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# 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. Please seat yourself in a good meditation posture. It is important that one subdues the unsuitable mind because the unsuitable mind is like a misleading friend. If we have an acquaintance who is actually an unsuitable person to associate with one can receive great harm from that person. Likewise, by associating with an unsuitable mind one also receives great harm. For example, one will be grumpy and frowning and unwilling to talk to others and so forth. Since one is inseparably bonded with one's mind one might as well choose a positive state of mind as one's companion.

The positive and pure mental states, positive minds and pure minds, are actually a real friend. They are an actual internal friend. To have as an internal friend a mind that is mellow and peaceful is very important. Even though one might lose one's external friends, as long as one hasn't lost one's internal friend, one won't be alone and one won't experience suffering. But if one becomes devoid of such an internal friend and, on top of that, loses one's external friends then one will feel very lonely and very sad.

One has to take responsibility for oneself, but what kind of responsibility does one have to take? One has to take responsibility to protect oneself, to take care of one's mind, of one's body and one's speech. The way this is done is to protect one's body from engaging in harmful actions, to protect one's speech from engaging into harmful speech and one take care of one's mind, protecting one's mind from harmful negative mental states. That is one's own responsibility.

Of body, speech and mind, the most important is the mind. If the mind is subdued then the actions of body and speech will naturally be pure. So out of body, speech and mind, the mind is the most important one. As long as the mind is not subdued, and as long as harmful states arise within the mind, there will always be something missing within one's life.... there will be some dissatisfaction, some type of internal hunger. It will be as if one is hungry and is not able to get enough sustenance. In order to be able to attain real happiness one needs to subdue one's mind.

It is very important that one subdues the mind and that one acts according to one's ability and doesn't engage in too much thinking. Of course we have to have certain concerns for our life.... how we live our life and so forth. But if we engage in making plans and start to fantasise about things that we are actually unable to do it just causes more problems. One should plan for things that

one can actually do. One should make plans for activities and actions that one actually can do and then engage in those actions and they will come along very smoothly. As long as the mind is unsubdued the potential of the mind will be dispersed by the conceptualising mind. In order to concentrate and focus the potential of the mind one needs to practise meditation and subdue the conceptualising mind.

Therefore you should stop engaging external objects and not let the mind be carried away to external objects by the conceptualising mind, and instead focus the mind internally. Then, after having completely focused the mind internally, you place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. The breath should flow very softly and naturally. There is no need for heavy breathing; for breathing that makes lots of noise. The actual focus of meditation on the coming and going of the breath is more the mental awareness of the coming and going of the breath than the actual air coming in and out of the nostril. Just let the breath flow very freely and softly and focus on that mental awareness of the coming and going of the breath. *Pause for meditation.*

In both the *Intermediate Stages of Meditation* and in the *Great Lam Rim* it states that during meditation on the coming and going of the breath that there should be no experience of air at the nostril. The meaning I give to this is that when we have an experience of the air flowing in and out of the nostril we have a physical sensation. It means that we have generated a sense consciousness. But a sense consciousness is actually a distraction because meditation is done with the mental consciousness.

#### 4.1.1.4 The benefits of relying upon the spiritual friend

The last time we said that the best way of pleasing one's teacher is to practice his/her instructions, to engage in the practices that have been advised and to stop doing what the teacher advises to stop doing. By engaging in the virtuous practices advised by one's teacher one would also receive the benefits from those practices. That's why the next outline is the benefits of proper reliance upon a spiritual friend. We also have to be aware of the benefits that we receive when we rely properly upon a friend. When we engage in the virtuous practices that one's teacher prescribes for us we have to be aware of the benefits that we receive when we engage in those practices.

The **first benefit** that arises is that one will become closer to the state of enlightenment.... to the state of a Buddha. By engaging in the virtuous practices prescribed by one's teacher one's qualities will increase and one's faults will decrease. The state of enlightenment is a state where all faults have been eliminated and all qualities been perfected. By increasing one's qualities and lessening one's faults one becomes closer to the state of enlightenment. That is the first benefit.

Then the **second benefit** is that the Buddhas will all be pleased if we rely properly upon the spiritual friend. Why? Because by properly relying upon the spiritual friend one will attain the state of liberation, the state of cessation of suffering, and that pleases the Buddhas.

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The **third benefit** is that one will also not lack a spiritual friend in the future. **Fourthly**, one will not fall into the lower realms. The **fifth benefit** is that if one practises what one has been advised by one's teacher then it will be more difficult for negative karmas and afflictive delusions to overcome one. One will be much stronger and much less afflicted by delusions and negative karma.

**Sixth**, by engaging in the virtuous practices advised by one's teacher one will not be in contradiction with the practices of a Bodhisattva and, by being mindful of the practices of a Bodhisattva, one's accumulation of qualities will increase further and further. Through this one will accomplish both temporal and ultimate purposes.

All the points mentioned relate to the benefit of becoming closer to enlightenment. If one properly relies upon a spiritual friend one will be less overcome by negative karma. **Seventh**, by pleasing the spiritual friend and engaging in, for example, praising the spiritual friend and so forth, and practising what the spiritual friend advises karma that would otherwise ripen into a very strong suffering in the future will ripen in this life with some insignificant result. This can happen even while praying to the teacher.

**Eighth**, making offerings to the teacher, different types of offerings and so forth, particularly the offering of practice, will be equal to making offerings to the limitless Buddhas. The merits that one accumulates by engaging in practices advised by one's teacher will equal the merits of making offerings to all the countless Buddhas.

#### **4.1.1.5 The shortcomings of not relying upon a spiritual teacher in the proper way.**

After having relied upon a spiritual friend there are also certain disadvantages if one the reverses ones reliance upon that spiritual friend. If one doesn't form a relationship with a spiritual friend that's different. But if one reverses from ones reliance upon a spiritual friend after having started to rely upon one, then one will receive various faults such as experiencing sicknesses and spirit harms in this life and limitless suffering in the lower realms in the future lives.

One should definitely abandon the non-virtuous friend in order for one's qualities and abilities to increase. One should take as one's example someone who has more qualities and abilities than oneself. Then, by orientating oneself toward someone who has more qualities, one's own qualities will also increase. But if one orientates oneself toward someone who has less qualities and more faults that will lead to a decreasing of one's qualities. Therefore, one should definitely abandon non-virtuous friends.

#### **4.1.1.6. Summary**

Then we come to the outline number six which is a summary of the chapter of proper reliance upon the spiritual friend. We have been through the different points in the past Wednesdays. Now we come to a short summary of all those points.

What we call guru yoga, the practice of guru yoga, is regarded as very special and precious and should be

engaged in according to the previously explained points. This practice should not just be very brief and sporadic but should be engaged in in a continuous manner according to the points explained previously. If one wants to get the benefit of this practice one has to engage in the practice sincerely and over a long period of time. If one just engages in that practice sporadically here and there for short amounts of time that would not be called guru yoga.

If one wants to practise the Dharma from one's heart then one needs to rely continuously on a qualified spiritual friend that can guide one unmistakably along the path.

One point here mentions the faults that one incurs when one doesn't practise reliance upon the spiritual friend properly. It has been explained how to engage in that practice and the benefits if one engages in these practices properly. However there are also faults if one doesn't engage in this practice properly. There are shortcomings. What can one do in order to overcome those shortcomings? First of all it is very difficult to really comprehend the practice of guru yoga, or proper reliance upon a spiritual friend, in its totality. Even if one does comprehend it, it is extremely difficult to practise properly. One will make faults. Also, many people are very unskilful, take many teachers without first checking their qualities and then later gradually criticize the teacher, feel more and more superior to the teacher and disparage the teacher.

So, the thought, 'How can I purify this negative karma', comes into ones mind. What One has to do is to confess and purify those non-virtuous karmas.

It is very natural for the mind to arise that asks, 'If I commit some mistakes in my guru practice what should I do?'. The answer is that one has to engage in the practice of confession and purification. That completes the preliminary topic of reliance upon the spiritual friend.

Next time we will come to the main body of the text. It starts with how to actually engage in different practices of meditation. Then it explains, in a brief manner how, after having received the instructions from one's teacher and one has returned to one's room, one should then meditate upon those instructions. That method of meditation can then be applied to all the different topics of meditation, not just the topic of meditation of proper reliance upon a spiritual friend. It can be related to all the other topics of meditation as well. At this point, the six preparatory practices will be explained. Now for tonight, do you have some questions?

*Question: We from out side should take someone with more qualities as our example, but if I only have a little bit of Dharma wisdom can those around me who have lesser qualities as myself rely upon me?*

Your friends do not have to rely on you. They can also rely upon others. They can also take others as an example. It's not as if they have to take you as an example. You don't have to hold onto your friends. You can also refer them to someone who has even more qualities.

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If you are someone who has a really open mind and is really concerned for the welfare of your friends and acquaintances then you will refer them to someone who has more qualities. If a teacher knows there's someone else who can teach even better than and it would be good for the student to go those teachings then of course a good teacher would that student to go there. If a teacher has a very egotistical mind than he won't let the students go to other teachers with more qualities, even if it would be beneficial for them

It is said that if two people with wisdom engage in a debate then, through that debate, new wisdom will be generated. Sometimes great and learned Geshe debate with boys learning the introductory debating topics.

*Question inaudible. Geshe-la, I didn't understand that last point [in the main talk, about going to teachings where there are many people??]. I thought you were saying that one of the difficulties for teachers is if they teach a large crowd it will generate...*

Translator clarifies. No, no...it's my fault. But also you misunderstood it even further (*laughter*) Geshe-la was referring to the situation where people receive teachings from many different teachers, particularly without first confirming that they actually want to take that teacher as their teacher. They just go and listen to the teacher and establish a relationship. Later they start criticising the teacher, break the relationship and so forth.

Before relying upon a teacher one should analyse the teacher, checking whether the teacher really has all the qualities that are required to be a qualified teacher. Then, when one feels that the teacher has all the qualities, one relies upon that teacher. Otherwise people go into a teacher-disciple relationship quite enthusiastically but with no discrimination. After some time then they start to feel that the teacher has less and less qualities and they feel more and more superior to the teacher and so forth. In that way one receives the faults of breaking the teacher-disciple relationship and then those faults have to be purified.

*Question inaudible. I misunderstood about the aim to subdue the conceptualising mind. Does that apply to all conceptual thoughts? Because during the teaching I am required to analyse what I hear etc.?*

When we say to subdue the conceptualising mind it refers, of course, to the harmful conceptualising concepts. The harmful thoughts. In general, we have many different types of thoughts, of conceptualising minds. There are harmful ones, there are positive ones and so forth. When we talk about subduing the conceptualising mind it refers to the harmful conceptualising mind, the harmful thoughts.

No more questions?

As was explained, focus the mind internally, not engaging external objects, but instead totally focus it internally, and then place it single-pointedly on the name mantra of the Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

I have a good story to tell regarding thoughts such as, 'Oh, he has lesser qualities than I'. But I'm not going to tell it now (*laughter*).

When we were in north-east India, in Baksa, there were about 1,500 monks. There was one Geshe from Drepung and one Geshe from Sera Je and they belonged to the same class. The debating session always started with one on one debate. Because there were many monks in that class these two never got a chance to debate together. The Geshe from Drepung actually had a low opinion of the Sera Je Geshe. He thought, 'I don't think that he actually knows philosophy very well'. He didn't have a very high opinion of the knowledge of the Sera Je Geshe.

One time it came about that there was no-one else left to debate with and these two had to debate together. The Drepung Geshe did the debating and the Sera Je Geshe did the answering. Because the Sera Je Geshe gave such good answers, such sharp answers, the debate of the Drepung Geshe didn't get into any flow. He didn't get to debate very much because he was constantly thrown by the good answers of the Sera Je Geshe.

The next time that they debated together the Sera Je Geshe did the debating and the Drepung Geshe did the answering. The Sera Je Geshe debated so well that the Drepung Geshe didn't get to say much. After that he completely reversed his opinion of the Sera Je Geshe. His mind changed.

I personally know both of them. They are actually both very knowledgeable Geshe, but at the beginning, one Geshe thought, 'Oh, I don't think he knows very much'. The Drepung Geshe told me that initially he had a very low opinion of the Sera Je Geshe but after having debated him he told me, 'I don't know. There's nothing I can do, I always lose when I debate with him' (*laughter*).

It's very difficult to ascertain the qualities of another person. The qualities of another person lie within, they're internal. There is nothing external so it very difficult to actually ascertain the state of the mind of the other person and the qualities of the other person. The stripes of the tiger are external. The appearance of the tiger is something external, the stripes and so forth. But human qualities lie within. They're internal.

*Transcribed from tape by Gabrielle Thomson*

*Edit 1 by John Burch*

*Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak*

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