
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

16 June 2004

We will meditate for some time as usual. Please sit in a comfortable and correct meditation posture.

On the basis of sitting in a correct meditation posture, it is important that we make the mind serviceable and subdued so that we can focus it on any virtuous object we wish to meditate on; we can then meditate with that mind on the object for as long we wish.

This type of 'serviceability' of the mind is attained through the methods of mindfulness and introspection. In *The Essence of the Middle Way*, this process of attaining serviceability or pliancy of the mind is explained by the analogy of the unsubdued mind as a crazed elephant. At present, our mind is not serviceable. Although we would like our mind to remain on one object, it doesn't do so, because at the moment, it is as unsubdued as a crazed elephant.

To subdue a crazed elephant we need certain tools – a rope, a hook and a pillar to which we can tie the elephant. Likewise, when we subdue the mind, we need mindfulness, introspection and a meditation object.

In the analogy, the crazed elephant is tied to the rope, which is an analogy for mindfulness. If the crazed elephant still doesn't listen, from time to time it has to be tapped on the head with the hook, and in such a way become tame and does what the owner tells him to do. Likewise, the crazy elephant mind is tied to the pillar of the meditation object with the rope of mindfulness, and when one is meditating, from time to time one needs to use the hook of the mental factor of introspection to see whether the meditation is still progressing correctly, and then nudge the mind in the correct direction.

So, initially one ties the mind to the meditation object with mindfulness. By doing this, one attains a single-pointed internal focus. The more well trained one's mindfulness, the more one will maintain the single-pointed internal focus achieved during meditation. From time to time, with the part of the mind that is mental introspection, one needs to check up on the meditating mind – whether the meditation is still progressing correctly or whether any of the faults of meditation have crept in.

In such a way, one is able to attain perfect single-pointed concentration, in which the mind becomes very serviceable. The mind will then be able to do whatever one wishes it to do and the mind will also be held by inner ecstasy.

Therefore, on the basis of sitting in the correct meditation posture, turn the mind inwards, stopping it from

engaging with external objects and not letting it be distracted by disturbing thoughts that try to divert it towards external objects. Rather, turn the mind completely inwards trying to achieve a total internal focus. Then, from within that space, place the single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath, and meditating in that manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

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

We will now return to discussing how to make offerings.

We were in the middle of talking about ordinary offerings and highest offerings. What we are referring to as ordinary offerings are worldly offerings and the highest offerings are those offerings that are beyond the world, beyond samsara. From another point of view, what are referred to as ordinary offerings are material offerings, while the supreme, the highest offerings, are emanated offerings that are free from any type of fault.

So, ordinary offerings still possess some type of fault, but higher offerings are devoid of any type of fault.

Highest offerings are also referred to as emanated offerings because they are offerings emanated by bodhisattvas through the power of concentration and prayer. Through the power of concentration and prayer, bodhisattvas emanate various types of offerings that are unseen by the ordinary eye and are not seen in this world – many precious substances, the vase with nine attributes, precious fields, and so forth. Bodhisattvas emanate such things as the wish-fulfilling vase and the wish-fulfilling jewel; you might have heard of the wish-fulfilling vase or the wish-fulfilling jewel that bestow upon the owner whatever he or she wishes.

Of course, at the level of an ordinary individual, this type of offering is difficult to perform. While as an ordinary individual we are not able to perform those offerings, we can still meditate on performing the offerings of Samantabhadra.

While we cannot actually emanate those offerings, we can still do the visualisation of the Samantabhadra offering, where we first visualise ourself as the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. Our hands are in the mudra of prostration and between them, we visualise that we are holding a jewel. Samantabhadra actually emanated a jewel, but we can just visualise our hand in the mudra of prostration with a jewel between them. From the jewel, light rays emanate into the ten directions carrying forth at their tips many different types of offerings such as flowers. From those offerings, more light rays emanate even further, again carrying forth at their tips more offerings from which even more light rays emanate and further offerings are carried forth at the tips, until the whole of space is filled. This visualisation is also a very good meditation and a very good offering practice. This type of meditation on making offerings is called

Samantabhadra's offering, which is useful to know because it is mentioned again and again in the texts.

So, while we are not able as an ordinary individual to perform the actual highest offering, in the sutras it mentions three types of offerings that we can do as an ordinary individual that would be regarded as the highest offerings of an ordinary being. The first type of offering is meditating on compassion and generating bodhicitta; the second is to retain the Dharma; and the third is putting the Dharma that one has listened to into practice – transforming the scriptural Dharma into the Dharma of realisation.

Within the Dharma, there are two categories: scriptural Dharma and realised Dharma. Scriptural Dharma refers to the written or spoken words that one reads or listens to. Realised Dharma is the actual transformation of one's continuum, the actual realisation of the written word in one's mind.

So these are three ways of performing the highest offerings as an ordinary individual – meditating on bodhicitta and compassion; listening to and retaining the Dharma; and putting the Dharma one has listened to into practice immediately.

We also have the offering of merits, which is also regarded as the highest offering of an individual, as stated in the *Lama Choepa* or Guru Puja, where the text requires us to offer a pleasure garden with many flowers, and so forth, that is an embodiment of one's virtues and merits. So, one can offer one's merits and virtues by mentally transforming them into offering substances and offering them to the merit field. This is not explained as such in the sutras, but it has been handed down in the oral instructions from the teachers.

The reason why meditating on bodhicitta and compassion, retaining the Dharma, and putting the Dharma into practice become an offering to the Buddhas is because, as we mentioned the other day, the essence of making offerings to the Buddhas is to actually to please the Buddhas. So here, the definition of making an offering to the Buddhas is not just giving something, but actually pleasing the Buddhas, generating happiness and bliss in the Buddhas' minds.

From that point of view, we can understand how those three activities become offerings to the Buddhas, because there is nothing more pleasing to the Buddhas than to see somebody meditating on compassion and bodhicitta, generating empathy for sentient beings, generating compassion for sentient beings, generating bodhicitta for sentient beings.

It's like parents who are happy and joyful when they see their child doing well in their studies. When parents see that their child is studying well, they feel that at last the child has finally understood what life is about and so the parents are very happy and pleased. Likewise, when the Buddhas see somebody meditating on bodhicitta, they think: "Finally, there is somebody who got it!" They think the same about someone who retains the Dharma and who puts it into practice. There is nothing more pleasing to the Buddhas than to see someone actually

remembering even just a few words of the Dharma, such as the four-line Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer, or putting the Dharma into practice and effecting some positive change in the mind.

So, when one actually makes offerings, one tries to make offerings devoid of any of the three poisons – attachment, anger and ignorance – and with a good motivation. Then, one can visualise that from one's mental heart¹ offering goddesses emanate, carrying different offerings that they present to the Buddha. Or, after having set out the actual physical offerings, one can just visualise oneself emanating many bodies that actually present the offerings to the Buddha. If that is also not possible, then one can just offer the offerings set out on the altar by one lonesome self.

So, when one is making offerings, one can choose to visualise offering goddesses emanating from one's heart presenting the offerings to the merit field and, when the merit field receives the offerings, one should also meditate that all the faculties and aggregates of the merit field are completely pervaded by uncontaminated bliss that is generated by the offerings. Or, if one is not able to visualise the emanation of the offering goddesses, one can just emanate many replicas of oneself, making offerings to the merit field together with those replicas. Again, when the offerings are received, the faculties, elements and aggregates of the merit field become completely pervaded by bliss.

If this second possibility is not possible, one can just offer the physical offerings that are set out on the altar without any greed or clinging. Again, the same applies, that when the merit field receives the offerings, it is completely pervaded by bliss.

Also, the offerings are first transformed or blessed by the syllables 'Om Ah Hung'. The syllable 'Om' purifies the different impurities of colour, smell and so forth; 'Ah' transforms the purified offering into a beautiful offering. For example, if one offers some kind of tactile substance such as a pleasant, very soft cloth, all its impurities and imperfections are purified with the syllable 'Om'; then, the 'Ah' transforms it into something beautiful and perfect; and the 'Hung' makes it inexhaustible. Generally, when we say we are blessing the offerings, the meaning of blessing is to transform them. On the one hand, it purifies all stains, impurities and faults of the object, and on the other hand, the blessing transforms them into something pure.

When we make the different individual offerings, they are made to different parts of the offering object.

For example, when we offer flowers, in the case of Tara, they are offered to Tara's crown. Flower garlands can be hung around the neck of the offering object or the flowers can be offered by putting them in front of the Buddha. Sounds are offered to the ears, and butter lamps are offered to the eyes. However, if one is worried that the butter lamps might burn the Buddha's eyes, they can also

¹ In the centre of the chest.

just place them in front of the offering object. Perfume is applied to the heart of the Buddha, and other types of scent are offered to the Buddha's faculty of smell in the nose. Tactile stimuli such as cloth and fabrics are offered to the whole body of the Buddha. Food and drink offerings are offered to the mouth. An umbrella is also offered to the crown, as we mentioned also before.

It is much better if we can perform these offerings while visualising ourself as having many emanations. As explained before, when the offerings are presented to the different parts of the body of the Buddha, they generate uncontaminated bliss in the Buddha's mind, so that all the Buddha's faculties are pervaded by uncontaminated bliss. Sound would generate uncontaminated bliss in the auditory or ear faculty; and the offering of butter lamps would generate uncontaminated bliss in the sight faculty, and so forth. In the end, the whole body and mind of the Buddha, all the faculties of the Buddha, are pervaded by uncontaminated bliss.

By training one's mind in such a way, making offerings can have a very great purpose and significance.

We will finish discussing how to make offerings today. Next time, we can move on to the confession of non-virtues.

So, do you have any good questions?!

Question: Geshe-la, you speak of the Buddhas as though they have earthly needs like we do. Are we to understand that Buddhas do go around in an earthly body or are they spiritual?

Answer: We do these offerings for the purpose of building up our merits – not because the Buddha is hungry, but to build up our merits.

Of course, this is a reasonable question. But one doesn't make offerings because the Buddha has different needs and desires that must be fulfilled – that is not the point of making the offerings. It's not as if the Buddha desires all these offerings and is then very happy when he gets them – that's not how it works. The purpose of making those offerings is to build up our own merits.

During Shakyamuni Buddha's life, although he had no need for normal food from his side, he would still go on begging rounds, visiting different patrons and sponsors to have lunch in their homes. These days, lamas don't have to go anywhere – the food is brought to them. But the Buddha very humbly went to different homes to have lunch. The purpose of going to these different homes for food was not because the Buddha needed food, but for the sponsor to generate merit - the food would be blessed and offered. Also, the Buddha had an opportunity to teach the sponsors. That was the purpose of the Buddha going to have lunch in different peoples' homes – not because he needed it.

Likewise, when we make these offerings, it is really to build up our own merit. For that purpose, one meditates that the offering object has generated uncontaminated bliss – that is something one can do.

Some students have this notion that it's not necessary to give anything to their parents because they say their parents have everything they need. However, although it

might be the case that the parents have everything they need, they are still very happy if one invites them for lunch or dinner. Likewise, although the Buddha doesn't have any needs of his own, he is still happy if he is invited for lunch or dinner.

Previously, when I went to Kushinagar – the place where the Buddha passed into paranirvana – with a few students, for the purpose of auspiciousness, I borrowed a begging bowl from one of the local beggars and a saffron robe from one of the local Theravada monasteries. Then I asked all the students to line up and went on a begging round. I asked them all, for auspiciousness, to put a little bit of money into the bowl. They all put quite a bit of money into the bowl. I did that for auspicious reasons, because I was very happy to be at this special holy place of the Buddha. Then I gave the bowl back to the beggar from whom I had borrowed it. There was quite a bit of money in it, so he was also quite happy.

In general, I am not really worried; should the time arise when I don't have enough food or funds, I wouldn't be particularly ashamed to go out with a begging bowl. The Buddha did it, so I don't feel that it would be beneath me to do it, if it is something that the Buddha did.

For you, it would be different. You lead normal householders' lives, so your outward behaviour needs to conform to a certain standard. But this doesn't really apply to me. I think if I were to do it, maybe I would be happy, but I don't know if Tara House would be particularly enthusiastic about it!

Once, I had a pair of old shoes that I really liked. Some kind of effort was made to replace those shoes and to get me new shoes. I said: "I don't actually want any new shoes. I am perfectly happy with those old shoes. I really like those old shoes". But one of the students said: "Geshe-la, even though you might like the old shoes and they may be good for you, they are not really very good for the image of Tara Institute!"

As was explained at the beginning, turn the mind inwards and bring it back home. Upon having focussed the mind internally, place it single-pointedly on the mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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