
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
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We can meditate for a little bit as usual. Firstly, you need to sit in a good posture. The purpose of meditation is to increase the power of one's mind, to make one's wisdom more powerful and to increase one's wisdom. The reason for turning the mind inwards, collecting it internally, is to increase one's wisdom and to make the mind more powerful.

There is lots of emphasis to develop internally in order to be completely happy. This does not mean that all the activities that you engage in to attain external wealth and external comfort are completely useless and completely meaningless. That is not what I am saying. What I am saying is that their value should not be exaggerated and that external wealth and these activities should serve as the cause to increase one's happiness and to make one's life better. They should not become the cause for further suffering. To avoid these becoming the cause for further suffering one needs to develop the mind. For external comfort and external wealth to provide happiness the individual needs to develop internally.

For example, in this country there are many conditions for external happiness and there is no question that if all the internal conditions for happiness were present one would be able to live a perfectly happy life. This is not the case because the mind is unsubdued. The reason why one cannot fully enjoy the happy situation that one experiences in this country is the unsubdued mind. One should recognise the unsubdued mind as the problem, as the cause that makes it impossible for one to experience a happy life and to take full advantage of the good conditions in this country. One should recognise that the reason one is unhappy is not a lack of external good conditions but the unsubdued mind.

The purpose of meditation is to subdue the mind. Therefore we can now sit in the appropriate meditation posture, turn the mind inwards and stop engaging external objects. After the mind is completely focussed internally place it single pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. First one collects the mind internally and then one places the mind single pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. This placement should be done in a very vivid and complete manner. It shouldn't be a partial placement of the mind but a complete placement of the mind on the coming and going of the breath. We can meditate in this manner for a few minutes. *(Pause for meditation)*

4.2.2.1.2 The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.1 Training the mind in the stages of the path of the small capable being

4.2.2.1.2.1.1 The actual way of training in the motivation common to the being of small capacity

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.1 Generating the aspiration for happiness in the future life

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.1.1 Remembering death, becoming aware that one is not going to remain for a long time

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.1.1.2 The benefits of cultivating mindfulness of death (cont)

Meditation on death and impermanence is the door to all virtuous practices. It makes the difference between practising the dharma and not practising the dharma. Awareness of death and impermanence is the tool through which one can overcome all mental afflictions and negative actions. Meditation on death and impermanence is the door to all qualities.

The only basis that one has to achieve something for the next life is the present life. Generally, in one's existence one spends a lot of time in the lower realms where one does not have any opportunity to practice the dharma. Even though very occasionally one takes rebirth in an upper realm it is mostly a rebirth where, even though it is in the upper realms, there is no opportunity for the practice of dharma. Now one has the opportunity of a precious human rebirth and one has to ask oneself what is the reason that, even though one has a precious human rebirth, one is not able to practice the dharma purely or does not practice the dharma purely. The reason one does not practice the dharma purely, or cannot practice the dharma purely, is because one has not remembered death and impermanence. That is the reason. The mind that grasps at one's permanence is the door to all obscurations, downfalls and ignorance.

Next comes the refutation of some opponents who think that the meditation on death and impermanence is insignificant and unimportant. There are also others that feel that the meditation on death and impermanence is important at the beginning but they don't feel that is important enough to practice it at the middle and the end of the path.

In reality, meditation on death and impermanence is important in the beginning, the middle and the end of the path. It is important at the beginning of the path because it initially induces one to practice the dharma. It is important in the middle of the path because, after having started to practice the dharma, meditation on death and impermanence enables one to practice the dharma purely and continuously. Awareness of death and impermanence is also important at the end of the path because through it one will be motivated to complete one's practice of the path and not stop before having completed one's path.

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.1.3 The type of mind mindful of death that is generated

The next outline is the identification of the mind that remembers death and impermanence. There can be different types of fear and concern generated in the mind through the contemplation of death and impermanence. For somebody who does not have the awareness of the

dharma it will be more likely to be a fear of being separated from one's friends, from one's possessions and one's body. This is not that type of fear that one aims to generate by meditating on death and impermanence. The type of mind that one tries to generate by contemplating death and impermanence is a mind that is ready. One tries to generate a state of readiness for death and impermanence, for one's death.

For example, the meditation that we always do at the beginning of the class, recalling the mind from external objects and placing the mind in a state that is free from anger and attachment and pride and so forth, is preparation for death. If one is able to do this type of meditation at the time of death one can die unafraid with a very happy and peaceful mind. This is an example of how one's practice becomes a preparation for death. The purpose of the meditation on death and impermanence is to make one aware of the possibility of death and the need to be prepared for death. One should approach this meditation from that point of view. If one can prepare for death in this way, learning to manifest this mental state that is free from mental afflictions such as the anger and attachment and pride and jealousy and so forth then, at the time of death, it will be much easier. One will find it much easier to manifest this state. If one does not make this preparation now and just leaves it to the end it is very unlikely that one will be able to manifest this virtuous state at the time of death. If one did not take care of one's mind during one's lifetime then it is very unlikely that, miraculously, at the time of death one will be able to have this peaceful and virtuous mental state. If one can practice now familiarizing one's mind with this mental state free from the mental afflictions then that is an excellent preparation for death.

One also needs a mind free from afflictions to experience happiness in this life. One needs a mind that is free from grasping, desire, anger, pride, jealousy and so forth. If one does not have such a mind then it is unlikely that one will experience happiness in this life. A mind that is distracted by attachment and anger does not experience happiness. A mind that is distracted by pride or jealousy does not experience happiness. Instead it is very distracted, dissatisfied, unhappy, experiences suffering and so forth. So, even from the point of view of this life, it becomes very important to lessen the mental afflictions.

For those of you that are more advanced in years, 40 or 50 years old, the uselessness of playing around with attachment should, by now, be pretty obvious. If young people do not always see the uselessness of playing around with attachment they can be forgiven. But if somebody has reached 40 or 50 years and still does not see this then it is something different. Young people can be forgiven for not seeing the disadvantages and trickery of attachment. They are like somebody who has not eaten for a long time and is presented with food. That's how I like to think of them. They can be forgiven.

When the mind is under the control of attachment the person becomes involuntarily, and also quite unreasonably, attracted to another person, quite often primarily to the body of the other person. When the mind

is completely under the control of attachment it is very difficult to have a different perspective. One becomes somehow fully attracted to the other person and perceives the other person also as wholly attractive. This is not really reasonable because the body is not really wholly attractive. It is not as if there parts of the body that are not repulsive. But one does not see this when one is under the control of attachment. As long as one is blinded by desire one cannot see this. One should try to recognise that desire is not reasonable. It is not a reasonable perception and it is also not conducive.

I'm not telling young people not to have friends and relationships. What I do advise them is not to go after other people like a hungry dog that finds some food on the street, but to be more discerning. If one is not more discerning the mind becomes blinded by one's misperception of desire and the other person is perceived as wholly attractive. Then, sooner or later, one perceives the faults of the other person and one's mind switches from attachment and desire for that person towards anger and repulsion. In this way it becomes very difficult to have stable and enduring friendships. I advise young students not to have friends but to be more discerning and to try to have stable and good relationships that one can also enjoy. We have now explained the difference between somebody that generates fear of dying or who does not have knowledge of the dharma and someone who generates fear of dying and has knowledge of the dharma. Do you have some questions for tonight?

Question: When one is at the hungry dog stage, it's hard to perceive what's going on. Can you give some advice about how to see through what's happening?

It is probably all right if you look at whether your perception of the other person is really accurate or not. Is the other person really the wonderful, faultless person that one perceives or is there discrepancy between what appears to one and what really is? I usually tell younger students not to only look at the external appearance or at the face of the other person but to also look inside the other person. Look at what is behind the pretty face and see what is in the other person's mind? What one should analyse is whether the other person is a person that one can spend one's life with or not. Is this person a suitable person to become one's life partner or not. That is what one should look at.

Some of the younger students follow this advice and they find it very useful. It turns out very well for them. Others say it is too difficult. Some of the students say, "What you say is true but unfortunately I can't practice it". Then what can one do? Sometimes a child receives very good advice from their parents and recognises the advice as such, but says, "Even though it is very good advice I am not able to follow this advice". Sometimes this can serve as the cause for disagreements between the child and the parents. If they develop different views then sometimes that can serve as a cause for disagreement.

Question: In practices done in other cultures, they meditate on corpses. Do you recommend this?

That practice also exists in Buddhism. There is, for

example, the practice of chöd, which means literally 'cutting'. One goes at night to a cemetery and undertakes this practice whereby one mentally cuts up one's body and divides it between the different spirits and other non-human beings that assemble in the evening in the cemetery. This is, of course, not a practice for the faint-hearted. The actual meaning here is to cut off self-grasping and if one does not possess self-grasping one will not generate fear in the course of this practice. One generates fear because one has self-grasping. The practice of chöd to get rid of self-grasping was very popular in Drepung monastery which is one of the biggest monasteries both in Tibet and India. The monks used to go at night, instead studying, and do this practice, in which a big dameru and a bone trumpet are used. You bang the dameru three times, invoke all the spirits, and offer your body to them. I occasionally do this practice myself but I don't go to the cemetery. One of the older students, an American called Harry, liked this practice very much and did it a lot. Lama Zopa Rinpoche also did this practice for some time.

Question: Is it OK to live near a cemetery? At the end of my street there is a cemetery.

To live next to a cemetery is very good. You can meditate on death and impermanence. People go to the cemetery to meditate on death and impermanence. We go there, you already live there. One can, for example, go to the cemetery and take a piece of bone and then meditate on where the bone came from? It came from a body. How did the body come about? It came from birth. How did the birth come about? It came about because of karma and afflictions. In this way you can meditate on the reverse sequence of the 12 interdependent links. This is a practice very popular amongst hearer and self-liberators.

In relationships, is it possible and desirable to not be aware of someone's faults and just concentrate on their good points? Or is it better to recognise their faults?

If you are aware of the faults of the other person then that, of course, is better. It is also realistic because, inevitably, the other person will have faults. One brings one's own faults to the relationship and likewise the other person brings their faults to the relationship. It is realistic to be aware that the other person has faults. However it is not conducive to focus on the faults of the other person. It is more conducive to focus on the qualities of the other person. Focusing on the qualities of the other person will automatically lessen one's perception of the faults of the other person and in this way one's gets the benefits.

As was said at the beginning, turn the mind inwards and place it single pointedly on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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