
The Condensed Graduated Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
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We can meditate as usual. Please sit in an appropriate meditation posture, a good physical posture.

Everybody aspires to having a relaxed and happy mind. We have to investigate what conditions are conducive for such a state of mind to arise, and what obstacles prevent the arising of a peaceful, happy mind. Regardless of what we aspire to, there will always be conducive conditions that will support the result and obstructing conditions that will prevent us from attaining our aim.

It is important to understand that if we have all the conducive conditions for a happy, peaceful mind, even if we don't desire it, our mind would still be happy and peaceful. Likewise, as much as we desire to have a happy and peaceful mind, as long as we have obstructive conditions in the mind that prevent such a mental state from arising, we will not experience that mental state.

We should regard a happy and peaceful mind as the root of all happiness, and as the primary cause for having harmonious relationships and for our actions to be beneficial to others. If one acts out of a happy and peaceful mind, then one's actions will also bring happiness and peace to others. We should regard this happy and peaceful mind as something very, very precious and important.

One of the primary obstructive conditions for attaining such a happy and peaceful state of mind is that the mind is under the control of the mental afflictions. If the mind is not relaxed, the person is also not relaxed and neither is their body. The reason why the mind is not relaxed is that it is under the power of the disturbing thoughts. This can take various aspects. For example, the mind may be constantly over-excited and always engaged with external objects. Or, the mind may be too tight and too withdrawn upon itself, going around in circles, continuously thinking about the same things.

There are various ways the mind can be under the control of the disturbing thoughts. As long as this is the case, one will not experience happiness and peace. However, if the mind is happy and relaxed, one is not so worried about what happens externally, because internally one is relaxed and happy.

When we feel physically unwell, we say, "I'm unwell". Likewise, if we feel mentally unwell, we say, "I'm unwell". Actually, we need to be able to say the reverse – that we are physically and mentally well. To attain this state of well-being, we need to free the mind from the

control of the disturbing thoughts. To do this, one needs to focus the mind internally and regain control of the mind from the disturbing thoughts that try to distract it towards external objects.

Therefore, turn the mind inwards, not engaging with external objects. After having focused the mind inwards, gently try to keep it in that state for some time, completely focused inwards. When you find that the mind again is trying to escape to external objects, place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. Here, try to have a good single-pointed focus on the coming and going of the breath, a mental awareness of the coming and going of the breath. If you are able to do this, after some time, the mind will be placed very vividly on the coming and going of the breath and will become clear. We can meditate like this for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*) Please wake up from your deep meditational equipoise!

As a Geshe said, if one doesn't know the psychology of the mind, one will not experience mental well-being. One has to understand the way the mind works – where it goes, what it does when it goes in a certain direction and what this does to oneself. In such a way, one can attain mental well-being.

This is also the meaning of the Dharma, to reverse the mind from distorted mental states and place it in valid, positive wholesome mental states. In general, the word dharma is synonymous with 'phenomenon' and, in this context, one talks about dharma as 'that which holds its own identity'. However, in an even more specific context, we don't just talk about Dharma from the point of view of holding its own identity – it also means to reverse the mind from distorted and disturbing states, and place it in wholesome and valid mental states.

Dharma is a Sanskrit word, the definition of which is 'that which holds its own identity'. For example, the clock is dharma in the general sense, because it holds its own identity. Whenever you look at the clock, the clock is able to generate the mind that apprehends 'clock'. That is something the clock always will do. So, the clock holds its identity of being a clock and this makes it a dharma. When one thinks about this deeply, there is a deep meaning here.

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 talked a little bit about the limb (of the Seven-Limb Prayer) of requesting the Buddhas to turn the wheel of Dharma.

The definition of Dharma or the Wheel of Dharma is 'a pure white quality that is either contained within the speech of the Buddha, or is contained within a clear realisation on the path'. So, what we refer to as Dharma is either the speech of the Buddha or a realisation that is already on the path.

Why do we refer to the Wheel of Dharma? Because the Dharma has the characteristics of the precious wheel of a wheel turning king. One characteristic is that the Dharma is passed on from one disciple to the next, in the same way as a wheel goes from one place to the next. The Dharma also overcomes all adverse conditions and all obstacles, in the same way that a precious wheel overcomes all obstacles and adverse conditions. This is why one refers to the Dharma as the Wheel of Dharma.

Turning the Wheel of Dharma means to teach the Dharma, and to request the turning of the Wheel of Dharma means to request the Buddhas to teach. It is very effective for the mind to think about these characteristics of the Dharma, by remembering that it possesses these characteristics of the precious wheel, such as being able to overcome all obstacles and adverse conditions, and so forth.

Also, although one's own internal realisations at the moment by definition might not be realisations that are on the path, they can be approximate realisations that approximately possess those qualities of the internal Dharma Wheel – being able to overcome obstacles and adverse conditions, one's own inner positive and wholesome mental states, and so forth.

When we request the Buddhas to turn the Wheel of Dharma, we are requesting them to teach the scriptural Dharma. By listening to the scriptural Dharma, the teachings, one generates the wisdom arising from listening. Then one can further contemplate what one has understood through listening, and generate a deeper understanding through contemplation. Next, one can meditate on the meaning one has contemplated and generate the wisdom arising from meditation. In this way, the mind is transformed and develops. The Buddha did it like this, and all Buddhas did it in this way. There is no such thing as instantaneous, instant enlightenment. One has to go through a gradual process.

Of course, the question arises in one's mind, why is it necessary to request the Buddhas to turn the Wheel of Dharma? Because they are enlightened, they have great compassion and they have the ability to teach. Actually, all they want to do is teach. So, why is it necessary to request them to teach?

To become enlightened, one needs to rely on the Dharma; of the Buddha and the Dharma, the Dharma is more important for one to become enlightened. From one's own point of view, the Dharma is the most important thing that one needs in order to become enlightened. From the Buddhas' point of view, teaching the Dharma is the only way for them to benefit sentient beings. So, to generate respect and admiration for the Dharma, one makes this request to the Buddhas to turn the Wheel of Dharma.

The person who first requested the Buddha to teach was Brahma. The Buddha practised austerities for six years, and subsequently attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree. Then he was requested by Brahma to teach the Dharma. After the Buddha became enlightened and was sitting in meditative equipoise, he actually wanted to be requested by Brahma to teach. He sent light rays

from his forehead to Brahma's and blessed Brahma so that Brahma would request him to teach. Through this inspiration, Brahma requested the Buddha to teach.

The reason why the Buddha wanted to be requested by Brahma to teach was that at that time, Brahma was very much admired by other gods. So, when Brahma requested the Buddha to teach, everybody paid attention to him; everybody became interested in the Dharma. One also practises this limb of requesting the Buddhas to teach the Dharma in order to create new merit and increase one's merit.

The Buddha chose Varanasi as the first place to teach, although he had been invited to go to other places to teach. There are various reasons why the Buddha chose Varanasi as the first place to teach the Dharma. One reason is that all the past Buddhas had given their first teaching in Varanasi, so he knew that all the Buddhas would praise him for giving his first teaching in Varanasi; they would rejoice in that. The Buddha knew that if he were to start teaching in Varanasi, it would be very auspicious for spreading the Buddhadharma and benefiting sentient beings. The Buddha also recognised Varanasi as a blessed place.

So, the Buddha turned the first Wheel of Dharma in Varanasi, teaching the Four Noble Truths to his five disciples. Then he turned the second Wheel of Dharma, which is the Perfection of Wisdom, in Rajagriha on Vulture's Peak Mountain. The third turning of the Wheel of Dharma was at Sarasvati. The third turning of the Wheel is the explanation of what is true and untrue according to the view of the Mind Only school of tenets, explaining all phenomena in the context of the three definitions.

So, the first turning of the Wheel was primarily for Hinayana practitioners; from the point of view of tenets, these are those who had potential to follow Vaibashika and Sautrantrika tenets. The second turning of the Wheel was primarily for Mahayana practitioners, primarily those who held the Prasangika and Sautrantrika-Madhyamika tenets. The third turning of the Wheel was for Mahayana practitioners, those advocating the Mind Only view.

So much for the fourth limb, requesting the Buddhas to turn the Wheel of Dharma. Last time, we went through the way of doing the visualisation, and today I told you the significance of Brahma requesting the Buddha to teach and also a bit of the historical background, the benefits of the practice, and so forth.

Question: I've been meditating on the feeling of the air coming in and out when I do breathing meditation, but lately you've been talking about having just an awareness of the breathing, so I'm a bit confused about it.

Answer: When we talk about having a mental awareness of the breathing, you should mentally count the breathing. Don't direct your awareness towards the movement of the air in the nostril, because then your mind will have wandered to an external object, the feeling at the opening of your nostrils.

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Both Kamalashila and Lama Tsong Khapa explained that there shouldn't be any feeling of the movement of the air in one's nostrils. One's breathing should be so subtle that there is nothing to feel. If you direct your attention there, in terms of trying to feel the movement of air, as long as the breathing is coarse, there might be something to feel, but this just distracts the mind towards an external object – the opening of your nostrils. This is not the correct way of meditating on the coming and going of the breath.

Rather, one should have an internal focus, a mental awareness of the coming and going of the breath, and the way this is done is by mentally counting the breaths. It doesn't mean that you stop breathing. If you have strong mental awareness of the coming and going of the breath, you will automatically not engage the tactile consciousness at the opening of your nostrils, because you will be preoccupied mentally. However, if you focus your attention towards the movement of the air at your nostrils, you will have already distracted your mind from the mental focus.

Question/comment: Following on from that answer, we are told that the object of meditation should be clear and precise. To me, a mental awareness of the breathing seems like a very vague object.

Answer: At the beginning, you will not get a very clear mental awareness of the coming and going of the breath. That only comes about through continuous practice mentally focusing on the coming and going of the breath with the help of counting. Then, by repeated practice, the object will appear clearer and clearer, and the focus will also become clearer and clearer. By continuing the practice, the mind becomes more pliant and flexible, and one goes through the different stages of calm abiding, until the attainment of calm abiding.

In *The Treasury of Knowledge* by Vasubandhu, it explains the way of attaining calm abiding in conjunction with the meditation on the coming and going of the breath. The coming and going of the breath is an easy and convenient object for one to meditate on. There is not much reasoning or understanding needed and, because it doesn't have any particular shape or colour it is neutral, making it a suitable object to pacify the conceptualising mind. If one is very angry or has strong attachment, then one can sit down and just meditate on the coming and going of the breathing for some time to calm the mind down.

The meditation on the coming and going of the breath is a particular antidote to the over-conceptualising mind. When the mind is very excited and is over-conceptualising, one can calm the mind down with the coming and going of the breath. By having pacified the mind with the preliminary practice of meditating on the coming and going of the breath, one can then engage another virtuous object during the main part of the meditation. So, by meditating on the coming and going of the breath, the mind becomes calm and clear.

As was explained at the beginning, turn the mind inwards and focus it on the mantra.