is difficult to comprehend, and I have already given that explanation many times, but maybe it hasn't sunk in yet! (*More laughter*)

It seems like it hasn't been understood fully, even though I have already given the explanation. At one point, I felt it was a bit of a waste of time, because it seemed like it wasn't properly understood. But that's also because it's quite difficult, it seems to be a bit difficult to comprehend the meaning of the mantra.

For example, when the mantra says 'Vajrasattva', in Tibetan it is 'Dorje Sempa'. The 'vajra' in Vajrasattva refers to the non-dual wisdom of bliss and emptiness. Does that convey anything to you? So, Vajrasattva means someone who is in the nature of the non-dual wisdom of bliss and emptiness, who has arisen in the form of a deity.

Then 'samaya' means precepts; the literal meaning of the Tibetan word would be 'holy words' or 'superior words'. Precepts refers to something that one cannot transgress. So there's a lot in the mantra.

Now I have given a bit of an answer to your request, so now you should try to think that for the time being that's enough! However, there are also explanations of the mantra in the texts if you look it up. Also, you can ask among the students.

Question [paraphrased]: The gist of the Buddhist teachings is that you do good to purify evil. However, the precepts seem like non-negotiable, something that monks do. If you don't take precepts, karmically what is the disadvantage – if we don't take precepts, are we ever going to develop spiritually?

Answer: Are you at a disadvantage by not taking precepts? Is that the essence of the question?

If you don't take vows, there's a certain disadvantage, a loss, which you get. People who take vows benefit, they get a certain gain. If you look who has the greater gain – those with vows or those without – those with vows have the greater gain.

For example, if there is someone with vows who engages in virtue, and someone without vows who engages in the same virtuous action, the virtue that is created by the person who has vows will be stronger because of the vows. Having vows makes the virtue one creates more powerful. However, there's also the downside that having vows also makes the non-virtue that one creates more powerful.

Questioner: Because you have transgressed the vow?

Answer: Not, it's not specifically the transgression of the vow; rather, if you engage in a non-virtuous action and you have vows, that karma becomes more powerful. So, it works both ways.

It says in the sutras that for some, morality becomes happiness, and for some, morality becomes suffering. For those who keep their vows, morality becomes happiness, and for those who break their vows, morality becomes suffering.

Regarding what you said – that it is easier for a person with vows to stop a non-virtuous action – it doesn't depend on the vows, it depends on the morality of the person. Whether someone can abandon a non-virtuous action easily or not, if they have a vow but don't keep the vow, there is not much benefit. Rather, how well you keep a vow depends on your morality. It's really morality that enables you to easily abandon non-virtue. The Buddha said that those who remain as householders can attain liberation.

Questioner again: Am I right to presume that morality is synonymous with non-harm?

Answer: Without going into whether it is synonymous or not, if you look at the action of killing for example, killing is regarded as a non-virtuous action. When you kill, you obviously inflict harm on the other person. So, by refraining from killing, you also refrain from harming the other person. That's the way you have to think about morality.

As was said initially, withdraw the mind from external objects, stop engaging with external objects and focus the mind 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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