
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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We can meditate for a bit as usual. Sit comfortably in a good posture. On the basis of the body sitting upright, if the mind can abide in a natural space, then that would also be good.

The purpose of meditating is to subdue the mind. Subduing the mind is essential, because without subduing the mind, we will not be able to subdue our body and speech. As long as the mind remains unsubdued and under the control of the disturbing thoughts, we will engage in harmful physical and verbal actions. To be able to stop harmful physical and verbal actions, we need to subdue the mind, because our actions of body and speech usually follow what is in our mind.

To be able to stop harmful actions of body and speech, we need to get rid of our harmful mental states. There are many physical and verbal actions that harm ourselves and others, and there is no question that they are harmful. We can observe that in our daily life.

So the question arises, where do these actions arise from? They arise from harmful mental states – that's why we say that the mind is at the root of everything. Why do people fight with each other? Why do people have arguments and cannot live together harmoniously? The answer is because of their harmful mental states. Therefore subduing the mind becomes very significant. We know from personal experience that as long as our actions of body, speech and mind are unsubdued, we will not experience happiness, but if our actions of body, speech and mind are subdued, our life will be happy.

To subdue the mind, three conditions are needed – a meditation object and the mental factors of mindfulness and introspection. With these three, we can subdue the mind because with mindfulness and introspection we can direct the mind to the meditation object, and then hold it. The more familiar the mind becomes with the meditation object, the fewer the afflictions in our mental continuum.

This is very important because we should not empower the mental afflictions. We should prevent new mental afflictions from arising, lessen the strong ones that we have, and completely get rid of the weaker ones, because as soon as we let the mind fall under the control of the afflictions, our actions too will become uncontrolled.

For example, if we let our mind fall under the control of anger, quite likely what we will end up with is a wound on our head, or there will be a wound on the other person's head, or wounds on both!

Because the mind is under the control of ignorance and anger, we engage in all kinds of actions. Initially there is

ignorance, not understanding the situation correctly; then, because of this ignorance, we generate anger. If we were able to take a step back, the situation would look quite funny. Often, if we think back, it is amusing to see the way the mind works, but at the time, it can be harmful to let ourselves fall under the control of those mental states.

To learn how to avoid letting the mind fall under the control of the mental afflictions, we will now meditate a little. First, sit properly in the meditation posture. Then, recall the mind from external objects, focusing it internally. After having focused the mind completely internally, 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*)

4.2.2.1.2 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

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2 Relying on the methods for achieving happiness in future lives

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1 Training in going for refuge, the entrance to the Dharma

We had reached the outline of the individual advice relating to the three refuges, and we have completed what is to be rejected. Next comes **what is to be adopted**.

The advice of **what to adopt when we go for refuge to the Buddha** is that we should not discriminate between representations of the form body of the Buddha – such as statues – on the basis of the quality of material, the craftsmanship, the size of the statue, the painting, and so forth. Some people take down a statue from their altar because it is made of an inferior material or because it is slightly damaged – we should not do this. Rather, we should train our mind to have faith in the Buddha, regarding all representations of the Buddha equally as the actual Buddha, regardless of size, quality of material or craftsmanship.

The advice on what to adopt when we go for refuge to the Dharma is that we should regard all scriptural representations of the Dharma – any Dharma book, Dharma text or written Dharma words – as being the actual Dharma. It is not said that they are the actual Dharma by definition, but we should regard them in our mind as being the actual Dharma, and not place them on the ground, sit on them, or put them in places where we normally sit or put our feet. We should not walk over them or throw them in the rubbish.

This is not specific to Buddhism. In any kind of religion we will be taught to respect the objects of refuge, to treat the objects of refuge with respect and reverence, to practise well what is taught, and to respect those who practise the teachings well and follow their advice and example. Here, in relation to going for refuge to the Dharma, the practice to adopt is to view any scriptural representation of the Dharma as being like the actual Dharma, and then treat it accordingly.

Dharma texts and words contain the method for attaining happiness in this life and in future lives, how to subdue the mind, and so forth. Without Dharma texts, it would not be possible to do these things. Therefore Dharma texts are very important and special. When we store them, they should be placed on a proper place on the altar, in a proper way, not placed in a messy manner. Regarding Tibetan texts, all the pages should be in proper order and nicely aligned. We should take care that the pages are always lying neatly, one above the other, and that they are not messy, because this will disturb our mind.

It is said that disrespect to Dharma texts cuts off our wisdom – even the way we hold the Dharma text is important. The pages should always properly aligned and in their proper order. Also, placing them above our head as a sign of reverence is important before or after reading them is important. All this has meaning; disrespecting Dharma texts will harm our wisdom.

Regarding going for refuge to the Sangha jewel, there is no question about us being respectful to the actual Sangha jewel, but we should also view even the ordained practitioners who represent the Dharma jewel as if they were the actual Dharma jewel.

Some geshe say that you can even pay respect to the robes of an ordained practitioner by viewing them as the embodiment of all the Sangha, and placing them on your head. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that if you consider the importance of the Sangha.

If we think about it, even in worldly terms, some people will spend many thousands of dollars to get their hands on a piece of clothing that has been worn by a famous person and then place it somewhere high up or special, where they can always see it and where it can't be touched. You can see a similar way of thinking here. Similarly, some people will spend thousands or even hundreds of thousands of dollars to get their hands on a cricket bat or a baseball bat or something that has been used by a famous player, but what will they do with it? What use is it for them? Nevertheless, they see it as important, so from a Dharma point of view, there is nothing to be ashamed of if we regard the things that are really important as being important. You can see that the principles we find in the Dharma are quite often similar to the principles that we find in a worldly way of life, except that we apply different values.

Similarly, if we reflect on the qualities of the Buddha and treat our Buddha statue respectfully with the qualities of the Buddha in mind, this is a worthwhile thing to do. There is nothing wrong with that. If we reflect on the qualities of the Buddha, it will be natural that we will want to make offerings and pay respect. Likewise, reflecting on the qualities of the Dharma and the qualities of the Sangha, we will naturally generate faith and the wish to make offerings and prostrations.

One benefit of treating our refuges with respect and the representations of the three refuges with respect is that we will be treated respectfully in the next life. Apart from benefit of coming closer to liberation and enlightenment,

we ourselves will be treated respectfully. If we think about it even in a very day-to-day sense, when we perceive somebody as treating their refuges with respect, we automatically have more respect for that person. So by paying respect to the objects of refuge and their representations, one result is that in future other people will treat us with greater respect.

It's a similar principle to laughing when you are with another person; that person will laugh back. Usually, to get a smile back from another person, we have to first offer a smile to them. It is very difficult to get a laugh or a smile from another person without first laughing or smiling at them!

There's one point left in this outline regarding a quote from the sutra about respect for the Sangha. But for now we can have some questions.

Question: What do you do when you have too many pictures of the Buddha? Is there an appropriate way to remove them?

Answer: If you have somewhere to put them, then you can always put them somewhere! (Laughter)

If you have many pictures, you can place many pictures on your altar – that is a sign of having great faith. You don't want to get rid of your pictures, place them all there, as that's a sign of having great faith. For example if you have 100 pictures, put up all 100 pictures. That means you have a hundredfold faith!

If you have strong faith, there is no problem with having lots of pictures. The problem of having too many won't occur. If you get into the habit of always replacing pictures, it becomes disrespectful as was explained before. You discriminate between the different representations of the Buddha and because of better craftsmanship or whatever, you take old ones down and put new ones up, but it's a sign of being disrespectful.

Question: I've got some guided meditations from the Gyuto monks. Would Geshe-la say its better to do silent meditation rather than guided meditation? Is there a preference between those two?

Answer: For a beginner, it might be more conducive to do the silent meditation. For a beginner it will be difficult to meditate while listening to external sounds, because when you listen to external sounds, as a beginner the mind will be distracted by the external sounds, and be occupied with an external object. There's not really any meditation there – you won't be able to focus the mind inwards and have that single-pointed internal focus, because the mind will be constantly distracted to the outside.

Sometimes, when the mind is disturbed, it can be beneficial to listen to these types of recordings, because then the mind is focused on the sounds through the ear-consciousness.

When you listen to a tape, there is not much that you need to do from your own side. You just sit there and listen. If you actually try to focus the mind internally, you have to make an effort from your own side, practise mindfulness, introspection, and so forth.

To have a successful meditation, you also need to be able to give meaning to what you hear, because otherwise you are just listening to the sounds, which are essentially meaningless. For example, in my case, when I hear Western music, for me the songs are just sounds and I don't really know what the words mean. Similarly, for proper meditation we need to ascertain the meaning of the words.

One very important tool of meditation is mindfulness, but mindfulness does not happen without familiarity with the object. We cannot be familiar with something that we do not know. If we do not know the meaning of the words, there is no way that we can practise mindfulness regarding the meaning of the words.

Because the whole focus comes about only because of the sounds that you are listening to, when the recording is over, the meditation is also over because the sounds have ceased. Thus there is no more focus on the sounds and no more meditation, and you will still be none the wiser about how to progress along the path. You still do not know how to meditate or how to do prostrations. At least when you apply what you learn here, how to meditate, it is something that you can do all the time. Once you have learned how to do it, you will be able to do it all the time.

One benefit of listening to the chanting of the Gyuto monks and so forth is that although you may not understand it, it still places very valuable karmic imprints in your mind, because the texts that are being recited are very special texts. So, even though you do not understand what is being said, it still places valuable imprints on your mind; it still something special to do.

Question: The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom sutra, it mentions that "all dharmas are empty". Could you explain what that means?

Answer: This statement that all phenomena are empty means that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence – that all phenomena are empty of existence from their own side.

"Existence from their own side" means existence independent of causes and parts. Phenomena exist in dependence on their causes and parts, and therefore lack existence from their own side. At the beginning of the *Heart Sutra*, Shariputra asks Chenrezig: "How should those practise who wish to engage in the practice of the profound perfection of wisdom?". Then Chenrezig replies: "Those who want to engage in the practice of the profound perfection of wisdom should view all phenomena as lacking inherent existence."

When Chenrezig says they should view all phenomena as lacking inherent existence, he is referring to what we just said. They should view all phenomena as lacking an existence that is independent of parts, causes and conditions. You have to relate the statement further down in the *Heart Sutra* – "All phenomena are empty" – back to what was said at the beginning of the sutra, about viewing all phenomena as lacking inherent existence.

Question: What's Geshe-la's view on competition? How do you view winning and losing?

Answer: Sometimes we need competition! For example, when students study, they improve by competing with each other. Also, sport works on the basis of competition – "No competition, not much interest!" To have a competitive mind without pride is a good thing. For example, in study, when we see another person doing well, we can say, "I'm going to do as well as that person". In this way, we can improve our study.

Question: Is there any significance in the different sizes of the Buddha statues?

Answer: From the point of view of the person who makes the statue, if the Buddha statue is greater, the merit is also greater. If they make a bigger and better statue – in other words, the more work and effort they put into it – the greater the merits they accumulate.

From our point of view, it doesn't really make any difference, in terms of our faith, whether the Buddha statue is big or small. We will still accumulate the same amount of merit. If we view the Buddha statue with faith and view it as the actual Buddha, it doesn't matter whether the Buddha statue is small or big. Once the Buddha statue is viewed as being the actual Buddha, size does not really matter. We do not accumulate more merits because we think it is a big Buddha or a small Buddha. But from the point of view of the person who makes it, if they make it bigger and better, they accumulate more merits.

Tonight you asked some good questions. It is nice to have this discussion between friends, not from the point of view of student and teacher, but to have a discussion from the point of view of sitting together as a group of friends.

So you can focus the mind internally, then place it on the

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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