
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
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We can practise some meditation as usual. Seat yourself in a relaxed and good meditation posture. The point of practising meditation is to get a grip on one's mind and to protect one's mind.

The way one should take a hold of one's mind and protect one's mind is clarified by the great Bodhisattva Shantideva in his *Introduction to a Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. He gives the analogy of a person who is carry a basket of fruit on their head and who has to do so under the supervision of someone with a sword who tells them that if even one fruits falls to the ground they will lose a limb. The person who is carrying the fruit will, of course, take very great care that none is dropped. It is similar.

One should feel the same urgency regarding the arousal of harmful and disturbing mental states because of fear from the suffering result as the person in the example would feel in taking very great care that no fruit falls because of fear of the sword.

We have to look at the harmful potential of the non-virtuous and disturbing unsuitable mental states. Once we become aware of the harmful potential of those mental states then we will feel a very great apprehension regarding their arousal. We have to investigate which mental states are beneficial to us and which mental states are harmful to us. Normally when we decide whether something is beneficial or harmful we look at the outside. We analyse external objects. Here we actually have to look internally to see which mental states are beneficial and which mental states are harmful. Unsuitable mental states, even though they are harmful, very often appear as if they have a purpose. They appear as if they are beneficial. One has to be very clear which mental states are really beneficial and which mental states may appear as beneficial but are actually not.

If one practises the Dharma more and more and develops more understanding of the Dharma one feels a very great urgency to purify the non-virtuous actions that one has committed. One wants to purify the non-virtuous karma that one has created through the arousal of harmful mental states. One wouldn't be able to remain comfortable for any amount of time after the creation of that non-virtuous karma. One would realise that those non-virtuous states, and the karma that they create, are really the cause of all one's suffering. One would be aware of all their consequences and immediately want to purify them. One wouldn't want to wait around even for one or two hours. One would want to purify them straight away.

Real practitioners feel a great urgency not to let any non-

virtuous state arise because of fear, as in the example, of the suffering that they create. One has to investigate again and again which mental states are useful and beneficial and which mental states are harmful. Then, through continuous practise, through regular practise, one lessens those mental states that one needs to get rid of and develops and increases the positive mental states that are beneficial and that need to be developed. This process is very important because if one doesn't protect one's mind in such a manner then inner happiness will be elusive. It will be impossible to attain inner happiness and if one has not really attained inner happiness then one wont experience happiness whatever situation one is in.

Unsuitable mental states are harmful both to oneself and to others. Because of one's own inner unhappiness one causes disturbance in other people's minds through one's harmful actions. It is very important that one protects one's mind appropriately. One needs to protect the happiness of the mind. A happy mind is a mind that is undisturbed and not agitated. In order to attain such a mind one needs to avoid physical actions that cause agitation because agitated physical actions cause mental agitation, mental disturbance. That mental disturbance then takes away one's mental happiness and when one's mental happiness is taken away then, regardless of which situation one is in, one will not be able to experience happiness. Even if one experiences some essential pleasure it wont really provide the happiness that one is looking for because of the lack of inner happiness.

The inner agitation the in turn will also affect one physically. One will feel physically unwell and stressed, is unable to sleep etc.

We need to identify the mental states that have to be gotten rid of and we have to identify the mental states that have to be generated and developed. Then through our practice we need to lessen those that have to be lessened and increase and develop those that need to be developed and increased, the positive mental states. Both these processes actually go hand in hand. By developing positive and wholesome mental states then naturally the unwholesome and harmful mental states will decrease. By making the mind more tranquil and making it more peaceful, clear and calm the disturbed mind naturally subsides and is lessened. In order to achieve this aim the mind needs to be focused single-pointedly. If the mind is very dispersed, wandering off to all kinds of objects this creates mental agitation through the different afflictive delusions that are generated within the mind. One needs to focus the mind on one object.

One needs to focus the mind single-pointedly, not engaging external objects but instead focusing it internally. If the mind is wandering off to external objects then it disperses and very different types of delusions and disturbing thoughts are generated. Then, after having focussed the mind totally internally, having not engaged external objects, you place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath, letting the mind enter the coming and going of the breath. We can meditate in that manner for a few minutes.

(Pause for meditation.)

4.1.2.1.1 How to strive during the meditation session

Preparation: the six preparatory practices

Sweeping the residence and arranging representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind (cont)

Last time we covered the preliminary practice of cleaning the meditation room before practising. We went through the different benefits of that practice. Cleaning the meditation room has various benefits such as facilitating the generation of a clear mind. If one wants to clean up the mind internally then it makes sense that one first cleans the room in which one wants to do that internal purification. This doesn't apply just to one's meditation room. In general if the environment where we live is clean and tidy it brings happiness to the mind. If one is mentally unhappy and depressed and lives in a filthy, untidy and messy place then on top of having internal unhappiness it becomes more depressing to live in such a place. Tidying up one's living space is beneficial for one's own mind as well as for other people that come to that place.

Cleaning out the room is also an antidote against laziness. Why don't we clean up the room? We usually don't clean up the room or the house because we are too lazy. So there is a general benefit.

After having cleaned up the place of meditation next comes the setting up of the representations of the Buddha's body speech and mind. The representation of the Buddha's body is a Buddha statue which is placed in the centre of the altar in order to remind us of the Buddha. Then, on the right side (from the Buddhas side), you place representations of the Buddha's speech. This could be a Lam Rim text or another Dharma text, a Wisdom-Sutra etc. Then on the left side you place the representation of the Buddha's mind which is a stupa. If you have a vajra and bell they are also placed on the left side as a representation of the Buddha's mind. Then in order to remind oneself of one's teachers one definitely needs to have a statue of Lama Tsong Khapa.

The Buddha, the text and the stupa should be viewed as being the actual Buddha. The Buddha statue should be viewed as being an actual Buddha. The text should be viewed as being the actual speech of the Buddha and the stupa should be viewed as the actual mind of the Buddha. In such a way one places very strong karmic imprints on one's mind on a daily basis.

To recollect the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech and mind is very beneficial and meaningful and to do that again and again is also very useful.... very good. By viewing those objects in such a manner and by recollecting the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech and mind one will receive the blessings of the Buddha's body, speech and mind within one's mental continuum. The benefits of doing so are explained in the Sutras.

There it explains that by viewing representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind as the actual Buddha's body, speech and mind one creates the karma to repeatedly be able to see the Buddha in future lives. In

the Sutra it says that even should one just look at a mere drawing of a Buddha on a wall with an angry and upset mind, the karma that is created in such a manner will be the cause to repeatedly see the Buddha again and again in future lives. If we look at a drawing or painting of a Buddha with a mind of faith, viewing it as the actual Buddha, there is no need, of course, to mention that limitless benefits will arise.

For example, Shariputra was one of the major disciples of the Buddha and always went where the Buddha went and was practically inseparable from the Buddha. The karma for him to be able to do that was created in a previous lifetime when he saw a drawing of a Buddha on a wall and naturally generated within his mind the wish, 'That looks like a very holy being. I wish, I hope, that I will be able to meet that holy being some time in the future'. Through that wish arising again and again from looking at the painting on the wall that the karma was created for him to be a constant companion of the actual Buddha.

Applying that point to our own practice it makes one enthusiastic to create that karma. This is not difficult. We can just look at the Buddha statue in front of us and create that karma by just thinking in the right way. One just needs to think in the right way and one can create this very powerful karma.

The next step is to set out offerings in front of the representation of the Buddha's body, speech and mind. If one just sets out those representations but doesn't make any offerings it is a sign that one has no faith in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. It is very good if one has a place of meditation that is private and separate where one can do all of those things. A place where, after initially cleaning the meditation room, one can set up an altar with representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind and then make offerings. Practising in such a way generates a very good feeling. Having designated a place as one's meditation place it helps one to not forget about one's meditation practice. In the Tibetan tradition that room would be called the 'offering room' where one goes to make offerings.

The next point is the way of setting out the offerings, but we can go into that the next time. For tonight maybe you have some questions? We can have some questions and answers.

Question: I've got a Buddha head, a cast of a head, and I was wondering if I could put that on (an altar).

Answer: Some people only have the head of the Buddha. It is also ok to place that on the altar.

Same man further questioning: In the centre of my altar?

Answer: Whatever representations of the body, whatever statues you have, have to be placed in the centre. If you place a head in the centre it should be then also be viewed as being the actual Buddha. It is also ok to place a mere head on the altar and by visualising it as the actual Buddha radiating light which enters and purifies oneself it becomes a very powerful meditation. By meditating in such a way you get the feeling that you yourself are also

completely filled with light. It's possible to get that feeling.

Question: I was just wondering about the left and right. Is it the Buddha's left and right or is it ours?

Answer: When we're talking about placing the texts and statues on the right and left, that's the right and left not from one's own point of view but from the statue's point of view.

Question: Geshe-la, when I do my practice my two dogs want to come to me and I was just wondering whether the area should be an enclosed space. They sit between me and (the altar) and they sit behind. Every time I go they know that I'm at the other end of the house and they'll come.

Tenzin Dongak: You have a meditation room?

Questioner: It's not a room that you can close off, and it's a small house with a small yard.

Answer: It's perfectly alright for the dogs to come to your meditation. If you could recite some mantras into the dogs ears before and after the meditation such as some OM MANI PADME HUMs or some name mantras of Shakyamuni Buddha that would also be very beneficial. You can also tell them that you hope that in the future, through those imprints, in the next life or some future life that they will also be able to practise the Dharma similar to yourself now. You can tell them that you're praying that that comes about.

Some people say they find it very comforting when they have their animal close by during meditation. For example, some people say that they find it very comforting if they have a cat that is sort of snuggling up to them while practising meditation.

Question: Geshe-la. I live alone and very few people come to my house. If I have secret images do I have to cover them even though I never have any one to my house. Can I leave them uncovered?

Tenzin Dongak: What kind of pictures are you talking about?

Questioner: Tantric.

Answer: With regards to deity pictures and so forth it's good to be a little bit discerning. There are some that should be kept secret and that would cause people who don't have enough information to lose faith in the Buddha Dharmas. Those should be covered up.

Lady: Even if no one ever comes to my house?

Answer: You can put those up but cover them with cloth. That then becomes like an omen that in the future someone will come to your house. *(Laughter)* Another thing. If one is in the situation where the altar is actually in the place where one is sleeping then one also places a curtain between the place where one is sleeping and the altar. One should at least have a covering for the altar that one can close at sleeping time. It is good to divide one's sleeping place from the altar in such a manner.

Question: Geshe-la spoke earlier, before meditation, about agitated physical activity

Answer: We have two situations here. We have one where you can't achieve a tranquil mind, a calm mind, if you don't abandon physical excitement... disturbing physical activities. Then there is the other sequence where the mind becomes disturbed and that mental disturbance creates a physical disturbance. For example, when a disturbed mental state such as anger arises, that anger also has an impact on one's physical body. One can observe the disturbance in the face of a person who is angry. It contorts the features of the person who is angry. *(Geshe-la speaking and making faces ... laughter)* Having a disturbed mental state disturbs the physical body. With anger you may get red eyes, red face and whatever.

Questioner continues: I was just wondering what agitated physical activity is?

Answer: These activities are activities that generate delusions. Physical activities that generate delusions are what are referred to here as the disturbed physical activities. Dancing, for example, would be such an activity. Of course if you dance with a good motivation then it is a different matter. But if you just dance with no motivation at all it agitates the mind and generates delusions in the mind and in such a way has no real benefit. The mind can't remain calm and tranquil while dancing.

Question: Is it necessary to have the statues blessed ?

Answer: It is said that it is good to have all of them, as you call it, blessed. Consecrated. In the process of consecrating the statue the statue is transformed into an actual Buddha and the actual wisdom beings of the actual Buddhas are invoked from their natural abode to residence in the statue. The actual enlightened beings are then residing in the statue through the consecration. Different mantras are also placed inside the statue as well.

It is actually quite an involved process. One just doesn't roll the mantras and then place them in the statue. The mantras also have to be consecrated themselves first. They are first dissolved into emptiness and then out of emptiness arises Amitabha. Then Amitabha dissolves into light and that light transforms into the mantras that are then placed into the statue. Many other substances are also placed in the statue such as powdered incense. They also all go through that process of being first transformed, dissolved into emptiness and then out of emptiness arises Vairocana. Vairocana then dissolves into light and transforms into those substances such as the powdered incense before they are placed in the statue. Consecration is quite a wholesome process. There are many more things that are done in the same sort of way.

Question: *(Inaudible but refers to people walking anticlockwise around the altar).*

Answer: Sometime ago we discussed that it doesn't matter whether it is clockwise or anticlockwise. We talked about the dog carried by water anticlockwise around the stupa and that that still created enough good karma to be reborn in the god realm. In the Chakrasambhava practice you actually have to circumambulate anticlockwise. It doesn't matter whether its clockwise or anticlockwise, as

long as there is circumambulation.

Lady: Inaudible but refers to keeping the altar secret.

Answer: If there are many things on your altar that are secret then you have to keep the altar secret. But, in general, it is good for everyone to see a Buddha statue. If you practise secrecy very seriously then you wouldn't even recite mantras with a mala in front of others, but keep the mala hidden.

We talk about secret mantric practice, secret tantric practice. There is a reason why it is called a secret. Those who practise openly in public wont attain realisations. Realisations are attained through secret practise.

Question: What's do you do if a mala string breaks?

Another questioner: Or a Buddha statue was broken while it was being moved?

Answer: Whether a Buddha statue breaks or not depends on the person. You have to look after a Buddha statue properly so that it doesn't break. And why would your mala break?

If a mala breaks you can change the string. When you change the string you have a string that is made out three strings. The string of the mala should be woven together from three threads. Ideally those threads should be woven together by a virgin. When you come to the practise of tantra those points come up.

There are various ways of blessing the mala with mantras. Once the mala has been blessed it shouldn't touch the ground. If it falls down after it has been blessed then you have to recite some mantras over it like OM AH HUM.

Questioner: I don't need an answer. I don't have a question. But to me it feels very much like attachment.

Tenzin Dongak: Probably if you could clarify the 'it' it would help.

Lady: To me, many say that even if you have stick in front of you, you can make it a Buddha. It doesn't really matter. To me it feels very much like a restriction, a confinement, an attachment. Where you put the Buddha, how you put the Buddha and then whether you walk left or whether walk right or whether you walk anticlockwise, clockwise. All these things feels so much like an attachment to do the right thing. Lets be free and do the wrong thing. Don't be afraid.

Tenzin Dongak: Well you see she didn't want an answer. (Laughter.)

Answer: The explanation is like a general outline of how to do things but there is no definiteness that it has to be done like that. There are also meditators who don't have a Buddha statue.

There is no need to do it like that. If, for example, you have a house you make a plan of where to put your things. You make some plan about the interior design of your house.... how you want to have the interior of your house. It is a little bit similar here. You might have things that you don't want others to see because they may get angry if they see them. So you will keep those things

hidden away. Those things we have to hide.

It doesn't have to be done that way. Sometimes we can also do it in the way we want to do it according to our own mind. You can do it in a way that makes one's mind happy and that subdues and pacifies one's mind.

As was explained in the beginning, collect the mind internally without engaging external objects, and focusing it internally and place the mind single-pointedly on the name mantra of the Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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