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# The Condensed Lam Rim

ཨོམ་ཤུབ་རྒྱལ་མ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་པོ།

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22 October 2003

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We can practise some meditation as usual. Sit in a good meditation posture. The important point in meditation is that the mind abides internally and therefore you have to reverse the trend of the mind to engage external objects, and instead focus the mind internally. You have to stop engaging external objects and focus the mind internally.

Upon focusing the mind internally you then have to keep the mind focused internally with mindfulness. You should place your mind completely internally under the control of a mindfulness that doesn't forget the object of meditation. Introspection investigates how the mindfulness is meditating on the object and whether it has enough strength and whether it is stable or not. In such a way one can develop powerful mindfulness; something that is immensely important.

After having totally focused the mind internally place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath and meditate single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. The coming and going of the breath is an object without shape and without colour. Then as was explained before, keep the mind on the object, the mind actually enters the object, and keep it there with mindfulness and introspection. We can meditate in that manner for a few minutes on the coming and going of the breath. (*Pause for meditation.*)

As a beginner one should initially tie the mind to the meditational object and then, after having tied the mind to the meditational object, generate a very strong aspiration not to let the mind wander off; not let the mind be distracted by disturbing thoughts. Then, after having generated this very strong aspiration, you just remain in the state of merely being aware of the object. All one has to do is merely be mindful of the object. If one thinks of it in this way one will get a good idea of what it means to meditate. Remaining in a state of just being merely mindful of the object is the method for beginners to attain the first of the nine stages of calm abiding. It really strengthens one's focus and through meditating in such a way one can prolong the time one is able to remain focused on the object.

## 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 week we went through six of the ten qualities necessary for a qualified Mahayana guru. Today we will go thorough the remaining four. The six qualities that we went through last time were the three higher trainings,

having a wealth of scriptural knowledge, having strong realisation of suchness and having superior qualities to oneself.

The next quality is **the quality of being a skilful speaker**. There is a lot to be said regarding this quality, but basically it means that one can teach disciples according to what is necessary for them and convey the meaning in a way that is comprehensible to them. It includes teaching in such a way that what one says carries weight and has a certain potency, and in this way has an effect on the mind of the disciple. It also includes teaching with knowledge of what the disciple needs and so forth.

Then one needs to be **endowed with love** for the disciples. This means that one needs to have pure motivation for teaching. One should be free from looking for material rewards or rewards such as praise and fame and only teach out of compassion.

One needs to be **endowed with enthusiasm**. One should be enthusiastic about teaching students.

The tenth quality is to **have abandoned reluctance**. One should not become tired of saying the same thing again and again and be patient with the difficulties one encounters while teaching the Dharma.

We said before that in a best case scenario a Mahayana teacher will have those ten qualities but in the next best scenario the Mahayana teacher would have five qualities, which are the three higher trainings, the quality of having realised suchness and the quality of loving compassion. In the least best-case scenario the teacher should minimally have three qualities. The first quality being that the teacher should have superior qualities to oneself. Then, out of this life and the next, the teacher should regard the next life as more important and out of self and others the teacher should regard others as more important.

The teacher should have at least those three qualities. The characteristic of the teacher having more qualities than oneself is necessary for oneself to improve. If one relies upon someone who has equal qualities or lesser qualities one won't improve. So the teacher should have more qualities than oneself. If the teacher regards this life as more important than the next life the teacher doesn't practise the Dharma. You would have a case where the teacher doesn't practise the Dharma. In order that one can say that the teacher actually practises the Dharma the teacher needs to regard the next life as more important than this life. Then, in order to be able to say that the teacher is a Mahayana teacher (and we're talking about a Mahayana teacher) the teacher needs to regard others as more important than themselves. If the teacher regards themselves as more important than others one can hardly say that he or she is a qualified Mahayana teacher. To be a Mahayana teacher the quality of regarding others as more important than self has to be present.

If one finds a teacher that falls within any of the three cases that we stated then that teacher is the root of the path and one should rely upon such a teacher accordingly. Why is such a teacher referred to as 'the

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root of the path'? Sometimes we talk about renunciation, bodhicitta and the right view of emptiness as being the three roots of the path. Without the teacher there is no renunciation, no bodhicitta and no right view of emptiness. Only in reliance upon a teacher can one generate renunciation. Only in reliance upon a teacher can one generate bodhicitta and only in reliance upon a teacher can one understand the right view of emptiness. Therefore, in a way, the teacher is the root of the roots. Normally we talk about those three as being the roots of Dharma practice. The teacher is the root of the three principles of the path and therefore referred to as the 'root of the path'.

We have covered the different points of how to listen to the Dharma, how to teach the Dharma and the qualities that a teacher should have. Now we come to the qualities that a student should have.

#### 4.1.1.2. The definition of a student

The text has a quote from the *Four Hundred Stanzas*.

A student should have an open mind, wisdom and should have a desire for realisation and learning.

A student should have an eager mind, an open mind, should be endowed with wisdom and should have a great aspiration for learning and development. Someone like that is a suitable vessel for the teachings. If they meet a teacher then the teacher's qualities will appear to them as qualities and not as faults. If those three qualities aren't complete than even though the teacher is very pure the student will, through the power of their own faults, perceive them to have faults. They will also perceive the teacher's faults to be qualities.

An open mind here means a mind that isn't attached to its own point of view and rejects other points of view. If someone is attached to their own point of view and rejects another point of view they won't be able to see the qualities that are present in the teachings of the teacher, the spiritual friend, and therefore can't develop.

There is a quote by Bhavaviveka from *The Essence of the Middle Way* which says if one has fallen down one won't realise peace. This quote can be interpreted in different ways. Sometimes one interprets it as the mind going in a direction that can be related to the extremes of nihilism and eternalism, and when it says that the mind won't realise peace it means it won't realise emptiness. If the mind has fallen into the extremes of nihilism and eternalism one won't realise emptiness. One can also just interpret it in general as saying that if the mind has fallen into the extreme of being attached to one's own view and rejecting another view one won't obtain realisations.

Just having a mind that is open is not enough. Just having a mind that is not attached to one's own point of view and that doesn't reject another point of view is not sufficient. The student also needs to have wisdom. He or she needs to be able to discriminate between what is correct teaching and what is misleading teaching. If the student is not able to discriminate between a correct teaching and a misleading teaching they are also not a suitable vessel.

If one is not endowed with wisdom then one will be like

water that can be guided anywhere. Lama Tsong Khapa said, 'A student that has faith in the Dharma but that doesn't have discriminating wisdom is like water that can just be guided anywhere.' With pipes we can lead water anywhere. Someone who has just faith but not discriminating wisdom will believe whatever he or she is taught. In order to become a really suitable vessel one needs to have discriminating awareness; to be able to discriminate between correct teaching and misleading teaching.

If one asks whether those two qualities (an open mind and discriminating wisdom) are sufficient the answer is that they are not sufficient. Having just those two qualities without the quality of aspiration one will be like someone who is just watching the Dharma like a movie.

The sequence of these three qualities can be reversed. The student can initially have aspiration, then wisdom and then from wisdom openness can arise. One can also present it in that way. Regardless of the sequence in which they are listed, they are all really very meaningful. If, for example, in worldly terms one only has wisdom but no aspiration then one won't be successful. Even in regard to worldly success one needs to have aspiration for what one is trying to achieve. It is the same here.

One also needs to have respect for the teacher and the teachings and one needs to have a stable mind that is focused on the teachings.

If we look at what was said so far we have the four qualities of great aspiration for the Dharma, listening with a concentrated mind, great respect for the teacher and the Dharma and, while rejecting wrong teachings, keeping the correct teachings in mind. The quality of wisdom is a conducive condition for the fourth one and the quality of openness eliminates adverse conditions for the fourth quality of keeping the correct teachings in mind while rejecting wrong teachings.

The next major point is the way that the student should rely upon the teacher. Just having a teacher that has the necessary characteristics and a student that has the necessary characteristics is not enough. The student needs to rely upon that teacher. We can discuss that next time.

We have some time for questions. Do you have some?

*Question:* Geshe-la can you explain why we circumambulate the stupa?

*Answer:* Because it is a good exercise. (*laughter*) There are benefits. A stupa is referred to as the representation of the Buddha's mind. If you circumambulate the stupa while, for example, contemplating the qualities of a Buddha's body, speech and mind there can be a great benefit from circumambulation. One also circumambulates for the purpose of building up the accumulation of merit. Regarding circumambulation there are many stories about the benefits.

When we do a circumambulation we shouldn't just think that we are circumambulating this solid structure. One should think that the Buddha is actually present here. Then while you circumambulate you visualise that light

rays emanate from the heart of the Buddha that is residing here that into the ten directions invoking the blessing of all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. These rays of light come back in a rain of white light that absorbs into that Buddha and then from the Buddha's heart light rays again emanate towards you and purify you while you're circumambulating. You visualise that the light rays from the heart of the Buddha enter you through your crown while you're circumambulating and purify you. Performing circumambulations in such a way will give you a good feeling for what circumambulating is about. You can then understand the benefits a little bit without me going into all the aspects.

If you circumambulate a stupa that contains relics of the Buddha you will accumulate great merits – even if you just circumambulate without any particular motivation. There is nothing funny or strange about that because a relic of an enlightened being is something very special. In these days people they will spend a very great amount of money to buy some object that belonged to someone famous. People sometimes will spend a hundred thousand dollars to buy a hat that belonged to someone very famous. There is not really any practical purpose in this because they can't use that hat, but just to have it they would spend that much money. So there is no need to feel it very strange to think that the relics of an enlightened being are special.

When you prostrate you can also keep in mind the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech and mind and do the visualisation with the light. Doing circumambulations and doing prostrations is also a very good physical exercise. It definitely is strong, good exercise. Prostrations are the physical exercise of the Buddhists.

*Question:* A question about anticlockwise circumambulations.

*Answer:* No, no, you can also do that. If you practice the Chakrasamvara system you do anticlockwise circumambulation. When you're doing the six-session guru yoga and you recite the *Sixteen Line Praise* you visualise yourself circumambulating the refuge field anticlockwise.

In Tibet above Ganden monastery there was a particular stupa that was always circumambulated anticlockwise. It was said if you circumambulated it a certain number of times it would help cure leprosy. That stupa was said to be very powerful. I once went there to do circumambulations and many people afflicted by leprosy went there to do circumambulations.

In the Theravada tradition in Burma and so forth they will do the anticlockwise version because they think then one meets the Buddha who is circumambulating clockwise. Hindus will also do the anticlockwise version because they say if you do it anticlockwise then you meet god who is circumambulating clockwise. It doesn't matter if you perform them clockwise or anticlockwise.

*Question:* Am I correct in understanding that you said earlier that you cannot develop true renunciation without a teacher, without a guru? I have a conceptual understanding of the purpose and benefit to renunciation

so, in my mind, I have the thought or belief that I could develop renunciation on the basis of that. But what's been said is that that's actually incorrect?

*Tenzin Dongak:* But you have a teacher. (*Laughter*)

*Answer:* So where did that understanding of the benefits of renunciation, the faults of samsara and so forth come from?

*Student:* Um, it's come from a variety of sources. (*laughter*) Not any particular one, so, you know, ...

*Answer:* If you want to generate real renunciation you have to generate renunciation regarding the self-grasping that is the actual object of the renunciation. Otherwise the renunciation that you will generate will be renunciation that is like goose bumps.

For example, if you are standing in the rain and you are getting wet at that time you will generate some kind of renunciation but then later, when the weather is nice, the renunciation will go away. Likewise, if you are unhappy with the material possessions you have or you don't like them, you can go through a phase where you give them all away, but later it changes again and you again start to accumulate things.

There is a type of renunciation, an adventitious and superficial renunciation that we generate because of some momentary uncondusive conditions that we experience. This renunciation is called the renunciation like goose bumps.

For example I have had the repeated experience that students come to me saying; 'I'm done with relationships. I am over wanting to have a partner'. Then the next time I see them they are pregnant. (*Laughter*) There is this type of adventitious, superficial renunciation that we generate because of some momentary discomfort and some momentary experience of obstacles and adverse conditions. But that is not necessarily a really deep type of renunciation. This superficial adventitious renunciation is not very useful.

This renunciation is like goose bumps. Goose bumps arise temporarily but they don't stay.

As was explained in the beginning focus the mind internally and then place it single-pointedly on the mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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*Edited Version*

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