
The Condensed Lam Rim

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We can do some meditation as usual. Seat yourself so you are comfortable and relaxed. It is important that one is comfortable and relaxed even if one is just meditating for a short time. If the body is not comfortable the mind will not be able to relax. Then, at the outset of the meditation, you have to generate a virtuous motivation. I have mentioned many times before how important it is to generate a good motivation before the meditation.

After having generated a virtuous motivation before starting the actual meditation it is very important that one has continual mindfulness of the meditation object during the period of the meditation. Another word for mindfulness is remembrance. It is very important that one doesn't forget about the object of meditation for the period of meditation.

Concentration is a mental factor, the abiding aspect of consciousness. There are two major obstacles to attaining concentration: mental excitement and mental sinking. They prevent the attainment of concentration and the more relevant initially may be mental excitement.

Mental excitement belongs to the family of attachment. What we call mental excitement are those types of distractions where the mind wanders off to an attractive and beautiful external object. However, not all forms of mental wandering are mental excitement.

There can be virtuous types of mental wandering and neutral types of mental wandering. An example of a virtuous type of mental wandering would be that while one is meditating single-pointedly on oneself as the deity the mind wanders off and thinks about the suffering of sentient beings and about compassion for sentient beings. In this case, even though compassion for sentient beings is of course, a virtuous thought, it has distracted the mind from the main object of the deity and is therefore also called a mental wandering or distraction. But it is not classified as mental excitement.

There are other types of mental wandering that are neither virtuous nor non-virtuous. And if anger disturbs one's meditation that it also classified as mental wandering, as non-virtuous mental wandering, but it wouldn't be classified as mental excitement. By engaging in meditation mental wandering in general, and mental excitement in particular, will become less. The mind will engage external attractive objects less and less and through that one experiences a lessening of attachment. Through continuing meditation there is a lessening of all the afflictions such as attachment, anger and so forth.

Through the lessening of the different mental afflictions

such as attachment and anger the mind becomes very flexible. One attains what is called the workability, or pliancy, of mind which induces the pliancy of the body; the flexibility of the body. After having attained the pliancy of the body one attains the pliancy of the subtle energies and the winds. Subtle energies can then flow throughout the body very well and that, in turn, induces the bliss of physical pliancy. This in turn induces the bliss of mental pliancy. When one has attained both the bliss of mental and physical pliancy the mind is very subdued and there are no coarse afflictions arising in the mind. The mind is very stable and very peaceful and clear. One will also experience an increase in wisdom.

In this way one cultivates an internal state that becomes like an internal friend. We need external friends but we also need an internal friend. This will be an internal friend that will be with us during all the different periods of our day - waking, walking, sitting, sleeping and so forth - and will help us in our life. This is an internal friend that is not dependent on external conditions. It is a friend that arises purely through inner conditions and is not dependent on external conditions.

The cause for attaining such a state is to generate a wholesome mental state. By again and again generating a wholesome, positive, virtuous mental state and by acquainting one's mind more and more with such a state over time this will become the mental state of calm abiding. One needs to train in that of course and over time, by continually acquainting one's mind with a wholesome mental state, it will become single-pointed concentration. That is the reason why I always tell you to meditate regularly. It doesn't matter if one is not able to do long periods of meditation, just to do a little bit of meditation, but do it on a regular basis. The great Bodhisattva Shantideva said that by training one's mind it only becomes easier. Nothing becomes more difficult through training, it only becomes easier.

Our mind is a creature of habit and it is a medium that can be formed into whatever we want it to be. The way we think and feel is not, for example, set in concrete. For example, at one point somebody might be our strongest enemy, a person that we can't stand even the sight of, but then something changes in our mind and our view of the person completely changes, turns around 180 degrees, and that person becomes our best friend; becomes somebody that we can't even be without for one hour. That is a very common experience. That shows that the mind is changeable; the mind is trainable. The only thing that one has to do is one to set out to train the mind and it can be trained to anything.

Having seated yourself in a comfortable meditation posture, turn the mind inwards, bring it back home, focus it internally and don't let it be distracted by disturbing thoughts to external objects, but turn the mind 100% inwards. Then, after remaining in this state for a short while, place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. The mind should actually enter the breathing and we meditate like that for a few minutes.

Pause for meditation.

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

In the text we have reached the second limb, the limb of making offerings. We have discussed the offerings that are classified as highest offerings and then the offerings that are classified as lesser offerings. Now we have to identify them. The lesser offerings are explained in the King of Prayers where it talks about garlands of flowers, and so forth.

In the King of Prayers, the first offering is **flowers**. We have offerings of fresh flowers with bright and beautiful colours and shapes, put together in beautiful arrangements and also individual. Then we have flower garlands where the flowers are woven together into a garland. The flowers can be both actual, real flowers, as well as artificial flowers such as paper flowers or brocade flowers. One makes this flower offering in a room that has been already cleaned and set up. The flowers are of different colours, the blossoms are open and they are very clear, nice, clean fresh flowers. Making this flower offering will change the atmosphere in the room to something more clean and clear. Making those offerings with a clear mind also, of course, has a beneficial effect on the mind.

Secondly, it mentions **music**. Here it can be the music of all kinds of instruments, string instruments and so forth, that is offered.

Thirdly one offers nice **scents** and smells.

Then one offers **umbrellas**. In India it is said that umbrellas are very useful in that they have three virtues – when it is hot the umbrella shields one from the hot sun and when it's raining the umbrella shields one from the rain. If it's neither raining nor the sun is shining but one feels tired then one can use the umbrella as a stick. These are the three benefits. It is a symbolic offering of something that shields one from the heat and oppression of the mental afflictions. When you go around, for example, in the rain with an umbrella you can meditate that the umbrella is actually shielding you from the downpour of the delusions.

Next comes the offering of **light**. In the text it refers to butter lamps and brilliant jewels. There are certain precious stones that are very brilliant, that can capture the light and disperse it back into the room. One can offer those and one can offer the butter lamp on the altar.

Next comes **incense**. There are different types of incense, such as medicinal incense (for example argara), and so forth that one can offer.

Then there is the offering **cloth**. Fabrics that are very soft and thin.

Then it talks about **perfect aroma**. This type of aroma arises when one puts some aromatic oil into water and it disperses then a very nice smell in the room. It also talks about different types of powder that also have a scent

and a nice smell. By sewing them into a cloth and then putting them in different parts of the room they give off a very nice scent into the air.

These types of offerings are called the lesser offerings. What is translated as 'lesser' in Tibetan means, 'those offerings where there are higher ones'. Describing them as lesser isn't being derogatory and implying that those offerings are not good. 'Lesser' just means that there are other offerings that are better. Don't get the idea that they are not worthwhile to do. They are very important to do, it's just that there are other offerings that are even better.

One doesn't just have to stick to those that were just explained. One can, in general, offer anything that is of a nice shape, colour, smell and so forth. One doesn't have to religiously stick to those that have been mentioned. When they are offered one should imagine that happiness and bliss has been generated in the Buddha's mind.

That completes those offerings that are not quite the best offerings. Do you have some questions?

Question: I have mandala sand give to me by the Gyuto Monks. Can I offer that?

We just talked about offering. I just said one can offer anything that is beautiful and nice. That sand was probably given to you as a present. The sand of the Kalachakra mandala is blessed for many hours, six hours every day for probably a whole week by His Holiness and 20 of the monks of his monastery. It's not really normal sand any more. That sand is something very special, but I couldn't vouch for the sand around here. I'm not quite sure if the blessing is the greater feature of the sand or whether it's more for the visual impact. I'm not sure. But if the greater aspect of the sand lies in the blessing it has received then of course it's something that can be offered. In Tibet many precious stones would be pounded up and mixed into the sand. I'm sure that they also do it for the sand that is used for His Holiness' mandalas but I don't know whether it would be here.

Question: Do you have some advice for visualisation?

I have said before that one major piece of advice for a good visualisation is to have good mindfulness. There are two main conducive conditions to visualisation – mindfulness and introspection – and the two main obstacles are mental excitement and mental sinking. If you have stable mindfulness the mind will remain very focused on the object. If you don't have mindfulness the mind will wander away from the object.

Question: When would one clean the room?

Cleaning the room is the first thing that you do. We went through this in the preparatory practise. The first thing is to clean the room and then you set up the altar, then you arrange the offerings and so forth. While cleaning the room one should, of course, think of cleaning the mind. If both the room and the mind are clean then one can be very happy. Here in these days there are maybe different ways of cleaning the room, but in India one used to sweep the room with a broom. When you sweep the room you could say or meditate that you are cleaning

away the negativities, the non-virtues and so forth. You could meditate that the broom is actually the wisdom that realises emptiness, the truth of the path that is cleaning away the truth of suffering and the truth of origin. The dirt is the different sufferings and their causes, afflictions and karma. That's what is being swept out of the room.

At the time of the Buddha there was a monk who had difficulty remembering. He was not very intelligent and could not even remember four lines together. The Buddha in his kindness put him to work sweeping the rooms and the courtyards. While he was sweeping he was meditating and reciting that he was sweeping away the dirt, sweeping away obscurations. The Buddha told him to do that. In the beginning he just related it to the actual dirt that was lying around on the floor, the dust and so forth. Then, over time, he came to realise that when the Buddha said 'dirt' he actually referred to the mental afflictions of anger, attachment and ignorance. Over time the monk actually attained very high realisations. If you meditate in the proper manner while cleaning the room you purify lots of negativities. The person, or persons, who clean our gompa here accumulate lots of merit. It is a very powerful thing to do. Just think about how many people come here every week and how they benefit and their minds made happy by the cleanliness of the room.

As was explained in the beginning, turn the mind inwards and place 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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