
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. Sit comfortably in a good posture.

Before we do the actual meditation, I think it is good if we talk a bit about meditation in general and the fruits of meditation – even though we talk about it all the time!

Generally, you can choose any meditation object that you feel comfortable with, but tonight we are meditating on the coming and going of the breath.

After having chosen a meditation object, it is important that we initially familiarise ourselves with the appearance of the object – its colour, shape, size and so forth – so that we are familiar with its different characteristics. Through this, a mental image of the object will appear within the mind, which is the reflection of the object. So, a reflection of the object or an aspect of the object will appear in the mind, and this will form the actual meditation object. If one focuses single-pointedly on that mental image, this can be called a pure meditation.

As you can see, the actual object is not the external object, but the reflection of the object arising in the mind. You can also understand how the mind can become one with the meditation object, because when we meditate, it should not be in a dual manner – with the mind over here looking at the object over there – but the mind should become one with the object of meditation. It should become one with, or be absorbed into, this reflection of the external object arising in the mind. That is a crucial point for our meditation.

To achieve this single-pointed focus on the meditation object, we need to rely on the two methods of mindfulness and introspection. Mindfulness is a part of the mind that holds onto the object of meditation or does not forget it. Introspection is another, more investigative part of the mind that looks at the rest of the mind – how it is meditating, whether mindfulness is still holding onto the object correctly, whether the focus is clear, vivid and sharp, and so forth.

Through this twofold method of mindfulness and introspection – the two internal conducive conditions for good meditation – we can overcome the two internal obstructive conditions of mental excitement and mental sinking. Mental excitement are those thoughts that belong to the family of attachment. Mental sinking is a certain dullness and lack of clarity that can occur in the mind; the mind lacks a certain brightness, energy or vividness.

These two internal obstacles – mental sinking and mental excitement – can be overcome with the two conducive

conditions of mindfulness and introspection. Upon having recognised the two internal obstructive conditions, it is important that we free the mind of them. First we have to identify them, and then we have to free the mind of them with the help of mindfulness and introspection.

Regarding single-pointed concentration, we should not confuse the single-pointed mind or the mindfulness that keeps the mind on the object with single-pointed concentration. As we said, mindfulness is the mental factor that does not forget about the meditation object and keeps the mind focused on it. It is easy to think that mindfulness is single-pointed concentration, but that is not correct. Through mindfulness, we attain single-pointed abiding of the mind on the object, and this is single-pointed concentration. Even the single-pointed mind itself is not single-pointed concentration.

So there are two ways of looking at it: we say that either the single-pointed abiding of the mind on the object is single-pointed concentration; or the mental factor that naturally from its own side engages the object single-pointedly is single-pointed concentration. Either of those two – the mental factor that from its own side or of its nature engages the object single-pointedly, or the single-pointed abiding of the mind itself – is concentration.

The meaning of the word meditation is to familiarise ourselves with the object of meditation. Once the mind engages the object properly, in a single-pointed way through familiarisation, it has the effect of generating both physical and mental well-being and happiness. When the mind engages the object single-pointedly, this subdues or stills the other conceptual thoughts that normally disrupt the mind and bring suffering. So, regardless of how busy we may be, it is important that we know this benefit of meditation – that it can bring about mental and physical well-being through the subduing of disturbing thoughts.

If we look at the connection between dharma and meditation, at how meditation becomes dharma, meditation frees the mind from the thoughts that engage the object in a distorted manner, and places the mind in a valid, undistorted, correct state. Basically, by changing the mind from a confused mind to a clear, valid, perceptive mind, meditation becomes dharma.

For example, when the mind is overcome by anger, if we investigate how the anger arises, we find that one condition is the appearance of the object to the mind. As long we remember the object of our anger and hold it in our mind, anger will arise. This is a confused state of mind. However, if instead of holding the object of our anger in the mind, we direct the mind to a virtuous object, the anger will subside, because the object no longer appears to the mind. We have diverted the mind to a virtuous object, and because the object of anger does not appear to the mind, the anger subsides.

It is the same with attachment, which is generated in the mind because of the condition of the object of attachment appearing to the mind as desirable. Again, if instead of the mind being preoccupied with the object of

attachment, we direct it to the object of meditation, because the object of attachment no longer appears to the mind, the attachment will subside. In such a way, we can bring the mind from a confused state to a clear and valid state through meditation.

The reason why this works is because the mind cannot hold two strong opposite thoughts for the same object at one time. So one cannot have anger and attachment towards one object at the same time.

To meditate means to familiarise the mind with virtuous objects and mental states that are free from anger and attachment. Attachment is a mental state that is impure and brings suffering to the mind. Anger is also a mental state that is non-virtuous and that brings suffering to the mind.

By familiarising the mind, for example, with a mental state of non-attachment, which naturally counteracts attachment, not only do we free the mind of attachment, but we also free it from the suffering that accompanies attachment. Attachment is an unsuitable state of mind that induces suffering and many unsuitable types of action. By familiarising the mind with a virtuous mental state of non-attachment, we will free the mind from attachment, and implicitly through this we will free ourselves of the problems that always accompany attachment, and from the unsuitable actions that we would engage in out of attachment.

The same also goes for anger. By familiarising the mind with a state of non-anger, we counteract anger and its problems.

Through this process, we will generate new wisdom and insight, and we will become aware that the cause of our problems does not lie on the outside, but is internal. The cause is our disturbing thoughts and our way of thinking. It is common to identify external objects as the cause of our suffering, but through doing meditation, we come to recognise that the primary cause of our suffering is internal. It happens time and again that we experience suffering because of our way of thinking, our mental patterns and so forth. By knowing how to counteract the distorted and disturbed mental states and by generating their opposites – by counteracting them with positive virtuous mental states – we will have learned something that is priceless, because it is the actual path to happiness.

Understanding that different mental states are direct opposites and cannot abide simultaneously in the mind with respect to the same object is priceless and supreme, because it is the method to achieve happiness.

This understanding needs to be applied within our relationships. For example, if one partner gets angry, it may lessen the attraction the other person had felt for their partner at the beginning of the relationship. Perhaps the second partner might also get angry. Here, it is important to meditate on patience. Meditating on the mind of non-anger is the meditation on patience – this is the way the dharma has to be applied in relationships. In a relationship, we have to counteract anger – especially there.

Regarding attachment, while it might be reasonable that a man and woman will feel attachment for each other when they are together, there are many other occasions when attachment arises for other objects. There are many other objects that will appear attractive and will tempt or seduce the man or woman. There are many occasions outside the relationship when you have to be careful not to let the mind fall under the control of attachment, because if you follow that attachment, it often has a disastrous effect, ending the relationship, splitting up the family, and so forth. Here you have to apply the dharma by meditating on a mind of non-attachment and counteracting the attachment that arises for that third person.

It wouldn't be appropriate for somebody who feels they have studied a lot of dharma and regard themselves as a dharma practitioner to let their mind fall under the control of the afflictions – attachment or anger – and then inflict suffering on others. That would be very inappropriate. If anger arises or if you are tempted by the many attractive appearances outside your relationship then you have to apply the antidote and should not let your mind fall under the control of the afflictions.

This is very important, because if we do not apply the antidote, the mind will always be under the control of the afflictions; this will happen naturally as long as we do not apply the antidote to the mind.

Now we will meditate for a little while. Sit comfortably in a good meditation posture and focus the mind internally, making it vivid and clear, and stopping it engaging external objects. After having perfectly focused the mind internally, place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. Normally as I said you can choose any type of meditation object, but for the purpose of tonight, we will meditate on the coming and going of the breath. It is important that the focus of the mind is clear and vivid and that the mind then becomes one with the breathing. We can meditate in that way for a few minutes. *(Pause for meditation)*

Do you have a question for tonight?

Question: If you find yourself in circumstances where you see strong negative emotions, can you meditate on that rather than meditating on patience, which is a way of looking for something better? Should we always discriminate between good and bad?

Translator: You mean to meditate single-pointedly?

Student: We are looking for something outside. We naturally discriminate between good and bad. If you see good in the bad, you don't worry about it so much, and it's not so bad.

Answer: That is very difficult to do, to generate liking for suffering

Student: The worst is the fear of being judgmental – judging myself and others all the time. I'd rather just stop. I'd rather not be judgmental all the time.

Answer: It is difficult to generate liking for suffering, although advanced practitioners will actually generate a liking for suffering and actually pray for more suffering.

Student: No, that's not what I'm saying. I'm saying we all

judge, we all discriminate, it's a constant thing, the mind just does it, it's automatic. If you see that somebody else is suffering and you look around and see everyone suffering, it's the same thing. You can't run away. There's no place I can put myself to judge and say "This is not happening to me". We all do the same mental trick all the time, trying to escape from suffering.

Translator: While I'm not quite sure what you mean by judging everything, I asked Geshe-la that maybe you feel that if one classifies "this is good" and "this is bad" then that makes the mind uptight and unhappy. So I'm not quite sure whether that's what you are referring to.

Anyway, Geshe-la said that, of course, people may become uptight when they think about the law of cause and effect, about karma. But that is only because they don't know how to think about it properly. It is because of a lack of knowledge that the mind becomes uptight and unhappy.

It is important that one subdues the eight worldly dharmas. If one has subdued the eight worldly thoughts, that person will not have like and dislike for happiness and suffering.

Student: Then how can you look at other people without being overcome with concern? It is easy to see that everywhere you look there is suffering. Do you see what I mean? We all spend a lot of time and emotion trying to shield ourselves from that realization – at least I do anyway. We try to escape. What can we do?

Answer: One can be liberated from suffering, but to achieve that is very difficult.

Initially it is good to experience some suffering, because then one will want to become free of that suffering and through this, one will attain liberation. We need to have the wish to become free from suffering.

Student again: The basis of my perspective on compassion is that if you see nothing is really real, you can get a deeper sense of compassion. You know in your heart it is not a matter of "me" and "you". It makes compassion real, whereas before the limited view of compassion is just trying to escape from fear.

Answer: You seem to be referring to the type of compassion called "compassion without object" or the "compassion of the unapprehended". This is the highest type of compassion, which is superior to the mere compassion that focuses on all sentient beings' suffering.

However, while there are three types of compassion and all three are valid, we cannot jump straight to the highest type of compassion; first, we have to generate the initial types of compassion, then the higher ones later.

Question: I was wondering, for the mind to become non-dual with the object, at that point, what object would there be other than the mind?

Answer: The reflection of the object in the mind, the aspect of the object that arises in the mind.

Student: So how is that appearing to the mind, if it's non-dual with the mind?

Answer: The aspect of the object arises right there in the mind. Here we are not talking about emptiness, but about a conventional phenomenon. So the aspect arises right

there in the mind. The appearance of the object arises in the mind. It is similar to the appearance of a person on television. It is just the appearance of that person, not the actual person. Similarly, after having watched television, the appearance of that person arises in the mind. It is not the actual person you see, but an appearance of the person that arises in the mind, like a reflection of the person in the mind.

As was said earlier, focus the mind internally and place it single-pointedly on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed from tape by Lois Smith

Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine

Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak

Edited Version

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