
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
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9 March 2005

We can meditate for a bit as usual. The meaning of meditation is to train one's mind single-pointedly on a virtuous object, and then to familiarise the mind with this object to achieve a stable focus on it.

To meditate doesn't come naturally, so at the beginning, one needs to go in small steps. We find it difficult to place the mind single-pointedly on a virtuous object because the mind is so familiar with non-virtuous objects, so accustomed to following the objects of the mental afflictions, that when we place the mind on a virtuous object, the mind finds it very difficult to abide on that object.

It is important that we see which objects make the mind happier. Is the mind happier when it abides on a virtuous object, or is it happier when it is preoccupied with the objects of the afflictions? We need to train the mind slowly, focusing on and abiding on virtuous objects – which, initially, has to be done in a leisurely manner. We need to take it easy. However, by doing this process repeatedly, the mind picks up the trait. It will become accustomed to this habit of abiding on a virtuous object.

In such a way, we will develop the wisdom that can distinguish between right and wrong, between beneficial and harmful. If one investigates deeply, one will recognise that certain experiences provide some superficial happiness on the surface, but deep down they cause further suffering. In such situations, one has to look deeper and more closely at what is happening within the mind.

For a mind that lacks happiness, training the mind will enable it to begin experiencing happiness. A mind that was unclear can become clearer and more mindful. But one also has to be careful. One's practice has to be continual. One cannot just practise a little bit then, when one starts to experience some mental happiness, give up one's practice because the mind will again fall into unhappiness. One has to be careful that just because one has some greater happiness, one does not as a result become reckless and give up one's practice.

If we calmly place the mind internally it will also experience greater happiness, even if it is not placed on a virtuous object. Merely by the mind abiding internally, it experiences greater happiness. That's what we can do now. We can first sit in a comfortable and appropriate meditation posture, turn the mind inwards, focus it internally, then place it single-pointedly on the coming

and going of the breath. We can meditate in that manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

4.2 How to train after having established a relationship with a spiritual friend

4.2.1 Exhorting the disciple to take the essence of this basis with endowments

4.2.1.1 The identification of the basis of the freedoms and endowments

Last time, we started to talk about the eight freedoms and ten endowments, and we arrived at the conclusion that we are all free from the eight inopportune states to practise the Dharma, and that's why one has the eight freedoms. (Sometimes, in our mind, we create a ninth inopportune state by mentally self-sabotaging our Dharma practice in various ways!)

So, there are eight inopportune states and, when one is reborn in one of these, it is really difficult or impossible to practise the Dharma. Therefore, one should regard oneself as being very fortunate not to be reborn in the lower realms. We can think: 'I am very fortunate that I have not been reborn as an animal or in the hell realms and so forth', because in these situations, it is not possible to practise the Dharma. By having this freedom one has the opportunity to generate the wisdom that can distinguish right from wrong, and one can put this wisdom into practice. That one can do that – generate this wisdom that can distinguish right from wrong, beneficial from harmful – is due to being free from the eight inopportune states.

As Lama Tsong Khapa says: 'Take the essence of the precious human rebirth', and as it is mentioned in various prayers: 'May I be able to take the essence of this precious human rebirth'. There are various ways in which one can take the essence of this precious human rebirth.

The minimum one can do is to avoid non-virtue, practise virtue and purify non-virtue, thus avoiding a lower rebirth in the next life and attaining a higher rebirth. On the intermediate level, one can attain liberation, or at least create the causes of liberation from cyclic existence. At best, one can attain complete enlightenment, or at least create the causes for complete enlightenment. By reflecting on the precious human rebirth and its potential, this meditation directs one's mind towards the practice of virtue; by engaging in these practices, one can take the essence of this precious human life.

The eight freedoms are called this because they refer to being free of the eight inopportune states to practise the Dharma. The ten endowments are the other features of the precious human rebirth, which are the conducive conditions for the practice of the Dharma. So, on the one hand, one is free of the eight adverse conditions for the practice of the Dharma, and on the other hand, one is endowed with the ten conducive conditions for the practice of Dharma, the first five of which relate to the individual while the second set of five relate to the circumstances of the individual.

It is good to contemplate the significance of the conducive conditions, because without having the conducive conditions for Dharma practice, one would not be able to actually engage in it. Even though one might have the leisure for Dharma practice, one might not engage in it. For example, many people might have the time, opportunity and wish to go on a holiday, but complain that they don't have the other conducive conditions to do so. Similarly, one needs to have all these conducive conditions. One might want to take the essence of the precious human rebirth and have the leisure to do so, but one also needs to have the conducive conditions.

The first five conducive conditions are related to the individual: being reborn as a human, being reborn in a central country, having complete faculties, having not reversed from karma, and having faith into the baskets of teachings.

Regarding the first point, there is no doubt that we are all humans, so that one is confirmed. **With the second point** – being reborn in a central country – we talked about the definition of a central country last time, to having the presence of the four types of disciples, male or female upasakas, and male or female fully ordained practitioners.

Thirdly, one has complete faculties, meaning one is not mentally impaired, not dumb or deaf, blind or so forth. This means we have the opportunity to see a spiritual teacher, and the opportunity to listen to listen to teachings from the teacher; one can understand what is being said, discuss the dharma with others, because one has the complete sense faculties, eyes, ears and so forth.

Not having reversed from the path of karma refers to neither having committed the five immediate karmas¹ oneself, nor having induced others to do them.

Finally, having faith in the source. What is the source here? The source refers to the three baskets of teachings, which are the source of all white dharmas, both the worldly white dharmas as well as white dharmas that have gone beyond cyclic existence; – the Sutra basket, the Abhidharma and the Vinaya basket. Through the practice of all three, one can completely subdue and liberate the mind. All the explanations about positive actions and harmful actions and so forth originate from these texts, and all the Buddhist teachings are contained within the three baskets of teachings. All the practices of the Buddha are contained in the three higher trainings – the higher training of morality is explained in the Vinaya basket; the higher training of concentration is explained in the Sutra basket; and the higher training of wisdom is explained in the Abhidharma basket.

Relating to the second feature, being reborn in a central country, the definition was that there is the presence of the four types of disciples, male or female upasakas, and

male and female fully ordained practitioners. The significance of that is that in this time, after the Buddha has passed away, one could find oneself in a situation where one might encounter the Buddha's teachings but cannot understand their meaning. Or, even if one could understand the meaning of the Buddha's teachings, one might not be able to practise these teachings purely. For this reason, it is useful to have upasakas or fully ordained monks and nuns to whom one can look as an example for practice.

For example, if one sees ordained practitioners, it is good to rejoice in their practice of morality, thinking: 'They are practising pure morality, which is a great thing' and rejoice in this, because if one loses faith in the sangha, one will not have much faith left in the Dharma practice. But, by rejoicing in the practice of morality of the monks and nuns and of all male and female practitioners with vows, one will also get the benefit oneself.

Because of the presence of monks and nuns, one can make offerings and do circumambulations. They are also able to explain the finer points of the Buddhist practice. If one is in the situation where one has heard the Buddha's teachings but doesn't quite know what they mean, one can ask them. Even if one has something of an understanding but doesn't understand it completely or is not able to practise it purely, again one can look to the sangha and ask them.

So there is a great significance in having these four types of practitioners around. Otherwise, if one regards as meaningless the practice of morality of ordained practitioners and lay people who hold vows, the second point of being reborn in a central country also becomes quite meaningless. There is a certain significance and benefit in being reborn in a central country.

First, one has been reborn as a human being, and there is great significance to this, particularly in this world, because as a human being one has incredible potential to practise the Dharma. There are many beings in higher realms that actually pray to be reborn as a human, because as a human one is in a situation that it is very conducive to progress along the path.

As to being reborn in a central country, one has not just reborn in a central country but one can also make use of that situation because one has complete faculties – one can see a special teacher, hear what a spiritual teacher says, discuss the dharma, and have the mental capacity of comprehending the teachings and discerning what they mean. One also has the physical agility to move around, and so forth.

Then one has not created or induced others to create the five immediate karmas. However, having these four conducive conditions is not enough – one needs to also have faith in the Dharma, and one must aspire to practise and have faith in the three baskets of teachings, the Vinaya, Abhidharma and Sutra basket of teachings, particularly in the Vinaya basket, which explains the

¹ killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an arhat, drawing blood from a Buddha with evil intent, causing a schism in the sangha.

most fundamental practice of avoiding harmful, non-virtuous actions and practising virtuous, good actions. The practice of morality and ethics is explained in the Vinaya. It is regarded as the most fundamental practice.

One is so incredibly fortunate to be in this situation where all these conditions have come together, but if one doesn't practise the Dharma now, one will probably never practise it because it doesn't get any better for Dharma practise, and it would be an incredible loss if one did not practise the Dharma while in this situation.

We can go through the five endowments that relate to the circumstances of the individual, next time. For tonight, do you have some questions? By contemplating the eight freedoms and ten endowments, relating them to one's situation, recognising how one has them, will really turn one's mind towards the dharma.

(Question about rejoicing in the fortune of other human beings)

Answer: Rejoicing in the fortune of others is like the situation when a beggar finds a piece of gold – that beggar will be incredibly happy. When one rejoices, one should feel the same kind of joy for the fortune of others. By rejoicing in the good fortune of others, we think that they, like us, want happiness and so we feel the same happiness about their fortune that we would feel if we were to have these fortunes.

One can generate happiness for them by seeing that they are exactly the same as oneself. Rejoicing in the happiness of others counteracts jealousy, because if one doesn't rejoice in the fortune of others, the fortune of others will generate jealousy in one's mind. So rejoicing is the antidote to jealousy.

One can rejoice both in one's own fortune, as well as in the fortune of others. When one rejoices in one's own fortune, it counteracts pride; if one rejoices in the fortune of others, it counteracts jealousy.

To rejoice in the fortune of others, one has to remember that the other person is exactly the same as oneself in lacking happiness yet wanting happiness. So if something good happens to them, one can rejoice in their happiness. If one is not able to do that, there is a danger that jealousy will be generated.

Rejoicing brings happiness in one's own mind and also generates virtue, because when we rejoice in the fortune of others, we generate virtuous karma. So there is a double benefit. One generates happiness in one's mind and one generates virtue by thinking how great it is that the other person has a situation that is fortunate.

Lama Tsong Khapa describes the practice of rejoicing as a virtuous practice that requires little effort, but which accumulates great waves of merit.

Question: How can I change my view from being negative to thinking that it does not matter.

Answer: There are three types of equanimity – 'immeasurable' equanimity; the feeling of equanimity; and what is referred to as an equanimity of action.

Equanimity of action really only applies to the advanced stages of calm abiding, so that's not what you would be talking about. The feeling of equanimity refers to a feeling that is neither happiness nor suffering. Immeasurable equanimity refers, for example, to the wish that all sentient beings may be free from anger and attachment. It can also refer to a mind that is free from anger and attachment, so which one did you mean?

Probably you are referring to the worldly attitude of saying: 'Don't worry about it...I don't want to have a good view about it or a negative view about it. I just don't want to worry about'. Is that what you mean? Or do you mean transforming problems.

When one experiences a problem, you can use that problem by transform it into the path, take it into the path by reflecting on the causes and conditions of the problem. Recognise what the different causes and conditions are that gave rise to the problem, and recognise that primarily the problem arose because of non-virtuous karma and afflictions. Reflecting in this way, it will naturally make one want to avoid non-virtue, to purify non-virtue.

If one experiences happiness, one can do the same, reflecting on its causes and conditions, and recognising that it comes from virtue. In such a way, one will naturally want to create more virtue, because one wants to experience that happiness again. This is how one can transform both happiness and sufferings into the path.

One can generate the wisdom that can distinguish virtue from non-virtue by the practice of 'taking adverse conditions into the path'. If one can generate the wisdom that can distinguish black and white karmas, through the experience of adverse conditions, then one has received benefit from experiencing these adverse conditions by taking them into the path.

As was said before, turn the mind inwards and place it single-pointedly on the name mantra of the Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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