
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 for a bit as usual. You need to sit comfortably and upright. On top of that, you need to have a good motivation. To meditate means to familiarise the mind with virtuous ways; to acquaint it with virtuous objects. That is the purpose of meditation.

It is important that we recognise the significance of wholesome, virtuous mental states, and to recognise the benefit that they bring us. Through meditation, we work at the mind to make it more refined, more supple and subtle, and to lessen the rough mental states. This brings happiness to the mind – the mind becomes clearer and more stable. If the mind is under the control of disturbing thoughts, it usually is disturbed, agitated and unhappy. It is important to recognise this difference.

Meditation is about training and developing the mind. By training the mind in pure and good mental states and developing our mental qualities, we improve our quality of life. It is important to know this point and to know the significance of wholesome mental states.

Sitting in a good posture, turn the mind inwards, completely recalling it from external objects and focusing it completely inwards. Then place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. After you have recalled the mind and focused it completely internally, from within that space very gently place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath, letting the mind become one with the breathing. We will meditate in such a manner, not letting the mind escape to any other object. (*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 Generating the aspiration for happiness in the future life

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

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.1.4 The way of meditating on remembering death

We completed the outline of how to meditate on death and impermanence. The realisation of death and impermanence is difficult, but because it is in the nature of the mind to be able to learn by continual training, eventually something will definitely appear to the mind.

Geshe Potowa said that the meditation on death and impermanence is the main meditation through which he was able to eliminate the grasping at the happiness of this life – such as grasping at friends and relatives, possessions and wealth and one's own body. After having pacified grasping at the happiness of this life, the mind is free to work towards the happiness of future lives – towards liberation and enlightenment. There is no greater obstacle to one's Dharma practice than a mind consumed by the appearances of this

life and grasping at the happiness of this life.

By engaging in the practices of purification and accumulation of merits, and making requests towards our teachers, we will be able to overcome obstacles to generating realisations, and realisations will be generated without any doubt in the mind.

Even realisations that we feel are difficult to gain – that we feel we would not be able to generate even if we meditated for a hundred years – can be generated if our meditation is supported by the practices of accumulating merit, purifying non-virtue, and making requests to our teachers. If our meditation is supported by these conditions, realisations will be generated, even if we don't want them! If all the meditations we have discussed – such as meditating on the virtuous, spiritual friend, our precious human rebirth, and death and impermanence – are supported by these practices then one will progress well along the path.

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2 The happiness and suffering of higher and lower realm beings: Reflecting on what is to come in subsequent lives

The next outline is contemplating the sufferings of the three lower realms.

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1 Reflecting on what is to come in subsequent lives

We start by contemplating the two possibilities for our next life – a happy life or a suffering life. After we die, we do not just cease to exist, but continue to a next life. For our next life, there are only two possibilities – either we will have a happy rebirth or a suffering rebirth. So, after having ascertained death and impermanence, we need to contemplate the possibilities of what happens to our continuum after we have passed away.

At present, we have a happy rebirth, a high rebirth, and we have to consider how much we would like it if we were to take rebirth in a lower state of existence in the next life. By contemplating the sufferings of a lower state of existence we come to realise that we would find it very difficult to bear these sufferings. This contemplation generates many qualities in a person's mind.

In the whole of cyclic existence, there are six general types of rebirth one can take, three in the lower realms and three in the higher realms. The lowest are the hell realms, then above that is the hungry ghost realm, and above that is the animal realm. The first of the higher migrations is the human realm, above that is what is called the demi-god realm, and the highest is the god realm. Sometimes the god and the demi-god realms are included in the one god realm, which adds up to five types of cyclic existence.

In the hell realms, one has the experience of extreme heat or cold. The predominant experience in the hungry ghost realm is that of extreme hunger and thirst. The predominant experience of beings in the animal realm is that of strong ignorance. It is important to consider these different types of experience, and to be aware that at present one has a higher type of rebirth – in this rebirth we have the opportunity, and hence the responsibility, to abandon the causes for rebirth in a lower realm, purify the causes that we already generated (for rebirth in a lower realm) and create the virtue needed for a higher rebirth.

We need to exert great effort in abandoning the causes for a lower rebirth. In general, there is a lot of suffering in cyclic

existence, but it is at its strongest in the lower realms. In the texts of some traditions, the sufferings of the lower realms are explained at the same time as the being of medium capacity, after taking refuge has been covered. However, Lama Tsongkhapa explains the suffering of the lower realms before refuge as the motivation for going for refuge.

Generally, the contemplation of suffering is very important and has many benefits. Shantideva outlined the five benefits of suffering in his *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. Although in the *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* these are explained in relation to our present suffering, here they are explained in the context of the sufferings one is yet to experience. One of the five benefits is that **suffering reduces our pride**. Reflecting on our future experience of suffering in the lower realms will reduce our pride and help us regain our focus and mindfulness.

Another benefit of contemplating the future sufferings of the lower realms is that **it makes us apprehensive about the cause of those sufferings**. Naturally, because we do not want suffering, we do not want to create the causes of suffering. We also recognise that the suffering we presently experience is purifying karmas that would otherwise ripen in the lower realms as a much more intense suffering experience. This gives us the strength, courage and mental happiness to experience present-day sufferings.

Otherwise, if the mind becomes depressed and overcome by misery and mental suffering when we experience physical suffering, our suffering is twofold. But if we recognise that our present experience of suffering is purifying karma that would otherwise ripen in a heavier experience in the lower realms, our mind will be happy, we will not lose our courage and we will remain upbeat.

Naturally, when we experience suffering, we want the suffering to cease and experience happiness. Here, when we contemplate our future experience of suffering in the lower realms, we will want our future experience to be one of happiness, which **makes us enthusiastic about creating virtue**, which is the cause of future happiness.

Also, by recognising that other sentient beings experience these sufferings, **we will generate greater compassion for them**. After first contemplating these sufferings in relation to oneself, one transfers that understanding to others, thus generating strong compassion for other sentient beings. **One will also generate renunciation** and the wish to attain liberation from cyclic existence.

The five benefits of suffering outlined by Shantideva in the *Introduction to The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* are in the context of the present day-to-day suffering one is experiencing. Here, the context is slightly different. One thinks about the sufferings one will experience in the next life if one takes a lower rebirth.

We can finish off here for tonight and have some questions and answers. Next time, we can continue a bit with the topic, but I don't think we need to go into great detail about it!

Question: Geshe-la, what do mean specifically when you speak of making requests to the teacher?

Answer: One makes a request to the teacher for blessings to be able to develop all qualities, to purify all faults, to generate all the realisations of the Lam Rim, and so forth.

You can make requests to the Lama in the form of making requests to Shakyamuni Buddha, the original teacher of

Buddhism. One can make strong requests to Shakyamuni Buddha for the three great purposes – blessings that in one's mind all distorted paths may immediately cease, that all correct paths may immediately be generated, and that one may not be harmed by any kind of adverse condition or obstruction. These points we already covered earlier during the six preparatory practices.

Question: Do the aggregates come across from your past lives? I know that karma comes across, but do the aggregates?

Answer: Karma goes to the next life together with the aggregate of primary consciousness, the compositional factors, recognition and feeling. Only the form aggregate is left behind.

The way you have to imagine it is that when you create karma, the karma itself ceases immediately in the subsequent moment, but while it exists, it places a potential on the mindstream. When the karma ceases, its potency is left behind in the form of a karmic imprint on the mind. Virtuous mental states leave behind virtuous karmic imprints, and non-virtuous mental states leave behind non-virtuous karmic imprints.

Question: How can one be reborn again in a higher realm after being reborn as an animal?

Answer: Being reborn in the animal realm does not mean that all virtuous imprints are lost. When a karmic virtuous imprint ripens again, one will take rebirth in a higher realm.

Generally, at the time of death, one can say that one's strongest karma will ripen. If both virtue and non-virtue are equally strong, the one that was accumulated earlier will ripen. However, that doesn't mean that the other karma has ceased to exist. It is still in the mental continuum of the animal and can ripen later.

It is explained in the Abhidharma that if both virtue and non-virtue are equally strong, that with which one is more familiar will ripen first. If both the strength and the familiarity are equal, the karma that one created first will ripen first.

For example, the mental affliction with which we are most familiar will ripen easier than the others. For example, although one has both attachment and anger, the affliction that one is more familiar with tends to be the one that dominates the mind most and the one that manifests the most. Generally, in our case, we can say that attachment is predominant in our mind. Attachment arises easily, all the time, for all kinds of objects.

To contemplate what we talked about today is important so that we can identify the causes for these sufferings. Otherwise, we might think: "It's said that I'm supposed to experience these sufferings in the future, but what could possibly be the reason for that?". So, one also has to think about the causes.

As was explained earlier, focus the mind internally, then place it single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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