
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 meditate for a little while as usual. Sit in a proper and good posture – apart from that, I have nothing more to say. You know what to do, both physically and mentally. If you don't do it, it's your loss!

If you don't know how to do something and don't do it, that's one thing; but if you know how to do something and then don't apply it, that's a great loss. We can use the example of two classmates graduating from high school. One uses the knowledge he has gained and applies it, while the other just hangs around and doesn't use his knowledge. After a few years, when they meet again, the one who worked hard will turn up in a nice car, whereas the other one will only have the option of being jealous.

It's very important to work with one's mind: to use the knowledge one has gained and then work to overcome one's harmful mental patterns. It's very good to use what one has learned.

Every day, we should develop the wisdom to know which actions are right and which are wrong and act accordingly. When we see harmful thoughts and actions, we should work to overcome them and develop right actions of body and speech. To do this daily – even hourly – is important. You should spend 10 minutes every hour doing this.

Now, we need to stop the mind engaging with external objects, and focus it internally in order to overcome the disturbing thoughts. Let go of external objects and stop engaging with them; instead, concentrate your mind towards the inside. Then, from within that state, place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath.

You should place the mind completely on the coming and going of the breath, as if the mind is entering the breathing, then try to remain fully focused on it, even if just for a very short time. If you can initially do it for a minute, over time, you can extend this to two minutes, then three minutes, with the length of time progressively increasing. This is a good way of going about it.

We can meditate in this manner on the coming and going of the breath for a few minutes. (*Pause for*

meditation.) That's maybe enough.

When one starts one's meditation practice, one should just focus on doing a short meditation of good quality, and doing it regularly. For example, on the first day, one could meditate for one minute on the object of meditation. On the second day, one could extend that to two minutes, and perhaps on the third day, the mind could remain focused for three minutes. If one extended the time of one's focus by just one minute every day then, by the end of the month, one would be able to meditate for half an hour.

This is the way one should go about developing single-pointed concentration – by starting out with a good meditation of good quality that is not necessarily very long, and extending the duration day by day.

We have gone through the different points, such as the definition of a spiritual teacher, and the definition of student.

Now, we come to the part where the text explains how the student has to rely upon the spiritual friend. Here, we have reliance in thought and reliance in action. Reliance in thought is further subdivided into training in faith and training in respect.

4.1.1.3. The way for the disciple to rely upon the spiritual friend

4.1.1.3.1. The way of relying in thought

4.1.1.3.1.1. Generating faith

We had started with the outline of training in faith, where we had this quote that says 'one should view the spiritual friend as one views Shakyamuni Buddha'. When we know the qualities of the teacher and know how to generate faith in the teacher, the negative mind with regards to the teacher won't arise.

When it says to 'view the teacher as a Buddha', this has more to do with viewing the qualities of the teacher. When one is able to see the teacher as having all the qualities and not having any faults, one will see the teacher as a Buddha. Seeing the teacher as Buddha doesn't mean viewing the teacher as having all the marks and signs of a supreme emanation body, such as the crown pinnacle. Rather, it has to do with viewing the teacher's qualities.

One should train one's mind in looking only at the qualities of the teacher – not looking for any faults. In general, we should never look for faults in others. Atisha said: 'One shouldn't highlight the faults of

others; rather, one should highlight one's own faults and others' qualities'. It's the same with regards to the spiritual friend: one should not look for any faults but should only look at their qualities. The more the mind becomes trained in looking at the teacher as having only qualities, one will reach a point where one will view the teacher as having all the qualities and no faults at all, and that means that one sees the teacher as a Buddha.

If one views the teacher as having qualities and no faults, one will gain realisations. But if one looks for faults within the teacher and sees no qualities, one won't gain any realisations. If one looks at the teacher with a negative mind, one will be blind to his or her qualities – they will be hidden by one's own negative attitude.

When someone looks at us with a negative attitude, they will not be able to see our qualities. Similarly, if we look at the teacher with a negative attitude, we will not be able to see his or her qualities, and we will not get the benefit of the qualities that the teacher possesses.

If we know the correct way of training the mind to have faith in the teacher, the external appearance of the teacher won't become an obstacle for us, even if that teacher is not physically attractive.

Generating respect for the teacher is done by remembering the teacher's kindness. By remembering the kindness of the teacher, one will generate respect. Similarly, if one remembers the kindness of one's parents, one will generate respect for them, and also generate the motivation to repay the parents' kindness.

For example, Atisha regarded Serlingpa as one of his main teachers, despite Atisha's view of emptiness being superior to that of Serlingpa, because Serlingpa followed the mind-only point of view. Atisha had other teachers from whom he received the middle-way point of view, but because he had received the teachings on bodhicitta from Lama Serlingpa, he regarded Lama Serlingpa with the utmost appreciation – just hearing Serlingpa's name caused great faith and admiration to arise in Atisha's mind.

Even though Atisha had the higher view, and his teacher Serlingpa had the lower view, that didn't prove an obstacle to Atisha's faith, admiration and respect for Lama Serlingpa, because he regarded Lama Serlingpa as the root of the Mahayana Path. He said that from Lama Serlingpa he received the teachings on bodhicitta, and thus it was due to Lama Serlingpa that he was able to generate bodhicitta and the Mahayana Path.

Taking Atisha as an example, we can see the importance of the attitude of cherishing others. When we see the importance that Atisha gave to generating bodhicitta, we should do likewise. We should consider cherishing others as being very important and to do it to the best of our abilities. We all have a certain concern for the welfare of others, so we should act upon that concern for the welfare of others and implement it in our daily lives.

If we don't have the motivation of wanting to help others, we will not be able to benefit them. Therefore, it is important that one generates the attitude of wanting to help others, and the attitudes of love and compassion.

We have to relate this to our own practice. One needs to train in the minds of love and compassion. Love is the wish for others to have happiness and compassion is the wish for others to be free from suffering. One needs to train one's mind in those two attitudes, following in the footsteps of Serlingpa and Atisha.

Even between two people, for mutual benefit to arise, there needs to be an attitude of love and compassion. Without those attitudes of love and compassion – wanting the other person to have happiness and to be free from suffering – one won't engage in concordant actions; one won't act beneficially if one doesn't have love and compassion in one's mind.

It is important in relationships that one person respects the other's rights and has concern for their welfare, happiness and freedom from suffering; if one acts in concordance with these concerns, one can benefit the other person.

We should start applying our practice of love and compassion in day-to-day circumstances. Although this might only be in relation to a few people, it is still more practical than having vast and expansive thoughts of altruism while sitting alone in one's room, but which one then isn't able to implement in one's daily life. It is possible to feel expansive thoughts of love and compassion for all sentient beings and to feel very altruistic when one is alone. However, what often happens is that then once we are back in real life and confronted with others, we can't put those expansive and vast thoughts of love and compassion into practice.

Therefore, it's much better if we just have true love and compassion for the people we are in daily contact with, if we relate our practice to day-to-day life. This is where one has to start one's practice of love and compassion, and then widen it from there. There is not much value in having vast and

expansive thoughts of love and compassion while one is alone, and then not being able to put these thoughts into practice when one starts to interact with others.

We can explain more next time about the way of remembering the kindness of the guru, of the teacher. For tonight, perhaps we can finish with some questions.

It is important that we relate our Dharma practice to our day-to-day experiences –investigating what causes us to experience mental suffering and what causes us to experience happiness – and then put that knowledge into practice.

Question: Geshe-la, would you explain a bit more about Atisha being on a higher level and Lama Serlingpa being on a lower level? Isn't bodhicitta on the highest level of any teachings that Atisha would have had?

Answer: (Laughter) Here, we are talking about the view of emptiness. Atisha followed the view of emptiness of the Middle Way – the Madhyamika. On the other hand, Serlingpa followed the Mind Only view of emptiness, which is regarded as a lower view relative to the Madhyamika.

Also, we have to consider that this was according to how Serlingpa appeared to ordinary beings – as a person who followed the Mind Only view. In reality, this might have been different.

Question: What can you do about the dissatisfaction that arises from feeling you are not doing enough: not helping enough people, not good enough, not studying enough?

Answer: Do you mean being dissatisfied because one cannot fulfil the wishes and expectations of others? Is that what you mean? If you do mean that, don't worry, because there is no way you can fulfil all the wishes and expectations of others!

It is said that great compassion is important in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. It is important in the middle because, after one has generated compassion for others and has engaged in activities to benefit them, one may encounter sentient beings – and there are many such beings – who are ungrateful and behave badly. In such a case, it is easy to lose one's altruistic motivation once one is engaged in benefiting others. Then it is also important to purify one's own attitude.

Questioner's response: Say you're benefiting a couple of people and think, 'I should benefit more and more and more people'. You just feel like you're never doing enough. It's a sense of dissatisfaction of not doing enough practice...what type of practice I

don't know. Is it OK to just benefit a couple of people? *(Laughter)*

Answer: You have to look at where the dissatisfaction comes from. What exactly are you dissatisfied with?

For example, if you are concerned with wanting to bring about world peace, thinking about the situation of all people in the world and their suffering, and then generating some compassion in your mind and wanting to make all people in the world happy, that is a very difficult task.

One has to bring about benefit to others according to one's capabilities. If one tries to act beyond one's capabilities, it can make the mind uptight and hard. One needs to let go [of such ambitions] and recognise one's capabilities and then just act in accordance with what one can do. Then, over this lifetime and future lifetimes, one's abilities will increase.

Also, sentient beings have many different needs. There is a variety of ways that one can help sentient beings. Some sentient beings can be helped through one's qualities; others need material help; others lack friends and company. If one looks practically at one's present situation, it is not possible to fulfil all the needs of others.

The situation can also arise where one does the best one can according to one's abilities and one is completely satisfied with what one has done for the other person. However, the other person may be dissatisfied.

There was once a businessman who had to travel the same route by train again and again, and became familiar with certain porters at the different train stations. Normally, a porter would get 50 paise for carrying the bags. However, on this occasion, the trader thought, 'Today I am going to make this porter really happy and I will give him 5 rupees instead of just 50 paise'. When he gave the porter the 5 rupees, the porter demanded 10 rupees! So the businessman took the 5 rupees back and gave the porter the 50 paise and said, 'You can take your 10 rupees. There is no satisfying sentient beings'.

Question: Geshe-la, I'm presented with the situation at work of women wanting to have an abortion. Obviously, from a Buddhist standpoint, abortions aren't right. To what extent should we go to indicate to the person involved, considering they haven't come from a Buddhist background, that the abortion would cause greater suffering? How do you approach that when they're not coming from a Buddhist background and they're in the normal, daily world?

Answer: If they are not Buddhists, you don't need to tell them that abortion is bad. You have to be skilful in the way you talk with the other person.

First, you cannot approach it from a religious point of view and say, 'It's bad because the Buddhists say it's bad,' or '...the Christians say it's bad' – abortion may also not be allowed in Christianity and Islam. Second, you can't say, 'It's just bad'. Somehow, you have to encourage them to want to have a child, saying how good it is to have a child, talking about the benefits of having a child, and then making them want to have the child. For example, remind them of how nice it would be to be called 'mummy'.

Some families have many children because they don't practise abortion. I heard that in Catholicism they don't allow abortion, and that's why Catholic families have so many children.

(Student in audience comments that this is no longer true and that Italy has the lowest birth rate. Another student comments that, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there are 72,000 abortions here every year in Australia.)

Geshe-la continues: In modern times, it may have changed. Also regarding marriage and children, previously I was told that in Germany it was regarded as bad to have a child without being married, but that these days the ethics are more loose.

Question: How is meditation going to help someone who is diagnosed with approaching Alzheimer's disease? If someone you know going to be suffering from Alzheimer's disease is meditation going to be helpful to them?

Ven. Tenzin Dongak: Do you mean, does your meditation help them or does it help them if they meditate?

Student: I don't know...does it matter if I meditate or they meditate?

Ven. Tenzin Dongak: It makes a difference to the way I answer the question! *(Laughter)*

Answer: If the person meditates, it will definitely have a benefit. Also, it is important that one develops a happy disposition from a young age, so there is less likelihood that one's mind will be disturbed as one grows older.

You get situations where people start to hallucinate and imagine different things that are not really there. If the mind is very confused, then practising single-pointed concentration helps.

There is a discrepancy between what the person perceives and the actual reality; the mind becomes more and more confused. Meditation can definitely

help with those disturbed states of the mind. It may get to the state where our parents don't even recognise us any more, even though we are their children.

Question: Geshe-la, how do you know when to persevere and when to let go? Is there an easy way to choose?

Answer: You have to exert enthusiastic perseverance for as long as you have not achieved your goal. When you have achieved your goal, you can stop enthusiastic perseverance.

So, we will now focus the mind inwards, remove it from external objects, and place it on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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