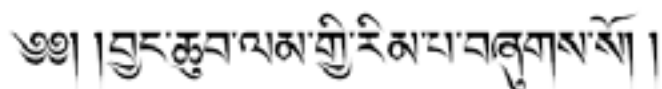

The Condensed Graduated Path to Enlightenment



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
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We can meditate for a little as usual. Please seat yourself in a comfortable and relaxed posture. Then, as usual, turn the mind inwards, stop engaging external objects and instead turn the mind inwards and, upon having turned the mind totally inwards, place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. We can meditate in that way for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

Generally, meditation is universally liked by everybody regardless of whether the person is a religious person or not. Actually meditation is part of religion but it is liked by everybody regardless of whether that person is religious or not. We have many different visitors that come to meditate at Tara House and for Tara House there is no problem with that. Tara House is very happy if people come to meditate regardless of the religion they belong to. People usually like meditation because they can see its value. They view meditation as an indispensable tool that they need in their life and that they like. Why then is meditation liked? Why do people like meditation? Everybody recognises the detrimental effect that mental afflictions have on their happiness. Everybody can recognise how mental afflictions generate unhappiness and can recognise the value of purifying the mind of these mental afflictions to make the mind more supple, flexible and serviceable.

Everybody has the very strong notion of “I” that generates a strong desire for happiness and a strong aversion for suffering. One needs to think very clearly about the causes that can subdue unsuitable mental states. One needs to be very aware of the unsuitable mental states and one needs to think about the causes that disturb the mind and the causes through which one can subdue the mind and make it undisturbed, and then meditate with this awareness. In this way, when one recognises the causes for an undisturbed mind, one will generate stronger faith and conviction in the Dharma. This is the way that one has to generate faith and conviction of the Dharma. One needs to explore the Dharma with one’s own intelligence and one’s own experience. Faith that is generated through one’s own investigation is much more stable than faith that is generated just because one hears other people saying that meditation is useful.

With regard to subduing one’s own mind, Lama Tsong Khapa said,

“One should abandon the negative mind and adopt the virtuous mind. Don’t let harmful intent arise in the

mental continuum but generate a concern for the welfare of others. Subdue your mind by contemplating what you have heard, and by then meditating upon the contemplated meaning”.

Lama Tsong Khapa is basically saying that first of all one has to practice ethics and morality, abandoning negativity and adopting virtue. Then he says not to let harmful intent be generated in the mind, but instead generate a concern for the welfare of others. This emphasises the need for love and compassion. Then one has to subdue one’s mind through the three steps of listening, contemplation and meditation.

In order to purify the mind of mental afflictions one needs to practice abandoning negativities and adopting virtue. Everybody can see the faults that the mental afflictions bring and even though it sometimes seems as if the mental afflictions arise without any reason, they don’t arise completely without cause. They arise because one has placed the imprints on one’s mind and that’s why sometimes, out of the blue, mental afflictions arise in the mind and make the mind unhappy. Why? Through prior habituation. To overcome these traits one needs to practice abandoning negativities and adopting virtue, because that is what negativities are –mental states that disturb the mind.

One also has to recognise the faults of the egotistical mind and the benefits of having a concern for the welfare of others, which is the root cause of a happy life and happy interaction with others.

It is good to remember that, as Aryadeva mentioned in his “*Four Hundred Stanzas*”, everybody experiences suffering. Regardless of whether one is a king or an ordinary person one always experiences suffering. If one looks at it from the outside the king seems to be perfectly all right and have all the happiness that he needs. In reality even a king has different types of worries and sufferings such as worrying about losing his status, losing or maintaining his wealth, being jealous of other kings and so forth. Even a king has different kinds of sufferings. On the other end of the scale, poor impoverished individuals experience different types of sufferings – lack of money, lack of materials and, on top of that, different types of physical and mental ailments. Basically one can say that everybody experiences suffering regardless of their status and position. Maybe we are the happiest because we are in the middle of those two extremes. That’s actually something to contemplate deeply; one’s position in the middle and the happiness of being there.

Abandoning harmful intent and generating a concern for the welfare of others is also very important. To be able to have a harmonious and happy life one needs to have a concern for the welfare of others. If one doesn’t have a concern for the welfare of others one’s practice of love and compassion degenerates very easily and one very easily engages in fights, starts arguments and so forth, and one’s relationship with others deteriorates very quickly. On the contrary, if one has true concern for the welfare of others that provides the basis to have a harmonious and stable relationship with others where one looks after the welfare of the other person, where

one helps them when they are down and where one looks after them and tries to make them happy when they are depressed and so forth.

One needs to engage in the practice of first facilitating wholesome actions and then restraining oneself from harmful actions. In order to do this one needs to recognise the detrimental effect that a selfish attitude and harmful actions have on one's life, regardless of which area one looks at. If one has problems at work or relationship problems, in particular or in general, one needs to look at the mental attitudes that cause these problems. One then needs to change one's mental attitude to one that is more concerned with the welfare of others and, in this way, one can improve in these different areas. By becoming aware which mental states generate happiness and which mental states generate suffering one can act accordingly. First generate the insight that understands which mental states are conducive for happiness and which are conducive for suffering, and then act upon this insight, restraining and refraining from harmful actions and facilitating and generating wholesome actions.

When one has some spare time, when one can sit down relaxed, it is very useful to reflect upon these topics because generating virtuous states makes the mind clearer, more stable and happier. My main point is to increase the good mind and to lessen the harmful mind.

I think the year went very well and I want to thank you very much for your interest and for coming. I also want, in the name of Tara House, to wish you a happy time and good luck. I pray that next year you will all come back with a happy and smiling face.

As I say every year, this is a time where there are many parties so it is very good to be mindful during this time. Sometimes it looks as if those who are very hungry and who can fit lots into their stomach can take better advantage of this time. Those who don't eat a lot can't take that much advantage. It is important to watch one's intake of food because, even though it is tasty in the moment, if one eats too much then one ends up with a stomach ache. One should also not drink alcohol. It's important not to drink something that makes the mind disturbed and uncontrolled because it is very easy to get into a situation where one acts in a way that one later regrets. One should not sacrifice long-term happiness for some short-term happiness that is provided by alcohol and food.

Perhaps it seems nice to sit for two hours and to eat and drink and talk. The more one drinks the more one talks about all kinds of useless things and it can very easily get out of hand. I had a first hand experience of this in a place where I went some time ago. I wasn't actually aware that the person was drunk at the time. What happened was that, even though the man was there with his girlfriend or wife, because he was drunk he came on to other women who were also around. Right there he laid the foundation for an argument with his girlfriend upon returning home. He probably didn't mean anything by it. He was out of control because he was drunk, but that is what happens when one is drunk. One lays the foundation for later arguments and regret. Try

to be aware of this and to behave well in that regard.

From Tara Institute I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I want to wish all the students of Tara House Tashi Delek. I like all of you very much and you are close to my heart. Specifically I want to thank all the members of Tara Institute and all those that have made donations to Tara Institute. I want to really thank you from my heart for your support. Your help is invaluable to Tara Institute and has great benefit.

For example, Tara Institute doesn't charge anything for my talks and also provides tea and biscuits and cake for the students after the talks. I think this is really quite an extraordinary act of generosity which is made possible by your support. In these days its very, very difficult to find true generosity in the world so I think that this is one act of true generosity about which I am really very happy. As members or benefactors of the centre, somebody who has given donations to the centre, you should also rejoice thinking that I made this possible. Rejoice in that action. If you are a member consider increasing your support and being supportive for a longer time and, maybe, if you are just an occasional benefactor consider becoming a member.

I have heard many times that students who come to Tara House appreciate that there is no entrance fee for the teachings. Students have told me that, even though there are many centres, they don't like to go to other centres because it is very costly to attend the courses and teachings. It has also been observed that as other centres charge a lot for a course one goes to the course thinking, "Oh, since I have to pay a lot of money for the course something much more special than the Tara Institute will be offered". But students report that the course is basically the same. I don't subscribe to the idea that the more is charged for the teaching, the more attractive it becomes to the students. I don't subscribe to the idea that by charging a lot one can attract students. Some may subscribe to this idea that similarly to fashion, where the more hyped up and expensive the trousers or the clothes are the more desirable they become. They may think that this can also apply to the Dharma, but I don't think so.

I want to thank of all of you, and Tashi Delek to all of you and I pray for your long life, good health and success.

The year finishes next Wednesday when Venerable Carolyn will present a teaching. The program starts again on the 10th of January with a Monday teaching and on Wednesday the 12th of January. The Monday will be the normal Monday nights and on the Wednesday there will be Tara Practice. Both Monday and Wednesday nights will be held by Allys Andrews. I think if you come you will find that as well as learning something it will also be quite entertaining. (Laughter) If you look at somebody who likes to laugh, then one easily laughs oneself.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Edited Version

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