
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 will do some meditation as usual. Sit in the correct meditation posture, which you have learned how to do.

As I have said repeatedly, when we meditate, we try to familiarise the mind with positive, wholesome mental patterns. On the basis of sitting in a relaxed, correct meditation posture we also want to put our mind into a relaxed space. However, there are certain factors in our mind that make it difficult for us; what makes it difficult for us to put our mind into a relaxed space are the disturbing thoughts. So, when we meditate, we have to stop the mind from being controlled by the disturbing thoughts.

Our mind is a creature of habit, which means it will always follow those mental patterns that are strongest and most prevalent. Even if we are able to bring the mind back home and focus it internally and allow it to remain in that internal non-conceptual state for some time, if the mind is in the habit of engaging external objects and being distracted by them, it will easily start to wander off to external objects again.

The reason for this is that the mental habit of being distracted and involved with external objects is very strong. Because it is in the nature of the mind to follow whatever habit it is most familiar with, that mental pattern will arise more easily and will abide more often and with more stability. So, if our mental patterns fall more into the category of disturbed mental patterns, that is the way the mind will go. But if, through Dharma practice and meditation, we change our mental patterns so that they become more wholesome and positive, that will be the way our mind will go naturally.

If our consciousness is strongly conditioned to engage external objects, our mind will wander off very easily. It is almost as if we don't have any control over the mind. When the disturbing mental patterns direct the mind to unwholesome, disturbing objects, they take away the power of the mind completely.

If one were at least to get some mental happiness from that, it wouldn't be so bad; if one were to associate with a misleading friend, for example, as long as one got some happiness from that association, it might not be too bad. But, if the association is not fruitful, it is not beneficial.

We also have to be aware that if we leave our mind under the control of the disturbing mental patterns throughout our life and don't do anything to change those mental patterns, as time progresses, even though our physical body loses strength and we become physically weaker, it doesn't mean that our disturbing mental patterns will

also naturally weaken. Actually, those patterns will remain at full strength within the mind, and what one will have is a situation where one will be physically weak and can't follow one's physical impulses any more; however, the disturbing mental patterns will still be strongly prevalent within that person's mind, causing them great misery, I think.

If we take good care of our mind from an early stage of our life, and take care not to develop new disturbing mental patterns – to decrease the negative mental patterns that we have and establish wholesome states of the mind – then, as we grow older, although our physical body will weaken, those wholesome, positive mental patterns will remain strong within our mind. If we take care, those positive mental patterns will gather strength over time, and although we might be physically incapacitated or weak, mentally we will be perfectly happy.

Therefore, one has to look at the benefits of wholesome, positive mental patterns and the harm that is given to us by disturbing mental patterns. That is why I always emphasise that we have to meditate to generate and develop those wholesome mental patterns.

We should be aware that as long as we don't generate and apply a mental antidote within the mind, it will forever be under the control of the disturbed mental states, and we will be without any freedom or self-control. We have to develop the antidote – an internal refuge that will help us to overcome and counteract those disturbed mental states. Through meditation, the mind will come under the control of wholesome and positive mental states, and that will be very worthwhile.

You should contemplate the importance of meditation for your well-being and happiness; you should generate such a sense of urgency on seeing how important it is to meditate that you will immediately want to start meditating right away!

On the basis of sitting in a correct meditation posture, bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards and not letting it be distracted by disturbing thoughts towards external objects. Don't let the mind engage external objects, but focus its attention completely internally. Then, from within this internal non-conceptual state, when you find that the mind is again trying to engage external objects, direct it to the coming and going of the breath and place it single-pointedly and gently on the coming and going of the breath.

Here, the mind is actually absorbed into the breathing; it is not as if the mind is looking at the breathing but becomes one with it. We can meditate in that manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Last time, we explained how, on the basis of sitting in the seven-point meditation posture of Vairochana, one adopts the eighth point of placing the mind on the coming and going of the breath as a means of bringing the mind to a neutral state, and making it calm and clear; on this basis, one can then adopt the virtuous motivation of refuge and bodhicitta. Whether one is placing the mind

on the coming and going of the breath or not, one begins any meditation by generating a virtuous motivation.

It is said that the motivation is the beginning of the meditation. We need to have some motivation that directs the meditation towards a certain aim. If we just sit down to meditate on a particular object without any particular motivation, it won't be that beneficial. However, if we first adopt a motivation for the meditation, that will direct the meditation towards a certain aim. Even if we just meditate for a brief time, we should still first adopt a virtuous motivation.

This principle should also be applied to the other practices of listening and contemplation. Regardless of whether we engage in the Dharma practices of listening, contemplation or meditation, we should always begin by generating a virtuous motivation, which will steer our Dharma practice towards our aim – in other words, our motivation is actually our aim.

This principle of first generating a virtuous motivation should be applied to any type of action we do. If, first thing after waking up in the morning, we could generate a virtuous motivation for the day instead of letting the mind immediately fall under the control of the disturbing thoughts and being distracted, that would be very good.

Instead of letting the mind immediately become distracted after we first wake up, we should collect it internally and generate a virtuous motivation for the day – first, reflecting that we are very lucky we didn't die during the night and that we woke up at all; then remembering that we have a precious human rebirth; and that we want to make this precious human rebirth worthwhile. Think: 'I am going to direct all my actions today for the benefit of other sentient beings. May whatever I do today only be beneficial for others and may I not engage in any harmful actions towards others'.

If we can motivate ourselves for the day in such a manner immediately after waking up, this will be very good. On the other hand, if we just let the mind be until after we have risen, the mind will have started to again be distracted and it will be too late; the quality of what the mind can do at that time will have already decreased to a great extent.

Immediately after waking up in the morning make the strong promise: 'Today I am not going to engage in any harmful actions; I am only going to engage in wholesome and beneficial actions'. Doing this continually, every morning, will have a positive impact on the transformation of one's mind. One will also develop the wisdom that can discriminate between right and wrong – between harmful and useful actions, and so forth. By training the mind this way every day, avoiding harmful actions and engaging in wholesome ones, over time we will engage in fewer harmful actions and in more and more wholesome ones.

This is the practice of watching one's karma. On the basis of the wisdom that understands right from wrong, harmful from beneficial, white karma from black karma, one motivates strongly in the morning, making the

promise: 'Today, I am only going to engage in positive, wholesome and beneficial actions'. Doing this every day would be very good.

Within this statement or promise – 'I am not going to engage in any harm and I am only going to benefit the other person; I'm not going to harm the other person at all' – the whole of Buddhist practice is contained. There is no Buddhist practice other than this practice.

If one makes such a promise to oneself in the morning, it will also have a positive impact on one's actions throughout that day; one will hopefully quarrel less with one's partner and engage in fewer arguments, and so forth.

By practising in such a way, one is really practising the Buddhadharma. It is said that the Buddhadharma is the practice of non-harmfulness. We should contemplate this point very deeply, so that we can also understand the significance of the practice of love and compassion in the Buddhadharma. One can't practise love and compassion without abandoning harming others.

The motivation before we engage in any type of action should be a virtuous one, so now, before we engage in listening to the Graduated Path to Enlightenment, we should generate a virtuous motivation of bodhicitta.

Regarding what we said before about the practice of non-harming, by engaging in the practice of non-harming, we are also engaging in the practice of avoiding harmful karma – in such a way, we will improve our mind and actions. We will also become more honest with others; avoiding harming others is also becoming more honest with them.

Now, we will generate the motivation of bodhicitta. In generating the motivation of bodhicitta, there is effortful bodhicitta or spontaneously arising bodhicitta. Although one might be able yet to generate spontaneously arising bodhicitta, one should generate the altruistic motivation of bodhicitta with mental effort, which will purify and beautify one's mind.

Externally, we engage in a great deal of effort to clean our bodies and make them presentable and nice. Likewise, internally we should engage in a great deal of effort to make our minds beautiful, nice and wholesome.

The motivation of bodhicitta is the altruistic wish to attain enlightenment so that we can accomplish the welfare of all sentient beings. However, when we just hear the words: 'This is the motivation of bodhicitta, and you should adopt this motivation', we will find it difficult to do so immediately – it won't arise immediately within our mind and we will also find it difficult to generate. Rather, it is a motivation that has to be meditated upon and that initially has to be generated with mental effort, again and again.

To generate the motivation of bodhicitta, initially we should reflect upon our great fortune of having a precious human rebirth, through which we have the very great potential to benefit all sentient beings.

However, ordinarily our mind is caught up in the pursuit

of attaining the happiness of this life and avoiding the suffering of this life. Our mind is completely involved with discriminating sentient beings into friends and enemies, so that we become attached to those categorised as friends and develop aversion to those categorised as enemies and then engage in actions to benefit some and harm the others. This attitude can also be found in animals – it is not specifically human. Animals also discriminate between friend and enemy, and they will engage in actions to harm the enemy. So, as a human being, because of our superior mental capacity and intelligence, we should adopt a more discriminating mental outlook than the one that animals also have. We should at least adopt the motivation of thinking that we will engage in actions that will, at the very minimum, benefit our next life.

Now, when one has a precious human rebirth, one has arrived at a very important and critical point in one's path. On the one hand, one has a great opportunity, but on the other, one has also arrived at a crossroad where one has to decide which way to go. Are we going to go up or down?

Recognising the significance of one's situation, one should make the motivation that one definitely has to engage into the practice of the Dharma.

We need to make the determination that we are definitely going to practice the Dharma. If we look at the course of our life, the end of our life is coming closer and closer, and the beginning of our life is moving further and further away from us.

We should be able to look forward to the end of our life with joy, contentment and happiness. We should feel as if we are on the way to visit a person who was going to give us a huge amount of money – very joyful, cheerful and happy! Or, we could relate it to the feeling of anticipation when we go out for a very nice meal in a nice restaurant, or any such occasion that we normally look forward to.

In the same way, through having practised the Dharma, we should be able to look forward joyfully to our time of death by deciding that we are now going to make our life meaningful by practising the Graduated Path to Enlightenment, and by dedicating our practice of the Graduated Path to Enlightenment towards the attainment of perfect enlightenment so that we can accomplish the welfare of sentient beings. This is the special virtuous motivation that should precede our meditation; next time we will explain more specifically the virtuous thoughts of refuge and bodhicitta.

In the Lam Rim, it explains that first one goes for refuge, second generates the special Mahayana bodhicitta motivation and third meditates on the four immeasurable thoughts. Then one engages in whatever practice one wants to do – meditating on emptiness, generating oneself as the deity or, in accordance with the Lam Rim, engaging in the Seven-Limb prayer and practice.

You might ask, if we have already generated bodhicitta at the very beginning of the meditation, why do we again have an explanation of bodhicitta at the end of the Lam

Rim text, where the practices of the practitioner of greatest capacity are explained?

The difference here is that we are presently talking about bodhicitta from the point of view of motivation – adopting it as the fundamental motivation for all subsequent practices and meditations. When bodhicitta is again explained later in the text, it is done from the point of view of taking the bodhisattva vows, generating bodhicitta in conjunction with the formal ritual and promise.

So, by repeatedly generating motivational bodhicitta, one will get a certain experience of bodhicitta; then, to strengthen that bodhicitta, one will engage in the bodhicitta ritual and take the bodhisattva vows. Thus, the later explanation of bodhicitta is given from the point of view of generating bodhicitta in conjunction with the ritual of taking vows.

The Lam Rim is divided into the practices common to the being of small capacity, the practices common to the being of medium capacity, and the practices of the being of great capacity. Here, the significance of the word 'common' is that we don't aim to become a practitioner of small capacity, nor do we aim to become a practitioner of medium capacity, but we still train in the practices common to those practitioners. We don't actually aim to become practitioners of those levels. This is a point worth remembering.

Question: Is it better to do the same meditation every day, or is it better to shift between different meditations?

Answer: If you engage in the practice of mental stabilisation, with the aim of attaining single-pointed concentration and calm abiding, you wouldn't change the meditation object. You would do the same meditation again and again. Once you have attained calm abiding – single-pointed concentration – then you can change!

When we engage in the practice of mental stabilisation, of wanting to attain single-pointed concentration or calm abiding, not only would we not change the object, we would also not change the size or the colour of the object. Once you have decided on the object's size, form, aspect, and so forth, you wouldn't change any of that later on; also, you wouldn't switch from one object to another object, and so forth.

When we engage in the practice of the Lam Rim, of doing the Lam Rim meditations, there is a lot of analytical meditation involved. Here, you could meditate on a variety of meditation subjects.

In principle, we have two types of meditation – analytical meditation and single-pointed meditation. When we meditate on the Lam Rim, although there is some single-pointed meditation involved, most of the time it is analytical meditation. However, if we try to combine analytical meditation and single-pointed meditation, I think that would be very good. We would do this by initially engaging in analytical contemplation of the meditation subject, and subsequently engaging in single-pointed focus on the meditation subject.

If you look at the process of mental development from

the point of view of listening, contemplation and meditation, really, first of all, we need to listen to explanations of a Dharma topic. Subsequently, we need to contemplate the Dharma topic that we have heard about, to generate wisdom arising from contemplation. Then, as one meditates single-pointedly on the understanding that is generated through contemplation, one generates wisdom arising from meditation, by meditating on the Dharma subject in conjunction with single-pointed meditation.

Thus, without having first engaged in the steps of listening and contemplation, one's practice of meditation won't progress. The wisdom of meditation must be preceded by listening and contemplation.

For example, initially we might listen to a talk about the benefits of meditation and we will get some understanding of that topic. However, this understanding is only generated through the condition of having listened to the teacher talking; it is not really an understanding of the benefits that we have generated through our own understanding. It hasn't come about through our own insight, but was generated through the insight of somebody else.

But then, we can contemplate the benefits of meditation that were explained to us, and analyse for ourselves whether they are accurate or not, or whether those benefits associated with meditation exist or not. If, through our own insight and understanding, we generate the realisation that meditation does have those benefits then, if we go to an isolated place or into a meditation retreat, there won't be any doubt in our mind that what we are about to do is very beneficial and we will know why we are there.

However, if we just go off to a meditation retreat or into isolation to meditate without having a really firm understanding of the purpose and benefits of meditation – just acting on some urge or idea – once there, we might find it quite difficult and think: 'What am I doing here? Does this really have any benefit?'

Question: When I meditate with my eyes open a bit, sometimes I get drawn into external objects around me. Is it better to have no external objects around me?

Answer: If we have very strong mental engagement with the meditation object, the sense consciousnesses will not disturb that mental engagement. However, if our mental engagement is not very strong, the sense consciousnesses will become overpowering.

That's why we normally say that it doesn't harm one's meditation if the eyes are open, because if one has a very strong mental engagement with the meditation object, one's sense consciousnesses are powerless.

The great Dharmakirti remarked on the significance of our mental consciousness, saying that we really have to make our mental consciousness the primary medium of our meditation. That is really what we have to regard as the more important consciousness. Then, when the mental consciousness is engaged properly – for example, if one is single-pointedly meditating on the meditation

object – the sense consciousnesses will be powerless.

We all know the situation where, although we may be listening to somebody else talking, because of being mentally strongly attached or attracted to another object – even though one is present and hears the other person's speech – we don't comprehend the meaning, because of being mentally strongly attached and attracted to another object. I think this is a situation that maybe many of you are somewhat familiar with. *(Laughter)*

Question: Geshe-la, when we wake up in the morning and wish for good things for sentient beings, is it alright to wish for good things for ourself, as well as wishing to benefit other sentient beings?

Answer: It is understandable that you might start worrying that if you have to generate this motivation of only benefiting all sentient beings that you will be left out.

However, you should understand that by having the motivation of wanting to benefit others, your own benefit is implicitly also accomplished. When you think: 'May my actions be beneficial for all sentient beings', that doesn't exclude you, since you are also a sentient being. For example, if you motivate: 'May I benefit all Australians', since you are also an Australian, you also fall into that category.

When we motivate to accomplish the benefit of all sentient beings, we will also have to accomplish our own benefit. From the point of view of Dharma, if we accumulate lots of merit through the condition of other sentient beings – who enable us to practise virtue – those merits are all beneficial for our own life.

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

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed from tape by Gaye Lewis-Radcliffe

Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine

Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak

Edited Version

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