
The Condensed Lam Rim

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We can meditate a little bit as usual.

The motivation for meditating is to gain control over one's mind in order to make the mind happier. One's happiness depends upon being able to control and subdue the mind. Without controlling and subduing the mind, it will be difficult to attain happiness.

As the great Bodhisattva Shantideva said, the attainment of happiness that one wishes for and the avoidance of the suffering that one doesn't wish for depends upon subduing one's mind and controlling one's mind. He is saying that if we don't understand the way the mind works, the psychology of the mind, then although we may wish to attain happiness and avoid suffering, and engage in many activities to achieve that aim of attaining happiness and avoiding suffering, all these activities will be completely meaningless if we don't understand how the mind works and if we are not able to control and subdue the mind.

Therefore he says that apart from the practice of subduing one's mind, there is no other practice of austerity needed.

The problem lies with one's habit of letting the mind fall under the control of the mental afflictions and letting one's mind be distracted to external objects; not focusing the mind inwards, but rather letting it be distracted and engaged by external objects. Because they are not aware of this essential point, most people engage in a lot of activities and work in order to attain happiness, but happiness seems to be elusive.

It happens again and again that people say: 'I work hard in order to be happy, but somehow that happiness doesn't come about. In fact, the more I try to do in order to become happy, the more confused and complicated my life seems to become'. A person in such a situation is unaware of the important point (discussed before) regarding the attainment of happiness: that happiness has to come from the inside.

One has to make the mind happy, satisfied and joyful. As long as one disregards the mind and runs after external objects one will not be able to attain that happiness. It is important that one understands this crucial point: in order to attain happiness, one needs to control and subdue the mind.

This doesn't mean that one completely becomes divorced from external conditions, that one no longer relies upon external conditions. That's not what we mean here. What we mean is that our primary means of attaining happiness should be an internal process.

If people are unhappy, they always look elsewhere for happiness: the grass always seems to be greener on the other side. They think that if they could just change their boyfriend or girlfriend, there will be more happiness with that other person. This in itself shows that this person is suffering, because if they were happy, they wouldn't have this compulsive need to look for more happiness in another person. This restlessness and compulsive need comes about because one is unhappy in the first place.

One should recognise that the purpose of meditation is to subdue the mind and make it happier so that it is not so much under the control of the disturbing thoughts. This process of attaining inner happiness is lengthy; it happens slowly, slowly, step by step. It is like the seemingly endless unravelling of a massive knot made up of many different pieces of string tangled and woven together in one ball. One will not be able to separate them all at once, but has to go slowly, string by string, to unravel the knots.

Likewise with one's mind, one has to unravel the tangled net or web of one's disturbing conceptual thoughts; one has to unravel them slowly, bit by bit. In this way, over time, the mind will become happier, more peaceful and more stable. As long as the mind is disturbed by conceptualising thoughts, it will be unstable. However, by unravelling this knot of disturbing thoughts, gradually there will be fewer and fewer disturbing thoughts, and the mind will become happier, calmer and more peaceful.

In the sutras, it says that we are our own protector. This means that one is responsible for one's own mind, and that one can attain happiness over time. I always give these explanations so that you realise you have the ability to meditate and so that you know the context of meditation.

Now we can sit in the appropriate meditation posture. One has to turn one's mind inward. If the mind is distracted by the disturbing thoughts, to external objects, we know from our own experience that it will be unstable. So, you have to totally focus the mind internally, not letting it be distracted by thoughts of external objects at all. The mind does not engage at all with external objects; rather, one totally focuses the mind inwards.

When we have done this, we place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. This should not be done in a dualistic manner; rather, the mind should actually enter the breathing. We can meditate in this way for a few minutes.

4.4 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 The actual way of striving

4.1.2.1.1 How to strive during the meditation session:

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

Of the seven limbs, we are now starting with the second

limb, the limb of offering.

In accordance with the King of Prayers, there are two types of offerings: superior or highest offerings and lesser offerings. The former is called 'highest offering' because there is no other offering higher than it. The highest building in the world is called that because there is no other building that is taller. Likewise, highest offerings are so-called because there is no better offering; all other offerings are referred to as lesser offerings. Sometimes, the highest offerings are referred to as the 'offerings gone beyond' and the lesser offerings are referred to as worldly offerings.

The aim of making an offering is to generate happiness in the mind of the objects of the offering. One should meditate that one's offerings are generating uncontaminated happiness, uncontaminated bliss in the mind of the objects of offering. We are always talking about pujas and doing this puja or that puja. The actual meaning of the word puja, which is Sanskrit, is 'to please, to make happy'.

When one makes an offering, the physical action must be accompanied by the mind of giving up, of letting go of the objects of offering. Of course, some offerings may be more difficult to give up than others – for example, the offering of one's sense powers and so forth. However, in general, when one makes an offering, it has to be combined with the practice of generosity, of giving up the objects of offering. The recipient of the offering doesn't have to be a beggar; there are also other people one can make offerings to apart from beggars.

Since the making of offerings has to be combined with the practice of generosity, which mental affliction does the practice of making offerings counteract? Which karma does it purify?

The affliction that making offerings counteracts is greed. Greed is that which directly prevents one from making offerings; greed is the reason why one doesn't invite people for lunch. One accumulates lots of non-virtuous karma because of greed. When one starts the practice of making offerings, one starts out with small offerings. Then, slowly, over time, one can increase the amount of one's offerings.

The less greed one has, the more happiness will arise in one's mind. Greed gives us many problems. If one is a wealthy person with lots of greed, one will have lots of trouble. Such a greedy, wealthy person will not even help one's family and children. The children will then become upset with that parent, so the parent will be unhappy because their children do not love them. However, it all started because of that parent's greed. So, the less greed one has, the easier it is for one to live together with other human beings. We all have to live with others and interact with them.

Of course, greed is regarded as an important condition to facilitate wealth, because if one never gives anything away, one's money will continue to accumulate. There might be some temporary benefit from that, but generally, greed is not a beneficial mental state.

Do you have some questions for tonight?

Question: Does taking anti-depressants affect meditation practice?

Answer: I haven't taken any so I don't know! People can suffer a great variety of mental problems. For example, some people suffer from a certain type of hyperactivity, always having to do something with their hands, putting things back and forth, and even taking medication can help to calm them down.

Whether such medication harms one's meditation practice or not is a somewhat subtle point. I have already mentioned this point many times before: some friends have told me that the continual taking of medicine harmed the power of their mindfulness. Whether it is beneficial for your meditation practice or not may be difficult to decide, but it may benefit you as a person.

As it says in one of the bodhisattva treatises, if it were beneficial, one could even take poison. Generally, it is not advisable to take poison, but in certain instances, certain types of poisons can cure certain sicknesses in an appropriate dosage. That's why doctors in certain situations will prescribe something that is normally poison, but in that case it is beneficial in a certain dosage.

Question: What's the line between accumulating wealth so you have the potential to give away more later, and giving it all away now? How do you draw the line about how much to save and how much to give away?

Answer: That is a difficult point. As long as one doesn't have the money, one is quite generous with the money that one doesn't have!

I have seen it time and again that someone in financial difficulty will say: 'Once I have money, I will help other people who are experiencing the same problem'. When one is experiencing problems, one can empathise and sympathise them; one may have this thought that, 'once I come into some money, I will help others'. However, when one actually comes into some money, somehow that idea of helping others disappears! One is more consumed with putting the money one has to work for oneself, to make more money, presumably.

This happens again and again. Quite often I tell students not to generate this type of useless motivation, a motivation that will not happen in the end anyway.

In the past, people have promised me when they didn't have any money that when they came into money, they would give it to me. Then, when they came into money I said: 'What happened? Now you have come into some money, why are you not giving any to me?' Then they say: 'Oh, because I don't have enough'.

No matter how much money one has, it is never enough. There is always some way of dividing up what you have very quickly, for many different purposes, so that the money you have is never enough.

Nagarjuna said that the person who is content with what they have is really a rich person; out of the different types of wealthy people, those who are content with what they have are truly wealthy. So, although someone might not

appear wealthy in ordinary terms, from the point of view of the actual meaning of the word wealthy, they are truly wealthy because they are content with what they have.

Question: How many prostrations should we do on a daily basis?

Answer: Start out with a minimum of 25, then slowly work your way up. Don't start out with too many, because your knees will start to hurt very badly. Initially, one will encounter some difficulty, because one's body is not trained. However, when one has done more prostrations, one's body is trained, and it becomes natural and very easy. Take your time when you do your prostrations. Don't do them in a rush – otherwise you might hurt your back!

Question: When good things happen to us and we get overly excited is that a negative thing?

Answer: If things are going well, you have to meditate on rejoicing and happiness.

If one has some success and things are going well in one's life, one should feel happy about that and rejoice, while also wishing that others will experience the same type of happiness and success. In such a way your happiness doesn't become tainted by pride. One should rejoice about one's success without becoming proud.

Also, wishing others to have the same type of success counteracts one's competitive attitude or one's jealousy. Otherwise, there's always this feeling of jealousy of the success of others and feeling competitive with them, and so forth. If things are going well, just feel happy and positive and rejoice about it and also wish for the same for others. If our success is virtuous, by rejoicing in it, we increase the power of that virtue. One of the seven limbs is the practice of rejoicing; by rejoicing in something virtuous, one increases the power of the virtue, so one increases one's virtuous karma: one creates more virtue by rejoicing in virtue.

Question: What are the 'highest offerings'?

Answer: That comes next time. The highest offerings refer to the peerless offerings emanated by bodhisattvas. The flowers we buy in the shop or that we cut from the garden are lesser offerings, because their causes and conditions are different from highest offerings: they need to be grown from the earth, and so forth.

Question: When the Buddha touches the earth, is that a symbol of perseverance?

Answer: No. The earth-touching mudra signifies the overcoming of certain evildoers. It signifies that the Buddha is unharmed by certain evildoers, by maras.

Question: Maras that harm us?

Answer: There are many different types of evil beings that harm Dharma practitioners.

The life story of the Buddha explains how, while the Buddha was in meditative equipoise, certain types of maras, or what you might call demons, tried to distract the Buddha from meditation.

First, they tried to frighten the Buddha with frightening

emanations. The Buddha remained undisturbed. Then they magically projected those emanations as throwing weapons at the Buddha and trying to disturb the Buddha's meditation. But all those weapons fell to the ground and became flowers. Then they tried to distract Buddha's meditative equipoise by emanating many different types of goddesses. The Buddha wasn't disturbed by of these. That is why he assumes the earth-touching mudra.

The earth-touching mudra signifies that the Buddha's mind is undisturbed by any of the maras. Of the four types of mara, there is one that is referred to as the 'son of gods'. This particular type of mara can inflict different types of harm; the mara is a certain type of non-human that tries to disturb the son of gods, the Dharma practice of Dharma practitioners. The earth-touching mudra signifies that the Buddha has overcome that type of mara.

Then we have the other three maras of death, the aggregates and the mental afflictions. That the Buddha has overcome these three maras is signified by the nectar in his begging bowl, which is uncontaminated and signifies long-life. So we have outer maras and inner maras; inner maras refer to the different types of mental afflictions like the three poisons and so forth.

Question: Can you explain Lama Tsong Khapa's mudra as displayed in the statue?

Answer: It is referred to as the mudra of turning the wheel of Dharma. We can observe that type of mudra being used by the chant leader for prayer festivals when he starts the prayers. Geshe-la just showed us the correct mudra; the wrong way of doing it is keeping your hands in front of your mouth. Also, Milarepa keeping his hand at his ear is also said to be the mudra of turning the wheel of Dharma.

Question: In relation to the earlier question about anti-depressants, when I'm not well and I don't take my medication, my meditation practice goes. But when I take them, I can do it, because I'm not so self-absorbed.

Answer: If it helps your Dharma practice, that is a good thing.

For example, if some people don't drink any alcohol, they start to get the shakes and they can't talk properly; they can't do anything. But, if they drink a little bit of alcohol, their shakes start subsiding, they become a bit calmer and sometimes they may even become quite sharp and can practice the Dharma and so forth.

In Tibet, when there were disputes or people were having heated discussions then quite often they felt they could participate better when they had drunk a little bit of alcohol. They would just drink enough for them to make them vocal. The power of their voice would increase and they would find the courage to say something, so they could have better disputes.

Of course, if you drink too much and become drunk, it becomes useless. It's important to know one's limits and it's to know what harms one's body and what doesn't harm it and acting accordingly.

If we go to a doctor and the doctor sees that we are quite aware of what benefits us and what harms our health and that we act accordingly, the doctor will be quite happy; he or she does not wish us to be ignorant about our health.

I'm very pleased that you can practice the Dharma with the help of the medication and I'm also very happy to see you again today; I haven't seen you for some time. When you came into the gompa tonight, you came in very happily and that also made me happy.

Student in reply: I'm happy because I have brought my mother tonight.

Geshe-la: It's very important to treat one's mother well. There is a compilation of advice by Nagarjuna for lay people – a list of things for lay people to practice. At the very top of the list is to make offerings to one's parents, the benefits of which we will explain.

There are many benefits explained for respectfully making offerings to one's parents. This is very practical – if one has still parents, one can just make offerings to one's parents; one doesn't have to look very far for people to make offerings to.

As was explained before, bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards. Then place the mind single-pointedly on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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