
The Middle Length Lamrim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Just as we said in the prayers, we must always begin the practice by taking refuge and generating bodhicitta. Since many of you are already familiar with the meaning of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, which is an altruistic mind of enlightenment, this is the time to apply it in practice by trying to give rise to the bodhicitta mind. If we put effort into generating the bodhicitta mind repeatedly, it is possible to develop genuine bodhicitta within us.

Bodhicitta means having a good, kind heart toward other beings. As we cultivate this bodhicitta mind within us, we develop a positive mental attitude toward others, recognising the qualities they possess. With this positive attitude, we will see others in a better light. Therefore, even in our everyday lives, if we cultivate and maintain the bodhicitta mind, we will realise how much benefit it brings to our lives.

As part of some prayers we recited earlier, there is a verse that offers homage to Lord Buddha. This prayer expresses how we honour the Buddha for his teachings, emphasising that all things arise through dependent origination. Since all things are dependently originated, there is no true cessation or arising, no one or many, and so forth.

The realisation of arya beings

The prayer conveys the meaning of the ultimate reality of things. It does not suggest that things do not arise or cease to exist, nor does it deny the existence of multiplicity or singularity. However, in the realisation of arya beings, or superior beings, who are in deep meditative equipoise on the ultimate truth, there is no arising, no ceasing, and so forth within that realisation. Therefore, the ultimate truth referred to in that line points to the experience of meditative equipoise realised by superior beings.

As mentioned before, from the perspective of the realisation of wisdom in the meditative equipoise of arya beings, or superior beings, there is only the understanding that everything is empty, devoid of inherent or true existence. Therefore, in the prayer, when it states that there is no product or cessation—nothing that is produced and nothing that ceases—it is referring to the absence of inherent existence. From the perspective of true existence, the lack of true existence means there is no arising and no ceasing.

We will continue reading from this lam rim text. What is meditation? Meditation is the practice of training our mind to focus single-pointedly on a virtuous or positive object, making the mind deeply habituated and accustomed to that positive object or thought. Meditation

practice also involves training the mind by directing it towards correct ways of thinking, shifting from wrong views or preoccupations with unwholesome objects.

In Tibetan, the word for meditation is *gom*, which literally means ‘to get used to’ or ‘to habituate.’ Therefore, meditation is the practice of familiarising our mind with positive thoughts and wholesome objects. At the same time, it aims to dismantle negative thinking patterns and harmful mental habits.

Additionally, the term ‘Dharma’ in Tibetan is *cho*, which means ‘to change’ or ‘to modify’. Thus, the essence of both meditation and Dharma lies in transforming the mind toward positivity and wisdom.

Eliminating negative ways of thinking

When we engage in the practice of Dharma, it carries the same meaning as engaging in meditation: to eliminate negative ways of thinking and replace them with positive ones. For example, if our mind lacks belief in the truth, we apply meditation or Dharma practice to remove this doubt and cultivate a mind filled with faith—in the truth, in the Dharma.

Similarly, when it comes to correcting our mental attitude, sometimes our mind becomes obsessed with certain things. To change this, we need to understand why we are obsessed with that object—because our mind projects certain qualities onto it. In order to overcome this, we engage in meditation on the unpleasantness or unattractiveness of that object. Meditating in this way helps counter the obsession by diminishing the intensity of attachment.

It is clear that if we want to bring more peace and happiness into our lives, we must work on taming our uncontrolled and unsubsided mind. As long as we remain under the influence of such a mind, it will be impossible to experience true peace and lasting happiness.

Controlling afflictive or negative emotions

We need to find a way to free our mind—or at least minimise its control—from afflictive or negative emotions, such as anger, attachment, and ignorance.

What is Dharma? Dharma is the remedy, the antidote to afflictive emotions. Reflecting on this helps us realise that, more than any external causes, the primary source of suffering and unhappiness in our lives lies within—our own negative emotions, manifesting as anger, desire, and so forth.

When we talk about the happiness we seek in life—something that brings us joy—we can discuss it on two levels. On the physical level, we experience happiness through good material conditions or by enjoying good health, which gives us a sense of meaning and joy. On the mental level, however, happiness does not depend on external conditions but arises mainly from a sense of inner satisfaction and peace.

Thus, happiness can be understood in terms of physical happiness and mental happiness. Of these two, we already have some knowledge of how to achieve physical

happiness, such as by improving our health and material well-being. Achieving mental happiness, however, is where we need to put in more effort. On the mental level, the main obstacle to happiness is not external circumstances but unwanted thoughts and emotions. Therefore, the practice of meditation, dharma, or spirituality helps us counteract these afflictive emotions.

When we consider how essential it is to manage these unwanted thoughts and emotions, we might notice that even when we are in favourable external conditions—having everything we need—we can still feel unhappy, sad, or miserable for no apparent reason. On one level, this seems strange—how can we feel this way when our circumstances are favourable? Upon reflection, we find that the cause lies within us, rooted in certain mental patterns or ways of thinking.

The purpose of meditation

As mentioned before, the purpose of meditation is to correct these thoughts so that we develop a more accurate and beneficial way of thinking. This shift will bring us a profoundly different inner experience, fostering genuine happiness and peace.

In changing our mental attitude and training our minds, we need to cultivate a positive mental attitude toward all beings, regardless of who they are—whether they are friends, enemies, or strangers. We must put in the effort to create the right conditions and causes that will bring about mental happiness.

On a mental level, there is no doubt that we all desire happiness and inner peace. If we ask ourselves, we can see that this is true. Therefore, we have the responsibility to create the causes and engage in actions that lead to mental peace and happiness.

Examining our mental attitudes

When we examine our typical mental attitudes, we may notice that they are often narrow-minded and biased. We tend to feel close to only a few beings, while for many others, we may hold indifferent or distant feelings. As a result, attachment arises toward those we feel close to, and we may develop hatred for those we consider distant. These mental attitudes of attachment and hatred lead to significant unhappiness.

What we need to do now is put in the effort to cultivate a state of equanimity or an even-minded attitude toward all sentient beings. When we consider the attitude of holding some beings at a distance while harbouring feelings of hatred, grudge, or resentment, we see that such an attitude is detrimental to our inner peace and happiness.

Even if we cannot achieve a state of equanimity toward all beings, we can at least strive to apply this attitude to those we feel close to. However, even among those we feel close to, there are biases; some are closer than others. Therefore, we must work on diminishing and overcoming any sense of hatred toward others.

What we are discussing is not solely related to religious practice but is essential for achieving sustained peace and

happiness. To experience lasting peace, we must overcome the attitude of holding hatred toward others. These negative emotions only disrupt our well-being.

Equanimity

In working on or training ourselves to cultivate a state of equanimity towards other beings, we can start by focusing not on all sentient beings at once, but perhaps first on those closest to us—such as our brothers, sisters, or other family members. We can begin by practicing this attitude with people with whom we already have a close connection.

It is not just about how others, including family members or parents, behave. Rather, it is about the importance of maintaining an equal attitude toward all family members. Failing to treat or regard all children equally in a family can create significant problems. This principle of equal regard applies not only to our children but also to how we treat ourselves. Therefore, as a way to create the cause for peace and happiness within ourselves, it is important to put effort into cultivating and developing such an attitude towards others—at least towards our loved ones. Regardless of how they see us, we must understand and strive to develop a state of equanimity towards them. One must recognise that this is something to be done with the mind that thinks, ‘I must do this in order to create the true cause of peace and happiness within myself’.

What we are trying to do here is cultivate a positive mental attitude, at least from our own side. This means always striving to be kind to others. When we speak of a positive attitude, it refers to avoiding conflict or irritating others and instead engaging in actions that foster friendly relationships. From our side, we should strive to do things that please others, make them happy, and acknowledge their worth. This practice is highly relevant if we wish to find greater happiness in our own lives. It is something we must cultivate in this lifetime.

On this basis, we integrate our meditation and spiritual practices, making them directly relevant to our lives. These practices help bring more happiness into our lives and shape us into better human beings. When we approach Dharma practice in this way, we can experience its benefits firsthand. If this approach makes sense, we can more effectively apply Dharma practice to attain higher levels of happiness—or even the ultimate level of happiness.

Student question (inaudible)

If you find yourself holding anger toward someone who has already passed away, remind yourself that the person is gone and no longer exists in this world. There is no point in continuing to hold on to that anger—you cannot control or change that person anymore and whatever harm they caused in the past is already over. From the perspective of Dharma, that person committed non-virtue by harming you, and therefore, it is important to try to forgive them. You can even pray that they be reborn in a pure land, such as Amitabha’s realm, and wish them a good future life.

In general, any thoughts or emotions that disturb us arise because they are conditioned by certain objects or situations. It may not be easy at first to let go of the object triggering these emotions, and it might continue to return to your mind. However, if you consistently put in the effort to release your focus on it, over time, you will gradually be able to forget about it. Eventually, you will overcome these unwanted thoughts or emotions, preventing them from troubling you further.

Making prayers is beneficial

When we make a prayer, we extend it to other beings, whether they are close to us, related to us, or not. Making prayers is very beneficial. Of course, it is particularly helpful if you dedicate a prayer to someone you love because the personal connection adds benefit to them. However, even without a personal connection, noble beings often extend their prayers even to those who have harmed them, including their enemies. They generate prayers with the intention of benefiting others.

Therefore, it is good to dedicate prayers toward others, regardless of who they are, whether they are connected to us or not. This practice will be very beneficial.

Are you happy with the answer to your question?

Student: How do you apply emptiness ...

Sandup: How do you use emptiness to pacify your mind?

Student: Yes.

Geshe-la said that to overcome suffering, you need to understand the true causes of suffering, which must be abandoned and overcome. The truth of the cause of suffering is something we need to eliminate. The root cause of all suffering is mental afflictions and karma. All mental afflictions arise from and are rooted in self-grasping of true existence.

It is said that those who realise the truth—specifically the truth of emptiness—no longer create throwing karma. This shows how the root cause of all suffering is ignorance, specifically the ignorance that grasps at things as existing truly or inherently. Emptiness is the direct antidote to this ignorance.

A partial understanding of emptiness is beneficial

While we may not yet have a full realisation of emptiness, even a partial understanding can demonstrate the power of that insight. Such a mind brings peace by reducing and calming mental afflictions. Every mental affliction ultimately stems from the perception that things exist from their own side or truly exist. On the other hand, understanding emptiness cuts off this mistaken view of inherent existence.

There is a text that states that even a rough understanding of emptiness reduces attachment to cyclic existence.

Student: (inaudible)

If a practitioner gains the realisation of emptiness, they would not announce it to others. True practitioners do not proclaim their realisation to others.

Student: (inaudible – something to do with difficult people)

What is required, if possible, is to develop and cultivate love, care, and compassion for that person within you. This is undoubtedly important and beneficial for you. However, having love and compassion does not mean you must remain silent or avoid challenging or confronting the person.

It is essential to find a way to address the situation while maintaining your genuine sense of care and compassion. Without losing these qualities within yourself, you can communicate effectively and handle the situation appropriately with that person.

Student: (inaudible)

What you just said is very difficult. There is a quote by Shantideva that speaks to this: ‘What is difficult or easy depends on the cultivation of your force of habituation and familiarity.’ When you become familiar with something, tasks that once seemed very difficult become much easier.

From this, we learn that progress takes time, but we should not give up. Even if something feels difficult now, with consistent effort, bit by bit, you may eventually find it easier than you initially thought.

In some relationships, like between a husband and wife, the wife may often be noisy, scolding, and yelling. However, the husband remains calm, acting as if he doesn’t hear anything. Though he holds no resentment, he stays quiet and composed. This kind of situation does happen.

Geshe-la shared a story about a Tibetan couple from the past. The husband was much older than his wife. They had two children, and he was semi-retired—working only two days a week and not doing much otherwise—while his wife did most of the work and often scolded him. One day, he told Geshe-la, “Look at her. She’s always like this. I’m sure one day she’ll get fed up with me and leave.” Yet, he continued to be himself and care about his family.

As time passed, the husband suffered a serious foot injury. Surprisingly, his wife took great care of him during his recovery. They stayed together, and in that moment, he realised that all her scolding words were nothing compared to how much she truly cared for him.

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