
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
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We will do some meditation as usual. Sit in a relaxed and comfortable posture. The etymology (or derivation) of (the term) calm abiding is that the meditator calms down or pacifies the disturbing thoughts that distract the mind towards external objects, so that his or her mind abides single-pointedly internally.

We can also focus the mind on external meditation objects. When we visualise an external meditation object, it should be visualised at the height of the eyebrows, about one full prostration length away, in the space in front of us. It should be visualised to be about the size of your thumb, with a certain heaviness and brilliance. The brilliance overcomes the obstacle of mental sinking, while the heaviness overcomes the obstacle of mental excitement.

Although we visualise it as if it is an external object, it is really the reflection of the actual object in our mind. When we then focus single-pointedly on this reflection of the external object that appears in our mind, the mind should become one with that reflection of the object.

Disturbing thoughts artificially create many problems. They create suffering where there is no suffering, and worries about things that we don't need to worry about, making the mind miserable and very tired. The mind feels as if it doesn't have any strength. We feel empty and, whatever what work we engage in, it feels pointless. These are some of the problems created by the disturbing thoughts.

In order to overcome these disturbing thoughts, we should focus the mind on an internal meditation object, such as a visualisation, which is actually just a reflection of an outer object. We absorb the mind into that meditation object, remaining in that single-pointed state for some time. When we find that the mind tries to escape to an external object again and again, it is better if we just take a break from the meditation and relax the mind, letting it engage with external objects. Then, after having a short rest, we should again focus the mind internally, again having a good meditation for a brief time.

This process is better than doing it the other way around, where one may be sitting for a certain amount of time, but all one is doing is constantly bringing the mind back to the meditation object after it keeps wandering off. If we meditate in such a way, we will not get anywhere – all we are doing is constantly bringing the wandering mind back to the object. That is not very fruitful. What one should be doing is to have this total focus, even if only for a very brief time – that is sufficient. Then, one can take a break, before again having this total focus for a brief time,

then taking a break again. Over time, the duration of one's single-pointed concentration will increase.

Because the mind is a creature of habit, if we get into the habit of meditating in a back and forth manner – bringing the mind back to the object, letting it wander off again, bringing it back to the object before it wanders off again – the mind will become accustomed to that pattern. We know, for example, that certain people with a restless nature cannot keep a job for more than a few months; due to their restless nature they have to keep changing jobs again and again, simply because their mind is so accustomed to being restless.

If we want to achieve a sustained, single-pointed focus, we shouldn't even start this habit of allowing the mind to wander off, bringing it back to the meditation object, letting it wander off, and bringing it back again. Rather, we should accustom the mind from the very beginning to having very good single-pointed focus – even if that single-pointed focus is just for a brief time. We can just have this brief single-pointed focus, then relax the mind, and then have single-pointed focus again. Over time, one's single-pointed focus will naturally be prolonged.

On the basis of sitting in the proper meditation posture, bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards and not letting it be distracted by thoughts that want to engage external objects. Rather, focus the mind completely internally, then place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. Let the mind enter the coming and going of the breath, and meditate in such a manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

The stages on how to guide the student with the actual instructions

- **The root of the path: The way to rely upon a spiritual teacher**
- **A brief presentation on the way to sustain reliance**
- **What to do during the session: The six aspects of preparation**

Last time, we finished the third preparatory practice, which was adjusting body and motivation. The fourth preparatory practice is visualising or establishing the merit field. We can relate this to the Seven-Limb Prayer, which is done in relation to the merit field.

We talk about the merit field, because it is the object or basis on which we accumulate merit. Lama Tsong Khapa said that: 'These days, if people listen to the Dharma, they don't understand what is being said; they can't even listen to the Dharma, and even if they listen, they don't realise the meaning'. For these students, visualising the merit field is best solution.

At times when one is at the end of one's tether, not being able to understand the words in the teaching, then not being able to understand the meaning, then not being able to establish the meaning in the mind – at that time, one should visualise the merit field. It is all to do with karma, or cause and effect. One may find that one cannot listen to teaching, cannot understand the meaning, and cannot realise the meaning. This is because negative karma and obscurations push down on the mind. Making

prayers to the merit field will overcome these negativities that push down on the mind, causing one to not hear the teaching, understand it and then realise the meaning.

The purification of negativities is done in relation to the merit field, through which the mind is revitalised and purified. Lama Tsong Khapa, out of his concern for sentient beings, asked Manjushri what was the best thing to do for sentient beings in order for them to have realisations. The answer was to make requests to the Guru, who is inseparable from the deity, and to do the practices of accumulation and purification. Also, one should train oneself in meditating on this (virtuous) meditation object, which becomes the substantial cause for one to attain the state of the meditation object.

So Manjushri told Lama Tsong Khapa to do three things: to view the Guru and the deity as inseparable from each other; to do the practice of accumulation (of merit) and purification (of obscurations) on the basis of the merit field; and to do meditation practice on the chosen meditation object, which will become the substantial cause for one to have realisations.

These three should be unified into one practice – that is why we do prayers and Tara practice at beginning of the teachings. If one engages in these practices, one will generate realisations sooner. If one does not engage in these practices, one will take longer to reach attainments. So, we have to do those practices.

When we visualise the merit field, we can visualise it in three basic ways:

We can visualise the collective merit field as a very extensive visualisation, with the buddhas, bodhisattvas and other objects of the merit field side by side, in different groups.

We can visualise the lineage lamas etc. stacked one above the other.

We can visualise one central figure called the 'all-encompassing jewel' as the embodiment of all the other buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Each of these visualisations of the merit field has a different significance. In general, visualising in the first way – the buddhas and bodhisattvas etc. in the different groups – is auspicious in terms of creating the cause in future for one to have a big entourage and lots of money, for example.

The significance of visualising the lineage lamas stacked one above the other is so that one will be able to pass on the lineage. In the visualisation, one lineage lama dissolves one into another, right down to the present day lama, so the lineage is passed on. The significance of this visualisation is for the continued abiding of the teaching lineage.

The significance of visualising a solitary figure that is the embodiment of all the deities is for the speedy attainment of the realisations. These explanations of the significance of the different visualisations are just general, not absolute.

Here in the Lam Rim it talks about the extensive

visualisation of the merit field, which includes all the different lineage lamas, deities, Hearers, bodhisattvas, etc. It becomes very complicated! For those of us who want quick realisations, we should also do the visualisation of the 'all-encompassing jewel' or solitary figure.

Any questions?

Question: I have a problem with building up merit.

Answer: Even without talking about rebirth in the hell realms or the hungry ghosts, but just talking about human beings, some have it easy, some difficult, while some find success easy. When we compare humans to animals, like a cat, the difference is clear. Even in one family, one child will have easy success or no sickness, yet another will have many difficulties and sickness. So, we need to see this variation in merit and hence see the need to protect our future body. We say that our body is a reflection of the past, while our mind is reflection of our future. So, to protect our future, we need to cultivate our mind.

To understand cause and effect is very difficult, very profound. Buddha realised that when he taught. It is said that those who have lots of merits can achieve what they set out to do, exactly as they wanted to. We can observe this at the human level, even though the law of karma is very difficult to see and understand. The Buddha said it was difficult, but still we can see these differences.

Some people are very successful in being able to stabilise their mind and increase bodhicitta – easily, incredibly successfully, and very quickly. But another person who engages in the same activities may not achieve any success or very limited success, even through prolonged and very strong effort. Here, we can observe these differences in karma. Therefore, if we engage in the accumulation of merit, it will also be easier for us to have success, and we will be able to achieve what we pray for.

Next question inaudible.

Answer: People accumulate merit for many different reasons. There are many different motivations, good and bad, and the quality of the result will depend upon the quality of the motivation. If the quality of the motivation is inferior, the quality of the attained result will also be inferior. If one has a good motivation, the result that one attains will also be good.

As ordinary beings, we have different types of motivations that have different qualities – some are better, some are worse. As ordinary beings, it is difficult for us to engage in an action that is not done with the thought of oneself in one way or the other. As an ordinary being, most of one's actions are done with a selfish attitude, so we have to take care that at least, from time to time, we intersperse selfish actions with altruistic ones, in which we think of others.

We can use the worldly example of a father with two or three children at home. If he earns money with the thought of providing well for his children – whatever they need, clothing, food and so forth – all will go well for the family. However, if the father only earns the money

with a selfish attitude and is not willing to share the money with his family, eventually, he will go his own way in order to be able to enjoy the money by himself. So, we can see the significance of the motivation is even in these day-to-day situations.

Question: Geshe-la, as we all know, in the last week we've had an assassination overseas in Israel. One of the main reasons that the Israeli government chose to give that instruction was that this person who was killed was ordering the deaths of many, many people and was strongly encouraging other people to do that. He also said that the discourse for a peaceful solution had failed and that this organisation would no longer even discuss matters of stopping the instruction of killing people. So, they are saying that the reason why this person was killed was to stop the killing of many, many hundreds of other people. Is that ever a justifiable reason, in a Buddhist context, if you're trying to protect a large number of other people, to cause this damage to one person?

Answer: There is no permission that you are allowed to kill such a person. In Buddhism, there is no exemption as to what type of people you can and cannot kill. You are not allowed to kill them.

However, there is a story pertaining to one of the previous lives of the Buddha, when he was on the bodhisattva path. In one life, he was a ship's captain, and ferried 500 traders to an island, from which they then came back with lots of diamonds and jewels.

On the way back, one of the traders got it into his head to kill all the other 499 traders in order to take their jewels. The Buddha tried to reason with him, talk him out of it, but it wasn't possible. So, the Buddha felt great compassion for that person, feeling that there was no stopping him from killing those other traders. If he did kill them, he would create a huge amount of non-virtuous karma: apart from creating suffering for the other traders, he would create the karma of killing 499 people and stealing their jewels and so forth.

By considering the suffering that the other traders would undergo and the suffering of the trader and his karma if he were to kill the other traders, the Buddha generated infinite compassion, both for the trader who wanted to kill and for the other traders who would have been killed. Based on that compassion, he thought it would be best if he were to kill that one trader. So, he killed that one trader on the basis of his compassion.

While the action of killing was non-virtuous, the Buddha accumulated a great amount of merit through the compassion that preceded the action of killing. So, in this case, a lot of merit was created by the compassion that preceded the action of killing, but the action of killing itself was non-virtuous.

Question: Does merit make suffering easier to bear?

Answer: If you purify non-virtuous karma, then what is referred to as the ripening fruit of that non-virtuous karma will not have to be experienced in the future.

As explained before, bring the mind back home, focusing

it internally and placing it 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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