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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 practise a little bit of meditation as usual. Sit in a good meditation posture.

It is said that a subdued mind is happiness. Although we constantly encounter objects that are supposed to provide happiness, we don't experience happiness because we are unable to control the mind.

Instead of remaining calmly collected and focused internally, the mind is usually sidetracked and dispersed between all kinds of external objects. When the mind constantly gets distracted by different types of external objects, one loses one's mental happiness.

I think it is really crucial that we have mental happiness. If we have mental happiness, even if we lack clothes to wear and have to run around naked, we won't be bothered by it. But, if we are mentally unhappy, we cannot experience happiness, even if we have the finest clothing available to wear. That's my opinion – I might be wrong, but that's what I think! (*Laughter*)

We should not worry that subduing our mind and reducing our attachment and so forth will prevent us from accomplishing our aims. One should think about one's real aims. What is really the most important thing for us in our life?

In fact, we aim all of our activities aimed at being happy. And real happiness is mental happiness: if someone is mentally happy, it doesn't matter whether they live the life of a divine being or if they live like a ghost, they will be happy. If someone has mental happiness but doesn't have many worldly possessions, is poor and doesn't have a good job, even though others might criticise this person for not having a good job or not having enough money and so forth, such criticism will not bother them. No matter how much others criticise them, because they have internal mental happiness, that happiness can't be affected the criticism of others.

It is crucial that we establish mental happiness by looking after the mind. If we look after our mental happiness properly from early on in our life, that happiness will only increase over our lifespan as we draw closer to the end of our life. However, if we seek mental happiness by focusing more on external objects – placing our hopes in them and allowing the mind to be primarily occupied by them – while those external objects at the time will provide a certain arising of the appearance of happiness in the mind, as time passes, that way of attaining happiness will not work so well. Then, we will be left with having neither external nor internal happiness.

Although external happiness initially provides some appearance of happiness and comfort in the mind, later on, after a period of time, that does not continue. But, if we continue to take care of our mental happiness by looking after the mind, such mental happiness will only increase. At the end of our life, we will have a strong internal experience of being mentally happy and comfortable, which is what we want. If we think about, it is essential that we go through life with a happy, comfortable mind. To attain such a happy and comfortable mind, we need to subdue, protect and look after the mind, which is done through meditation. So, that is why we need to meditate.

I am telling you this is because this is the way I try to practise. It is not something I'm telling you just for the sake of it, but it really is the way I think – the way that I look at life and what I try to do. That is why I am sharing this with you.

Therefore, we should start now to familiarise the mind with virtuous and wholesome mental states that provide inner mental happiness, so that at the end of our life, even if we lack external friends, the internal friend of inner happiness is a conducive condition that will not fail us.

To attain this inner happiness, we need to practise meditation. On the basis of sitting in a proper, comfortable meditation posture, bring the mind back home, collecting it internally, and not letting it be distracted by the disturbing thoughts of external objects. Rather, focus it completely within. After having completely focused the mind internally, it needs an object on which to focus, so place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath, allowing it to enter the breathing. We will meditate like that for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

It is important to meditate regularly. We can decide ourselves for what length of time we should meditate – whether we feel comfortable meditating for a short time or for a longer time. However, it is important that we practise meditation regularly – this is crucial.

## 4. How to guide the disciples with the actual instructions

### 4.1. How to rely on the spiritual friend, the root of the path

#### 4.1.2. A brief presentation of the way to strive

##### 4.1.2.1. Actual way of striving

###### 4.1.2.1.1 How to strive during the meditation session

Preparation: the six preparatory practices

Last week, we went through the first two of the six preparatory practices: 1) cleaning of one's meditation room and the setting out of the representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind and 2) arranging the offerings.

After having initially cleaned the meditation room and having arranged representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind, one sets out beautiful offerings. This completes the first two of the six preparatory practices.

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### *The third preparatory practice*

The third preparatory practice is to first sit comfortably in the seven-point posture of Vairochana on a comfortable meditation cushion, then adjust one's state of mind, generating refuge and bodhicitta motivation. This third preparatory practice explains first, how one has to sit in the proper meditation posture and next, what one initially should do with one's mind. This is what the third preparatory practice is about.

You can see that when we go through these preparatory practices in the text, it really explains very nicely, stage by stage, how to build up a daily practice.

Regarding the meditation cushion, the meditation seat should be higher at the back to support one's back when one is sitting upright.

The significance of having one's meditation seat raised at the back is manifold. Obviously, it will help prevent one from getting backache, because if one sits on a flat meditation seat and meditates for long periods of time, one is likely to develop a pain in the lower back; this, however, can be avoided by having the meditation cushion raised higher at the back. From the tantric point of view, there are many things to be said about why the back should be raised, which have to do with the arrangement of the inner psychic channels and so forth.

Below one's meditation seat, one draws the sun sign, which I believe looks like a reverse swastika. One draws the sun sign below one's seat as a substitute for the double vajra. For example, on the brocade hanging in front of Geshe-la's seat, there is probably a double vajra; but, because it is not suitable for an ordinary being to sit on a double vajra so, instead one draws the sun sign.

Also, when we become enlightened, at that time, the ordinary ground is unable to support a being who is just about to become enlightened – the ground has to be blessed. This is why Bodhgaya is called 'the vajra seat'. Bodhgaya is the place where the Buddha became enlightened, and it is referred to as the vajra seat because it was blessed in the nature of a vajra so that the Buddha could attain enlightenment there. Drawing the sun sign under the meditation cushion also helps us to remind us of the life story of the Buddha.

On top of the sun sign, one places certain types of grass, called kusha grass – I don't know how it is called in English – and also long-life grass. So, there are two types of grass – kusha grass and long-life grass – which are both placed under one's seat on top of the sun sign.

The significance of placing the grass is to further remind us of the life story of the Buddha. When the Buddha became enlightened, he didn't have a nice thick cushion to sit on for meditation; instead, he had to go to a trader and ask for some grass. So, first he had to beg some grass in order to make himself some type of cushion upon which he could meditate. Ordained people are also supposed to practice contentment by being content with a very simple seat, such as a grass cushion.

The significance of the long-life grass is for

auspiciousness – to signify that one will be able to meditate for a long time without obscurations and problems. Also, the kusha grass is a substance for cleaning and purifying, so it has also this significance.

Then, when one is seated on the cushion, one must sit in what is sometimes referred to as the seven-point (sometimes eight-point) meditation posture:

1. The legs should be placed either in the full vajra position or in the half-vajra position. If that is difficult, you can also adopt the style that Tara is pictured as using. So, while meditating, you can pretend that you are Tara! The significance of sitting in the full lotus position is manifold. In tantra, one talks about the vajra position endowed with the ten features and so forth, but there is no need to talk about that here.
2. Then, on top of one's legs, one places one's hands in the mudra of meditation. There is much to be said about the significance of this particular hand mudra – regarding method and wisdom, and being like the Dharmakaya and the form body of the Buddha, and so forth. The emptiness in one's hands signifies the Dharmakaya.
3. Regarding the position of one's body, one's back should be upright, neither leaning forwards nor leaning backwards, nor to the left or right. One benefit of sitting with one's body upright is that the psychic channels within one's body will be straight, which means that the psychic energies that flow within those channels can flow freely and unobstructed – this then facilitates the generation of mental pliancy; it makes the mind more pliable and workable.
4. One's mouth should be closed naturally, neither left open nor clenched shut tightly. It should just be closed in a natural position. If the mouth is clenched shut tightly, this interferes with the coming and going of the breath. If the mouth is left open, the air flowing through the mouth will dry it out. The tip of one's tongue sits behind the upper front teeth, touching the upper palate. Placing the tongue on the upper palate behind the upper front teeth prevents the accumulation of saliva. If one meditates for long periods, there is a danger that saliva accumulating within one's mouth will start to dribble out of one's mouth! So, in order to prevent this, the tongue is put in that position. Placing the tongue in this position also prevents the mouth from drying up completely. If one meditates for short periods, all these problems usually don't occur. But, if one meditates for long periods, it becomes important to know about those problems.
5. The head should be placed just as Geshe-la is demonstrating, not looking upward or straight ahead, but inclined slightly forwards – not looking straight ahead or upwards (trying to look like a great meditator and projecting one's presence outwards!), but inclining the head slightly forward, as Geshe-la

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has been doing. There is great significance in placing one's head in that position. If one looks straight ahead or upwards, this creates problems. Rather the head should be incline slightly forward and slightly drawn in. If one sits upright, with the head in the proper position, one's nose should be aligned with one's navel.

6. The eyes should neither be closed completely nor completely open, but should gaze over the tip of one's nose. One doesn't need to fix the eyes on the tip of the nose – it's just an approximation of where the eyes should be directed. Placing the head in the correct position and turning the gaze inwards and down a bit has an effect on the downward moving psychic energies; it makes one's meditation more stable by overcoming the problem of mental excitement. The significance of the eyes being neither closed nor open is that if one's eyes are closed, over a period of time, a certain mental fogginess or darkness – a lack of clarity – will creep into one's meditation and become a part of one's meditation, which will be a problem later on. If the eyes are left open completely, this causes mental excitement.
7. One's elbows should be placed in a natural position at the side of the body. The elbows shouldn't be tightly tucked into one's body, nor should they be pushed too far away from the body. Rather, you should let them fall into a natural position besides the body, keeping them a little away from the body. This also helps prevent mental sinking.
8. If, additionally, we place the mind on the coming and going of the breath, this becomes the eighth feature of the Vairochana posture.

This position is called the seven- or eight-point position of Vairochana because this is the physical position in which the Buddha Vairochana meditates.

Another significance of this meditation posture is that it is a dependent-arising or cause to actually attain the physical form of Vairochana when one becomes enlightened. When we become enlightened, our physical form will arise in the nature and aspect of Vairochana. So, as a dependent-arising to attain that, one meditates in this position.

This is the seven-point posture, but there is no need to sit strictly in this posture. Sometimes, individuals find it more conducive to have slight variations or a different posture altogether. But, if one practices tantra, this is definitely the position one needs to assume.

In the actual outline of the text, it says to sit on a comfortable meditation seat, in a comfortable meditation posture. So, one's physical posture should be a posture that one finds conducive and comfortable to sit in.

Do you have a question or two?

Student: The two types of grass, are they available in Australia?

Answer: You can find long-life grass growing everywhere; it's possibly considered a bit of a weed that

prevents other plants from growing. For example, if this long-life grass grows on a field and one tries to plant barley or wheat, the wheat won't grow because all the nutrition is sucked up out of the ground by the grass and its roots pervades the whole field.

There is plenty of the other type of grass – kusha grass – in India and perhaps Thailand, but maybe not so much here. Probably you are not allowed to import it because of quarantine laws. (A student interjects that this grass is imported in the form of brooms.) You can't find the really fresh and clean kusha grass here, only the material that has been made into brooms.

Student: The fact that it is a different species in Australia, does it matter – the long-life grass you find in the fields?

Answer: No, the long-life grass you can find everywhere, but the fresh kusha grass you can't find – kusha grass that hasn't yet been made into brooms or whatever. Just the grass by itself you are not allowed to import into Australia for various reasons – I'm not quite sure about the reasons.

But this is just general advice – you don't need that type of grass in order to meditate.

Another student: I meditate in a chair because of arthritis. Should I put a picture of a sun sign under my chair?

Answer: Yes, that's alright. You can put it between your cushion and the chair itself. Of course, you can use a picture, but why not just draw it in white chalk?

Some people feel they can meditate better on a chair; some people feel they can meditate better while sitting in the vajra position on the ground; some people feel they can meditate better while lying down. It has to do with the arrangement of one's psychic channels and energies. That's why some people feel more comfortable in certain positions – there is really no hard and fast rule. It is also why some people are more comfortable with their eyes open, while others are more comfortable with their eyes closed.

There used to be a famous practitioner who was not able to meditate while sitting upright in the seven-point posture, but he could meditate very well in what is called 'the cow position', which means lying down. For some reason, because of karma, the make-up of his psychic channels was very similar to the make-up of the psychic channels of a cow. That's why, when he was lying down, he could meditate excellently!

You can meditate while walking or sleeping, because you can always contemplate, for example, while walking or while just about to go to sleep – that is very useful, very good.

Question: Is there any reason why the hands should be in the Vairochana position you described for meditation?

Answer: There are many reasons. For example, in tantra, the psychic channels of bodhicitta are in the thumbs. So, if you place your thumbs together like that and then place them at the navel, this facilitates the generation of the tum-mo at your navel and the arising of tum-mo fire.

When you place your hands with the thumbs touching at

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your navel, the bodhicitta channels in your thumbs facilitate the generation of heat, which then becomes the tum-mo fire at the navel. When the tum-mo fire rises, it melts the bodhicitta drops in the head chakra. The flowing down of the bodhicitta drops causes you to experience physical ecstasy, and this transforms into a meditation on emptiness – you generate an experience of non-dual bliss and emptiness in this way.

When we talk about non-dual bliss and emptiness, it means the blissful mind meditating on emptiness – the bliss of having a realisation of emptiness.

Student: Can you just give me a few pointers on patience? If you're working in a job with someone and you have very little time, and this person keeps putting more and more demands on you, and you have a friendship with that person, there is a point at which the practice of patience is not like the practice of meditating on your own on anger – in the end, I get very frustrated.

Answer: That is the situation where we can meditate on patience very well, as long as we don't encounter conditions where anger actually arises! (Laughter) You have to point the finger at yourself, and remind yourself that you have to meditate on patience. You have to point to yourself and say: 'Patience, patience, be patient, be patient, be patient.' (Laughter)

Of course, if you get more pay for the extra work, is there really anything to complain about? I mean if you got less money, of course it would be a problem; we shouldn't have the attitude of wanting a lot of money for little work, but if you get more money for more work then wouldn't that be alright? (More laughter)

Maybe also you can think that your friend is under some pressure and that it helps to relieve that pressure if they are able to give lots of work to you, so that they finish whatever they have to finish off.

If you can look at it from the point of view that, if you do that extra work that your friend gives you, it will relieve the pressure that they are feeling and will enable them to finish whatever they have to finish, making them happier and more relaxed. If you don't do that extra work, it will cause them more mental agitation and suffering.

Here, what is coming into play is our practice of love and compassion. Do you really want the other person to be happy and have less suffering or not? Because if the person is really a friend, shouldn't we always help our friends?

If you do the extra work, your friend will have the space to finish whatever work they have to finish, and in such a way, you can benefit them. When we talk about benefiting sentient beings, benefiting others, we really need to do this practice in this type of situation. If we don't benefit our friends in this type of situation, then when do we begin to benefit others? We need to benefit friends when they need the help, and by thinking of this situation in terms of love and compassion, this also helps you to practise patience.

As was explained in the beginning, bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards. After having focused the

mind completely inwards, place it single-pointedly on the name mantra of the Buddha.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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