
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 practise some meditation as usual. Sit in the proper meditation posture.

It is important that one keeps a clear, stable mind; meditation helps one to do this. It is important that one doesn't let one's mind fall under the control of the mental afflictions, because if one does, one's mental happiness will also decrease progressively.

The degree to which one lets one's mind fall under the control of the mental afflictions will determine the degree of mental unhappiness and difficulty one experiences. If the mind is under the control of the mental afflictions, even if we manage to have some moments of happiness, these moments will be easily disrupted and the over-conceptualising mind will take over again. This mind will begin to generate different trains of thought, disrupting any experience of happiness. To avoid this and to ensure that we have a stable, happy and clear mind, we need to prevent afflictions arising within the mind.

It is very important that we reduce the mental afflictions in the mind. To understand the importance of this, we need only analyse our own mind, our own way of thinking. For example, whenever we are unhappy and experiencing difficulties, stress and so forth, we only have to analyse our own way of thinking. Then, one will probably find something wrong with one's way of thinking and will recognise that one definitely has to do something about the way one's mind works and the way one thinks.

As the great bodhisattva, Shantideva, said: 'One definitely shouldn't leave one's mind under the control of the mental afflictions.' If we let our mind fall under the control of the mental afflictions, we will lose our mental happiness, and we will feel unable to do anything about our situation. This feeling of powerlessness comes about because the mind is overcome by mental afflictions.

On top of that, when mental afflictions arise, they take away our mental happiness. If we lose our mental happiness, then life really becomes quite pointless. We all know through our experience that if we don't have mental happiness, no matter what we do in life, it all becomes quite empty. No matter how many outer enjoyments we have, if we lack inner happiness, we cannot taste them and they bring us no real happiness. Therefore, it's critical that we do not let the mind fall under the control of the mental afflictions.

I forgot to add before that another reason why we need to change our way of thinking is that often we find ourselves faced with some external difficulty, but our

way of reacting to that difficulty can bring mental unhappiness and take away our mental happiness.

Another common situation is where there is actually no external problem and we just create a mental problem from our own side because of a wrong way of thinking. This is an interesting situation to observe and understand.

It is important for us to change the mind. There is no need to feel that we are unable to do this, because the mind is a creature of habit. For example, when strong attachment arises in the mind, we shouldn't feel that the ways of the mind are set and that there is nothing that we can do, because that is not true. If one takes it upon oneself to change it, the mind can learn new things; it will take on new ways of reacting. If one is familiar with the mental state of non-attachment, for example, although attachment will still arise strongly in the mind, the mental state of non-attachment will be able to arise through familiarity, and one will be able to overcome attachment.

So, there is no need to feel that one can't do anything.

It is important that one does some 'house-cleaning' – throwing out those things within one's mind that cause suffering, problems and misery. For example, if we were to lie down on a bed and find stones and thorns on it, one wouldn't leave those stones and thorns and just be uncomfortable all night long. Rather, one would throw out the stones, pull out the thorns, and sleep comfortably all night.

Likewise, we shouldn't leave those mental patterns that cause distress, unhappiness and so forth within one's mind, but we should throw them out. In the process, the mind will become more clearer, brighter, happier and more stable.

Sometimes, people keep everything 'locked' into the mind, the good things as well as the bad; they tend to hold strongly onto the things that are actually causing them problems. One shouldn't do that – one should throw out the things that cause distress and unhappiness.

This, of course, should be done in a gradual, slow, relaxed manner over a long period. Because our mind has been habituated to harmful ways for a long time, change usually doesn't happen overnight, but in a gradual step-by-step manner. However, because it happens gradually, that doesn't mean it is not happening.

For example, if we have a glass of hot water and put one drop of cold water into the hot, we won't be able to observe any immediate, noticeable change in the temperature of the water; won't have become immediately drinkable. However, if we continue to put drop after drop of cold water into the hot, over time, we will definitely be able to observe a reduction in the water temperature.

Likewise, with the process of meditation, things don't happen immediately but as a result of continual practice. So, it is important that one continually practises meditation; then, over time, the mind will slowly, slowly change.

This is why we need to practise meditation. So now, first we sit in a relaxed and proper meditation posture. Then, we bring the mind back home, focusing it internally, not letting it be distracted by external objects, but focusing it internally. After having collected the mind internally, we place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath.

This placement of the mind on the coming and going of the breath shouldn't be done in a dualistic manner; rather, the mind should actually enter the breathing. The subject – the mind – shouldn't be looking at the object – the breathing – but the mind should actually become one with the breathing.

This is general advice for all types of meditation – the mind should actually become one with the meditation object. We can meditate in that manner 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

Actual way of striving

4.1.2.1.1 How to strive during the meditation session:

The six preparatory practices

5) Visualising the merit field and offering the seven limbs

The first of the seven limbs, the limb of prostration, is also the first line of the Seven Limb Prayer that you recite before the teachings, where it says, 'I respectfully prostrate with my body, speech and mind'. You recited that line very nicely, in a very melodious manner!

When we say, 'I prostrate with my body, speech and mind,' this relates to combining physical, mental and verbal prostration. We have already explained before how one prostrates when one combines physical, verbal and mental prostration; now, we will explain how we do them individually.

First, there is the physical prostration. When we do a physical prostration, it should be done as it is explained in the King of Prayers: first, one thinks that one is directly seeing all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times and ten directions. We should not exclude the buddhas from anywhere, but include all the buddhas of all the ten directions; we should also not be specific about time, but include all the buddhas of all the three times – past, present and future.

Think that you can see them all directly in front of you, and when you make prostrations, imagine that you are prostrating with as many bodies as there are atoms in all the different universes. One should visualise that one is emanating as many bodies as there are atoms, on which the buddhas, who you have invited, are sitting.

This type of visualisation might sound a bit overwhelming when you first hear it, but you should recall the power of the mind and that the mind is definitely able to emanate that many bodies, and is able to see that many buddhas. At the moment, our mind is obscured and we are not able to see any emanation

body of the buddhas directly; however, if we practise in the prescribed way, the stains and impurities of the mind are purified, and one will reach the point when one is able to actually directly see the buddhas.

For example, a first level bodhisattva is able to see a hundred buddhas at any given instant. So, as one progresses along the path, one is able to purify the mind.

By firstly inviting all these buddhas, and then by emanating as many bodies as there are atoms of space on which are seated the buddhas, and then making prostrations, slowly one's mind will be purified, and one will ultimately really be able, for example, to see that many buddhas.

What one sees depends upon the purity of one's mind. For example, one level of the universe is said to be made of sapphire, and in the sapphire, many types of reflections can appear. If this precious stone is clean-clear, it can reflect many different types of objects, like a mirror. If a mirror is clean-clear, it can reflect many different types of objects. If the mirror is old and dirty, it won't be able to reflect many objects.

It is the same with our mind. If the mind is purified, one is able to see the two form bodies of a buddha. But, if the mind is still stained by impurities, one is not able to see those two form bodies of a buddha. That's how it is. Probably, most people are not able to see the two form bodies of a buddha, but there might be a few.

The mind is able to do many things. For example, if you all look at a TV, although it might be small, you are able to see a group of two or three hundred people in the screen. They are not actually there in the TV set, but we can still see them. Likewise, with the power of the mind, if one meditates well, one will be able to see the different buddhas.

We still have to do the verbal prostration and mental prostration, which we can do next time. If you have some questions, you can ask them.

(Question not audible on transcription tape)

Answer: If you take medicine that diminishes your mindfulness and clarity of mind, the power of your mindfulness and awareness, the result will be that in future, that's how your mind will be.

But it is difficult, for example, to give clear-cut advice on how much medicine a patient should take. When I asked psychiatrists, 'How much anti-depressant do you prescribe for a certain sickness?' and so forth, they could not really give a fixed answer. They seem to have to go on what kind of understanding they get from talking with the patient; they seem to have to take the measure of the person by talking with them. Then, according to the understanding they generate about the person's situation, they prescribe what they feel is the right level of medicine for that patient.

But I didn't really get a concrete answer when I tried to ask a psychiatrist how much medicine they prescribe. They don't really have a fixed scale of what to prescribe and when.

There are certain people who, when they don't take their medicine, become mentally unstable. When they take the medicine, it helps them, because the medicine somehow suppresses the physical basis for the mental instability.

Antidepressants and such medicines, by suppressing the physical basis of certain mental states, prevent those mental states from arising. I don't know exactly how it works but that's what I've heard, roughly.

Question: What is the future karmic result of taking antidepressants and anti-psychotic medication?

Answer: We seem to be able to observe that taking many different types of medicine can have an adverse effect on one's mindfulness.

Western medicines often quite have abundant side-effects. There have been geshe who, before going into hospital, had very stable mindfulness. However, when they came out of hospital after a long period of taking many different types of medicine, the stability of their mindfulness, the power of their mind, had been affected.

It seems that with western medicine, quite often it may be beneficial for one thing, but harmful for something else, in contrast to natural medicine that usually does not cause harm or have any heavy side-effects. Traditional western medicine quite often has lots of side-effects.

Quite often, it seems that herbal medicine doesn't have the side-effects that traditional western medicine has.

(Exchange here between translator and student asking for further clarification)

Geshe-la says he doesn't know what antidote means because that's an English word. There are antidotes – for example, if you overcome self-grasping, you won't get cancer because all sicknesses arise from self-grasping. If you go deeper and deeper, you arrive at self-grasping as being the final cause for any type of sickness. So, when you overcome self-grasping, you won't get cancer.

For example, in the Tibetan medical system, self-grasping is posited as the root of any type of sickness.

Question: Could you say something about self-grasping?

Answer: Self-grasping is the thought of thinking I, I, me, me; when one generates a very strong feeling of self, of I.

For example, when we feel that something is not right, we feel adversely affected and may think, "This is not right", and generate a strong sense of self at that time. This sense of self arises strongly and seemingly naturally in the mind. The thought that holds that sense of self is self-grasping.

(Next question not audible on tape.)

Answer: For example, if you have an object that you cherish a lot, that you find very desirable, attachment is generated for that object. If there is an object that you find repulsive or unattractive, anger is generated towards that object.

So, on the one side the mind becomes attached to the things it likes, the pleasant things and the nice things; and on the other hand, the mind generates anger and aversion towards the things it doesn't like, the unpleasant things,

the unattractive things. Somewhere in between that ignorance is also constantly in there.

We also have the situation where unhappiness is generated in one's mind upon seeing a desirable object. This is usually the case with jealousy, when another person has a desirable object. One is not able to bear the good fortune of the other person and generates jealousy, which makes the mind unhappy.

So, it is very important to identify the mental afflictions, and then one can set out about reducing them. One should go about trying to identify one's different mental afflictions very slowly. That's very important. Because without that first step of identifying the mental afflictions, you are not able to go to the next step of counteracting them.

Question: Geshe-la, I think I heard you correctly, you said that self-grasping causes illness. What about in the case of a baby who isn't even aware of self-grasping?

Answer: A small baby also has self-grasping. For example, they voice their dislikes very clear and loudly! Small babies are already afflicted by many different types of sicknesses and problems. When they are hungry, they are not able to verbally articulate their need for food, so they scream and cry.

Question: How is it that people who won't come to some spiritual meeting also have self-grasping and probably not get sick and then carry on without knowing about it and they are fine?

Answer: What you are saying is that somebody who doesn't practise the Dharma doesn't experience suffering, while those who practise the Dharma experience suffering. I don't accept that.

Questioner again: No, I didn't mean that. I meant that some people who don't know about it, can have these wrong thoughts and get on with their lives and do fine and not get sick and everything goes well.

Answer: This type of situation exists, and that comes about through the karma that that person created in a previous life.

For example, in this life if we practise the Dharma and improve our mind, perhaps in a future life we may take a rebirth where we don't accept the Dharma, but even though we don't accept the Dharma, we will naturally have a pure mind.

We can observe from our experience that there are people whose mind is pure even though they don't practise the Dharma. That comes about through what the person did in a previous life.

I say quite often to students to just to be happy, just to have a happy life – that is a good Dharma life. Even if, for example, you are a Dharma practitioner but you are constantly unhappy, then in the next life you may take a rebirth where you are not a Dharma practitioner but you will still be unhappy.

In this life, if somebody is happy just by seeing our face, then we have served our purpose. What comes in the future we don't know anyway.

(Question not quite audible but sounds like, '...are you saying that ...we're responsible for our own health? I mean, couldn't it just be that some people get sick ... Why do we get the responsibility ...?)

Answer: For example, people grasp strongly at their suffering as being their own personal suffering that nobody else can understand and that they don't want to share with anybody else. So, you take your own suffering very, very personally; you grasp at it as your own possession.

Therefore, one has to take responsibility for one's own health, by treating one's body properly and living healthily. Then also one won't get sick.

If a sick person goes to the doctor and the doctor makes an accurate diagnosis, prescribes the correct medicine, but the person then goes home with the medicine, never takes it and never recovers from the sickness, who's fault is it? Certainly not the doctor's fault and it is certainly also not the medicine's fault. It is the fault of the patient. Does that give you some idea about why you have take responsibility for your own health?

It is my point of view that one has to take responsibility for one's own health and for one's own improvement. One just can't give up and say, 'I can't do anything.' One has to take one's own destiny into one's own hands.

If one lives one's life in an independent manner and doesn't always let other people do things for one but does them oneself – makes one's own tea, one's own food and so forth – that also contributes to living a healthy life.

(Another not-quite-audible question about the recommended meditation for someone diagnosed with advanced cancer.)

Answer: Meditation is good to do – meditations involving light rays and meditation on the coming and going of the breath, meditations that focus the mind internally.

This type of meditation, even if it does not cure the cancer, will still help the person to have a happier life, because it will help them to let go of the worry and the mental unhappiness.

Maybe for tonight that's enough. As we said before, bring the mind back home, focusing it internally, then placing it single-pointedly on the mantra of the Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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