
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Lama Tsong Khapa said that all positive results – the grounds and paths – and all negative results arise from one's intention.

What this means is that all positive results arise from white karma. What is white karma? White karma is positive intention. All suffering results arise from black karma. What is black karma? Black karma is unsuitable intention.

By contemplating this point, we can gain some understanding of how our suffering and happiness depend upon our mind. The happiness that one desires depends upon positive mental states and positive thoughts. The suffering that one wants to avoid arises from black karma and unsuitable thoughts.

This means that we have to make our mind more positive – we have to transform the mind. We need to use methods that will transform the mind so that it will become more positive.

In order to effect such a transformation of the mind, we need to develop the wisdom that understands which mental states are harmful and which are beneficial. We need to develop an insight into which mental states cause us to engage in positive actions of body and speech, and which mental states cause us to engage into unwholesome actions of body and speech. By developing such discriminating awareness, we come to understand how the happiness and suffering in our life depend upon our intention and upon our karma.

There are more elaborate explanations of how happiness and suffering come about through karma in the context of many lifetimes, but these explanations are very subtle. Only a Buddha can fully comprehend how karma acts over the span of many lifetimes, causing happiness and suffering. So that may be difficult to comprehend. However, if you think about it from the point of view of this life – how our different mental states cause us to engage in different actions of body and speech that will cause either happiness or suffering – we can understand how our karma determines our happiness and suffering.

We all need to generate mental happiness and peace. To do this, we need to develop the wisdom that understands which mental states cause happiness and which cause suffering. After having generated that wisdom, we must act accordingly.

If we recognise the arising of negative states of mind that impel us to carry out a negative action of either body or speech, we shouldn't give in to that impulse; rather, we should try to stop that negative state of the mind from

being translated into actions of body and speech. We should also try to reduce that negative state of the mind.

On the other hand, with positive states of the mind, we should cultivate them as much as possible and then try to translate them into actions of body and speech.

By practising in this way, we can bring about a profound transformation in our life experience. We will find that the problems we have been experiencing will decrease. Where we had previously experienced many problems, after transforming our mind and our actions of body and speech, we will experience a decline in the problems we experience and an increase in mental happiness, peace and stability.

This is really the way to practise Dharma. On the one hand, we should reduce and then completely stop our negative actions, and on the other hand, we should develop and increase our positive actions of body, speech and mind. In this way, you can effect a profound transformation.

So, we need to act according to our wisdom. Just having an understanding of what is beneficial and what is harmful is not enough. One then needs to translate that wisdom into action. One needs to act according to one's understanding.

We have plenty of opportunity to engage in positive actions of body, speech and mind, and we have the knowledge of what is positive and what is harmful. However, through the influence of an unsuitable thought, we find ourselves engaging in harmful actions that cause great aggravation and distress to others as well as to ourselves, even though we have the opportunity to engage in positive actions of body, speech and mind. This comes about because one didn't act according to one's wisdom.

When one acts like this, it will definitely cause distress for us. Whether the action causes distress or suffering to others is an open question – it may or may not – but it will definitely cause us problems. This is a good way of relating to it – by understanding that, when we engage in positive actions of body, speech and mind, it brings us happiness, but when we engage in harmful actions of body, speech and mind it brings us suffering. This is something we can all relate to – understanding our own happiness and suffering.

We need to translate our knowledge of the Dharma into Dharma practice. Just having knowledge of the Dharma is not very beneficial and will only cause us to generate pride and conceit. A true Dharma practitioner will generate compassion if they see someone who is less fortunate than them, and rejoice if they see someone who has equal fortune or higher fortune. But when someone who doesn't practise the Dharma and who has only an intellectual knowledge of the Dharma sees someone else who is less fortunate, they will generate pride; if they see someone of equal fortune, they will feel competitive; and if they see someone who is more fortunate, they will feel jealousy.

The Dharma is really those methods that subdue

unsuitable states of the mind. If one's knowledge becomes the method that subdues one's mind, that is Dharma practice. But if one's knowledge doesn't become the method for subduing one's mind, there is no Dharma practice.

We need to have a stable mind in order to practise the Dharma more effectively. So, we practise meditation in order to familiarise the mind with a virtuous object. For the mind to be able to remain stable on a virtuous object continuously, it needs to be trained, so that is why we need to practise meditation. If we didn't practise meditation, it wouldn't be right, so we also need to practise meditation now, training the mind to remain on one virtuous meditation object. Even if, at the beginning, we might not be able to do that for a long time, by starting with short sessions, we will be able to increase the length of these over time.

If we had continuous single-pointed concentration on a virtuous object, there would be no opportunity for unsuitable thoughts to arise. When we have single-pointed concentration on a virtuous object, unsuitable thoughts will be pacified naturally. Of course, this is difficult to attain all at once and needs to be done slowly, in a step-by-step manner.

Therefore, we will now practise meditation for a short while to make the mind more peaceful, clearer and happier. It is good to sit in a straight posture that makes the body's psychic channels straight, allowing the energies in those channels to flow more easily, which will have a positive effect on one's meditation by making the mind clearer.

After sitting in an appropriate and relaxed posture, one needs to bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards. We need to remove the mind from external objects, not allowing it wander off to those external objects, but keeping it focused internally.

Then we place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. We should have a vivid, clear single-pointed concentration that is not distracted by the mind wandering off to external objects. So, we place that concentrated mind on the coming and going of the breath, and if we are able, we can mentally count each cycle of breathing. We will meditate in this manner for a couple of minutes. (*Short pause for meditation.*)

(*Geshe-la then resumes his commentary on The Condensed Graduated Path to Enlightenment.*)

Of the four greatnesses of the Lam Rim, we have completed the **first greatness** – the greatness of being able to understand that all teachings of the Buddha are complementary.

The **second greatness** of the Lam Rim is that all the teachings of the Buddha will appear to us as advice or instructions; one understands that everything the Buddha taught is an instruction that each of us has to practise.

By understanding the first greatness of the Lam Rim – that all the teachings of the Buddha are complementary – we understand that all the teachings of the Buddha are necessary in order to attain enlightenment.

But merely having that understanding will not necessarily induce us to practise the Dharma. However, when one understands that all the teachings of the Buddha are not only complementary and necessary to become enlightened, but that they are actually personal advice or instructions explaining how to practise, one will translate one's knowledge into practice.

There is a slight difference between these two greatnesses of the Lam Rim. While the first greatness of the Lam Rim makes one understand how all the teachings of the Buddha actually complement each other and are necessary to attain enlightenment, the second greatness of the Lam Rim enables us to understand that all these teachings are actually instructions for practice.

This means that, if we don't study the Lam Rim, we won't be able to understand that all the teachings of the Buddha are meant as instructions. Many people think certain parts of the Buddha's teachings are for intellectual, philosophical debate and discussion, but are not necessarily for practice, and that other aspects of the Buddha's teachings are for practice. This misunderstanding is very common – that certain types of the Buddha's teachings are for philosophical debate, or are texts that should merely be put on one's altar so that one can make prostrations to them and accumulate merits, but that they not really meant to be put into practice. This misunderstanding is corrected when one studies the Lam Rim.

Having this misunderstanding means that one holds a confused view of the Buddha's teachings as being two different sets of teachings. It acts as a significant obstacle, preventing one from generating respect for the canon of the Buddha's sutric and tantric teachings. One will think that these teachings weren't really meant for transforming one's mind, but just for some external purpose.

Asserting that some of the Buddha's teachings are not for practice but merely for some other superficial purpose will lead us to commit the mistake of abandoning the Dharma.

Actually, the great philosophical treatises contain the superior, unmistakable instructions for those who wish to attain liberation. Because of one's inferior mental capability in not being able to practise the Dharma in dependence upon the instructions of the great philosophical treatises, one needs to strive and practise by relying upon the oral instructions. The oral instructions referred to here are the teachings of the graduated path to enlightenment. Because of one's inferior mental capacity in not being able to practise the Dharma by taking the meaning of practice from the great philosophical treatises, one needs to rely on another set of instructions such as the graduated path to enlightenment teachings, which here are classified as oral instructions.

If, upon having studied the Dharma a lot, one generates a strong wish to want to practise the Dharma but then looks elsewhere for instructions on how to practise the Dharma, this shows that one has a need for studying these graduated path to enlightenment teachings.

The teachings of the Buddha are divided into the scriptural teachings and the realised teachings. The scriptural teachings are the words of the Buddha that contain instructions on how to meditate and practise. The realised teachings are one's own practice – putting the understanding gained from the scriptural teachings into practice in relation to one's own mind by meditating and practising.

If one practises the three higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom on the basis of taking refuge, one is considered a holder of the realised teachings. Just practising morality, concentration or wisdom would not be sufficient – one must practise them on the basis of refuge.

If, on the basis of refuge, someone recites the scriptural teachings of the Buddha, that person would hold the scriptural teachings of the Buddha. The scriptural teachings of the Buddha are the cause for the realised teachings one generates within the mind.

The Buddha said, '...wherever there is the higher training of morality based on refuge, there my teachings abide'. This is why the sangha are regarded as so important – because their function is to preserve the teachings, and they ensure the presence of the teachings through the practice of pure morality.

So, if the vows of individual liberation for ordained practitioners are taken on the basis of renunciation, the measure of whether the Buddhadharma is present or not is whether those vows are present or not. That is, the presence of the Mahayana teachings depends on the presence of the monastic vows of individual liberation.

We have time for one question.

Question: Is it necessary to be Buddhist to become enlightened.

Answer: To attain omniscient consciousness, you need to practise the Buddha's path. In Christianity, they say that there is no other better refuge than God and Jesus and Buddhists say that in order to attain enlightenment you need to become a Buddhist.

There are certain books in Tibetan that say Jesus is a bodhisattva, even though they don't say that he is enlightened. So the Buddhist and Christian point of view don't have to contradict each other necessarily. Anyway, in general, all religions assert their point of view as superior.

There are also different interpretations of omniscience. Buddhists assert omniscience, but different Hindu tenets also assert omniscience. So there are different types of omniscience presented in different types of religions.

At the very beginning of the Lam Rim teachings, I gave the definition of omniscient consciousness as a consciousness that has purified all faults and developed all qualities.

We all can see the clock directly with our eyes, but that doesn't mean that we became omniscient regarding the clock! (*Laughter*) In order to be omniscient regarding the clock, one would have to see all the atoms of the clock, the different parts of the clock, the impermanence of the

clock, the selflessness of the clock and so forth.

So it is easy to test whether one is omniscient or not. One just has to close one's eyes and if one can't see anything, it means one is not omniscient! (*Laughter*)

As explained before, bring the mind back home, focus it inwards, then place it single-pointedly on the name mantra of the Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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