
The Condensed Lam Rim

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We can meditate for a little while as usual. Sit in a proper physical meditation posture.

Merely seating yourself in a good meditation posture is not enough. You also need to take care of the mind, to properly protect it. As the great Bodhisattva Shantideva said, one is to know the psychology of the mind, the way the mind works. If one doesn't understand the psychology of the mind, then regardless of the actions one engages in to attain happiness, one will not achieve that aim.

Therefore, it is important that one starts to get a grip on the mind. All our activities are aimed at attaining happiness, but if we don't understand the psychology of the mind, we will not be able to achieve that aim.

We have to understand which objects we should direct our mind to, when to rein in the mind, and how to focus the mind single-pointedly on one meditation object. To achieve that, one has to stop engaging external objects, and rather focus the mind internally. One has to stop the conceptualising mind being distracted by external objects, and focus it internally. When one has focused the mind internally on the meditation object, the focus should be such that one doesn't lose it even a little bit. The focus on the meditation object should be total.

In order to get a grip on the mind, one has to focus it single-pointedly on the meditation object with mindfulness. It is important that one achieves this total focus on the meditation object with mindfulness supported by mental introspection. Shantideva says, 'I implore you with folded hands to attain this single-pointed focus with mindfulness and introspection, and not to give up this focus that is supported by mindfulness and introspection, even if it is at the cost of your life'.

The significance is that by attaining this total focus on the meditation object with mindfulness and introspection, one can break the control of the mind by the afflictive delusions; by breaking the control of the mind by the afflictive delusions one is able to attain real happiness.

Otherwise, although we aim to attain happiness, all our activities will become fruitless. To achieve real happiness, one needs to get a grip on the mind, to subdue the mind in the prescribed manner, with mindfulness and introspection. We need to learn to increase the positive and virtuous minds that facilitate inner happiness. We need to learn to recognise and reduce the harmful states of the mind that cause distress and suffering. This is the purpose of practising meditation.

So, on the basis of sitting in the proper meditation posture, don't let your mind fall under the control of the disturbing thoughts that distract it toward external objects; rather, focus the mind internally. Then, after having totally collected your mind internally, place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. Here, the way in which the mind is placed single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath is that the mind actually enters the coming and going of the breath. We can meditate in this manner on the coming and going of the breath for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

You should try to practise in such a manner on a regular basis, and consider those points that I mentioned. I think that would be very beneficial for you.

4. How to guide the disciples with the actual instructions

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

Previously, we talked about the way of proper reliance upon a spiritual friend: here, we have the way of relying in thought and the way of relying in action. The way of relying in thought is divided into the generation of faith and the generation of respect. We then mentioned the different ways of relying in action upon the spiritual friend, and went through the benefits of doing so and the disadvantages of not doing so.

4.1.2. A brief presentation of the way to strive

The next outline is a brief explanation of actually striving in practice, meaning that after having received the different instructions on the important points of reliance upon the spiritual friend, how does one apply them when one actually sits down to meditate on those points?

Here, the text explains how to translate the points that we have heard previously into actual meditation practice. The way those points are translated into actual meditation practice is that first one meditates on those points in a brief and condensed manner; then, in order to ascertain those points more clearly, one widens out one's meditation in order to ascertain the points more clearly.

One can apply this system of meditation – initially meditating in a brief and condensed manner and then slowly extending one's meditation practice and widening its scope – to all the other topics of the Lam Rim, not only to the topic of reliance upon the spiritual friend.

Here we are dealing with the question, 'How do I actually meditate?' because without meditation, we won't make any progress. It is not enough to be told, 'You have to meditate, you have to meditate'. One needs to actually know how to meditate.

The way of striving is further subdivided into the actual way of striving and the necessity for striving in both ways – the condensed way and the extensive way.

The outline of how one actually strives, the actual method of striving is explained in two points: how to strive during the meditation session, and how to strive in

the post-meditation period (meaning in between the meditation sessions). This is again a very logical approach.

4.1.2.1.1. How to strive during the meditation session

First, the text explains what one has to do during the meditation session, but then of course the question arises, 'What am I supposed to do in between my meditation sessions?'. Both are explained in the text. One might not be clear about what to do during the actual meditation session. Maybe one thinks, 'That's the time when I'm supposed to go to sleep (*laughter*), where the explanation of sleep yoga becomes relevant!' (*more laughter*)

Some people are very clever. They say, 'I engage into the practice of sleep yoga', even though actually all they are doing is just sleeping. At the monastery, there used to be a special debating season and after the actual debates, our group would all sit and study and read the texts under the supervision of our teacher. One of the monks covered his head with his robes. When the teacher told him he shouldn't be sleeping and asked him what he was doing, the monk replied: 'I'm not sleeping, I'm just thinking!' (*laughter*)

The way of striving during the meditation session is explained in three steps: what one should do at the outset as a preparation; what one does during the actual practice; and what one does at the conclusion of one's practice.

Preparation: the six preparatory practices

What one does at the outset of one's practice as a preparation for the actual practice are the six preparatory practices that were explained by Lama Serlingpa.

First, one cleans the place of one's meditation practice and sets up representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind. **Second**, one sets out offerings in front of the representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind. **Third**, one sits in front of those representations on a comfortable meditation cushion in an upright manner in the seven-point position of Vairocana and engages in the practice of going for refuge and generating Bodhicitta. **Fourth**, one invokes the merit field in space in front of one. **Fifth**, we train the mind in the seven limbs, which contain all the essential points for the accumulation of merit and the purification of negativities and non-virtue. **Sixth**, we visualise the merit field very clearly, then offer a mandala to the merit field and make requests and prayers to the merit field for the great purpose.

Here, the *Condensed Lam Rim* by Lama Tsongkhapa includes the offering of the mandala in the sixth of the six preparatory practices. In other Lam Rim texts, the offering of the mandala is included in the fifth point, the training in the seven limbs.

- Sweeping the residence and arranging representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind

So, the first point is to properly clean one's place of meditation. Since one places representations of the

Buddha's body, speech and mind in one's place of meditation and since one then invokes the merit field – the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas – into that place of meditation, it would be improper to not clean that room first.

If we invite a king to our house, we would clean the house very carefully; likewise, when we invite the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to our meditation room, we should clean that place first.

When we clean the meditation room, we should not just clean it mindlessly but clean it with a particular intent – with the motivation of bodhicitta. First, we think that we have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, so we motivate, 'I have to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, and in order to attain that complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, I have to meditate on the graduated path to enlightenment, and for that purpose, I am cleaning this room'.

One generates this motivation at the outset, before actually sweeping the room. There's also a specific way that one can think and meditate while actually sweeping the room.

Applying this method is very skilful and useful, because one virtuous mental state leads to another virtuous mental state, so it is a very practical system. By following this method of meditating and practice, one virtuous mental state leads to the next virtuous mental state, and one's mind will be very happy.

While one is cleaning the room, the object one uses to clean it – a broom or whatever – one should think of it as the wisdom that realises emptiness, and the dirt being cleaned up and swept out of the room as the non-virtue, obscurations and negativities of oneself and all sentient beings. While one is sweeping and cleaning, one can meditate that one is purifying both one's own negativities and obscurations, as well as those of all sentient beings, and one can actually say those words while one is sweeping: 'I'm abandoning negativities, I'm abandoning obscurations'.

After completing one's sweeping practice, one can rejoice and meditate on the result: that one has actually purified both one's own negativities and obscurations, and the negativities and obscurations of all sentient beings.

Next, the text explains the benefits of doing that practice of sweeping the room. Being aware of the benefits of the practice will help us keep laziness at bay. If we are aware of the benefits of our actions, we won't become lazy about engaging in the action.

The first benefit is that one's mind will become clearer. If the place where we are is clean, this also helps to make our mind clear. Likewise, the minds of others will become clear. This is really true. If the place where one is living is neat and clean, it helps make the mind clearer. Another benefit is that the gods of the white side that protect Dharma practitioners will be pleased and will protect you. If you don't clean the room, the gods of the

white side won't be interested in coming to visit your house and will remain in space, but if the room is very clean, they will come. This is quite true. Also, one will accumulate the karma of gaining a beautiful and handsome appearance. By engaging in this practice, one creates the causes to be reborn as beautiful and handsome, and one creates the causes to be reborn in a pure land or in a god realm.

Next time, we will study an explanation of how to set up the representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind – how to set up the altar with the representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind. For tonight, however, we can stop and have some time for questions.

Question: Does the increasing characteristic of karma apply only to non-virtuous karma?

Answer: Of course, the natural increasing of karma applies to non-virtuous karma as well as to virtuous karma.

We can see the same occurrence in the external world, where a whole tree with many seeds for further trees can grow from one single seed. Actually, the potential of the internal karmic seeds is vastly greater than the potential of external seeds. The tree is only used as an analogy. The internal potential and the way it increases is much greater, and the effects also will be much greater and felt much more strongly.

Therefore, one should never disregard small karmas. How the awareness of the increase of karma is translated into practice is that one should not regard small karmas as insignificant, or as being too insignificant to purify. It explains in the sutras that one should not disregard small karmas, not think of them as insignificant, because a vessel will be filled through an accumulation of single drops. A sequence of drops of water falling into a vessel will gradually fill the vessel with water. Thus, one will still achieve one's aim through the continuous accumulation of small virtuous karmas.

One should not disregard small, virtuous karmas as insignificant nor should one disregard small non-virtuous karmas as insignificant – even a small flame could eventually burn Mount Meru. We can observe that while a small flame by itself may seem insignificant, if one doesn't take care and throws it away carelessly, it could burn up a whole country. Or if one is not careful with small flames in the house, there's a danger that the whole house will burn down.

Question: Sometimes we have greater opportunity to practise bodhicitta in this realm of existence as compared to a pure realm. Is it preferable to be reborn into this realm of existence so that we practise bodhicitta, rather than being reborn into a pure land where we have a limited chance of practising bodhicitta?

Answer: That depends upon the individual. For some people, it might be better to be reborn in a pure realm, and for others, it might be better to be reborn as a human.

In our case, it's probably better to be reborn in a pure land, because we are not able to bear even small suffering

– we don't wish to have even the smallest sufferings. However, if one takes rebirth as a bodhisattva in the human realm, of course there is vast benefit to human beings.

Our Dharma practice is very fragile, and as soon as we become sick, we become unable to practise the Dharma and unable to bear even small insignificant sufferings. If we look at the way we live our life, our youth is spent looking for excitement here and there; the middle part of our life is spent engaging in different types of relationships and spending time with one or another partner; and as one grows older, there's not much opportunity any more for Dharma practice. The mind is unclear and unstable, and it is questionable whether one will be able to be aware of the laws of cause and effect at an older age either.

Question: The visualisation of the merit field explained in the 'Liberation' is very complicated. Is there an easier way of doing it?

Answer: If you find the visualisation of the extensive merit field too difficult, you can do the simpler version, which is called the style of the 'all-encompassing jewel'.

In the extensive version of the merit field, you have five sections of the merit field – one in the centre and one in each of the four directions. Above, there are also two levels, but you can also just do the version that is called the version of the all-encompassing jewel, where you just visualise Shakyamuni Buddha as the embodiment of all the different Buddhas and deities and so forth.

Of course, if one is initiated into one of the different tantric practices, the visualisation of the merit field can be done in relation to the particular deity that one is practising, such as Yamantaka, Heruka or Guhyasamaja, but if one hasn't received those initiations, one just does it according to the sutra system.

Question: How about the refuge visualisation?

Answer: You can also take the visualisation of the merit field as a visualisation for taking refuge. There is a system where they are the same, and there is a system where they are different.

You can use the visualisation of the merit field for going for refuge, because when you go for refuge, if there's no refuge object visualised in front of you, you are not able to do the visualisations of the nectars coming down and purifying you.

If you're not engaging in the practice of visualising the nectars, it is also alright not to visualise the objects of refuge. So, if you don't engage in the practice of the purifying nectars coming down, you don't need to visualise the objects of refuge. In order to engage in the practice of the purifying nectars, you need to have the visualisation of the objects of refuge. But even if you don't engage in the practice of the nectars, and don't visualise the refuge objects, the refuge objects will still be there, because the refuge objects are all-pervading. So, when you go for refuge, you can just think that the refuge objects are there.

It is said that whenever one visualises the Buddha, the Buddha will actually enter that visualisation. The Buddha is all-pervasive. If the Buddha came and visited you in your room, you would be able to see this. So, you have to generate some hope of seeing the Buddha and think, 'In case I see the Buddha, then...'

Question: What should you do if two people are fighting each other and being abusive? Would you step in there and split them up or let them fight it out? What should one do?

Answer: If you could step between them unharmed (*laughter*), of course that's what you should do. But there is the danger that one of them at least might turn on you.

If you try to intervene between two people who are fighting, both parties might get the impression that you are actually helping the opposing side, and might direct their anger at you also, so both of them might actually turn on you! They might hit you as a mere protective reaction, thinking, 'I have to hit him before he hits me!'

Question: What's the best way to purify non-virtuous karma created in relation to ones teacher?

Answer: With the four opponent powers – this applies to all non-virtuous karmas.

The recitation of the Confession to the Thirty-Five Buddhas becomes the third of the four powers, the complete application of the antidote. In fact, when you go through the Sutras of the Three Heaps (Confession to the Thirty-Five Buddhas), then the four powers are present in that text anyway.

Question: If I want to get rid of attachment to an old friend with whom I am not together anymore what can I do?

Answer: You are quite young, how could you have an old friend?! (*laughter*) Only when you are a bit more grown up you can talk about old friends!!

I think that if you don't meet with that person, you won't generate attachment. It's very good to take care of that problem now, at a young age, and not let your mind be so overcome by attachment, because if you generate attachment all the time from a young age and get into the habit, as you grow up, it will become very difficult to stop; it will just build up more and more, and later it will create more and more problems in your life.

Also, in your case, it is good for you to rely on your parents if you have any doubt. There's no need for you to listen to what other people tell you. If other people give you strange advice that raises questions and doubt in your mind, tell your parents about what that person told you, and then listen to your parents.

Particularly now, at your age, you're not really empowered to fully decide what you should do. You're still at the age where it's good to rely on your parents. Even elderly people who have reached the age of sixty need someone to rely upon for advice, so when you're eleven, there is no doubt that you need guidance.

Also, you should focus on what is really important for

you at your age. I think that it is really important for you now to study well and to develop good qualities and knowledge. If you are a good person with good qualities, naturally others will be attracted to you and you will not need to have any worries about getting friends.

Also, if you study well and acquire good qualities now, you won't have any problems later in making lots of money; you will be able to buy a good car and a good house. So don't worry about having friends now or whether you will be able to get friends or not. If you now focus on what's important – to study well and to develop qualities – friends and a car and so forth will all come later on.

If you don't study well now and don't develop any qualities or knowledge, you won't be able to get good work: you won't have any money, you won't have a job, and you won't have any friends, because people will say, 'Who is that? She doesn't have any money. She can't even pay for herself when we go to the restaurant, and she doesn't have any job'.

I'm saying this to you because for some children, when I give them this advice, it has a benefit. Previously, I gave similar advice to one young girl when she was six years old. I told her to always put away part of the pocket money that she got and to put it into an account regularly, and by doing that, would accumulate money and later be able to buy whatever she wanted. These days, she is in her twenties, and she has already bought her own house. The parents told me that they were very pleased that I gave that advice to their daughter. They said, 'If we would have advised her, she wouldn't have listened, but because you said it, she listened'. So, now she has her own house and she also practises meditation in the morning regularly, so it worked out well.

As was explained in the beginning, collect the mind, focusing it internally, and then place it on the name mantra of the Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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