
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. Since we have talked about the seven-point meditation position of Vairocana last time you should all adopt this seven-point position.

I think you would all agree that it would be very useful if you could fix the mind on one point. By abiding in the proper manner, both physically and mentally, one will generate a great wellbeing. Whether one wants to experience this physical and mental happiness is up to oneself. It is a quite difficult, cumbersome and unproductive process if we try to attain physical and mental happiness through external objects. The mental and physical happiness that we get from external objects is very limited and it's a very unproductive process. On the other hand, generating mental and physical happiness from the inside, through one's own effort, is something that is much more productive and effective.

When we don't receive the happiness from external conditions that we normally rely upon we feel empty and unhappy and depressed and one can see it on the face of a person that they are not feeling happy. But if one has inner happiness, happiness that is very stable and doesn't rely upon external conditions, it never fails. If one doesn't have real internal happiness and external conditions fail, then the mind becomes heavy and depressed, scattered and so forth. Having such a mind is a sign that one is lacking real inner happiness. All these problems can be overcome by turning one's focus and one's efforts towards generating real inner happiness.

If one is without internal happiness and one only strives to attain happiness through external means and conditions, then, when those external means and conditions don't come about or fail or go away, one experiences a great inner unhappiness and emptiness. In order to avoid that problem it is important that one strives both within the conditions that generate external happiness as well as with the conditions that generate internal happiness. I always say that method and wisdom should be combined. We should not neglect either of those two methods. We should strive to accumulate the conditions for external happiness and we should also strive to accumulate the conditions for internal happiness. If one's effort regarding internal happiness is not greater than one's effort regarding the attainment of external happiness it should, at least, be fifty/fifty. In this way one is very well prepared because this inner happiness, that is the real inner friend and refuge, won't fail one when one is in need. I think having this inner refuge is something very important for myself and I think

that it might be also important for you.

It is very important that one takes good care of one's body and mind and one analyses, 'What harms my body? What harms my mind?' and abandons those things that harm one's body and mind. It is really important that this striving for inner happiness should start as early as possible. It is very important for young students that one tries this generation of inner happiness from an early age onwards. It then becomes stable as one grows older.

When we meditate we have to focus the mind internally. We can not let the mind be distracted by external objects because the situation arises where even though one physically sits in the perfect seven-point posture, one's mind is wandering off to all types of objects. One might, for example, sit in the perfect seven-point posture but if the mind is occupied with an external object such as one's friend, thinking, 'My friend might come by today', then the mind has already wandered off to the friend and there is not really much benefit.

If one doesn't take care and control of the mind it starts to circle around certain subjects. Sometimes one even start to generate fears that have no basis in reality. One starts to worry about certain things that might happen or that might come about and then one artificially generates fears that are completely unnecessary. That's something to be careful about. So, bring the mind back home; focus the mind internally. This is done in a very gentle manner. You bring the mind back home from the external objects and focus the mind internally in this very gentle but complete manner. Through that you come into a non-conceptual space where the mind is focused internally and is not distracted with thoughts that want to wander off to external objects. You can remain in that space for a little while and when you realise that the mind again tries to escape to an external object place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. The mind enters the breathing. We can meditate in that manner for a few minutes. *Pause for meditation.*

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

6 Preparatory practices - c) Seating oneself comfortably on a comfortable meditation cushion and generating refuge and bodhicitta

Last time we already talked about the position that one should adopt for meditation; the seven-point posture of Vairocana. Sometimes it is described as the eight-point posture. When described as an eight-point posture it includes placement of the mind on the coming and going of the breath as the eighth point.

There is a specific purpose for placing the mind on the coming and going of the breath as the eighth point. If non-virtuous mental factors arise in our mind then our mind that is concomitant with those non-virtuous mental

factors becomes diluted by that non-virtue. For example with anger, we are angry it is very difficult to generate the altruistic state of wanting to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. If one's mind is in a non-virtuous state then it is very difficult to generate a virtuous state, a virtuous motivation for meditation practice, generating refuge and bodhicitta. Our mind is also not very stable, it goes here and there, and, if we try to focus the mind on bodhicitta it doesn't stay there. Therefore as a skilful means firstly the mind is placed on the coming and going of the breath.

This eight-point placing of the mind on the coming and going of the breath is a very skilful means. Instead of immediately placing the mind on a virtuous object one places the mind on the coming and going of the breath, which puts the mind into a neutral state. If one is in a non-virtuous state of mind such as being angry it is virtually impossible to go straight from the non-virtuous state of mind to a virtuous state of mind. It is more skilful to first put the mind into a neutral state. So one goes from the non-virtuous angry state for example to a neutral state and then, from the neutral state one can progress to a virtuous state of mind. That is the reason one initially places the mind on the coming and going of the breath and not immediately on a virtuous object.

If we have a piece of white cloth that we want to dye but the white cloth is dirty one needs to remove the dark stains before can apply the colour and get the proper effect. In order for the colours to really absorb into the white cloth the cloth needs to be clean. It is similar with the mind. In order for virtuous states to be able to take proper root in the mind the mind needs to be clean and clear. This is done with meditation on the coming and going of the breath. First one puts one's mind into a neutral state and then it is a good receptacle for the generation of a virtuous state.

To be able to properly dye white cloth with a particular colour we need to remove any stains, dark stains, dirty stains, from the white cloth. This is possible because the white cloth is, by its nature, white. The various stains that are in the white cloth are not really of one nature with the white cloth. By washing the white cloth those stains can be removed because the natural colour, the real colour, of the cloth is white. The stains are only adventitious obscurations; adventitious stains that can be removed and one can then dye the cloth in the colour that one chooses.

Similarly the different non-virtuous mental factors that taint the mind are not really an integral part of the mind. They only taint and obscure the mind temporarily. They are temporary obscurations that can be removed and are not an integral part of the mind. After one has removed them the mind is ready for virtuous states to be generated. That is why one initially meditates on the coming and going of the breath to make the mind clean and clear and purify it from those non-virtuous mental factors that would otherwise prevent and obscure the generation of a virtuous state. When the mind has become calm and clear it is ready for the generation of a virtuous state.

In Buddhism the primary consciousness is clean, clear and unobscured. It is not one with the different mental obscurations, the different non-virtuous and disturbing mental factors, that arise adventitiously within it. Those non-virtuous mental factors, the disturbing mental factors, are not an integral part of the root consciousness. The root consciousness is clean and clear and that is the reason why it is possible to develop qualities and lessen one's faults. Because the faults are not an integral part of the root consciousness they can be removed from the root consciousness. That is why it can be purified and why one can develop qualities and lessen one's faults.

By mentally counting the breaths one accomplishes this process of making the mind neutral, of purifying the mind so that it becomes ready for the generation of the virtuous states. By counting the breaths the mind goes from a non-virtuous mental state to a neutral state and the non-virtuous states fade away. One is then ready for the generation of virtuous states.

In this meditation on the coming and going of the breath, as we always explain, you have to focus the mind internally. After having focused the mind internally in a very relaxed and gentle manner you place the mind on the coming and going of the breath. Then you mentally count the coming and going of the breath. You have to have a good mental awareness of the coming and going of the breath. You mentally observe the breathing, now one breath is going, now one is coming in. And then again, one breath is going, another one is coming in, and in this way you can count 21 circles of coming and going of the breath.

One should let the breath flow very naturally and gently. There shouldn't be any noise. There shouldn't be any heavy breathing and there also shouldn't be any forced breathing. One just very naturally lets the breath come and go. In order to facilitate the mental awareness of the breath one counts 21 circles. Because the mind is focused on the coming and going of the breath and the mental consciousness is not able to focus on two things at once, one has basically diverted the mind from the attachment or the anger that was previously disturbing it to the coming and going of the breath. Through meditating on the breath in this a way one is able to let go of attachment and the anger and the mind becomes calm and neutral and clear and peaceful.

One can combine the meditation on the coming and going of the breath with a visualisation where one visualises that all of one's mental afflictions, delusions, mental disturbances and distress leave one's body with the out-breath in the form of black light. When one breathes in one visualises that one is breathing in white light that is the blessing of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. One can combine the basic meditation of the coming and going of the breath with this visualisation.

One doesn't have to do this. This is something that is sometimes done in order to make the meditation on the coming and going of the breath more powerful. But one doesn't have to do it. If one meditates on the coming and

going of the breath in conjunction with this visualisation one's meditation on the breath will be an actual Buddhist meditation. If one just meditates in general on the coming and going of the breath that is not really a specific Buddhist meditation. It is a meditation that is done in also many other traditions.

In a way this meditation on the coming and going of the breath tricks one's mind into letting go of disturbing states of the mind. To explain this we can use the analogy where one would like to sit in a comfortable chair but there's already someone sitting in the chair. If one just goes up to the person and says, 'Please get up. That chair's very nice and comfortable and I would like to sit there.' they're not going to get up and let us sit there. So one has to do something clever. One goes up to the person and says, 'There seems to be something really special going on over there.' (*laughter*) and then the person will get up and will ask, 'Oh, where is it? Where?' (*laughter*) After they have got up one can sit down in the chair (*laughter*).

The mental awareness of an ordinary individual is not able to engage two objects at once.

Here, making use of this characteristic of the mind one can divert, trick, the mind into letting go of the disturbed states of the mind by doing this meditation on the coming and going of the breath.

By doing this meditation the mind will be placed in a very nice, neutral, state of equanimity. This state then is a very good basis for the generation of bodhicitta and refuge. We can talk about that next time. For tonight we can have some questions.

Question: What about if my nose is blocked or I am not comfortable with the breath as the object.

You can just generate a mental image of the breath coming and going. Without focusing on the actual breath coming and going you generate a mental image of it. Ultimately, what is really important is the mental awareness of the coming and going of the breath, rather than having some actual feeling, for example, of the air entering and leaving the nostril. They say that when one does this meditation on the coming and going of the breath it should be done without an awareness of the air moving in and out of the nostril. The reason for this is that the feeling that is generated through the contact of the air moving in and out is, in a way, focussing on an external object. Your mind is still partially occupied with something external rather than having a good inner focus.

Even though this meditation where you just focus on the coming and going of the breath in and out of the body through the nose is very useful, as one progresses through the different stages of this meditation one will go to a purely mental focus. Meditating on the coming and going of the breath purifies the breathing and trains the mind in meditation on the coming and going of the breath. That becomes a very good preparation for later tantric practice. Meditation on the coming and going of the breath has been greatly praised by great practitioners such as Marpa and Milarepa. Vasubandu also explains it

in great detail in the Treasury of Knowledge.

Question: When I do the meditation with the black and white light it went the other way round and I breathed in black light and I breathed out white light.

You probably confused it with the meditation on 'tong-len', the meditation on taking and giving which is explained in the mind training practice. When we have trained our mind very well on the coming and going of the breath we mount this practice of taking and giving on the breath so it becomes combined with the breathing.

Having meditated on love one generates the desire to make sentient beings happy. The practice of giving, where one gives away all one's virtues, happinesses, qualities and merits to sentient beings, is an extension of the meditation on love.

The practice of taking, is an extension of the practice of compassion, where one takes on the suffering of sentient beings, their afflictions, non-virtues, problems and so forth. This practice can be mounted on the coming and going of the breath if one's mind is well trained in this practice of the coming and going of the breath.

It's not recommended to mount it on the breathing if the mind is not well-trained in the meditation on the breath already. But if the mind is well trained one visualises that with the out-breath white light leaves one's body and goes out to all sentient beings. This white light has all one's qualities and one's virtues, merits, happiness and so forth and makes all sentient beings happy and gives them all what they each need and so forth.

Then, with the in-breath, one breathes in black light, which is all the sufferings, delusions, bad karmas and so forth of sentient beings. One takes them off sentient beings and breathes them in and they are all absorbed into the self-cherishing and dissolve into emptiness together with the self-cherishing. First they are all absorbed into one's self-cherishing and then, together with one's self-cherishing they are all dissolved into emptiness.

That last part is important because if one stops the meditation after having absorbed all of those sufferings and problems, all the delusions and bad karmas, into one's own self-cherishing, and just leaves them there it, then it generates some un-wellbeing. They need to be dissolved into emptiness; become completely non-existent.

This can be combined with words from the Guru puja, where it states something to the effect of, 'Please, Guru, bless me that all the non-virtuous karmas, afflictions and sufferings of sentient beings may immediately ripen upon me, and may all my happinesses and virtues and merits ripen upon sentient beings as the cause of their happiness. Please bless me so that this comes about right now'.

One can also combine this meditation on taking and giving with the recitation of this verse and the breathing. It looks like you are doing this meditation and that is really a very good thing and I want to thank you very much for doing it.

Question: If I look at my children I can see that they are happy and have not yet that unhappiness one often develops as an adult. Is it possible to remain as happy as a child?

The point that I am making is that it is possible for us to have the same mental happiness that these children are experiencing if we start to take care of our mind from an early age. If we wait until we are old it becomes very difficult.

Also, children can be tricked into letting go of their own unhappiness. When they are unhappy or upset by something and their mother gives them a small treat they will immediately forget about their problem and be very happy with their treat. I had some experience with that when I was young. When I was in the monastery at a young age I was always very happy when my mother came from the village to visit me. When she left and went back to the village, then for some hours afterwards I was always unhappy. My teacher, seeing my unhappiness upon my mother's leaving would always send me off to play with the other kids. He wouldn't give me any duties or anything but he would send me off to play with the other kids. Once I started playing with the other kids there was no worry any more and the unhappiness was gone. As long as I had my mother in mind I was unhappy. When I started playing with the other kids I forgot about my mother and also about the unhappiness.

We should recognise this trait of our mind and make use of it. It seems that every so often we have to trick our mind into happiness. I always recommend going for a run. As you are jogging or running along, and are focused on the running, you forget about all the other problems and upsetting things and so forth, and the mind becomes very well settled and focused. If you don't make use of this characteristic of our mind and don't trick your mind from time to time when necessary, then the mind remains unhappy. It stays focused on this unhappiness. But if we make use of this trait of our mind and trick it in such a way it lets go of unhappiness and becomes well. There is also the situation where the mind is happy as long as one doesn't remember one particular object. But when one remembers this particular object the mind becomes unhappy. That is also something to look at.

Question 'I'd like to pass on that my granddaughter liked very much last Saturdays puja.. (laughter).

She sits very well during puja. She is very good, sitting in the meditation posture and reciting the prayers.

Questioner continue ; She also asked me if Geshe-la suffered from stage fright.

I'm a little bit afraid' (laughter). If you the audience smile at me then I'm quite happy and relaxed (laughter) but if the audience frowns at me then I become afraid (laughter).

As was explained in the beginning, bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards, and then place it single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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