
The Middle Length Lamrim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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As usual, please try to cultivate a good motivation and, if you can, cultivate bodhicitta, which is an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. If you listen with a good motivation and if I give the teaching with a good motivation, then what we do will be most beneficial for us all.

The value and benefit of love and compassion

It would be wonderful if we could cultivate the thought of wishing others to have happiness and be free from suffering rather than always having a narrow-minded and self-centred mind. It is more beneficial to think broadly with an open mind. By generating the thought of wishing other beings to have happiness and be free from suffering, we are showing love and compassion towards others. We are sharing with others the kind of warm and caring thoughts that parents have for their children, always wishing them happiness and freedom from suffering. Furthermore, parents take personal responsibility for and are ready to help and support their children. This sense of responsibility and readiness to help others comes from love and compassion, wishing others to have happiness and be free from suffering.

With love and compassion and this sense of universal responsibility, we feel connected and close to others. So, it is a precious and altruistic mental attitude that can greatly benefit others as well as ourselves. Whereas if we lack love and compassion towards others, we will become prone to feeling jealous and competitive about the wealth, qualifications, or successes of other people, and pride in our own accomplishments, with the result of unnecessary suffering and pain.

So, love and compassion close the door to the various afflictive emotions that bring suffering and damage our close relationships with others. On the other hand, if we hold love and compassion for others, then, instead of feeling jealous and negative, we feel happiness and joy when we see them happy with their wealth, beauty, and success. With love and compassion for others, we sincerely and wholeheartedly wish them to be free from suffering and are ready to support them if they lack happiness or are afflicted with suffering. Love and compassion bring benefits to ourselves and others.

All our problems are rooted in afflictive emotions

The most effective and best way to realise our potential is to utilise our own wisdom-knowledge, our sense of judgment, and our ability to think. When we think about it, we will find that most of the time what we experience in life is related to our relationships with others - our friends, relatives, or partners. But, in fact, the main cause of our up-and-down experiences, our happiness and

suffering in everyday life, is related to our mental attitudes towards others and the situations we face; for example, our jealousy, competitiveness, pride, hatred, etc., all of which bring suffering and problems.

If we look into the cause and effect of this suffering through the lens of our discriminating wisdom, we can clearly recognise that whenever we generate any afflictive emotions such as attachment, hatred, and jealousy, we experience unease and turmoil. When we generate any positive mental outlook such as being more loving and compassionate and broad-minded towards others, we feel a sense of peace and joy. With a positive mental attitude, instead of feeling jealous and miserable, we can feel positive and rejoice at the success of others, as well as being inspired and learning from them.

Cultivating the right mental attitude

I think wanting to compete with others and being inspired by them are quite separate things. Competition with others is driven by jealousy, which we do not want because it can be painful. But we do need inspiration to keep up our spirits and determination to cope with life and accomplish our goals. Inspiration gives us hope and courage. To be inspired by others, we must have a sense of veneration, love, and compassion. Every being is unique, and they have admirable qualities within them. By honouring and recognising their qualities and knowing what they wish and deserve, we can develop respect for others and more understanding of them.

In this way, when we see the goodness of others, instead of feeling jealous, we rejoice in and admire and are inspired by them. In short, cultivating love and compassion for others will bring about all these positive mental attitudes that we are talking about here. Based on the view that everyone is endowed with excellent qualities, we should respect them and be humble, and in this way, we will learn from our association with them. We should never look down upon them and harm them.

Just as with everyone else, they may also possess negativities, but we should not judge them from that perspective. Rather we should see them from the perspective of their positive qualities and as a worthy object of our veneration. Having such a positive mental attitude will prevent anger, jealousy, and pride from arising in our minds. Hence, we can sustain a stable form of peace and happiness in our lives.

Whereas if we associate others with a wrong mental attitude, then not only will we never learn from them but we will also be easily influenced by their bad conduct. For example, if the person with whom we associate is very short-tempered, we will also end up like them because we will always be in the mode of reacting and retaliating whenever they direct their tantrums at us. Later, if our relationship breaks down, the person will leave you behind but their negativities such as their short temper will remain with you. On the other hand, if we associate with them with the right mental attitude, they will become a source of inspiration and a good model for us to gain more knowledge, skills, and qualities which will always remain with us.

All this may sound very simple, but it is important that we reflect upon it and realise that we do have the potential to make a change and achieve all our desired goals. We should also always remember that as human beings, we are gifted with an intelligent mind, an ability to think, reason, and discriminate. We probably are accessing only a small portion of our intelligence, even though it is our best resource and guide. So, if we are to make any important plans or decisions, we must apply our intelligence to the best of our ability. We should utilise our discriminating wisdom and thoroughly examine and check whether what we want to do is worthwhile or not, and if so, how can we achieve it. By utilising our wisdom, things will become very clear to us. Then we will find that this is the best approach to doing things – basing our decision on our own well-informed and thoughtful analysis.

No practice or instruction is more beneficial than love and compassion

There is no more important and beneficial Dharma practice than developing love and compassion. The good news is that when it comes to practicing love and compassion, we don't have to start from scratch, for we all naturally possess love and compassion, at least towards some other beings, and it arises every now and then. Even animals possess love and compassion, and they take care of their offspring with great love and self-sacrifice.

However, we need to recognise the value of further developing love and compassion to extend it to all other beings equally and while ensuring it is not tainted by self-cherishing. Showing love to others and benefiting them will naturally bring us a tremendous sense of joy and fulfilment. When you take good care of animals, they express their love and friendliness and acknowledge us. This sense of being appreciated and loved makes us happy and we feel we have a good friend and companion.

People usually appreciate those who show them love and support and reciprocate those feelings. We can observe from our own experience how people to whom we show true love and care respond to us with appreciation, which gives us a great sense of joy and happiness. This means that showing love and compassion to others means more happiness for ourselves. So, when through our experience we recognise the benefits, we will be inspired to practice even more.

At the end of the day, we are led by our own thoughts, ideas, and way of thinking. What we want and do not want and how we accomplish our goals is very much dependent on our minds. However, that doesn't mean that we are not dependent on others. In fact, we wish to be loved and supported and to have lots of friends and supporters around us. We enjoy meeting other people for a chat, to share food, and to have a drink with them, but most importantly, they come to support us when we are in despair.

However, to win the friendship, support, and love of others, we must show the right mental attitude towards

them. There is no better attitude than expressing genuine love and compassion, sharing our warm-heartedness, care, and regard for them. Generally, people share their love with those who love and hold them in high regard. It is evident that when we need help and support, it is only those who truly love and care about us who will happily support us. So, if we wish others to be friendly, loving, patient, and helpful to us, we should be demonstrating these qualities to them, and the most important cause for us to be able to do this is cultivating love and compassion.

In hospitals, it makes a huge difference to the recovery of the patients if the nurses and doctors treat them with a genuine sense of care, love, and respect. Along with the medical treatment, if the professionals connect with the patients with genuine care, respect, and even a smile and gentle touch, then that brings a great deal of comfort to the patients and will influence the way they receive the treatment.

The patients may be undergoing more pain and aches on the mental and emotional level than the physical illness. For example, they are suffering more because of being isolated, helpless, anxious, fearful, and so on. You could have someone who might have some treatable eye infection which may not cause any pain. But, if the person starts to worry about going blind, then they would go through a great deal of suffering and pain on a mental level. If untreated, mental health problems can lead to more serious problems. So, we go through two kinds of problems – those that are directly related to physical conditions such as sickness, hunger, and financial crises, and those that are directly related to the mind. In most cases, the cause of the suffering is not physical but due to emotional and mental attitudes.

Overcome emotional problems by changing our minds

To understand any emotionally or mentally related problems, we must utilise our own wisdom-knowledge and experiences and deal with these problems on a mental level. You can receive some support from others or learn from outer resources, but to remedy emotionally or mentally related problems, individuals must address these themselves and alter their thinking and feelings. So, your own intelligent wisdom is your best resource and your courage and determination are the most powerful tools. Through applying our discriminating wisdom, we can often observe that the main cause of the intense stress, anxiety, and turmoil that we are going through is just an uncontrolled, disturbing thought that is boiling in our mind.

We need to examine the details of that thought, for example, its object. Having recognised the object, one quick way to prevent the thought from arising is by diverting our mind to a different object or thought. So, we can understand here how from one angle changing our mind is easy, for all it takes is forgetting an object that is in our mind; it is harder to change our external circumstances because they do not depend on us.

But our mind can be under our control. To change our minds, we need to understand the details of our mind,

such as its objects and their effect on us and the relationship between the mind and its objects. The remedy is cultivating a different state of mind causing our mind to leave the object that causes the disturbing thought or counteract the perception associated with the disturbing thought.

Summary

The point here is to recognise the value of loving-kindness and compassion towards other beings that we already possess within ourselves. Our practice is to further increase that by both thoughts and deeds, making it more inclusive and practical. Always be helpful to others. In this way, not only will we make our life meaningful by benefiting others, but we will also find more happiness and joy for ourselves. Practicing love and compassion is the key to winning more friends, more supporters, and bringing harmony to our relationships. When we enjoy health and happy relationships and have many friends and admirers, we say life is good. On the other hand, when our relationship is deteriorating and more people seem to dislike or hate us, we say things are not good.

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Edited Version*

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