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# The Condensed Graduated Path to Enlightenment

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Now we can meditate a little. Sit a relaxed and comfortable meditation posture – the seven-point meditation posture, which you are all familiar with.

It is important that we have relaxed and a clear mind. We can observe the difference it makes to our physical body if we relax mentally. As long as the mind is uptight, the psychic channels within the body will be tight, and the gross physical body will also be hard and tense. But by loosening one's mind, the psychic channels also become more loose and relaxed, and the coarse physical body becomes less tense.

This is one benefit we get from meditating on the coming and going of the breath – by focusing on the coming and going of the breath, the mind becomes more relaxed, which relaxes the psychic channels, which in turn relaxes the coarse physical body. Then, for example, there is less danger that one will become physically sick. Otherwise, if the body is very tense and uptight, one will also feel physically unwell and will more easily become sick. But, if the body is loose and relaxed and the mind is relaxed and clear, one will feel much better.

We can all experience this mental feeling of wellness that arises from being mentally relaxed. Otherwise if, at certain times, the mind is tied up in knots and is too tense, that will also express itself physically. But, by meditating on the coming and going of the breath, one can relax the mind. One can train one's mind so that, slowly, over time, one will gain this experience of mental relaxation.

It is also important that one doesn't let the mind wander off to external objects, regardless of whether those external objects are pleasant or unpleasant. Normally, when we encounter pleasant objects, they generate attachment; when we encounter unpleasant objects, they generate aversion and anger. It is important that one doesn't let the mind get distracted by either of those objects.

For example, it can easily happen that while one is meditating, one may hear certain sounds that one is attached to, such as music. As soon as one hears the music while meditating, the mind will become distracted, because it will immediately start to engage with the music, and in no time, the mind will have wandered off to an external object. One should try to avoid this type of situation.

Some people say it is impossible to stop the mind

wandering off to attractive objects – they feel that it is in the nature of their mind to act in such a way. However, by setting this artificial boundary, by saying: 'I can't stop it because it is the nature of my mind to act in that way', they prevent themselves from generating pure, wholesome thoughts. So, one shouldn't set this type of artificial boundary, but one should be aware that the mind is a creature of habit that will follow one's training.

Now, we should focus the mind internally and not let it engage either pleasant or unpleasant objects, but have a pure internal focus that is very clear and vivid; the mind abides internally, in a relaxed manner. Then, one places this clear, vivid, relaxed mind on the coming and going of the breath. We can meditate in such a manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

You have to meditate regularly. It is important to set aside at least five minutes every day for meditation, and not let that time slip by, but to meditate continually in such a manner. Some people may be in a situation where initially, when they weren't practising the Dharma, they were unhappy. Then, when they started to practise the Dharma, their mind improved and they became happier. However, they may have subsequently become distracted by other types of happiness and let their Dharma practice and meditation slip, so that their mind again degenerated. So, it is important that we continue to meditate regularly.

We have to look after that which gives us happiness. If we let these internal tools for attaining happiness slip, it will be very difficult for us to attain happiness through external means. If we don't possess happiness internally, we cannot somehow attain from the outside. It is difficult to generate happiness through external conditions, so one has to increase one's inner happiness.

Happiness and suffering are not external states or external objects. If they were, we could acquire and reject them in the same way that we buy new things that we want, and throw away old ones that we no longer like. But with suffering and happiness, it doesn't work that way. One can't just acquire happiness, and one can't just throw away suffering on the rubbish heap. Happiness and suffering are internal, and are not external objects.

It is understandable that we may generate the perception we can acquire happiness through external means – we are presented with so many things as external conditions for happiness, that we can't really be blamed for thinking that we can attain happiness through external means.

We should generate the insight that we cannot complement our inner happiness through external conditions. It is understandable that we may generate the perception that we can attain perfect happiness through external conditions – that if we don't have the perfect external conditions for happiness, it would be impossible to be happy internally, because we have become so conditioned to this way of thinking. Then, one becomes so focused on the external conditions for happiness that one really starts to believe that it will be impossible to be happy without those external conditions. This is a common state of mind that we all share; we all are

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enslaved by this type of attitude. Therefore, it's very important to understand the true conditions of happiness and suffering.

It is important that we have enough strength of mind to withstand external pressures that try to make us believe that we are unhappy because we lack different types of objects, this fiction that we must have different types of objects in order to be happy. If we don't have that internal strength of mind, we will start to believe: 'I'm unhappy because I don't have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, or because I don't have a house or not a nice enough house, or because I don't have money, or not enough money', and so forth. By starting to think in this way, we will become unhappy.

For example, from my side, my external conditions are not fabulous, and in the course of my life, many times they were very poor. However, I never lost my internal happiness. My internal conditions for happiness were always complete, even though the external conditions weren't so good. Some of you can attest to the fact that I am always cheerful and happy!

While we cannot improve our internal conditions through external means, when we improve our internal conditions for happiness, our external conditions naturally seem to improve. For example, if one is a happy and cheerful person, one will have more friends, because people will say, 'If I go to that person's house, I will have a happy experience, I will have a nice evening'. If someone is always grumpy and miserable, people will think, 'I don't want to go there, because he or she's always grumpy and miserable and it just makes me grumpy and miserable, so I don't want to go there'. So, one will have fewer friends. But, if one is happy and cheerful, one will have more friends. The person who is grumpy and unhappy, instead of recognising that their loneliness is their own doing, they will direct the blame towards others, thinking: 'They are at fault because they don't care for me and they don't look after me', and so forth.

## **A brief presentation of the way to strive**

### **The actual way of striving**

#### **4.1.2.1.1 How to strive during the meditation session:**

#### **The 6 preparatory practices: 5) Gathering merit and purifying negativities**

Now, we will do the sixth of the seven limbs. This limb concerns making requests to the Buddha not to enter parinirvana. This request is directed at the supreme emanation bodies; even though a buddha doesn't actually go into parinirvana, they show the aspect of going into parinirvana.

There are two reasons. One is for the benefit of the direct disciples, teaching them impermanence. When the direct disciples saw the Buddha passing away, this generated awareness of impermanence in their minds. For this purpose, a buddha can pass into parinirvana. Or, a buddha passes into parinirvana because he foresees that some people would create great negative karma towards him and towards the Dharma. Instead of letting that

situation come about, a buddha will say, 'I'm going somewhere else where that won't happen'.

So, from the point of view of the whole of existence, the sun of the Buddhadharma never sets. From the point of view of one place, a buddha completes the twelve deeds sequentially, but a buddha also accomplishes the twelve deeds simultaneously in other places. Because of this ability of a buddha to engage into the twelve deeds both sequentially and simultaneously in different places, the sun of the Buddhadharma never sets

However, although the Buddha might show the aspect of passing into parinirvana in one place, one directs the request to the supreme emanation bodies not to pass to pass into parinirvana, but to continue to stay and to teach the Dharma.

The way to do this request is to visualise replicas of one's body, as many as there are atoms in the world systems. Then, imagine all of those bodies, with hands folded, making requests to the supreme emanation bodies to remain in cyclic existence and to turn the Wheel of Dharma, to teach the Dharma. By doing that, one accumulates merits that become the cause for the temporary happiness of the human realm and existence in the god realm, in the divine realm. Also, this becomes the cause for the ultimate happiness of liberation and enlightenment. When one is making that request, one can also visualise that this supreme emanation body is sitting on a lion throne, and then one offers a vajra seat, which is represented by a double vajra like the one that hangs in front of Geshe-la's table here in the gompa.

After offering the vajra seat to the supreme emanation bodies, one meditates that they have accepted one's request, and that one has become their direct disciple. Also, during the previous limb of requesting the buddhas to turn the Wheel of Dharma, after making the request, one can meditate that they have accepted one's request and that one has become a direct disciple of those buddhas. One can also offer a mandala if one likes, which makes it even more perfect.

This limb of requesting the buddhas not to pass into parinirvana purifies the negativities that one has created in relation to the virtuous spiritual friends, one's teachers. If you look at the Sutra of Golden Light, which you have, there are many words in that regard.

In this sutra, it says that the buddhas don't pass into parinirvana and that the sun of the Buddhadharma never sets; rather, they show the aspect of passing beyond into parinirvana for the benefit of disciples.

The point here is that this practice becomes an antidote for the negativities that one has created with regard to the spiritual friend. Now we can have some questions.

*Question about the Buddha's twelve deeds.*

*Answer:*

The Buddha takes rebirth from Tushita pure land,

Takes place in the mother's womb;

Takes birth;

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Performs the deed of excelling in worldly activities and games like sports and so forth, outshining others in such a manner;

Takes a wife;

Becomes ordained;

Engages in austerity – the time of meditation;

Goes to Bodhgaya

Subdues the maras;

The action of enlightenment;

Turns the Wheel of Dharma;

Enters parinirvana

*Question:* Geshe-la, you made it clear that we need to meditate often. How important is the length of meditation and is it better to meditate twice a day rather than once?

*Answer:* That maybe answers both questions. The length of time of the session should really be determined by one's ability to have a clear, stable, vivid focus.

At the beginning, one doesn't have such a focus for a long time. Therefore it is better, as a beginner, for one to have short sessions rather than long sessions, because if one forced oneself to have long sessions without the necessary mental ability and conditions, one might reach a point where one will become nauseous just looking at one's meditation cushion! That is one of the reasons why it is advisable to have shorter sessions as a beginner.

But we will talk about that more next time. Does that answer both questions?

It is important that one trains one's mind properly from the start. If, from the very beginning, you build up this habit of letting the mind wander off the meditation object, then have to bring it back to the object, then let it wander off, then bring it back – if you habituate the mind in this way, later on, after you have meditated for some years, this is how the mind will function.

Rather than setting up this type of mental pattern, it is much better to set up a mental pattern where the mind has a clear and vivid focus on the object, where it abides clearly and vividly on the object. Even if it is just for a short time, at least it sets up the correct mental pattern. Then, slowly, slowly, through practice, that will naturally increase. So, the importance of meditation practice lies in having a meditation of good quality, not in the length of time.

As was explained at the beginning, bring the mind back home, turning it inwards, then place it on the mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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