
The Condensed Graduated Path to Enlightenment

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We can meditate for a little bit as usual. You need to seat yourself in a good posture. One should approach meditation from the perspective that one needs to protect one's body as well as one's mind. If we are able to properly look after our body, protect our body properly, one experiences a resultant physical wellbeing and happiness. Likewise, if one looks after one's mind and protects one's mind properly, one can experience the resultant mental wellbeing and happiness.

We engage in many actions on a daily basis and all of those actions are motivated with the aim of attaining happiness. If, through the actions in which one engages, one can achieve both physical and mental happiness, then one has really achieved the objective of one's life. There is not really anything more. If the body is well and happy, and the mind is well and happy, then the person is well and happy. The way to make the person well and happy is to have a healthy body and mind. So we have to look at what disturbs the mind, what makes the mind distracted, what agitates the mind and makes it unhappy. It is engagement with external objects that causes this damage to the mind.

Once sitting in the appropriate mental posture free the mind from the control of disturbing thoughts and the control of mental afflictions and turn the mind inwards. Then place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. (*Pause for meditation*)

One needs to look after one's body and one's mind. This is not something that others can do for one and it is not something that one can do for others. This is something that is the responsibility of each individual. One should be aware, for example, if one eats or drinks certain things what long term effect they have on one's body. There are certain things that one eats or drinks that, even though they give some short-term happiness, are harmful towards one's health in the long run. It is similar with the mind. There are certain objects that disturb and agitate the mind and there are certain mental states that disturb the mind. One should prevent those mental states and protect the mind from these objects that disturb the mind. In this way one can look after both one's physical health and one's mental health.

If the body is sick the person is not happy. It is a very sad thing if the body becomes sick just because one didn't

look after it properly. Likewise, if the mind gets disturbed the person is unhappy and it can have a detrimental effect on others through one's actions. It is a very sad thing if that happens just because one didn't look after one's mind properly. One should look after one's body and one's mind properly. If one approaches meditation with this philosophy then one's meditation will be more beneficial.

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

We have completed the preparatory practice of accumulating merit. The seven-limb practice that we have been through is, in that format, special to the Mahayana tradition. Individual aspects of the seven-limb practice, such as prostrations or confession, can also be found in the Theravada tradition but that particular format of a seven-limb practice is specific to the Mahayana tradition.

The motivation should be the motivation of the Mahayana mind generation. We started before with the point of sitting in the appropriate posture. This included adjusting the mind and motivation; generating refuge and bodhicitta. The underlying motivation is bodhicitta. That is called being endowed with the perfect motivation. On the basis of this perfect motivation one engages in the sixfold practice and the sixfold practice is the practice of the six perfections. The seven-limb practice is done on the basis of the motivation of bodhicitta, which is **the excellence of the basis**. Here it talks about the way the seven limbs are practised on the basis of the perfect motivation, which is the special Mahayana refuge and mind generation. Then each of the limbs is practised with the sixfold action, which means the six perfections. One combines each of the seven limbs with the practice of the six perfections.

The six excellences

In conjunction with the limb of generosity:

The motivation of bodhicitta is referred to as **the excellent basis** and the practice of the seven limbs is engaged in on the basis of that excellence. Then we have **the excellence of objects**, which refer to the different objects of offering that we have been through before. Then we have the **excellence of purpose**, which is the welfare of sentient beings. Because one's practice of making offerings is held by the wisdom realising emptiness, such as realising the emptiness of the objects of offering, this refers to being proficient in the **excellence of method**. Then, at the end, one has the dedication for complete enlightenment, which is **the excellence of dedication**. The practice is done in this order for the purpose of purifying the two

obscurations, which is *the excellence of purity*. If one combines one's practice with those six excellences one will have a very nice practice.

One can apply that to each of the seven limbs, initially relying on the pure motivation of bodhicitta, first generating the special Mahayana refuge and bodhicitta and then, out of that pure thought of bodhicitta, one engages in the action and, as the action is done for the purpose of the welfare of sentient beings, one has the pure purpose. Then there is the object of the action, which is the excellence of object, and one meditates on the emptiness of the object, which is being proficient in the excellent method and one then has the dedication for complete enlightenment, which is the excellence of dedication. Because all of that is done to purify the two obscurations we have the excellence of purity.

That leads us to the **sixth preparatory practice**, which is **the practice of making requests to the merit field and meditating on the descending of the nectars on the basis of having a clear visualisation of the merit field**. In our context this refers to the practice of making the mandala offering. In some texts the mandala offering is included in the fifth preparatory practice but there is also another tradition where it is included in the sixth preparatory practice. We follow that tradition where the mandala offering is included in the sixth preparatory practice. This makes sense from the point of view that in the sixth preparatory practice one makes requests to the merit field. It makes sense to first make an offering to the merit field. Similarly if one were to petition a king one wouldn't go empty handed but one would bring some offering. Likewise if one wants to petition the merit field its good to bring an offering.

The purpose of one's request is threefold. Firstly one makes requests for all the distorted, disrespectful attitudes towards ones' spiritual friend to be purified, secondly for all undistorted appropriate respectful mental attitudes towards one's spiritual friend to be generated, and thirdly for one's outer, inner and secret obscurations to be purified. Outer obscurations can refer, for example, to being under the control of another human being, being exposed to strife or war or outer disturbances and inner obscurations refer to sicknesses. There can be mental as well as physical sicknesses, which can be a real obstacle towards one's dharma practice. Then we also have also secret obscurations which refer to the mind not being workable and serviceable, not being pliant, but being very unwieldy, dark and heavy which also poses a great obstacle in one's dharma practice.

These points that I have related are only very brief. In the Great Exposition of the Lam Rim it is much more elaborate. According to the Tantric teachings it is different again.

To make requests to ones spiritual friend viewed as a buddha is regarded as a very important oral instruction that was passed on down the lineage of the great masters. Making these requests to the spiritual friend while

thinking of the spiritual friend as being in essence a Buddha, an enlightened being, or indivisible from Buddha or an enlightened being, has a special power. It is regarded as the special oral instruction to overcome mental obstacles or obstacles towards one's dharma practice such as not being able to retain the dharma words that one has heard or not being able to contemplate the meaning of the dharma words that one has been able to retain or not being able to generate realisations even though meditating on the meaning and so forth. There are different blockages that can be overcome by visualising the merit field and then making these requests and meditating on the coming down, the flowing down, of the purifying nectars. In the more extensive elaborate version we also make requests to the different types of lineage lamas. If you want to know that in more detail you can read it in the Lam Rim.

We can stop here for tonight and have some time for questions.

Question: I was wondering what Geshe-la's advice is about giving up smoking, especially what to do mentally.

Answer: The first step is to gather your mental strength. You need to gather courage and mental strength. You need to generate great mental strength, self-confidence and courage and then you have to make a promise on the basis of that. In order to gain this strong determination and mental strength it is beneficial to reflect on the disadvantages of smoking. We don't need to go too much into the disadvantages of smoking because I think you know them. One needs to reflect on all the detrimental effect that smoking has on one's health. Reflecting on these disadvantages of smoking one arrives at the inescapable conclusion that there is absolutely no benefit in smoking. Think about the dangers towards one's own health, what smoking is doing towards one's own body. To understand that look at the body of somebody who has smoked a lot. That will be enough to give you an idea.

The great bodhisattva Shantideva said if you want to overcome attachment to the human body, which might appear very attractive, all you have to do to overcome that misperception is to look at what's inside the body. Look at the cut-up body and think if you still find it very attractive. One can apply the same principle to other things. If you want to understand the disadvantages of smoking, just look at the body of someone who has smoked a lot to understand the damage better. Quitting might give you some physical difficulty for maybe two weeks. But then you will have overcome the physical habit. Mentally you will still generate the craving for a cigarette. Then it can help to have something hard to chew on. In India they chew on ... You can find it in Indian restaurants. They pack different types of sweets together and roll it into a leaf, which you just shove it into your mouth and chew on. When I last went to Wodonga and ate in an Indian restaurant, instead of giving aniseed, which they quite often do, they had this type of sweet which I just described, which is very nice.

The only thing that you have to deal with after two weeks is your mind, the cravings. And that is just the appearance to your mind, which you don't really need to take too serious. Even though it tries to make it very attractive, that is really just an appearance to the mind. You can meditate in that way and during those times you also have something to chew on. It might help also. The main thing is to deal with the craving, which is just an appearance to the mind.

After you have stopped smoking it will also purify your appearance. One can notice the difference when somebody stops smoking. Their appearance becomes much clearer and purer. You know people who smoke have a somewhat yellow appearance. They have a somewhat yellow face. If you want to have a yellow face and not such a good appearance then its probably advisable to smoke. If you want to have a more pleasant, cleaner appearance, then its better not to smoke. The point is that it is beneficial if you can make yourself afraid of smoking.

For example, once I asked a boy whether he liked chocolate and he said, "Yes, of course I like chocolate" and then I said to him, "Have a look at my teeth" and asked whether he liked to have teeth like my teeth and he said "No". Well, I said, "That's the teeth you get if you eat lots of chocolate" (laughter). "So, do you still want to have some chocolate", and he said "No".

Question: Could you describe who is in our merit field?

Answer: There are many beings in the merit field; teachers, Buddhas, deities, bodhisattvas. You don't have to think about the complicated one. You can just think about the simple one that we described before, just the Buddha.

Question: By making offerings and requests to the Buddha field, doesn't that amount to a request to have one's karma modified by an outside agent, whereas didn't the Buddha imply that one could only make a change through one's own efforts?

Answer: Making requests to the merit field and the Buddha saying that are not mutually exclusive. The practice of making offerings to the merit field is more a Mahayana practice. In the Theravada tradition they apply the same principle of making offerings to the sangha by, for example, arhats going on the begging round and the people make offerings to the arhats in order to accumulate merit. The principle is the same. If, for example, one makes an offering to a bhikkhu then the merit field at that moment is the bhikkhu. And if, for example, one makes offerings to one's parents the parents become the merit field.

There are three types of merit field. There is the merit field of qualities, which is the Buddha, dharma and sangha. There is the merit field of kindness, which are the parents, because they have been very kind to one, and there is the merit field of misery, which refers to those that are sick and destitute. When one helps those that are

sick or destitute and so forth they become the merit field; one's merit field. We don't have to think of a merit field as something that is necessarily very high. One creates most of one's non-virtuous karmas with regard to one's fellow human beings and likewise they also become the object of most of one's virtuous karma. We don't normally meet the Buddha in our daily life and so we don't really generate any particular non-virtuous karma with regards to the Buddha, dharma, and sangha in our daily life. But we constantly interact with our fellow human beings, such as other dharma practitioners and the other people that we know. They become the main object in regards to which we create merits, because we constantly interact with them.

As was said before, bring the mind back home and place it single-pointedly on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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