
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 good meditation posture.

On the basis of sitting in a proper meditation posture, we need to analyse our mind and check up on what state it is in. We might find our mind to be peaceful and relaxed, or we might find it to be under the control of the disturbing thoughts: one might feel down and depressed, or feel uninspired to do anything, and have self-doubt, and so forth. Such feelings occur when the mind is under the control of the disturbing thoughts.

As long as we leave our mind in this state, we will not be able to function very efficiently. Therefore, we should make the determination not to leave our mind in such a disturbed state, but to free it from the control of the disturbing thoughts. Just as the great bodhisattva Shantideva said, in the same way that the physical body is not able to function properly when it is sick, the mind cannot function when it is under the control of ignorance and foginess.

When checks up on one's mind, there are two possibilities: it will either be calm, clear, joyful and happy, or it will be disturbed, dark, unhappy and depressed. In the first case, we should think how fortunate we are to have a clear, stable and happy mind; we should rejoice in that fact and strive to increase that type of mind, thinking that we must take great care to preserve that mental state, because to lose it would be a great disadvantage. If, on the other hand, our mind is disturbed, unstable and unclear, we should make the opposite determination; we should recognise that mental state as being the enemy that prevents us from attaining real happiness, and we should make the determination to overcome such a mental state.

We should also recognise that as long as the mind is distracted, its energy will be dispersed. To fully harness the potential of the mind, one needs to focus its energy on a single object. As long as the mind is distracted and all over the place, its energy will be dispersed.

One needs to then gently bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards. For the duration of the meditation, one needs to let go of the things that normally cause different thoughts and disturbances to arise within the mind and just forget about them for the time being, gently focusing the mind internally.

Within that space, place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath and can meditate in that way for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

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

A brief presentation of the way to strive

The actual way of striving

4.1.2.1.1 How to strive during the meditation session:

The 6 preparatory practices: 5) Gathering merit and purifying negativities

Last time, we completed last time the fourth of the six preparatory practices, the visualisation of the merit field. Now comes the fifth preparatory practice.

The fifth preparatory practice consists of the seven-limb practice and the mandala offering. In some traditions, the mandala offering is included in the sixth preparatory practice, but here we can just include it in the fifth, together with the seven-limb prayer.

Lama Tsong Khapa said that if one doesn't engage in the practices of accumulating merits and purifying negativities, it will be difficult to train one's mind in the path. Therefore, in order to ripen the mind so that one can be properly trained in the path, one needs to engage in the practice of the seven limbs in order to accumulate merits and purify negativities.

In general, the seven-limb practice consists of all the important points for purifying negativities and accumulating merits for the practice of virtue. It is said that if one leaves out one of these seven limbs, one's practice of virtue will be incomplete. Like a carriage made up of seven parts, if one leaves out one part, the carriage won't function very well. In the same way, if one leaves out one of the seven limbs, there will be something missing in one's practice of virtue. That is one view of the seven-limb practice. Also, one reason why we often use seven offering bowls for water offerings is to signify the seven limbs.

The seven limbs are:

- i) prostration
- ii) making offerings
- iii) confessing negativities
- iv) rejoicing
- v) asking the buddhas to remain in cyclic existence
- vi) asking the buddhas to turn the wheel of Dharma, and
- vii) dedication

i) Prostration: Prostration can be three-fold – physical, verbal and mental prostration.

To do physical prostration, one folds the hands together in front. The right hand symbolises method and left hand symbolises wisdom – that's what one should remember when doing prostration. The hands shouldn't be pressed flat together, but the palms joined in such a way that they leave a hollow space in between. This space shouldn't be left empty but filled with the two thumbs.

When the hands are held in this mudra, it symbolises a jewel, which reminds us of the jewel of Samantabhadra, and the ten fingers symbolise the ten grounds and paths. The two hands being held together symbolises the unification of method and wisdom: one progresses along the path through the unification of method and wisdom.

Next, one touches the three places (with the joined hands), just as Geshe-la has just showed, at the crown, throat and heart. Placing the hands at the crown signifies the potential to attain the physical form of the Buddha; placing the hand at the throat signifies the potential to attain the speech of the Buddha; and placing the hand at the heart signifies the potential to attain the mind of the Buddha.

In such a way, one accumulates the merits and the potential to attain the body, speech and mind of a Buddha.

The obscurations being purified are the obscurations of body, speech and mind. By placing the folded hands at the crown, obscurations of the body are purified; by placing the folded hands at the throat, obscurations of speech are purified; and by placing them at the heart, obscurations of the mind are purified.

Sometimes, one also places the folded hands at four places – after one touches them to the crown, one also touches between the eyebrows. Placing them at the crown signifies the potential to attain the crown protuberance (or *ushnisha*) of the supreme emanation body; placing between the eyebrows signifies the potential to attain the special hair that grows between the eyebrows of the supreme emanation body; and placing them at the throat and heart are the same as before.

There are two types of physical prostration – full-length prostration and the five-point prostration, where one touches the ground with the five points (one's forehead, two knees and two hands). In the full-length prostration, instead of touching the ground with one's forehead immediately, one first stretches out one's body, stretching out the arms and hands completely in front so that they meet, then places one's forehead on the ground.

This can be related to the four types of enlightened activity:

1. The first action of lowering oneself to the ground signifies 'pacifying' enlightened activity.
2. Stretching out the body and arms signifies 'increasing' enlightened activity.
3. Getting up again from the ground signifies 'subduing' or controlling enlightened activity.
4. Completely bringing one's body upright again signifies 'wrathful' enlightened activity.

When stretch your body out completely, you shouldn't lie there for a long time, but rather you should get back up quickly again. Also, when you get up, it is important to lift your hands cleanly off the ground.

When we touch the three places with folded hands, we

can also remember the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech and mind. When you touch your crown, you can remember the qualities of the Buddha's body. When you touch your throat, you can remember the qualities of the Buddha's speech. When you touch your heart, you can remember the qualities of the Buddha's mind. You can feel that you have received the blessing of the Buddha's body, speech and mind.

So, on the one hand when you do prostrations, you purify the negativities of body, speech and mind; and on the other hand, you receive the blessing of the Buddha's body, speech and mind. In such a way, prostrations are beneficial both for your physical health, as well as for the mind – the mind will become very clear and pure.

So much for how to do prostrations. Next time, we will go into the benefits of doing prostrations. Sometimes, one finds there are ten limbs mentioned (in a text), in which case you shouldn't object by saying: 'That's not possible – there are only seven limbs and not ten!' The extra three limbs here are the limbs of faith, refuge and bodhicitta.

Also, doing this gesture with one's hands [one hand raised as if joined to another in prayer], this also counts as a physical prostration, so it is sometimes not so difficult to accumulate merit. One can visualise the object of the merit field and do a one-handed prostration and that will count as a physical prostration. If one recites the name of the Buddha aloud, that will count as a verbal prostration; and having faith in the mind is a mental prostration.

When one visualises the merit field, one should do so single-pointedly. If one does one's actions single-pointedly, they will become much more effective and they will be done well. Also, when one is doing prostrations, one should do them single-pointedly.

If you have some questions, we have some time questions and answers. Next time, we're going to go into more detail regarding physical, verbal and mental prostrations, motivation and benefits, and so forth.

Question: When studying Buddhism, how should one consider faith?

Answer: Faith is important in Buddhism. Pure faith is the root of all virtuous realisations.

There are two types of faith posited: the faith of the person of dull faculty; and the faith of the person of sharp faculty.

The faith of the dull-faculty person is probably what you refer to as blind faith, when the person of dull faculty just generates faith in whatever is being said or explained. At that time, the person will immediately think: 'Yes, that's how it is', and will generate faith in that.

The sharp-faculty person doesn't work in that way but will only generate faith in something after having investigated and analysed it. Upon having found it true, this person will generate faith in it. But they will not generate faith by just merely being told something.

The Buddha himself said: 'You should analyse my teachings in the same way that gold is analysed in three

ways. I rejoice in those proficient students who generate faith after having analysed my teachings.'

If we want to generate faith that some gold is really pure, we have to analyse the gold in three ways – with fire, cutting, and rubbing. The Buddha said: 'Likewise, you should analyse my teachings with the three types of valid cognition or analysis – direct valid cognition; inferential cognition arising through fact; and inferential cognition arising from scriptural reference. Then, if you find that my teachings pass these three tests, you can accept them to be valid. If you do this, it will please me greatly.'

Faith is like the mother – without the mother, no child will be born; likewise, without faith, no virtuous realisation will be generated.

Question: Geshe-la, what's a skilful answer to a non-Dharma practitioner when they ask you, 'Why do you bow down to images?' What's the best way to respond to that question?

Answer: You can say, 'To pay respect.' For example, if one's mother dies, one pays one's respect to the corpse. The Buddha was famous during his lifetime, and he had many excellent qualities of body, speech and mind. So, why shouldn't we be able to pay our respect to the Buddha by bowing down to a statue?

Even in worldly terms, people regard just a piece of clothing from somebody famous or rich as something special. If we have a piece of clothing from someone who used to be famous, we think it is very special.

Then, if you go into the accumulation of merit and the purification of negativities, the answer becomes more profound. If one relates the answer to the practice of accumulating merits and purifying negativities, it becomes more profound. Once, when I was in Kathmandu, I was asked the same question by two Muslim boys, so I tried to explain it. They liked what I said, but there was really not enough time to explain it properly.

Question: Geshe-la, I have a friend who recently lost her mother and I was wondering if you could give me advice about how to relate to her pain and give advice on what to do for her at this time?

Answer: You have to do things that are uplifting for them. You shouldn't say things that will agitate them even further. Sometimes, when people encounter others who are disturbed and upset, they say things that upset the person even further, making them even more disturbed. They add just that little bit of extra disturbance that may drive that person over the edge.

So, instead of doing that, one should talk pleasantly with that person. One should try to uplift them and put them at ease, explaining to them that getting upset is not really of any benefit. It certainly doesn't benefit the mother, who is already dead; the daughter getting upset will bring no benefit whatsoever for the mother. Also, the daughter will not benefit by getting upset her mother's death; it will only make her life miserable. So, there is really not much use in being upset.

You can also take her out for tea or coffee or a meal, have a nice conversation with her and give her an opportunity to relax.

That person will not forget your kindness, because we all regard a person who helps us when we are miserable as very kind. Also, something good will come back to you from that person in the future. She will become aware that she has friends and that she is looked after. Otherwise, people in that situation may become withdrawn and depressed, thinking: 'The only person I had was my mother, and now there is nobody to help me'.

(Question, in the form of a series of statements from a student – not clear, but seems to be about one's karma ripening and one's subjective perceptions of other people.)

Answer: We cannot say definitely whether another person is good or bad, because the qualities of another person are internal. So, we can form a perception of the other person, but we cannot really ascertain how the other person is internally.

The inner nature of the person is what brings forth the various actions in which they engage. Sometimes, one person appears to somebody as good, yet to another person as bad. Even with regards to one person it changes – one first thinks a person is very good, then one thinks that person is very bad, so it is very difficult to decide that a person is like this or that.

Question: How do you deal with someone's guilt for the hurt they have done to you. Can you advise me on that?

Answer: In general, if the other person feels regret about what they have done, it might not be such a bad thing, because having regret is one of the four factors for purification.

If, from their side, they feel sadness or regret for having done something to you, that's a sign that they are basically a good person and that they won't do the same thing to you again in the future. A person who accepts a fault as a fault is a better person.

But then of course you can also do things to uplift that person. Also, if it is difficult to talk with them, you can write them a letter saying that you don't hold what they did to you against them, and that you have no aversion to them for it, and so forth. If you write to them like that, they will feel better, and their sadness will go away.

Question: Geshe-la, one of my great strengths is carrying grudges and being impatient, (*laughter*), particularly when I think that someone has done something wrong to me. When does one forgive and when one does forget? I think this follows nicely from the last question.

Answer: The times when you receive harm are the times for meditating on patience and compassion!

Normally, when we are not receiving any harm, we can all meditate on compassion and love and patience. However, if it becomes difficult when there is some harm, that is a sign that one's patience and compassion is not very stable. So, the time for meditating on patience

and compassion is those times when we experience harm.

Also, if you look deeply into the mind of the other person, you will find that they are actually experiencing suffering and unhappiness, because that is why they feel inclined to cause harm.

Question: What's the best way to work with your own grief when someone close to you is dying?

Answer: What one has to do is meditate on impermanence.

There are many stories about that, but today there is not enough time. Meditating on impermanence helps – for example, remembering that there is nobody who has ever lived who will not die. We know there are a few people alive today who are over 100 years old, but there is nobody who is 200, 300 or 1000 years old. Everybody has to die sooner or later, so remembering that helps.

Meditating on impermanence will lessen our attachment for the other person, and that will lessen our suffering.

As was explained at the beginning, focus the mind internally and 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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