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# The Condensed Lam Rim

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

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We can meditate a little bit as usual. Please sit in a comfortable, relaxed, good meditation posture. And, as we always say, one needs to generate a good motivation.

One should approach meditation for the purpose of self-improvement – on the one hand lessening the harmful aspects of one's mind, getting rid of them and stopping them; and, on the other hand, increasing the positive aspects, protecting them and generating new qualities. The point of meditation is to become more and more familiar with the positive, good mental states. The more we can increase them, and the more familiar we become with them, the more we will have achieved the point of meditation.

Turning the mind inwards and stopping it engaging external objects reverses it from negative mental states. When we have focused the mind totally inwards, we place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. We can meditate in this manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

## 4. How to guide with the actual instructions

### 4.1. The way of relying on the spiritual friend who is the root of the path

#### 4.1.2. A brief presentation of the way to strive

##### 4.1.2.1. The actual way of striving

##### 4.1.2.1.2. What to do in the time between sessions

We had gone through the four points that explain how to practise in general during the post-meditation period: controlling the doors of the senses; acting with introspection; knowing the right amount of food to eat; engaging in the yoga of not sleeping, and when one goes to sleep, knowing how to sleep in the appropriate manner.

If we look at these four practices we can see that they are not exclusive to the post-meditation period, but that most of them have to be practised during the meditation session as well. There is no way one can meditate if one does not control one's door of the senses; and there's no way one can meditate without introspection. Also, there's no way one can meditate if one does not engage in the yoga of not sleeping. So, these apply both to the meditation period and to the post-meditation period.

Knowing the right amount of food and how to eat it and the correct way of sleeping are practices that are

exclusive to the post-meditation period. As you can see, it is not proper to have a cup of tea during one's meditation session! Spending one's meditation session meditating a little bit, having a cup of tea, then again meditating a little bit and sipping tea – this is not recommended. In fact, in the commentaries of how do retreats, for example, it is explicitly recommended not to eat or drink during the meditation session. Although one might feel hungry or thirsty during one's meditation session, one just has to wait until the session is finished.

Another important point to consider is the importance of eating, drinking and sleeping without transforming one's eating, drinking and sleeping into non-virtue. Why? Because these activities take up such a great part of one's life. Half of one's life is passed in sleep, so it is important that one's sleep is not non-virtuous. Likewise, eating and drinking take up a great part of one's life, so if one can spend these times without non-virtue, one will profit greatly. It is important that one spends these times without non-virtue.

The model of practice that has been explained over the preceding Wednesdays – the preparatory practice of the meditation session, the main part of the meditation session, the conclusion of the session, and the post-meditation period – applies to any meditation practice one can do. The only thing that will change is the meditation done during the main part of the session. For example, one could meditate on the proper way of relying on the spiritual friend as a particular theme of meditation. But then there are all the other topics of the lam-rim up the attainment of the union of calm abiding and special insight.

So, the meditation topic that one engages in during the main part of the meditation session will change, but otherwise this model – preparatory part of the meditation session, followed by the main part and conclusion of the meditation session, and then acting appropriately in the post-meditation period – applies to all practices.

#### 4.1.2.2. The reasons one needs to strive in two ways, eliminating misconceptions regarding the way of striving

A challenger who doesn't perceive all the buddha's teachings and their commentaries as instructions states, 'When meditating on the path one does so only through single pointed engagement without investigation of the object.'

Here, the text explains the reason for having a practice that includes single-pointed meditation and analytical meditation. Why is this point explicitly mentioned? Because it is a common misconception to think that meditation is only single-pointed meditation, and it is often overlooked that meditation can be also analytical meditation, and that both are needed for one's progress.

To refute this view that discriminating awareness should be solely confined to listening and contemplation, Lama

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Tsong Khapa says, 'This is a great misunderstanding with regards to the important points of the path, because it says in the *Mahayana Sutra Ornament*,

*From initially listening correct mental awareness is generated. From repeated familiarisation the transcendental wisdom of the correct meaning arises.*

Buddha Maitreya states here in the *Mahayana Sutra Ornament* that initially one needs to engage in the practice of listening to gain a proper understanding of the path. This understanding needs to be deepened with contemplation, and the understanding derived through contemplation needs to be further deepened through meditation in meditative equipoise.

So, the wisdom generated through listening becomes the cause for the wisdom generated through contemplation. Then, in meditation, one directly realises the profound meaning that was realised during contemplation.

Initially, through engaging in the practice of listening, one gains new Dharma knowledge that one didn't have before, through an external condition. When one engages in the practice of listening, the Dharma knowledge one acquires is generated through the external condition of the teacher and the words.

One then ascertains the meaning of the dharma by investigating it for oneself with quotations and reasons, i.e. contemplation, and in such a way clears away any doubts that one might have had.

In contrast to listening, the understanding generated through contemplation is not generated through an external condition, but is generated through the internal condition of one's own discriminative awareness. This generates a very strong and stable faith in one's mind. One then needs to then further familiarise oneself in meditation with this Dharma meaning that has been understood through contemplation. This process of analysing the object repeatedly is also meditation. Meditating can be to fasten the mind single pointedly without analysis to the meaning understood through contemplation, as well as examine this meaning with analytical meditation.

After having generated an understanding of the Dharma through the two steps of listening and contemplation, this understanding needs to be further deepened through meditation. Here, one needs to proceed in two ways: on the one hand, engaging the meaning one understood during contemplation as the object of single-pointed meditation; and on the other hand, subjecting that meaning to a further analysis in meditation using one's discriminative awareness, which is analytical meditation.

The wisdom arising from listening is preceded by listening. Then the wisdom arising from contemplation is preceded by contemplation. And the wisdom arising from meditation is preceded by meditation. The wisdom arising from meditation is preceded by meditation, which

establishes the wisdom that arises from contemplation as meditation.

The more one engages in the practice of listening, the more one will generate the wisdom that arises from listening. The more one generates the wisdom arising from listening, the more one will contemplate the meaning of what one has heard. And the more one contemplates, the more wisdom will arise from contemplation. The more wisdom arising from contemplation generated, the more one meditates, and proportionally the more one will generate the wisdom arising from meditation. The more wisdom arising from contemplation is generated, the more faults are cleared away and the more qualities are generated.

Basically, the more one engages in the preceding practices, the stronger will the following practices become because they are induced by the preceding practices.

By understanding this, one can see how those who assert that 'meditation' means only single-pointed meditation are at fault and have no understanding of the Buddhadharma. One can see that listening and contemplation are indispensable for meditation; saying that listening and contemplation are unrelated to meditation would be completely nonsensical. It would be like building a fine racetrack, but racing the horse somewhere completely different.

By contemplating the interconnectedness between listening, contemplation and meditation and the three types of wisdom that arise through them, you can understand their interdependent nature and how they are form a complete, interrelated path.

Another moral to take here is not to disregard the practice of listening. Some people feel that they can disregard the practice of listening, and just engage into practice; one can use the understanding gained here to counteract that misconception.

The text goes on further to say how the practice of listening and contemplation becomes meditation. During listening and contemplation, one familiarises oneself with the virtuous object. What one is doing during listening and contemplation is training the mind repeatedly on the virtuous object, trying to keep the mind single-pointedly on the virtuous object and familiarising oneself with the meditation object.

That's why listening and contemplation become meditation, because there is no difference between saying one familiarises oneself with the virtuous object and saying that one meditates – they are just two different terms. The great translators of the past translated these two terms as synonyms. This is how one can understand that familiarising oneself with the virtuous object is meditation and vice versa. Therefore, to think that analytical meditation is not meditation is laughable.

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The *Ornament of Clear Realisation* also says that since the Mahayana path of meditation consists of repeated analysis, contemplation and ascertaining of the object, one can understand that these activities are not mutually exclusive from meditation, since they are part of the path of meditation.

By understanding that familiarisation and meditation are synonymous, one can understand how the different topics of the *Introduction to the Middle Way* and the *Compendium of Deeds* are objects of meditation, because the great Bodhisattva Shantideva, in his introduction to these texts, which he wrote, states that: 'I am not composing these texts for the purpose of teaching Dharma to others, but I am composing these texts for the mere purpose of familiarising myself with these topics'. This shows that all the topics found in both texts are objects of meditation.

We can stop here for tonight. Next time, we can continue with a quote from the *Compendium of Deeds*, where it explains how one actually engages in analytical and single-pointed meditation along the path, and how one can develop very clear, discerning wisdom through this practice.

Do you have a question?

*Question:* Doesn't meditative equipoise require only single-pointedness of the object with which you have equipoise?

*Answer:* Yes, for meditative equipoise, you need to have single-pointed concentration, but that doesn't really contradict anything I said. Didn't I just mention that meditating can be to fasten the mind single pointedly without analysis to the meaning understood through contemplation

When one engages in single-pointed meditation, one has to stop the analytical process and just engage the object single-pointedly. However, if one has not clearly ascertained the object beforehand through listening and contemplation, where will your single-pointed concentration lead you if you have the wrong object? Also, the attainment of single-pointed concentration is preceded by listening to the methods for attaining single-pointed concentration and the benefits of single-pointed concentration, then contemplating these methods and benefits.

First, one needs to be clear about the method for attaining single-pointed concentration through the steps of listening and contemplation. One needs to eliminate all doubts and misunderstandings so that then when you go into a retreat to attain single-pointed concentration, you can actually do it correctly.

It is said that one can attain calm abiding in a six-month period of meditation, but one requirement to be able to do this is to have clearly understood the methods for attaining calm abiding.

Once, there was one practitioner who went off into retreat for a year to attain calm abiding, and when I heard about it, I was not very impressed. I said: 'That's not very useful, because that person has not clearly discerned and understood the methods for attaining calm abiding'. As it turned out, after one year, that person came out of retreat, down from the mountains, and decided that because they hadn't attained calm abiding, the teachings on calm abiding were lies because in the teachings on calm abiding it said one could attain it in six months. This person said: 'I have not attained it in six months, so therefore it is not true'. But it didn't stop there. This person disrobed and generated all kinds of other mistaken views about Buddhism. So, the retreat had completely the reverse effect.

There is great significance to these steps of listening and contemplation. First, you should listen well to the teachings and you should think about their meaning. In such a way, you will gradually arrive at a good understanding and a good result.

As said before, turn the mind inwards and place it single-pointedly on the sound of Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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*Edited Version*

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