
The Condensed Graduated Path to Enlightenment

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

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We can meditate a bit as usual. Sit in a good, relaxed physical position.

The purpose of meditation, among other things, is to protect the qualities that one has already generated, and to regenerate or repair the qualities that have been damaged. It is important that one protects the positive and pure qualities that one already has. If one doesn't protect one's mind from the mental afflictions, the mind will slowly fall under their control and one will lose one's qualities. If we don't properly protect our mind from the delusions, the good qualities that we want will further degenerate, and the negative qualities that we don't want will increase.

So, if one doesn't apply the antidote of meditation, the mind will fall more and more under the control of the disturbing thoughts. Therefore, to reverse the mental afflictions, one needs to apply the antidote of meditation.

On the basis of sitting in an appropriate meditation posture, we turn the mind inwards and stop it engaging with external objects. Then after having turned the mind inwards, we place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. (*Pause for meditation*)

I think it is a good idea for you to meditate regularly. By meditating regularly, you will not only attain a more single-pointed mind, but you will also be able to protect the qualities that you have already developed. This very important, because the more qualities we have, the fewer mental afflictions.

It's important to analyse one's mind and try to identify the parts of the mind that give us happiness and the parts of the mind that disturb us. When we do that, we will find that our good mental qualities have a beneficial influence – they facilitate a tranquil and calm mind – whereas the more faults one has, the more disturbed one's mind will be. So, it's important that one identifies the good qualities within one's mind and takes measures to protect these qualities from degenerating.

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 six preparatory practices: 5) Gathering merit and

purifying negativities

Last time, we started discussing the dedication of the merits [i.e. the seventh limb of the Seven Limb practice] that one has accumulated through the previous [six] limbs, such as the limb of prostration, the limb of making offerings, confession and so forth.

These merits have to be dedicated to becoming the cause for complete enlightenment. To illustrate the meaning of transforming one's merits into the cause for complete enlightenment, I use the analogy of transforming gold into an ornament. Initially, one has only the raw gold, which then has to be taken to the jeweller, who can transform it into the ornament that one wishes it to become. Likewise, one's merits must be transformed into the cause for complete enlightenment.

Dedication is very important, and the explanation of dedication follows 6 outlines:

1. The end to which one dedicates the merits for is complete enlightenment,
2. and the purpose for which one dedicates those merits is the welfare of all sentient beings.

The reason one dedicates the merits is so that they are not diminished or harmed. According to the oral instruction lineage, the merits dedicated towards complete enlightenment cannot be destroyed by anger and other adverse conditions. From the point of view of the great treatises, the merits dedicated for complete enlightenment become inexhaustible once complete enlightenment is attained. From the point of view of our current practice, the merits will not be destroyed by anger and so forth once they are dedicated towards complete enlightenment.

To illustrate this point, last time we mentioned the analogy of a water drop being absorbed into the ocean; it will remain for as long as the ocean remains. Likewise, any merit we dedicate towards complete enlightenment will remain unharmed for as long as complete enlightenment remains.

3. When one dedicates the merits in such a way for the purpose of the welfare of all sentient beings, this eliminates the self-cherishing thought during the dedication.

4. One should also meditate on what is called the emptiness of the three circles – the emptiness of oneself, the person who is doing the dedicating; the emptiness of the merits being dedicated; and the emptiness of the action of dedicating. When one engages in the practice of dedication on the basis of great compassion – dedicating the merits for complete enlightenment – one should also meditate on the emptiness of the three circles.

So, the fourth outline is dedicating by combining method and wisdom, which we just explained. When one

dedicates in such a way, one builds up one's accumulation of method and wisdom; one dedicates unifying method and wisdom.

5. The fifth outline is what is being dedicated, which is one's merits of the three times – the merits one has already created in one's past lives, the merits one is generating at that very moment, and the merits one will generate tomorrow, next week or next year. In fact, one dedicates all the merits one will generate in the future towards complete enlightenment.

6. The sixth point is the nature of the dedication. The nature of the dedication is that of aspiration, characterised by one having the cause of what one is aspiring to. For example, we can say that if it is a dedication, it is necessarily a prayer. But if it is a prayer, it is not necessarily a dedication, because for a dedication we need to have something that is being dedicated. So, we have actually the merits that become the cause of what we are aiming to achieve. Therefore, it is an aspiration because it is characterised by the cause, whereas a prayer is a mere aspiration, without necessarily having the cause. An analogy that illustrates the difference is saying to someone: 'Have a nice day' or 'Have a nice lunch': this is the analogy for a prayer. However, if we were to give the money we earned yesterday to the person and then said: 'Have a nice day' or 'Have a nice lunch', that is the analogy for a dedication. In the first case, there is just the mere good intention, and in the second, there is actually some substance being dedicated.

The function of the dedication is to prevent one's merits from becoming diminished, exhausted or harmed, and to transform a small positive result into a bigger and vast positive result.

The seven limbs can be looked at from different points of view. For example, from the point of view of the limb of accumulation and the limb of purification, we have six limbs that are explicitly accumulating merits, and one limb that is explicitly purifying negativities. Looking at the seven limbs from another perspective – adding the limb of increasing merits – we have five limbs that are explicitly generating merits, one limb that is explicitly purifying negativities, and one limb that is increasing merits (i.e. the limb of rejoicing).

The limb of dedication counteracts anger, and is also the antidote to wrong view with regard to the Dharma. By dedicating the merits, one protects one's merits from being harmed by anger; also, the dedication for complete enlightenment would not be possible for somebody who had wrong views with regard to the Dharma.

The seven limbs are the fifth of the six preparatory practices, the practice of accumulating merits and purifying negativities. The sixth preparatory practice is making requests to the lineage teachers. If you think back to when we started this outline, there were six preparatory practices; now, we have completed the fifth

one.

Do you have a question?

Question: What can be dedicated?

Answer: All the actions we went through – such as prostrations, generosity, meditations on compassion and so forth – are suitable to be dedicated.

Making offerings, having thoughts of compassion for one's partner when one sees that person suffering – all of that can be dedicated. We have lots of merits, but they need to be dedicated because they are easily exposed to anger, which can arise very easily. There's a danger that while you are here, you meditate very nicely, but then when you go back home, you may start fighting with your partner. It is possible that one will meditate peacefully in one's room, but then when one leaves one's room, one may generate anger – towards one's children, one's partner, and so forth. Because this can happen quite easily, it's important that one dedicates one's merits.

You might be meditating in your room peacefully, but when you leave the room, you might get into a dispute with your partner – wanting to know where he or she is going. However, if one generates a virtuous motivation before a meditation, then has a virtuous meditation, and then dedicates after the meditation, one will have created a good, complete, virtuous action.

Question: I am upset because a close relative died. This is probably because of attachment. Can you tell me what to do about attachment?

Answer: You probably don't have attachment. Sometimes, when we generate concern for another person through compassion and love, it can also happen that that our concern will generate mental unease or worry for that person. That comes about because of the condition of love and compassion, so that is not bad.

Quite often, one may profess to have great love and affection for the other person, as long as the other person is healthy and well. But then when they start to get sick, to suffer, become miserable and experience great sorrow, one may not be there to care for that person. That is a sign that one didn't really have real love and compassion for that person.

Unfortunately, that is a situation we can observe quite often, where somebody will just leave the person in need, letting them remain in hospital and feel alone.

One should have true love and compassion for the other person, and look after the other person without being concerned about whether one receives something in return or not. If our concern for the other person is based on what we may get back in return, this is not a foundation for having a good and stable relationship. We need to have a type of love and compassion where we can actually look after the other person without being concerned about what we get back in return.

Question: How is merit accumulated?

Transcribed from tape by Gabrielle Thomson

Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine

Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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Answer: The merit is accumulated through pure thought. For example, if you give food to somebody who is hungry, that will accumulate merit. That act of giving food wouldn't come about without some kind of pure thought. So there has to be some kind of concern for the other person.

Giving food and drink to those who are hungry, nursing and healing those who are sick, giving help to those who need help and are destitute – these are regarded as very powerful, meritorious actions. For example, helping refugees and giving food to those who are hungry.

If one does one's job, regardless of what it is, with the motivation of benefiting – not just doing it for the money, but also doing it with the motivation to benefit others – it will become more worthwhile. So, we can combine our ordinary job with the accumulation of merit.

Also, work such as being a doctor or nurse, or being a friend or relative supporting others who are in hospital is very meritorious. If somebody is so sick that they have to be in hospital, it is a very distressing situation for them. They have no choice but to be in hospital. So, for them, it is very precious to be looked after nicely by the doctor, the nurse, and friends and relatives.

For example, if one is a nurse, one can accumulate a lot of merit through one's work. If one has been in hospital oneself, one can really appreciate the difference it makes when one is looked after nicely by the nurse. In short, positive actions will accumulate merit, while harming others will create non-virtuous karma.

Question: What to do when the mind become too concerned with numbers of mantras?

Answer: You might be a person who is more concerned with the number of things than with the actual thing. There was once a group of four people doing a Refuge retreat together, and three of them quickly accumulated the required one hundred thousand Refuge practices. The fourth person just didn't finish. When they asked him why he didn't accumulate the necessary number of Refuges, he said: 'Because I'm doing a retreat on Refuge, and the three of you did a retreat based on accumulating the numbers.'

So, the significance of the motivation cannot be explained often enough. Even if one engages in an unsuitable action, if it is done with a virtuous motivation, it will be less harmful, less negative.

As was explained at the beginning, turn the mind inwards and place it single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA